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Homonymy and Polysemy in English

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I

Dedication

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Table of Contents

III

Abstract

Polysemy and homonymy are semantic phenomena that are part of our everyday language. Polysemous words possess two or more related senses; homonyms possess two or more unrelated meanings. These phenomena are distinguished by dictionaries based on two criteria: first, the word's etymology, second, the world's core meaning. Polysemous words are given one single entry, as they are believed to have arisen from the same historical source and possess a core meaning. Each homonym receives a separate entry, based on the claim that Homonyms have arisen from different historical sources and that they do not possess a shared core meaning.

This research will be divided into three sections:The first section will discuss the ai.s ,limits ,value of the study..etc.The second section will explain the meaning of Homonymy and Polysemy and the reasons of using these two lexical terms,also will discuss the types of Homonymy and Polysemy.The third chapter will talk about the similarities and distinction point between two lexical terms (Homonymy and Polysemy.

Section One

1.1 Introductory Remarks

Yule (1985:60) defines Homonyms in linguistics as words which are homographs (words that share the same spelling, regardless of pronunciation) or homophones (words that share the same pronunciation, regardless of spelling) or both.

A more restrictive or technical definition sees homonyms as words that are simultaneously homographs and homophones, that is to say they have identical spelling and pronunciation, whilst maintaining different meanings. Examples are the pair stalk (part of a plant) and stalk (follow/harass a person) and the pair left (past tense of leave) and left (opposite of right) (Ibid: 61-63).

Polysemy is the association of one word with two or more distinct meanings, and a polysemy is a word or phrase with multiple meanings. The word "polysemy" comes from the Greek for "many signs." The adjective forms of the word include polysemous or polysemic (James ,1983 :123).

Beretta (2005:57) defines Polysemy as the capacity for a word or phrase to have multiple related meanings. Polysemy is thus distinct from homonym which is an accidental similarity between two or more words (such as bear the animal, and the verb to bear); while homonymy is a mere linguistic coincidence, polysemy is not. In deciding between polysemy or homonymy, it might be necessary to look at the history of the word to see if the two meanings are historically related. Dictionary writers

often list polysemy under the same entry; homonyms are defined separately.

The words row (propel with oars) and row (a linear arrangement) are homonyms, as are the words see (vision) and sea (body of water).

Similarly, a river bank, a savings bank, a bank of switches, and a bank shot in the game of pool share a common spelling and pronunciation, but differ in meaning.

The words bow and bough are examples where there are two meanings associated with a single pronunciation and spelling (the weapon and the knot); two meanings with two different pronunciations (the knot and the act of bending at the waist), and two distinct meanings sharing the same sound but different spellings (bow, the act of bending at the waist, and bough, the branch of a tree) (Ibid: 124).

Polysemy examples :

The word good has many meanings. For example, if a man were to shoot his grandmother at a range of five hundred yards, I would call him a good shot, but not necessarily a good man.

"Now, the kitchen was the room in which we were sitting, the room where Mama did hair and washed clothes, and where each of us bathed in a galvanized tub. But the word has another meaning, and the 'kitchen' I'm speaking of now is the very kinky bit of hair at the back of the head, where the neck meets the shirt collar. If there ever was one part of our African past that resisted assimilation, it was the kitchen "(Beretta ,2005 : 58_65) .

1.2 Homonymy

Homonyms are two or more different lexemes which have the same form but are unrelated in meaning and have different historical sources in language. The words which are homonyms usually have different entries in dictionaries (Leisi,1985:26).

While investigating homonymy one also has to consider homophony and homography. Homophones are lexemes that have the same pronunciation, but can differ in spelling (Yule ,1985,P.96-97).

Homonymy can therefore be seen as a subclass of homophony and homography. Homonymy can also be divided in absolute and partial homonymy (Ibid:98).

Absolute homonyms are unrelated in meaning,all their forms are identical in pronunciation as well as in spelling and those identical forms are grammatical equivalent.Grammatical equivalents belong to the same word-class,have the same syntactic function and occur in the same grammatical environment (Rodd,2013:35).

For example :

Mail1 (noun 'posted letters and parcels')

Mail2 (noun 'armor made of rings or chains').

For example :

Lap1 [læp] (noun 'top part of the legs, forming a flat surface when sitting down') lap2 [læp] (noun 'a section of a journey or trip')

Partial homonyms fail to fulfill one or more features of absolute homonymy.There may be differences in form, pronunciation or spelling or a lack of grammatical equivalence.

For example :

Visit1 (verb 'to see a person or a place for a short time')

Visit2 (noun 'a period of time when somebody goes to see a person or a place')

Run 1 (noun 'a bar that forms a step of the ladder') run 2 (past part. Of the verb ring) (Leisi ,1985,48)

1.2.1 The Reasons of using Homonymy

1.2.1.1 Phonetic Convergence

The most common source of homonymy is the converging of sounds. A result of phonetic changes is that words which originally had different forms fall together and become the same in spoken language; sometimes they even coincide in writing.This form of homonomy is mainly found in languages which have many monosyllabic lexemes, for example in English and French (Rodd,2013:37).

1.2.1.2 Semantic Divergence

Homonymy can also result from sense-development going in different directions. The meanings of a lexeme diverge so much that there can not be found any relation between them, here polysemy is replaced by homonymy and the unity of the word does no longer exist. These kinds of homonyms are called secondary homonyms.

"This form of homonymy is the exact counterpart of a process discussed in the previous section: the reinterpretation of homonyms as though they were one word with two senses." In one process two words fall together to one form and in the other process one lexeme splits into two, which is the more common case (Lyons,1995:55) .

1.2.1.3 Foreign Influence

The number of homonyms in English is very high since there have been many words borrowed from other languages during the development of the English language.Those borrowings adapted themselves to the phonetic system of the English language and were also affected by the sound changes ,therefore the borrowed lexemes sometimes overlapped with lexemes in the receiving language (Cruse,2000:168).

For example :fray1 being a verb ('being worn through e.g. textiles') from French frayer (Latin fricare) coincides with fray2 ('a discussion or conflict') a noun already existing in English coming from Middle English fray (Lyons,1995:56-58) .

Another example for homonymy resulting from borrowing are the lexemes post1 ('a long piece of wood or metal set in the ground') and post2 ('system for sending letters'). The lexeme post1 has its roots in Old English postis (Latin postis) and post2 is a French borrowing from poste

1.3 Polysemy

1.3.1 Definitions of Polysemy

According to Blank (1999:11-15) A polysome is a word or phrase with different, but related senses. Since the test for polysemy is the vague concept of the relatedness, judgments of polysemy can be difficult to make. Because applying pre-existing words to new situations is a natural process of language change, looking at words' etymology is helpful in determining polysemy but not the only solution; as words become lost in etymology, what once was a useful distinction of meaning may no longer be so. Some seemingly unrelated words share a common historical origin, however, so etymology is not an infallible test for polysemy, and dictionary writers also often defer to speakers' intuitions to judge polysemy in cases where it contradicts etymology. English has many polysemous words. For example, the verb "to get" can mean "procure" (I'll get the drinks), "become" (she got scared), "understand" (I get it) etc.

Types of polysemy According to Cruse (2000:46) polysemy can be divided into two different types: linear and nonlinear. Linear polysemy accounts for a specialization-generalization relation between senses and, in turn, is divided into four types: auto hyponymy, automeronymy, auto superordination and autoholonymy (Blank ,1999:16-20).

6

1.3.2 Types of Polysemy

1.3.2.1 Linear polysemy

A. Auto Hyponymy: it occurs when a word has a sense describing a general quality of that word, and another sense which makes reference to a subvariety of that general idea. Cruse (2002:179) gives the example of dog which may refer to the general sense of " member of a canine race" (as a counterpoint to other races) or to the more specific sense of " masculine member of a canine race " , making a gender distinction inside the same species .

B.Automeronymy: it is very similar to auto hyponymy but, in this case, the specific sense could be defined as a subpart rather than a subtype of the general sense. A clear example for this could be the word table , which could make reference to the whole piece of furniture (legs , panel , screws   …) or just to the table – top : three people were needed to move the table to another room vs. put the books back on the table , please .

C. Autosuperordination: Cruse (ibid) defines this type by giving examples. A clear one would be the use of man as referring to mankind and the same word as opposed to woman .

D . Autoholonymy: this case of polysemy is the less clear one, as it is very difficult to distinguish it from automeronymy. An example for it would be the word arm with one of its senses including the hand, as in he lost an arm in the accident and the other one not (Ibid:179).

1.3.2.2 Non – linear polysemy

A．Metaphor:

Metaphor plays a very important role in many word senses relation, that is to say, many are related metaphorically. Its definition can be as follows: "A figure of speech in which a word or expression normally used of one kind of object, action, etc. is extended to another".For example : the well-known America is a melting pot, where a single culture emerging from many different ones is associated by resemblance to a melting pot. Another example "His refusal set off a chain of events that ended in his arrest." In this sentence the word chain is not used in its literal meaning , but it describes a succession of linked events , an idea that can be related by resemblance to the physical image of chains (Beretta,2005 : 50) .

b.Metonymy :

Traditionally, metonymy is defined as a person or object being referred to using as the vehicle a word whose literal denotation is somehow pertinently related. In a simpler way, "a figure of speech in which a word or expression normally or strictly used of one thing, is used of something physically or otherwise associated with it" .In this case , the most relevant characteristic in terms of polysemy is that it is based on an association . An example: The usage of capital city names so as to refer to the whole country as in London and Madrid do not agree with the decision taken in the assembly (instead of England and Spain…) (Rodd,2013:79).

Metonymically motivated polysemy is thought by some authors to be the representation of "pure" polysemy.It is divided it into several subtypes, namely count/mass, container/container , producer / product , product / institution , figure / ground (Blank ,1999 : 20-29).

Cruse (2000:57) also states that "some cases of polysemy are systematic in the sense that the relationship between the readings recurs over a range of lexical items that is at least partially predictable on semantic ground." He asserts that metonymy can be highly systematic , whereas metaphor is considered the least systematic one,linear polysemy also has some systematicity.

Section Two

2.1 The Association between Polysemy and Homonymy

Borowsky (1996:63) explained that the study of polysemy of a language has often been associated with the study of homonymy because distinction between the two has often not been very clear. In a piece of text, one can come across a set of words, which may appear either homonymous or polysemous. Since both types of word are often similar in surface representation (i.e., spelling and orthography) with no special mark for their distinction, one is easily misled to assume homonyms and polysemy or vice versa. However, there is a need to draw a clear line of distinction between the two, because these forms differ from each other not only in their nature, but also in function and implication .

2.1.1 Lexicographical Level

It is not always possible to distinguish polysemous lexical items from homonyms, and whenever this distinction is made, subjectivity prevails. The lexicographer's knowledge of the etymological development of the lexical items is of vital importance. In fact, the lexicographer shows the distinction made by entering homonyms separately in the dictionary, i.e. as two or more different lexical items even though the lexical items have the same spelling and/or pronunciation, while a polysemous lexical item is entered as one lexical item with its definition showing all its multiple meanings (Hogaboam,1975:265-274).

In this section an attempt is made to identify the clues and strategies that can be adopted for tracing the differences between the two types of words. Since there is no well defined process for doing this, one has to use traditional knowledge from linguistics, semantics and cognitive science. Making a perceptible distinction between the two types of words is a prerequisite for developing tools, systems and resources for natural language processing, language engineering, word sense disambiguation, machine translation, information retrieval, machine learning, cognitive linguistics, and applied linguistics (Ibid:175).

2.1.2 Semantics Level

In many languages, a large portion of words are semantically ambiguous in that a single word form captures multiple senses or meanings. Given this, it is not surprising that scientists have spent decades trying to understand how semantic ambiguity is resolved, and how semantically ambiguous words are processed. Early work in this area focused on whether or not both meanings of an ambiguous word were activated, and how biasing context, meaning frequency, and contextual strength influenced meaning activation. Past research has demonstrated that the presence versus absence of context, meaning frequency, and contextual strength interact during lexical ambiguity resolution (Adriaens , 1988:49).

Recent studies on ambiguous word processing and representation have taken into consideration the different types of semantically ambiguous words and the level of semantic similarity of the ambiguous words' meanings. Some researchers have found that polysemous words with more related senses have an advantage in lexical decision tasks, such that

polysemous words are responded to faster than unambiguous words, whereas homonyms have a small disadvantage in a lexical decision task such that homonyms are responded to more slowly than polysemous and unambiguous words (Rodd,2013:180-188).

Polysemous words can be distinguished from each other based on the source of ambiguity. For example, metonymic polysemy occurs when the interpretations of both senses of a polysemous word are literal, and these senses are connected in meaning through one of various types of relationships. For example, the polysemous word "chicken" has a count/mass (countable/uncountable) distinction that refers to the animal and the meat of that animal. Other forms of metonymy include container/contents (e.g., holding a "glass" of orange juice vs. drinking a "glass" of orange juice), synecdoche, in which the part of something represents the whole (e.g., "wheels" representing part of vs. the whole car), and figure/ground (e.g., "cage": the structure vs. the enclosed space). These aforementioned forms of polysemous words are considered regular polysemy because the relationships between the varying senses are formed via predictable relationships (e.g., container/contents, mass/count)(Ibid:189-194).

Cruse (2000:68) states that polysemous words have less predictable connections between the different senses; these are referred to as irregular polysemy. For example, metaphorical polysemy occurs when one sense of a polysemous word has a more literal interpretation and the other has a more figurative interpretation. The word "eye", for example, refers to a body part and to part of a storm. In general, the senses of metonymic polysemy are similar to each other in meaning and are connected via

literal relationships, whereas the senses of metaphorical polysemy are less related in meaning because their relationships are less concrete. Regular polysemous senses may be easier to process because the connections and relationships are more concrete.

2.2 The Differences between Polysemy and Homonymy

There are many homonymy words that may appear polysemy in a text. However, analysis of their origin, form, and meaning may help to isolate them from the group of polysemy to restore their approved lexico semantic identity in the language. To draw a line of distinction between the two types of words, there are various parameters proposed by James (1983:58) which are summarized below:

2.2.1 Polysemy is the existence of more than one semantic specification for the same lexical item. Homonymy, on the contrary, is the existence of more than one morphological specification sharing the same phonological and/or orthographic representation (Ibid: 59).

2.2.2 While polysemy have one and only one etymological ancestry, homonyms are not etymologically related (Yule, 1985: 96).

2.2.3 The best solution to the puzzle of polysemy and homonymy is to seek a core of meaning,and the homonymous items sharing the same core meaning should be undoubtedly markedas polysemous (Ibid: 97).

2.2.4 A word that is polysemic will have a variety of synonyms each corresponding to one of its meanings. Moreover, it will also have a set of antonyms. It is tempting to say that where the antonym is the same, there is polysemy (Pexman,2004: 107).

2.2.5 The ambiguity in homonymous forms is not likely to be sustained in a longer discourse,which may not be true to polysemous words (Kreidler, 1998: 55).

2.2.6 In polysemy, words are semantically related and sense variations typically originate from metaphoric usage; in homonymy, words are different in meanings which are not generally related (Armstrong,2011:8).

2.2.7 The context of homonyms consists of quite different vocabularies, whereas the context of polysomes may be quite similar (Ibid: 9).

2.2.8 In case of polysemy, words are registered in a dictionary as a single entry and their multiple meanings are normally numbered serially with examples of usage in different contexts, while in homonymy, words have dictionarial entries as separate listemes. Homonyms have separate entries in regular dictionaries (James,1983: 42-43).

Despite the strategies stated above, distinction between the two types of word has not been so simple and straightforward, since words that are etymologically related can, over time, drift so far apart that their original semantic relations are no longer recognizable. Moreover, etymologically related meanings are not always related in the mental lexicon of users; oppositely, there are cases where etymologically

unrelated forms are felt to be related in the mental lexicon. Furthermore, as language users, people often find a metaphorical connection between these forms and intend to adjust their understanding of the words accordingly. Thus, from a historical point of view what is a homonym may result from an accidental convergence of the forms, and be reinterpreted as a case of polysemy (Klepousniotou,2012:15-21).

2.3 Similarities between Polysemy and Homonymy

The study of polysemy of a language has often been associated with the study of homonymy because the distinction between the two has often not been very clear.

In a piece of text, one can come across a set of words, which may appear either homonymous or polysemous. Since both types of word are often similar in surface representation (i.e., spelling and orthography) with no special mark for their distinction, one is easily misled to assume homonyms and polysemy or vice versa (Lee,2009:50).

However, Yule (1985:30) states that there is a need to draw a clear line of distinction between the two,because these forms differ from each other not only in their nature, but also in function and implication.

Conclusion

To conclude this research ,a lot of students will know that Polysemy is one word that has many different meanings. Like synonyms, but synonyms are different words with one meaning. Whereas a polysemy is simply one word with multiple meanings. On the other hand, Homonyms are words that have different meanings but either the same spelling or pronunciation.

Finally, the difference between polysemy and Homonymy, Polysemous words can be used to express different meanings.Whereas homonyms are words that have the same spellings sometimes, or the same pronunciation but the meanings will never relate in any way. Polysemy refers to the coexistence of many possible meanings for a word or phrase. Homonymy refers to the existence of two or more words having the same spelling or pronunciation but different meanings and origins. This is the main difference between polysemy and homonymy

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