



## **POLYSEMY IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS**

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<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>KEYWORDS</b>
This research presents an analysis of the deep language factors that predetermine polysemy of English from the cognitive point of view. In line with a well-established point of view in cognitive linguistics, this study treats the semantics of a word as a two-level phenomenon possessing the semantic (external) level and the conceptual (internal) level. Unlike traditional research into polysemy inside historical and lexical semantics, cognitive analyses go beyond words and polysemy is regarded as a cognitive organizing principle shared by other areas of language, such as morphology, phonology and syntax.	cognitive, polysemy, linguistics, investigation, language, syntax

### **Introduction**

It is widely acknowledged that the advent of cognitive linguistics in the 1980s brought a new approach to polysemy as well. In general, cognitive linguists place central importance on the role of meaning, conceptual processes and embodied experience in the study of language and the human mind and the way in which they intersect. With their focus on linguistic categorization, as well as with its view that meaning is central to and motivates linguistic structure, the question of polysemy was placed center stage again.

This change in perspective was facilitated by new theories of how humans establish categories on the basis of prototypes and family resemblance. The word itself with its network of polysemous senses came to be regarded as a category in which the senses of the word are related to each other by means of general cognitive principles such as metaphor, metonymy, generalization, specification and image schema transformations.

Thus, within the cognitive framework, the main distinction between polysemy and homonymy is the systematic relationship of meanings that take place in polysemy. Cognitive linguists argue that the meanings of polysemous words are related in a systematic and natural way forming radial categories where one or more senses are more prototypical (central) while others are less prototypical (peripheral). It is assumed that the figurative senses of polysemous words are derived metaphorically from the more prototypical spatial senses.

In this view, metaphor is understood experientially based mapping between a concrete source domain and an abstract target domain. Furthermore, unlike traditional research into polysemy inside historical and lexical semantics, cognitive analyses go beyond words and polysemy is regarded as a cognitive organising principle shared by other areas of language, such as morphology, phonology and syntax.

Next let us see how the distinct areas of language, such as the lexicon, morphology and syntax exhibit polysemy. As for word meaning, *over*, which has been widely discussed by cognitive linguists, can serve as evidence for polysemy at the level of lexical organization. Consider the following examples which illustrate various senses of *over*:

- a The picture is over the sofa.*      **ABOVE**
- b The picture is over the hole.*      **COVERING**
- c The ball landed over the wall.*      **ON THE OTHER SIDE**
- d The car drove over the bridge.*      **ACROSS**
- e The bath overflowed.*      **EXCESS**
- f The government handed over power.*      **TRANSFER**
- g She has a strange power over me.*      **CONTROL**

As is argued by the cognitive linguists mentioned above, while each sense of *over* is distinct, they can all be related to one another; they all derive from a that not just physical objects but abstract notions such as power can be transferred and the CONTROL sense is licenced by the metaphor CONTROL IS JUST AS WORDS LIKE *over* exhibit polysemy, so do morphological categories. It can be illustrated by the diminutives as young age and small quantity. In addition, there are extensions to meanings of affection and pejoration. As pointed out by the above authors, the meaning of small easily shifts to endearment the affection we feel for small children and small animals and also to pejoration, since small can denote.

While it is a very productive feature of Hungarian and Italian, English has fewer diminutives and their productivity is much more limited. Although *booklet* can be glossed as a little book, *anklet* is not a little ankle (ankle chain, or ankle

bracelet, is an ornament worn around the ankle). However, the suffix connotes small size, e.g. a *hamlet* is a small town, but the base *ham* has no independent identifiable sense. *Starlet* refers to a young actress who plays small parts in films and hopes to become famous.

Besides having a diminutive meaning, the suffix as well. Consider *dinette* (a small space within a dwelling, usually alongside a kitchen, used for informal dining), *kichette* (a small area off the kitchen for casual dining), *kitchenette* (a small cooking area), restaurant serving light lunches, *statuette* (a small statue), *laundrette* (a self service laundry) vs. *usherette* (a woman working in a cinema, showing people to their seats) and *majorette* (a girl who spins a baton while marching with a band).

Similarly, the suffix *kin* can refer to smallness, such as in *napkin* (1. A piece of material (as cloth or paper) used at table to wipe the lips or fingers and protect the clothes, 2: a small cloth or towel), but also to endearment such as in *babykins* (a term of endearment, resulting from intense attachment to an individual and deep concern for their well).

The suffix *-ling* can also mean smallness (*duckling*, *sapling*) but with the exception of *darling* meaning endearment, it is affectionately pejorative, such as in *weakling*, *giftling* (trivial gift), *witling* (one with small wit) and *trifling* (unimportant or of little value). However, *starling* refers to a very common bird with shiny black feathers that lives especially in cities.

The suffix *y/ie* refers to both small size and is also used in babytalk, such as in *doggy*, *blankie*, *drinky*, *horsey* and *tummy*, etc. However, it is more productively used for nicknames, which suggest endearment, such as *Jimmy*, *Tommy* and *Susie*, etc.

In attitude of affection or pejoration is an instance of metonymic/metaphoric transfer. Thinking of entities with a small size can evoke a range of different attitudes. Small things can be regarded with affection or contempt.

Just as lexical and morphological categories exhibit polysemy, so do syntactic categories. Consider the ditransitive construction: SVOO, which has a range of abstract meanings associated with it as illustrated by the following examples:

*a Mary gave John the cake.*

*b Mary promised John the cake.*

*c Mary refused John the cake.*

*d Mary left John the cake.*

*e Mary permitted John the cake.*

*f Mary baked John the cake.*

In a AGENT successfully causes recipient to receive PATIENT; in b conditions of satisfaction imply that AGENT causes recipient to receive PATIENT; in c AGENT causes recipient not to receive PATIENT; in d AGENT acts to cause recipient to receive PATIENT at some future point of time; in e AGENT enables recipient to receive PATIENT; and in f AGENT intends to cause recipient to receive PATIENT. While each of the abstract senses associated with intransitive syntax are distinct, they are clearly related: they all concern volitional transfer although the nature of transfer varies from sense to sense.

It should be apparent from the foregoing discussion that cognitive linguists and argue that polysemy reveals important fundamental commonalities between lexical, morphological and syntactic organization. Scholars working in this area assume that polysemy is a conceptual rather than purely linguistic phenomenon, i.e. linguistic polysemy patterns reflect, and therefore reveal, systematic differences and patterns in the way linguistic units are organized and structured in the mind. The notion of polysemy is essentially extended and is applied to both lexical and grammatical language levels. It is argued that polysemy regulates and systematizes both lexis and grammar and may be considered as a factor which is organizing the language system. Thus polysemy is considered to be a fundamental feature of human language.

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