

Проблема различения полисемии и омонимии в современной английской лексикологии: критерии и подходы

Фируза Рустамовна Ахророва
Самаркандский государственный институт иностранных языков

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается проблема различения полисемии и омонимии в современном английском языке. Исследование основано на контекстуальном анализе, сравнении словарных данных и семантическом анализе английских лексем. Особое внимание уделяется критериям разграничения значений слов, таким как семантическая связанность, этимология, словарная фиксация и контекстуальное употребление. Полученные результаты могут быть использованы для развития лексической компетенции и совершенствования методики преподавания английского языка.

Ключевые слова: полисемия, омонимия, лексическая семантика, семантическая связанность, контекстуальный анализ, лексикография, английская лексикология, прикладная лингвистика, лексическая компетенция, словарный анализ, языковое образование в Узбекистане

The problem of distinguishing polysemy and homonymy in modern english lexicology: criteria and approaches

Firuz Rustamovna Akhrorova
Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Abstract: In recent years, the role of the English language in Uzbekistan has significantly increased due to large-scale educational reforms and national strategies aimed at strengthening foreign language competence among young specialists. Within this context, precise lexical competence becomes especially important, as misunderstandings at the semantic level may lead to communicative and academic inaccuracies. One of the most challenging issues in English lexicology remains the practical differentiation between polysemy and homonymy. Although these phenomena are widely discussed in theoretical linguistics, their applied interpretation in lexicographic practice and language teaching still raises methodological difficulties. The present study offers an applied analysis of criteria used to distinguish polysemy and homonymy in modern English. The research is based on contextual examination, comparative dictionary analysis, and semantic component analysis of selected English

lexemes. Particular attention is paid to how meanings are structured in authoritative English dictionaries and how contextual environment influences semantic interpretation. The article aims not only to clarify theoretical boundaries between related and unrelated meanings but also to demonstrate practical tools that can be implemented in English language teaching in Uzbekistan. The findings indicate that semantic relatedness, etymological origin, dictionary representation, and contextual transformation serve as the most reliable applied criteria for differentiation. The study contributes to improving lexical competence, critical dictionary skills, and analytical thinking among students and future language specialists. The results may be useful for linguists, lexicographers, and educators working within the framework of modern language education reforms.

Keywords: polysemy, homonymy, lexical semantics, semantic relatedness, contextual analysis, lexicography, English lexicology, applied linguistics, lexical competence, dictionary analysis, language education in Uzbekistan

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, Uzbekistan has implemented significant reforms aimed at strengthening foreign language education. According to the national development strategy and educational modernization policies, the mastery of English has become a key priority for academic mobility, international cooperation, and professional competitiveness. In his public addresses, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev repeatedly emphasized the importance of improving foreign language teaching standards and increasing the number of qualified specialists capable of functioning in a multilingual global environment [1; 3-7].

These reforms have led to the expansion of English language instruction at all educational levels. However, increased exposure to English also reveals persistent lexical difficulties. Among them, the distinction between polysemy and homonymy remains one of the most complex issues for students, teachers, and even translators. Although theoretical linguistics offers various definitions and classifications, practical differentiation often becomes problematic in real communicative contexts. Learners frequently struggle to determine whether different meanings of a word represent semantic development within a single lexical unit or separate lexical items sharing identical form. Therefore, the applied study of this distinction is highly relevant in the context of modern language education reforms in Uzbekistan.

The present research aims to identify and demonstrate practical criteria that can be effectively used in distinguishing polysemy and homonymy in modern English. The distinction between polysemy and homonymy has long been a central issue in lexical semantics. Despite extensive theoretical investigation, scholars continue to debate the criteria that separate multiple meanings of a single lexical unit from formally identical

but semantically independent words. One of the foundational contributions to English lexicology belongs to I.V. Arnold [2; 172], who defines polysemy as the coexistence of several related meanings within one word and emphasizes semantic development as a natural process in language evolution. According to Arnold, semantic connection between meanings serves as the primary indicator of polysemy, whereas the absence of such connection suggests homonymy. However, this semantic criterion is not always sufficient in borderline cases.

D.A. Cruse approaches the issue from a semantic-pragmatic perspective, arguing that meaning distinction should consider contextual compatibility and cognitive interpretation [3; 134]. Cruse highlights that some meanings may appear unrelated synchronically, although historically they share common roots. This raises the question of whether etymology should be decisive in classification. H. Jackson and E.Z. Amvela [4; 96] focus on lexicographic representation and suggest that dictionary structure often reflects the practical solution adopted by lexicographers. They note that some dictionaries split homonyms into separate entries, while others group polysemous meanings within one entry. Nevertheless, dictionary practice itself may vary depending on editorial policy. Within Uzbek linguistics, A. Rahimov analyzes semantic structure in English lexical units and emphasizes the importance of componential analysis for distinguishing related meanings [5; 52-74]. B. Yuldashev underlines the methodological challenges faced by English language learners in Uzbekistan, especially in identifying semantic boundaries between polysemous and homonymous forms [6; 112-119]. Uzbek researchers tend to support a combined approach that includes semantic, etymological, and contextual criteria. Despite the variety of approaches, most studies remain primarily theoretical. The applied dimension - particularly the practical use of differentiation criteria in language teaching and lexicographic training - is less systematically explored. This gap becomes especially significant in the context of expanding English language education in Uzbekistan, where students require clear analytical tools rather than abstract classifications.

Therefore, the present study aims to provide an applied perspective on the differentiation between polysemy and homonymy by integrating semantic, contextual, lexicographic, and etymological criteria into a practical analytical framework.

The primary focus is not theoretical classification but practical applicability of criteria in real linguistic practice and language teaching.

Applied Analysis of Selected Lexemes

1. The Lexeme "Bank"

The word bank provides a classical example for differentiation. In one context, it denotes a financial institution; in another, it refers to the side of a river. Dictionary analysis shows that most lexicographic sources separate these meanings into two distinct entries due to different etymological origins. Etymological investigation

confirms that the financial meaning derives from Italian "banca," while the geographical meaning originates from Old Norse. Since there is no semantic connection between the two meanings and their origins differ, this case represents homonymy.

2. The Lexeme "Light"

The word light demonstrates a more complex structure. It may function as a noun meaning "illumination," an adjective meaning "not heavy," or a verb meaning "to ignite." Semantic component analysis shows partial relatedness between some meanings (e.g., "light" as illumination and "to light" as to produce light). However, the adjective meaning "not heavy" demonstrates different semantic development. Dictionary entries usually present these meanings in separate sections, but not always as independent homonyms. In this case, contextual analysis becomes crucial. Where semantic transformation can be traced historically or metaphorically, polysemy is more likely.

3. The Lexeme "Spring"

The word spring can denote a season, a source of water, or a sudden jump.

Unlike "bank," etymological analysis shows that these meanings historically developed from a core idea of "movement" or "rising." The season "spring" reflects the time when plants "spring up," and the water source "spring" refers to water rising from the ground. Here, semantic relatedness supports the interpretation of polysemy rather than homonymy.

Practical Criteria for Differentiation

Based on the applied analysis, the following criteria prove most effective:

Semantic Relatedness - If meanings share a conceptual connection, the phenomenon is likely polysemy.

Etymological Origin - Different historical origins indicate homonymy.

Dictionary Representation - Separate entries often signal homonymy, though this is not absolute.

Contextual Independence - If meanings function entirely independently without semantic overlap, homonymy is more probable.

Possibility of Semantic Transfer - Metaphorical or metonymic development suggests polysemy.

These criteria are especially useful in educational practice, as they provide students with analytical tools rather than abstract definitions. The distinction between polysemy and homonymy plays an important role in vocabulary acquisition. Students who understand semantic structure demonstrate higher levels of reading comprehension and translation accuracy. Within the framework of modern educational reforms, it becomes necessary to integrate applied lexicological analysis into university curricula. Teaching students to work critically with dictionaries, analyze etymology,

and examine contextual meaning contributes to deeper lexical competence. Such analytical skills correspond to current educational objectives aimed at developing independent and critical thinking specialists capable of participating in international academic discourse.

CONCLUSION

The applied differentiation between polysemy and homonymy remains one of the most significant and complex problems in modern English lexicology. While theoretical approaches provide a foundation for classification, practical criteria are essential for real linguistic analysis and language teaching. The present study demonstrates that semantic relatedness, etymological investigation, lexicographic structure, and contextual functioning serve as the most reliable tools for distinguishing between polysemy and homonymy. In the context of ongoing language education reforms in Uzbekistan, strengthening applied lexical analysis becomes particularly relevant. The development of analytical lexical competence contributes not only to linguistic accuracy but also to the formation of critical thinking and professional language skills among future specialists.

Thus, the applied study of polysemy and homonymy has both theoretical and educational significance and supports the broader objectives of modern foreign language education.

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