

LEXICAL-SEMANTIC ASPECTS OF WORD KNOWLEDGE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK POLYSEMY

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the concept of word knowledge with a focus on polysemy, analyzing multiple word meanings from a linguistic perspective. Using the frameworks of Zimmerman (2009) and Schmitt (2000), it examines lexical-semantic characteristics in English and Uzbek. The study highlights how English relies on metaphorical and idiomatic extensions, whereas Uzbek employs morphological modifications to distinguish meanings. Cognitive and typological differences in polysemy processing between the two languages are also discussed. The research emphasizes the role of linguistic structure in shaping word meanings and semantic evolution. Findings contribute to a broader understanding of lexical ambiguity and its implications for linguistic theory.

KEYWORDS: vocabulary, polysemy, lexical semantics, cognitive processing, linguistic typology, English, Uzbek, metaphorical extension

INTRODUCTION

Word knowledge is a crucial aspect of language learning, encompassing not only the basic meaning of words but also their multiple meanings, lexical-semantic relationships, and contextual usage. According to Cheryl Boyd Zimmerman (2009), "knowing a word involves more than just recognizing its form; it requires understanding its meaning, its use in various contexts, and its relation to other words." Similarly, Norbert Schmitt (2000) outlines different aspects of knowing a word, including its meaning, spelling, pronunciation, and associations with other words. One of the most complex aspects of vocabulary acquisition is polysemy—the phenomenon where a single word has multiple meanings depending on the context. This concept is present in both English and Uzbek but functions differently due to linguistic and cultural factors. By examining word knowledge considering Schmitt's and Zimmerman's frameworks, this article explores the lexical-semantic characteristics of polysemous words in English and Uzbek, highlighting similarities and differences in how meanings evolve and are understood in each language.

Polysemy, or multiple word meanings, is a fundamental linguistic feature in both English and Uzbek. In English, many words exhibit a range of meanings based on context. For example, the word "bank" can mean a financial institution ("I deposited money at the bank") or the side of a river ("He sat on the river bank"). Norbert Schmitt (2000, p. 22) emphasizes that knowing a word includes recognizing its various meanings and understanding how they shift in different situations. In Uzbek, a similar phenomenon occurs with the word "yoz." It can mean "write" ("Men maktub yozdim") or refer to the season "summer" ("Yoz faslida havо issiq bo'ladi"). Cheryl Boyd Zimmerman (2009) notes that learning polysemous words requires contextual understanding and exposure to authentic language use. Despite these similarities, Uzbek and English differ in how polysemous words evolve. English often borrows meanings from Latin, Greek, and Germanic roots, while Uzbek polysemy is influenced by Persian, Arabic, and Turkic linguistic traditions.

Word knowledge is deeply connected to lexical-semantic relationships, such as synonyms, antonyms, and hyponyms. In English, a word's multiple meanings may be semantically related or distinct. For instance, "light" can mean "not heavy" ("This bag is light") or "not dark" ("The room is full of light"). Schmitt (2000, p. 22) explains that learners must develop the ability to distinguish between these meanings through contextual cues. Similarly, in Uzbek, the word "o'tkir" can mean "sharp" ("o'tkir pichoq") or

"intelligent" ("o'tkir aql"). Zimmerman (2009) highlights that semantic networks help learners grasp how words interconnect. While both languages share these lexical patterns, Uzbek relies more on agglutination—modifying words with suffixes to express nuances of meaning. English, in contrast, tends to separate meanings into different words or rely on idiomatic expressions.

Understanding polysemy and lexical relationships in vocabulary learning has significant implications for language acquisition. Schmitt (2000) argues that word knowledge is incremental, meaning learners acquire different aspects of a word's meaning over time. In English, exposure to authentic language—such as reading, conversations, and multimedia—helps learners internalize multiple word meanings naturally. Uzbek learners face additional challenges due to the rich system of derivational suffixes, which can alter word meanings significantly. Zimmerman (2009) points out that explicit instruction in polysemy, such as teaching words in context and using semantic mapping, enhances vocabulary retention. Comparing English and Uzbek, one key difference is that English relies more on phrasal verbs and idioms (e.g., "break down" can mean "stop working" or "lose emotional control"), whereas Uzbek conveys similar meanings through compound words or postpositions. Thus, effective vocabulary instruction should consider these structural and cognitive differences to aid learners in mastering polysemous words in both languages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of word knowledge and polysemy has been explored by various scholars, highlighting its complexity and importance in language acquisition. Schmitt (2000) categorizes vocabulary knowledge into different dimensions, emphasizing the importance of both receptive and productive knowledge. Zimmerman (2009) further expands on this idea by stating that word knowledge requires an understanding of meaning, usage, and lexical relationships. In addition, Aitchison (2012) examines how words develop multiple meanings over time, pointing out that polysemy is a natural linguistic evolution that aids communication but can also create confusion for learners. Similarly, Nation (2001) argues that knowing a word involves depth and breadth of knowledge, including its polysemous nature and contextual variations. This aligns with Laufer's (1997) assertion that a learner's ability to understand multiple meanings of a word is a key indicator of vocabulary proficiency.

Research on polysemy highlights the challenges second-language learners face in acquiring words with multiple meanings. According to Nation (2001), polysemous words can lead to misunderstandings if learners do not recognize contextual shifts in meaning. Schmitt (2000) emphasizes the role of frequency in word learning, suggesting that exposure to different usages of a word improves retention. Zimmerman (2009) reinforces this by stating that effective vocabulary instruction should include contextual learning and repeated exposure to polysemous words. Aitchison (2012) adds that polysemy is more prevalent in some languages than others, which affects the ease with which learners acquire new words. Uzbek, with its agglutinative nature, often expresses multiple meanings through suffixation, whereas English frequently relies on idioms and phrasal verbs.

The pedagogical implications of polysemy research suggest that explicit instruction is necessary for effective vocabulary acquisition. Laufer (1997) highlights that direct teaching of polysemy through semantic mapping and word association exercises enhances learning outcomes. Nation (2001) supports this by advocating for multimodal exposure to vocabulary, including reading, speaking, and writing activities. Schmitt (2000) and Zimmerman (2009) argue that learners benefit from encountering words in various contexts to fully grasp their multiple meanings. In the case of Uzbek and English, this means that learners must develop strategies to recognize differences in how each language handles polysemy. While English relies more on idiomatic expressions, Uzbek's morphological structure allows for meaning shifts through affixation. Understanding these differences is essential for language learners and educators aiming to improve vocabulary teaching methods.

DISCUSSION

From a linguistic perspective, polysemy plays a crucial role in the evolution and structure of languages, influencing word formation, semantic shifts, and cognitive processing. In English, polysemy often arises through metaphorical extension and historical language contact, whereas Uzbek relies heavily on agglutination and semantic shifts influenced by Persian, Arabic, and Turkic roots (Aitchison, 2012). Schmitt (2000) notes that English words frequently acquire multiple meanings through metaphorical and metonymic extensions, a phenomenon observed in words like "head" (e.g., "head of an organization" vs. "head of a person"). In Uzbek, however, such semantic shifts are commonly realized through derivational suffixes rather than metaphorical extension, as seen in the word "yoz," meaning both "summer" and "write," depending on context. This structural difference indicates that English tends to preserve polysemy within single lexical items, while Uzbek often differentiates meanings through affixation or compounding (Nation, 2001).

Another linguistic dimension of polysemy is its connection to cognitive processing and lexical retrieval. According to Laufer (1997), words with multiple meanings require more cognitive effort to process since speakers must rely on contextual clues to distinguish among possible interpretations. In English, ambiguity arises when words with multiple meanings are used in syntactically ambiguous sentences. For example, "He saw the bank" can refer to both a financial institution and the side of a river, depending on context. In Uzbek, such ambiguity is less frequent due to the presence of grammatical markers that clarify meaning (Aitchison, 2012). This difference suggests that English requires more reliance on syntactic and contextual disambiguation, while Uzbek leans on morphological clarity.

The development of polysemy also reflects broader typological distinctions between English and Uzbek. English, as an analytic language, often encodes meaning changes within the same lexical item rather than creating new words through affixation. Uzbek, a highly agglutinative language, frequently employs suffixation to modify a word's meaning without causing significant lexical ambiguity. For example, the English verb "run" extends its meaning metaphorically across different domains ("run a business," "run a marathon"), whereas in Uzbek, different affixed forms such as "yugurmoq" (to run physically) and "boshqarmoq" (to manage) maintain clearer distinctions (Schmitt, 2000). This linguistic contrast demonstrates that polysemy in English is more reliant on semantic expansion, while Uzbek systematically regulates meaning shifts through morphological processes (Zimmerman, 2009).

From a diachronic perspective, the mechanisms of polysemy formation also differ significantly in the two languages. English has absorbed numerous lexical influences from Latin, French, and Greek, leading to the development of polysemous words with layered etymologies (Aitchison, 2012). In contrast, Uzbek has experienced lexical expansion primarily through Persian and Arabic loanwords, many of which retain distinct meanings through phonological and morphological adaptations rather than merging into polysemous forms (Nation, 2001). This historical distinction suggests that English polysemy is often a result of external lexical borrowing and semantic drift, whereas Uzbek polysemy emerges through internal morphological changes and derivation. Understanding these linguistic processes is essential for analyzing how different languages' structure and manage semantic ambiguity within their lexicons.

RESULTS

The analysis of polysemy in English and Uzbek reveals significant linguistic differences in how multiple meanings develop and function within each language. English, as an analytic language, often retains multiple meanings within a single lexical item through metaphorical and metonymic extensions (Schmitt, 2000). For instance, words like "light" can mean "not heavy" or "not dark" depending on context, requiring speakers to rely on syntactic and semantic clues for disambiguation. Uzbek, in contrast, primarily utilizes agglutinative morphology to create meaning distinctions, thereby reducing lexical ambiguity (Nation, 2001). This structural difference suggests that polysemy in English is more reliant on cognitive flexibility in interpreting word meanings, whereas Uzbek systematically maintains meaning differentiation through affixation and derivational processes.

Cognitive processing of polysemous words also differs between the two languages due to their distinct linguistic structures. Laufer (1997) argues that languages with extensive polysemy, such as English, require greater cognitive effort for lexical retrieval, as speakers must determine meaning based on contextual cues. In Uzbek, where morphological markers often clarify meaning, cognitive load may be lower when processing polysemous words. This is evident in words like "yoz," meaning both "summer" and "write," where the surrounding grammatical structure aids in quick interpretation. In contrast, English speakers encountering a word like "bark" must rely entirely on syntactic and semantic context to differentiate between "the bark of a tree" and "a dog's bark" (Aitchison, 2012). These findings indicate that while polysemy is a universal linguistic phenomenon, its cognitive impact varies depending on language structure and typology.

Another key result of this study is that English polysemy is largely shaped by historical lexical borrowing, while Uzbek polysemy is influenced by internal derivation. English has absorbed numerous words from Latin, French, and Greek, contributing to the layered meanings of many terms (Zimmerman, 2009). This historical process has resulted in a lexicon where single words can carry multiple, sometimes unrelated, meanings. In Uzbek, polysemy arises more predictably through affixation and compounding, with loanwords from Persian and Arabic undergoing adaptation to maintain clearer semantic distinctions (Nation, 2001). This typological difference suggests that polysemy in English is more dynamic and fluid, whereas in Uzbek, it follows a more structured and predictable pattern.

The comparison of polysemy in English and Uzbek underscores the importance of linguistic typology in shaping word meaning and semantic development. Schmitt (2000) emphasizes that lexical relationships and word associations differ significantly across languages, affecting how speakers conceptualize polysemy. While both languages exhibit polysemous words, English relies more on metaphorical expansion and idiomatic usage, whereas Uzbek depends on morphological modifications. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how different languages manage lexical ambiguity and semantic extension, highlighting the role of linguistic structure in shaping the way words acquire and retain multiple meanings over time.

To further illustrate these findings, a table based on Zimmerman's (2009) model of word knowledge has been adapted to compare English and Uzbek word meanings, their translations, and associated connotations:

TABLE 1

Comparison of English and Uzbek word meanings, translations, and associated connotations

English Word	L1 Word (Uzbek)	L1 Translation	Polysemy	Connotation (Positive/Negative)
Light	Yengil	Not heavy	Yes	Positive
Light	Yorug'	Not dark	Yes	Positive
Bark	Po'st	Tree covering	Yes	Neutral
Bark	Vovullamoq	Dog's sound	Yes	Negative
Clever	Aqli	Intelligent	No	Positive
Stubborn	Qaysar	Determined	No	Negative

This table highlights the relationship between polysemy and connotation in both English and Uzbek, demonstrating how word meanings shift across different linguistic contexts. By structuring vocabulary knowledge in this way, learners and researchers can better analyze how words function in multilingual settings and how connotations shape their interpretations.

CONCLUSION

The study of polysemy in English and Uzbek highlights key linguistic differences in how multiple meanings develop and function within each language. English, as an analytic language, often relies on metaphorical extension and idiomatic usage to create polysemy, whereas Uzbek, an agglutinative language, primarily uses affixation and morphological modifications to maintain semantic distinctions. These structural differences impact cognitive processing, with English requiring greater reliance on contextual clues and Uzbek benefiting from clearer morphological markers. The comparison of polysemous words in both languages demonstrates that lexical ambiguity is managed differently based on linguistic typology and historical influences (Schmitt, 2000; Zimmerman, 2009).

Understanding polysemy from a linguistic perspective provides valuable insights into vocabulary acquisition, lexical relationships, and semantic evolution. While English allows for more flexibility in word meaning through external borrowing and metaphorical shifts, Uzbek follows a more systematic approach to word formation, reducing ambiguity through affixation. This contrast underscores the importance of linguistic typology in shaping word knowledge across languages. Future research could explore how speakers of these languages process polysemous words in real-time and how language learners navigate multiple meanings in different contexts.

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