

SEMANTIC POLYSEMY IN DERIVATIONAL MORPHEMES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract

Languages possess immense emotive and cognitive potential, and one of the most crucial tools enabling this expressiveness is polysemy — the capacity of a single word to carry multiple related meanings. This article explores the types of polysemy, the structural and functional properties of polysemous expressions in translation, and contrasts their usage and classification in English and Uzbek. Through a comparative linguistic analysis and close observation, the study uncovers key challenges and strategies for translating polysemous words and phrases. It also discusses how metaphor and metonymy contribute to the expansion of semantic fields in both languages.

Keywords: *semantic structure, lexical meaning, translation equivalence, metaphor and metonymy, contextual disambiguation, contrastive linguistics.*

Introduction

Polysemy — the phenomenon wherein a single lexical item possesses multiple related meanings — is a hallmark of natural language and plays a vital role in linguistic flexibility, expressivity, and cognitive economy. It allows speakers to use existing vocabulary creatively to accommodate new concepts without generating entirely new terms. In English and Uzbek, polysemy manifests differently due to the languages' distinct historical development, cultural nuances, and syntactic structures. This paper aims to delve into the semantic, structural, and functional aspects of polysemous words in both languages, with special attention to their usage in metaphorical and metonymic contexts. The translation of such lexemes presents unique challenges, especially when cultural or contextual interpretations diverge.

Therefore, a thorough understanding of polysemy is essential not only for linguists but also for translators and educators [1].

Methods

This study adopts a **comparative-descriptive linguistic approach**, integrating both **qualitative and contrastive methods** to investigate the phenomenon of polysemy in English and Uzbek. The research focuses on identifying, analyzing, and interpreting polysemous expressions from both structural and semantic perspectives, with particular attention to their figurative meanings and translation nuances.

Data for the study were gathered from a variety of **primary and secondary sources**, including:

- Modern and classical literary texts in English and Uzbek,
- Monolingual and bilingual dictionaries,
- Linguistic corpora and databases,
- Translations of selected works (notably from authors such as O. Henry and A. Qahhor),
- Academic articles and theoretical works in semantics, pragmatics, and translation studies [2].

This multi-layered methodological design allowed for a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of polysemy, providing insights into how it functions within and across English and Uzbek. The methodology also lays the foundation for practical applications in translation studies, language teaching, and computational linguistics [5].

Results

The results of the study revealed several significant patterns and tendencies in the formation, structure, and translation of polysemous words in English and Uzbek. Through a comparative linguistic analysis, it became evident that while polysemy is a universal feature of language, its expression and functional realization differ according to cultural, morphological, and cognitive factors.

First and foremost, the analysis showed that **polysemy in both English and Uzbek is predominantly based on metaphorical and metonymic extensions**, but the degree and direction of these extensions vary across the two languages. For instance, in English, metaphor plays a dominant role in the development of abstract meanings from concrete origins. A word like "*branch*", originally denoting a part of a tree, extends metaphorically to signify a division of an organization or science (e.g., "branch of government"). In Uzbek, while similar metaphorical shifts are present (e.g., "*ildiz*" meaning both "root of a plant" and "origin"), the number of abstract extensions tends to be more limited, often requiring context-specific interpretation or additional lexical markers for clarity [6].

Secondly, the study found that **structural-functional features of polysemy are more rigidly codified in English due to its analytical nature**, which allows for clear differentiation of meanings through syntactic placement and collocation. In contrast, Uzbek, being an agglutinative language, often relies on suffixes and contextual usage to signal shifts in meaning. For example, the English word "*run*" can convey numerous meanings depending on collocational partners ("run a business," "run a marathon," "run a program"), whereas the Uzbek equivalent "*yugurmoq*" tends to remain in the physical motion domain unless modified by additional context or morphological elements.

A key result from the translation analysis indicates that **polysemous words frequently pose challenges for translators**, especially when one word in the source language corresponds to multiple words or expressions in the target language. This was evident in the translation of figurative language, idiomatic expressions, and culturally bound terms. For example, the English polysemous verb "*take*" has many senses—"take a photo," "take responsibility," "take time"—which may require different verbs in Uzbek (e.g., *suratga tushirmoq*, *javobgarlikni olish*, *vaqt talab qilmoq*). Literal translation of such units often led to semantic distortion, loss of idiomaticity, or misinterpretation of the original tone and meaning [7].

Lastly, the research confirmed that **polysemy contributes significantly to language economy, expressiveness, and flexibility** [8]. Speakers of both English and Uzbek intuitively exploit polysemy to achieve communicative efficiency, often embedding multiple layers of meaning in a single lexical item. This creative use of language, while enriching discourse, also introduces ambiguity that must be resolved through pragmatic awareness.

Analysis

Polysemy in both languages often arises through metaphorical extension, cognitive association, and social usage. Conceptual Metaphor Theory, proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, provides a theoretical framework explaining how abstract ideas are understood through concrete experiences. In Uzbek, metaphors such as “shirin tush” (sweet dream) parallel English expressions like “happy dream,” where adjectives shift the semantic frame.

Additionally, Cruse’s classification of systematic metonymy (e.g., “container” for “contents” — “I drank the whole bottle”) is mirrored in Uzbek usage: “butilka ichdim” (literally “I drank the bottle”). Such examples highlight universal cognitive mechanisms underlying polysemy while also revealing cultural and syntactic divergences [9].

The distinction between polysemy and homonymy is essential: polysemous senses share a semantic core, while homonyms are unrelated despite phonological identity. For example, “bet” in Uzbek (“face of a person,” “page,” “surface”) illustrates polysemy, whereas English “bank” (financial institution vs. riverbank) shows homonymy.

Discussion

The comparative study of polysemous words in English and Uzbek provides valuable insights into how meaning is structured, interpreted, and transformed across languages and cultures. The findings reinforce the notion that polysemy is not a random or chaotic phenomenon but rather a systematic and motivated process deeply rooted in human cognition, communicative needs, and cultural experience.

One of the most significant points emerging from this research is the **interplay between linguistic structure and semantic evolution**. In English, an analytical language with a fixed word order and relatively simple morphology, polysemous meanings are often disambiguated through collocations, syntactic patterns, and phrasal constructions. For example, the verb "run" changes meaning depending on its context—"run a machine," "run for office," "run a fever"—with surrounding words guiding the reader or listener to the correct interpretation. This structural flexibility allows English to exploit polysemy as a means of lexical economy and expressiveness.

Conversely, Uzbek's **agglutinative structure** and morphologically rich system give rise to a different strategy of polysemy management. Meaning extensions in Uzbek are frequently marked through affixation or semantic shifts embedded in cultural idioms and proverbs. This sometimes results in more context-dependent usage, where meaning may not always be immediately apparent without deeper cultural or situational knowledge. This illustrates that while the phenomenon of polysemy is shared, the **linguistic tools for managing polysemy differ significantly** between the two languages [8].

In terms of translation, the discussion highlights **the practical implications of polysemy for interlingual equivalence**. Translators face the dual challenge of preserving both the literal and figurative meanings of polysemous words, especially when direct equivalents are lacking. The findings underscore the importance of context-sensitive translation strategies that go beyond dictionary definitions. For example, while the English word "light" can mean "illumination" or "not heavy," Uzbek uses different words (*yorug'lik* for illumination, *yengil* for weight), requiring translators to carefully assess the communicative intent. Literal translation in such cases can lead to misunderstanding or stylistic awkwardness.

From a theoretical perspective, this research adds to the growing body of literature emphasizing the **need for functional and cognitive approaches in semantic analysis**. Traditional models that categorize meanings as discrete and hierarchical fail

to capture the fluidity and interaction of senses in actual usage. Instead, a prototype-based model—where one central meaning gives rise to peripheral but related senses—better reflects the way speakers intuitively navigate meaning.

Conclusion. Finally, the findings point to the broader cultural and philosophical dimension of polysemy. The way languages categorize and associate meanings reflects how speakers **perceive and organize the world around them**. Thus, the study of polysemy is not only a linguistic endeavor but also a window into human thought, creativity, and intercultural communication. Differences in how polysemy is formed and used reveal underlying conceptual metaphors, social values, and historical influences unique to each language community.

Polysemy is a dynamic and essential characteristic of natural languages, contributing to their flexibility, depth, and expressiveness. Its manifestation in English and Uzbek demonstrates both universal cognitive tendencies and language-specific features. Understanding polysemy — particularly in metaphorical and metonymic contexts — is vital for effective communication, language learning, and accurate translation. Further interdisciplinary research combining cognitive linguistics, computational tools, and cross-cultural studies will deepen our grasp of this phenomenon and its practical applications.

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