

Architectonics of lexical meaning: a comparative analysis of radial and chain models of polysemy in English language

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Abstract: This article examines the architectonics of lexical meaning in the English language through the phenomenon of polysemy as one of the central issues in semantics. It explores radial and chain models of semantic organization, focusing on their cognitive and functional characteristics. Particular attention is paid to the mechanisms of polysemy formation, including metaphorical and metonymic transfer. A comparative analysis of these models is conducted to identify their similarities and differences, as well as their role in structuring lexical meaning. The study concludes that polysemy is a systematic and logically organized phenomenon reflecting processes of conceptualization in language.

Keywords: polysemy, lexical meaning, semantic structure, radial model, chain model, metaphor, metonymy, English language, cognitive linguistics

In the realm of modern semantic inquiry, lexical meaning is no longer viewed as a static, monolithic entity but as an intricate, multi-layered network of interconnected senses. This internal organization, frequently characterized as the architectonics of lexical meaning, finds its most profound and sophisticated expression in the phenomenon of polysemy. Broadly defined as the capacity of a single lexical unit to encompass multiple related meanings, polysemy serves as a primary testament to the cognitive flexibility and inherent economy of human language. Rather than proliferating unique tokens for every nascent concept or nuanced observation, language optimizes its existing inventory by strategically expanding the semantic reach of established words. Consequently, polysemy functions as a fundamental principle of linguistic efficiency, allowing for a vast range of expression through a finite set of lexical resources.

The internal configuration of a polysemous word is far from arbitrary; it is governed by systematic principles of cognitive extension and mental mapping. Within contemporary linguistic theory, two primary structural frameworks predominate: the radial model and the chain model. The radial model operates on the principle of a central, prototypical core - often the most perceptually salient, concrete, or historically foundational sense - from which various peripheral meanings originate. These extensions are typically the result of metaphorical or metonymic mappings, as demonstrated by the word "head." Its anatomical core radiates toward diverse

applications such as the "head of a committee," the "head of a table," or the "head of a bed," all while maintaining a direct, recognizable conceptual link to the primary node. Conversely, the chain model illustrates a sequential evolution where each subsequent meaning is derived from the one immediately preceding it, rather than the original center. This process can lead to "semantic drift," where the terminal sense in the chain may eventually appear cognitively distant or even unrelated to the original source. For instance, the historical transition of "paper" from a specific botanical material to a physical writing surface, and eventually to a digital scholarly publication or a set of identity documents, showcases this step-by-step transformation.

The formation and expansion of these complex semantic networks are largely driven by the cognitive mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy. While metaphorical transfer relies on perceived similarities and structural analogies - allowing abstract domains to be understood through the lens of physical experience - metonymy functions through contiguity, part-whole relationships, and situational association. These mechanisms are essential for navigating the fluid boundaries of meaning in a constantly evolving reality. Furthermore, the role of context is paramount in disambiguating polysemous units; speakers and listeners rely on pragmatic cues and situational frames to activate the relevant portion of the semantic network, ensuring that linguistic flexibility does not result in communicative failure or excessive ambiguity. Ultimately, the study of the architectonics of meaning provides vital insights into the intersection of human thought, historical development, and the systematic nature of linguistic expression, revealing how language mirrors the architecture of the human mind.

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