

THE ROLE OF THE CONTEXT – POLYSEMY IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract: *The report is totally dedicated to the role of the context and especially polysemy in English language where are presented three types of lexical meanings and different meanings of polysemantic words. Lexical changes and the basic criteria that places this phenomenon to wider field of word - formation. Moreover semantic changes are more frequent, and they contribute to a great extent to the enrichment of a language.*

This report briefly presents the major points concerning contextual meaning. The enormous potential possessed by words for generating new contextual meanings supported by various examples catalogue this process to one of the most outstanding means of enriching English and Romanian or any other languages.

Key words: *referential meaning, emotive meaning, stylistic meaning, contextual meaning, semantic changes, polysemy, objective reality.*

1. Introduction

English is a very productive language.

Due to its versatile nature, it can undergo many different word formation processes to create a new lexicon. Some of them are much lexicalised - such as derivation or compounding.

However, new trends are pointing up in the productive field. This is the case of the minor methods of word - formation - i.e. clipping, blending - and conversion. As they are recent phenomena, they have not been much studied yet. Even scholars differ in their opinions about the way they should be treated as H. Sweet, A.I. Smirnitsky, C. David. There is only one point they all agree with: these new methods are becoming more frequently used. Polysemy refers to the quality of some words to have several related meanings. A word which has several related meanings is thus a polyseme. These can be compared to homonyms, which are words that have several completely different meanings.

Polysemy is a very useful aspect of language as it enables learners to make informed guesses about the meaning of new words if they recognise them as polysemes. A deeper analysis of this phenomenon will reveal the genuine status of polysemy.

2. The types of the lexical meaning

Language differs not only in its phonological and grammatical systems its system of meaning is also different. "Meaning in our view, is a property of a language".

Therefore it seems to be necessary first to consider here the three types of lexical meaning which can be distinguished and are to be rendered in translation: referential, emotive and stylistic.

Referential meaning (also called logical, denotative) has direct reference to things or phenomena of objective reality, naming abstract notions and processes as well. It is also necessary to distinguish between primary and secondary referential meaning.

Emotive meaning, unlike referential meaning, has reference not directly to things or phenomena of objective reality but to the feelings and emotions, associated with them. It is a connotative meaning created by connotations raised in the mind of the speaker and reader; it is inherent in a definite group of words even when they are taken out of context.

Stylistic meaning is based on stylistic stratification of the English vocabulary and is formed by stylistic connotations. Stylistic and emotive meanings are closely connected. As a rule, stylistically colored words, i.e., words belonging to certain stylistic strata, except the neutral, possess a considerable element of emotive meaning. The slang-words "mug", "phiz" are undoubtedly more expressive than their neutral counterpart

“face” and have a pejorative emotive meaning. In addition to the emotive and stylistic meanings, proper to the word as a linguistic unit, some emotive connotations may be acquired in the context. Both are to be rendered in translation.

3. The role of the context

Different meanings of polysemantic words are revealed in the context. The term “context” is understood as the minimum stretch of speech diagnosing each individual meaning of the word. The context individualizes the meanings, brings them out. The context reveals concrete or abstract meanings of a word, its direct or transferred meaning.

A contextual meaning arises in the context. It should not be regarded as part of the semantic structure of the word. Every word possesses an enormous potentiality for generating new contextual meanings. These occasional contextual meanings are not arbitrary, but are always predetermined by the semantic structure of the word. It largely depends upon the semantic context. A contextual meaning possible in one language is impossible in another.

Contextual meanings often produce a strong effect, performing a stylistic function of “deceived expectancy”. The translator is confronted with a double difficulty: he/she should avoid toning it down and must not violate the norms of the target-language.

A closer investigation will show, however, some signs of patterned relationships, especially if one observes semantically related groups. The lexical meaning of the verb points out the instrument, the agent, the place, the cause, the result and the time of action. The example bellow serves only to illustrate this, the classification being far from exhaustive. It should be also borne in mind that verbs are mostly polysemantic and have other meanings in addition to those indicated. Like other verbs creating a vivid image they often receive a permanent metaphorical meaning.

Lexical changes do not consist only in the addition or loss of words, but also in the change of the meaning of lexical items. The description of the changes in meaning undergone by words is usually more difficult than the description of the changes in the grammatical form, or the description of sound changes. Nevertheless this is important, as semantic changes are more frequent, and they contribute to a great extent to the enrichment of a language.

In order to discuss semantic changes, there must always be taken into consideration an earlier stage and a later stage of development. This corresponds to a diachronic approach to language problems. On the other hand, each of these two layers must be conceived as being analyzable from a synchronic point of view.

When words are defined, lexicographers identify first the linguistic situations or contexts in which the words are used. The established meaning is the common denominator of similar occurrences. If a word is polysemantic, that is, it appears in several contexts which have marked by figures. The usual explanatory dictionaries define the meanings of words on the synchronic scale. The historical dictionaries, e.g., *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, later known as *The Oxford English Dictionary*, or its officially authorized abridgement, *The Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, explain not only the modern meanings of words, but also the various meanings each word had along centuries. Such dictionaries offer a more adequate image of the semantic changes undergone by words. They record not only the latest evolution in language, but also some meanings which are no longer used.

In the following table there is illustrated the evolution of 14 meanings of the verb *to run*, according to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. This is an incomplete diagram, but sufficiently large for didactic purposes.

Table 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Earlier stage (1500)	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	x	x			x	x	x
Latest stage (from 1500 onwards)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

1. When you run, or run a particular distance, you move quickly, leaving the ground during each stride.
e.g. I ran downstairs to open the door...
2. You say that something long, such as a road, runs in particular direction when you are describing its course or position.
e.g. The reef runs parallel to the coast.
3. If you run an object or you hand over something, you move the object or your hand over it.

e.g. She ran her finger down a list of names.

4. In an election, if someone runs for political office, they take part as a candidate.

e.g. He ran for Vice President on the democratic ticket.

5. If you run an organization or an activity you are in charge of it or you organize it.

e.g. We run a course for local teachers.

6. If you run a car, you have it and use it.

e.g. My mother runs her own car.

7. When a machine is running, it's switched on and operating.

e.g. The engine is running.

8. If a liquid runs in a particular direction, it flows in that direction.

e.g. The river runs our house.

9. If the colour in a piece of clothing runs, it comes out when the clothing is washed.

e.g. The colours had faded and run.

10. If a play, event, or legal contract runs for a particular period of time, it lasts.

e.g. The monsoons had six weeks more to run.

11. In the theatre, a run is the period of time during which the production of a play, opera, or ballet is regularly performed.

e.g. The play ended its six-week run at the Regent.

12. A run of success or failure is a series of successes or failures.

e.g. Luds United had a run of wins in December.

13. In cricket or baseball, a run is a score of one.

e.g. They had beaten England by seventeen runs.

14. If someone is on the run, they are trying to escape or hide from someone.

e.g. he is on the run after being arrested on drugs charges.

It should also be mentioned that a huge amount of phrases or phrasal verbs or even adjectives, attributes, nouns are built with the same verb "to run".

4. Conclusions

Polysemy is the linguistic term for a word's capacity to carry two or more distinct meanings, e.g. *grave*: 'serious' or 'tomb'. In some modern linguistic and literary theory, it is argued that all signs are polysemic, and the term has been extended to larger units including entire literary works.

Polysemy is a vital and developing process that penetrates contemporary speech as well. Subconsciously every English speaker realizes the immense potentiality of using a word in different contexts when the need arises.

In this work we have tried to investigate the problems of polysemy especially the classification and the differences of meanings, lexical and stylistic peculiarities in English language, but of course there is a number of problems remaining to be worked out as well as many aspects that need further developed.

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