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THE PROBLEM OF POLYSEMY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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presented by

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Introduction

Language is defined as a human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, or written symbols. But frankly speaking, language is far too complicated, intriguing, and mysterious to be adequately explained by a brief definition. The organic function of the language is to carry meaning. Most of the problems in linguistic science are intimately bound to question of semasiology and call for scientific analysis of communication in words. The study of words is not exclusively a study of roots and stems, of prefixes or suffixes. The mysterious world of words is an object of scientific investigation [ 13; 25 ].

Theoretical problems of linguistic form and meaning as relevant to the progressive development of language have attracted the attention of scholars, philosophers and grammarians since the times of Plato and Aristotle. From those times sameness of meaning was not very easy to deal with but there seemed nothing inherently difficult about difference of meaning. The situation is the same nowadays. Not only different words have different meanings; it’s also the case that the same word may have a set of meanings. This phenomenon is called polysemy.

Polysemy is the coexistence of many possible meanings for a word or phrase. Most words of the English language are polysemantic. Highly developed polysemy is one of the characteristic features of the English language. The system of meanings of any polysemantic word develops gradually, mostly over the centuries, as more and more new meanings are either added to old ones, or out some of them. We say that the word is polysemantic when it has many meanings. In the word the main and the secondary meanings are distinguished. Thus, the word is polysemantic in the language but in actual speech it is always monosemantic, that is, it has only one meaning. It is in the context that makes the polysemantic word monosemantic. The researches of polysemy are also significant in grammar, as most grammatical forms are polysemantic. Even a single grammatical form can be made to express a whole variety of structural meanings.

The semantic structure of a polysemantic word is treated as a system of meanings. Some semantic structures are arranged on a different principle. In the following list of meaning of the adjective dull one can hardly hope to find a generalized meaning covering and holding together the rest of the semantic structure.

The researches of the multiplicity of meanings began in eighteenth century and were continued in the nineteenth century. The most important investment in this century was made by Bréal whose research into polysemy marked a new starting point: he shifted the study of polysemy away from lexicography and etymology and investigated polysemy as the always synchronic pattern of meaning surrounding a word is itself he ever changing result of semantic change [ 6; 154 ].

The important researches in the sphere of polysemy were made by Lyon who considers polysemy and homonymy as two types of lexical ambiguity and introduce some criteria for deciding when it is polysemy and when it is homonymy. One criterion is etymological information about the lexical item in question. Lexical items with the same origin are considered as polysemantic, whereas if they have evolved from distinct lexemes in some earlier stage of the language then they are regarded as homonymous [ 15; 123-124 ].

Lexical meaning of every word depends upon the part of speech to which the word belongs. Every word may be used in a limiting set of syntactical functions, and with the definite valency. It has a definite set of grammatical meanings, and a definite set of forms.

Every lexico-grammatical group of words or class is characterized by its own lexico-grammatical meaning, forming, as it were, the common denominator of all the meanings of the words which belongs to this group. The lexico-grammatical meaning may be also regarded as a feature according to which these words are grouped together. Many recent investigations are devoted to establishing word classes on the basis of similarity of distribution.

In the lexical meaning of every separate word the lexico-grammatical meaning common to all the words of the class to which this word belongs is enriched by additional features and becomes particularized [ 6; 205-206 ].

In summing up this point, we note that the complexity of the notion is determined by the relationships of the extra-linguistic reality reflected in human consciousness. The structure of every separate meaning depends on the linguistic syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships because meaning is an inherent component of language. The complexity of every word meaning is due to the fact that it combines lexical meaning with lexico-grammatical meaning and sometimes with emotional coloring, stylistic peculiarities and connotations born from previous usage.

The importance of studying the phenomenon of polysemy is obvious because it is the object of confusion and in order to provide a quantitative and qualitative growth of the language’s expressive resources it is extremely important to investigate the semantic changes in the system of meanings in the English language. To understand a text, learners need to know words and knowing a word involves knowing: its spoken and written contexts of use its patterns with words of related meaning. When teaching vocabulary it is then necessary to consider aspects like denotation, polysemy, connotation and sociocultural aspects when teaching a second or foreign language so that learners are able to get meaning from texts.

The aim of research is to make an analysis of the main principles of word meaning and its problems in teaching English.

The objective of this research is the investigation of polysemy in diachronic and synchronic dimensions. According to the objective there are following tasks:

1. to show historical background of the polysemy;
2. to describe semantic structure of polysemantic words;
3. to discover the impact of the context on the meaning of polysemantic words;
4. to describe the practical usage of the polysemy.

To solve all these tasks my diploma paper was designed.

Chapter I. Words as Meaningful Units

1.1 Polysemy as the Source of Ambiguities in a Language

Polysemy is a semantic inherent in the fundamental structure of the language. All languages have polysemy on several levels. A wide-spread polysemy in English is rightly considered as one of its characteristic features conditioned by the peculiarities of its structure.

The main source of the development of regular polysemy is the metaphoric and metonymic transference, which is commonplace and appears to be fundamental in living language.

Polysemic words make up a considerable part of the English vocabulary. Potential polysemy of words is the most fertile source of ambiguities in language.

In a limited number of cases two meanings of the same English words are differentiated by certain formal means, as, for instance, by spelling: born — borne, draft — draught; by word-order: ambassador extraordinary — extraordinary ambassador; by inflexion: hanged — hang. The distinctions between thing-words (countables) and mass-words (uncountables) is easy enough if we look at the idea that is expressed in each single instance. But in practical language the distinction is not carried through in such a way that one and the same word stands always for one and the same idea [ 9; 112 ].

On the contrary, a great many words may in one connection stand for something countable and in the other for something uncountable. Compare:

1. Have an ice.
2. There is no ice on the pond.

In the first example ice — any frozen dessert, especially one containing cream, as a water ice, sherbet or frappé. In the second example ice — water frozen icing frosting, any substance looking like ice.

In the vast majority of cases the context, linguistic or situational will narrow down all irrelevant senses [ 11; 97-98 ].

Words often signs not of one but of several things. The linguistic mechanism works naturally in many ways to prevent ambiguity and provide the clue to distinguish the necessary meaning. It’s also important to take into consideration the significance of the context, linguistic or non-linguistic; many ambiguities are never noticed because the various possible meanings are excluded by the situation. Important observations in this area of the vocabulary have been made by contextual, distributional and transformational analysis [16; 185 ].

The problem of polysemy, in other words, the use of the same word in two or more distinct meanings in relevant to a number of other important questions. These are: the development of different types of synonyms, as a result of semantic transpositions of lexical units and homonymy.

Defining polysemy as a linguistic development, Charles Bally made distinction between its two aspects: first, when one linguistic sign has several meanings, and then, when meaning is expressed by several linguistic signs.

Words may grow in connotative power in accordance with the nature with the meanings connected with them. In the power of connotation lies the reserve force of language. Without this language would lose much of its expressivity and flexibility.

The frequency of polysemy in different languages is a variable depending on various factors. Languages where derivation and composition are sparingly used tend to fill the gaps in vocabulary by adding new meaning to existing terms.

Polysemy more often occurs in generic words than in specific terms whose meanings are less subject to variation [ 3; 214-215 ].

It is extremely important not to lose sights of the fact that few words have simple meanings. Practically most words have, besides their direct meaning, a fringe of associated meanings. As a matter of fact, language owes very much of its expressive power to the ideas and emotions associated with words. There are usually a variety of associated meanings which appear in varying degrees of prominence determined by the context.

The course followed by words used in different context and the shifts of meaning presents a major interest in contrastive lexicology and typological study of languages.

In analyzing the semantic structure of words we have already seen that some meanings invariably come to the fore when we hear the word in actual speech or see in written. Other meanings make themselves evident only when the word is used in certain contexts. The context makes the meaning explicit, in other words, brings them out. This is not to say that polysemic words have meanings only in context. As has already been emphatically stressed the semantic structure of the word is a dialectic entity and involves dialectical permanency and invariability [14; 126-127 ].

Meaning should always be understood as involving the relation of language to the rest of the world and such meaningfulness is an essential part of the definition of language.

The distributional analysis of meaning makes it possible to reveal a great deal about the total functioning and use of words in a language. It gives sufficient evidence to recognize that part of the total meaning of many words in all languages is to be determined by their relations with other words in both the basic dimensions of linguistic analysis, syntagmatic and paradigmatic. Words as individual lexical items are structurally related to each other [14; 129 ].

A special interest is presented by the polysemic words whose meaning is based on a wide notional basis. Such lexical units can be used as function words revealing the tendence to partial or complete semantic depletion.

The first to be mentioned here are the verbs to be, to do, to get, to have, to make, to set, to take. The semantic value and functional use of these polysemic verbs offers difficulties in language learning and lexicography.

As it has been pointed out, componential analysis presupposes the revealing of differential and integral semantic features of lexical units and their variant meanings, in other words, semantic oppositions on the lexico-grammatical level.

Compare, for illustration, the semantic group of verbs which, besides the verb to be in its locative meaning ‘бути, знаходитись’, includes at least such verbs as: to live, to stay, to dwell, to reside.

The distinctive features of the members of the group observed in their meaning reveal themselves in the information which they carry about the duration of the action.

The verbs to live and to dwell, for instance, do not show any special contrast in this respect. In spoken English ‘dwell’ is now usually replaced by ‘live’.

But if we compare such verbs as to be, to stay and to live, we shall see that they differ essentially in expressing the durative character of the action and are not always interchangeable. For example,

She is in the house.

She stays in the house.

She lives in the house.

The verb to reside is stylistically marked member of the synonymic group characterized by its use in formal English.

It is of interest to note that transferred meanings of words in different languages do not always coincide. By the way of illustration:

1. back — спина;
2. the back of a chair — спинка стільця;
3. the back of a hand — титульна поверхня руки;
4. the back of a ship — кіль судна.

A variety of associated meanings which appear in varying degrees of prominence determined by the context may be illustrated by the semantic value of the adjective great which implies ‘being much above the average in size’, magnitude or intensity; in certain contexts of its use great comes to mean: eminent, important: great writers, great scholars, great musicians. In colloquial use great often suggests distinction of proficiency [11; 102-103 ].

The problem of polysemy in grammar is one of the most important, the one which is very complex and seems to be relevant to a number of aspects. Like words which is very complex and seems to be relevant to a number of aspects. Like words which are often signs not of one but of several things, a single grammatical form can also be made to express a whole variety of structural meanings. This appears to be natural and is a fairly common development in the structure of any language. This linguistics mechanism works naturally in many ways to prevent ambiguity in patterns of grammatical structure. Orientation towards the content will generally show which of the possible meanings is to be attached to polysemantic grammatical form [ 7; 236 ].

Most grammatical forms are polysemantic. On this level of linguistic analysis distinction should be made between synchronic and potential polysemy. Thus, for instance, the primary denotative meaning of the Present Continuous is characterized by three semantic elements:

1. present time;
2. something progressive;
3. contact with the moment of speech.

The three elements make up its synchronic polysemy. So thus, we can clearly see importance of researches of polysemy in grammar.

1.2 Historical Development of the Polysemy

The modern term polysemy was popularized by Bréal in 1887. Most modern linguistics dealing with the topic of polysemy refer to the crucial date , but they rarely look further back into the past.

The “roots” of the concept of polysemy lie in the Greek philosophy, that is, the debate surrounding the problem of naturalness or arbitrariness of signs as debated in Plato’s (429-347B.C.) Cratylus. In his account of Plato’s contribution to linguistics, Fred Householder points out that Democritus (460-mid-4th century B.C.) offered four arguments in favour of arbitrariness:

1. homonymy or polysemy — the same sequence of phonemes may be associated with two or more unrelated meanings;
2. polyonymy or isorrophy — the existence of synonyms;
3. metonymy — the fact that words and meaning change;
4. nonymy — the non-existence of single words for simple or familiar ideas.

Polysemy meant primarily what was later to be called “homonymy”, referring to the multiple, but unrelated meaning of a word. Bréal still subsumed homonymy under the heading of polysemy [ 18; 25 ].

The term polyonymy was also used by the Stoics studying how one and the same object may receive many different names, how it can become “manynamed” or polyonomous.

During the Middle Ages the interpretation by the Holy Scriptures came up against the problem of polysemy that was acknowledged, but one that had been tampted (by the theory of four senses).

The first who used the tern polysemous in a relatively modern sense was Dante, who wrote about polysemous character of a poem: “Istius operis non est simplex sensus, immo dici potest polysemum, hoc est plurium sensum” (“this work doesn’t have one simple meaning, on the contrary, I say that it can be polysemous, that is can have many meanings”) [ 22; 176 ].

When presenting his poem to Cangrante della Scala, Dante makes immediately clear that it has to be read as a “polysemous” (“polysemantic”) message. One of the most celebrated examples of what Dante means of polysemy is given in his analyses of some verses of Psalm, in “Exit Israel de Aegypto”. Following the medieval theory, Dante says concerning the fierst verse of the Psalm: “ If we look at the letter it means the exodus of the sons of Israel from Egypt at the time of Moses; if we look at the allegory, it means our redemption through Christ; if we look at the moral sense it means the conversation of soul from the misery of sin to the state of grace; if we look at the mystical sense it means the departure of sanctified spirit from the servitude of his corruption to the freedom of eternal glory” [ 22; 192-193 ].

Thinking about meaning, language and it’s relation to the real and figurative word advanced enormously during the Renaissance, but real research into the multiplicity of meaning only began in the 18th century, with the study of neologisms, synonyms and the figures of speech.

Bréal observed modern meaning of the word, yesterday’s and today’s meaning, with which we first become familiar—something recently rediscovered in England. In 1985, the department of English at the Birmingham ran of computer analysis of words as they are actually used in English and came up with the surprising results. The primary dictionary meaning of words are often far from the sense in which they were actually used. Keep, for instance, is usually defined as to retain, but in fact the word is much more often employed in the sense of continuing, as in “keep cool” and “keep smiling”. See is only rarely required in the sense of utilizing one’s eyes, but much more often used to express the idea of knowing, as in “I see what you mean” [12; 83 ].

Language understanding and language acquisition follow the opposite route of language change. I both cases, the last, not the first or primitive meaning of a word is a basic meaning.

In Anglo-American world, polysemy was rediscovered with the advent of cognitive semantics in 1980s. Cognitive linguists began to reconnect synchronic and diachronic research into meaning.

Bréal knew that, diachronically, polysemy stems from the fact that the new meaning or values that words acquire in use do not automatically eliminate the old ones — polysemy is therefore the result of semantic innovation. The new and the old meaning exist in the parallel. And yet, synchronically, or in language use, polysemy doesn’t really exist — sense selection in the comprehension process is not a problem at all. In the context of discourse a word has one meaning — except, one should point out, in jokes and puns. The most important factor that brings about the multiplication of meaning diachronically and that helps to “reduce” the multiplicity of meaning synchronically is the context of discourse. We understand polysemous words because the words are always used in the context of a discourse and a situation, which eliminate all the adjoining meaning in favour of only one in question [ 12; 91 ].

However, in the constant dialectical relation between synchrony and diachrony, and between meaning and understanding incremental changes in the meaning of words occur having understood a word in a certain context in a slightly divergent way, become themselves speakers and might use a word in the newly understood way in yet another context, which again bring about different types of understanding, and so on. In the long run, these slightly variations in use and uptake may lead to major semantic changes.

Bréal was fascinated by the fact that when talking to each other we neither get confused by the multiplicity of meaning that a word may have, nor are we bothered with the etymological ancestry of a word, traced by historical dictionaries. The scientist was acutely aware of the fact that semantic, cognitive and developmental side of the language was not yet on a par with the advances made in the study of phonetics, of the more physiological side of language. With Bréal semantics as a linguistic discipline made a first step into the future, the future in which we are still participating and to which we are still contributing beyond the end of the 20th century [ 17; 63 ].

There followed a period of polysemous latency, so to speak, after the advent of transformational generative grammar with its focus on syntax and later feature semantics. Polysemy was illustrated by the research undertaken by Hans Blumerberg, Uriel Weireich, Harald Weireich, James McCawley, Charles Fillmore.

Modern linguists also pay great attention to the investigations in the semantic sphere. The traditional distinction between polysemy and homonymy is based on whether there is one or two lexical items involved.

1.2.1 The Diachronic Approach to Studying Polysemy

Polysemy is inherent in the very nature of words and concepts as every object and every notion has many features and a concept reflected in a word always contains a generalisation of several traits of the object.

A word which has more than one meaning is called polysemantic. Different meanings of a polysemantic word may come together due to the proximity of notions which they express e.g. the word “blanket” has the following meanings: a woolen covering used on beds, a covering for keeping a horse warm, a covering of any kind (a blanket of snow), covering all or most cases used attributively, e.g. we can say “a blanket insurance policy”. There are some words in the language which are monosemantic, such as most terms, synonym, some pronouns (this, my, both), numerals. There are two processes of the semantic development of a word: radiation and concatenation. In cases of radiation the primary meaning stands in the centre and the secondary meanings proceed out of it like rays. Each secondary meaning can be traced to the primary meaning. E.g. in the word “face” the primary meaning denotes “the front part of the human head” Connected with the front position the meanings: the front part of a watch, the front part of a building, the front part of a playing card were formed. Connected with the word “face” itself the meanings: expression of the face, outward appearance are formed. In cases of concatenation secondary meanings of a word develop like a chain. In such cases it is difficult to trace some meanings to the primary one. E.g. in the word “crust” the primary meaning “hard outer part of bread” developed a secondary meaning “hard part of anything (a pie, a cake)”, then the meaning “harder layer over soft snow” was developed, then “a sullen gloomy person”, then “impudence” were developed. Here the last meanings have nothing to do with the primary ones. In such cases homonyms appear in the language. It is called the split of polysemy. In most cases in the semantic development of a word both ways of semantic development are combined [ 2; 19-21 ].

In polysemantic words we are faced not with the problem of analysis of individual meanings, but primarily with the problem of interrelation and interdependence of the various meanings in the semantic structure of the same word. The problem may be approached from two different angles. If polysemy is viewed diachronically, it is understood as the growth and development or, in general, a change in the semantic structure of the word.

The term “diachronic” is composed of the Greek morphemes dia meaning “through” chromos meaning “time”. Thus, the diachronic approach in terms of special lexicology deals with changes and the development of vocabulary in the course of time. The two approaches in lexicology (synchronic and diachronic) should not be contrasted or set one against the other; in fact, they are interconnected and interdependent: every linguistic structure and system exist in a state of a constant development so that the synchronic state of a language system is a result of a long process of linguistic evaluation, the result of the historical development of the language [ 16; 176-177 ].

The diachronic approach in terms of special lexicology deals with the changes and the development of vocabulary in the course of time. The two approaches shouldn’t be set one against the other. In fact, they are interconnected and interrelated because every linguistic structure and system exists in a state of constant development so that the synchronic state of a language system is a result of a long process of linguistic evaluation , of its historical development.

A diachronic approach is one that analyzes the evolution of something over time, allowing one to assess how that something changes throughout history. You would use this approach to analyze the effects of variable change on something.

Polysemy in a diachronic terms implies that a word may retain its previous meaning or meanings and at the same time acquire one or several new ones. Then the problem of interrelation and interdependence of individual meanings of a polysemantic word may be roughly formulated as follows: did the word always possess all its meanings or did some of them appear earlier than the others? If so what is the nature of this dependence? Can we observe any changes in the arrangement of the meanings?

In the course of a diachronic semantic analysis of the polysemantic word table we find that of all the meanings it has in Modern English, the primary meaning is “a flat slab of stone or wood” which was proper to the word in the Old English period (OE. tabule from L. tabula); all other meanings are secondary as they are derived from the primary meaning of the word and appeared later than the primary meaning. The terms “secondary” and “derived” meaning are to a certain extent synonymous. When we describe the meaning of the word as “secondary” we imply that it could not have appeared before the primary meaning was existence. When we refer to the meaning as “derived” we imply not only that, but also that it is dependent on the primary meaning and somehow subordinate to it. In the case of the word table, e.g., we may say that the meaning “the food put on the table” is derived through metonymic transfer we can also describe it as secondary and metonymic [ 8; 203 ].

It follows that the main source of polysemy is a change in the semantic structure of the word. As can be seen from the above, in diachronic analysis of polysemy we can use many concepts and terms discussed in the paragraphs devoted to the change of meaning. We can speak, for example of metaphoric or metonymic meanings if we imply the nature of dependence of the meanings, of extended or restricted meanings, if we are connected with the interrelation of meanings as a result of semantic change.

Polysemy may also arise from homonymy. When two words become identical in sound-form, the meanings of the two words are felt as making up one semantic structure. Thus, the human ear and the ear of corn are from the diachronic point of view two homonyms. One is etymologically related to Latin auris, the other to Latin acus, aceris. Synchronically, however, they are perceived as two meanings of one and the same word. The ear of corn is felt to be a metaphor of the usual type (cf. the eye of the needle, the foot of the mountain) and consequently as one of the derived or, synchronically, minor meanings of the polysemantic word ear. Cases of this type are comparatively rare and, as a rule, illustrative of the vagueness of the border line between polysemy and homonymy.

Semantic changes result as a rule in a new meanings being added to the ones already existing in the semantic structure of the word. Some of the old meanings may become obsolete or even disappear, but the bulk of English words tend to increase in a number of meanings [ 18; 43 ].

To conclude we may say that, polysemy viewed diachronically is a historical change in the semantic structure of the word resulting in a new meanings being added to the ones already existing and in the rearrangement of these meanings in its semantic structure. As the semantic structure is never static the relationship between the diachronic and synchronic evaluation of individual meanings of the same word may be different in different periods of the historical developments of language.

1.2.2 Synchronic Approach to Studying Polysemy

The synchronic approach analyzes a particular something at a given, fixed point in time. It does not attempt to make deductions about the progression of events that contributed to the current state, but only analyzes the structure of that state, as it is.

The synchronic approach studies language as a theoretical “point” in time. It refers to descriptive lexicology as branch of linguistics deals with the vocabulary and vocabulary units of language at a certain time. Synchronically we understand polysemy as the coexistence of various meanings of the same word at a certain historical period of the development of the language. In that case the problem of interrelation and independence of individual meanings making up the semantic structure of the word must be investigated along different lines.

In connection with the polysemantic word table discussed above we are mainly concerned with the following problems: are all the nine meanings equally representative of the semantic structure of this word? Does it reflect the comparative value of individual meanings, the place they occupy in the semantic structure of the word table? Intuitively we feel that the meaning that is actually representative of the word, the meaning that first occurs to us whether we hear or see the word table, is “an article of furniture”. This emerges as the basic or the central meaning of the word and other meanings are minor in comparison.

It should be noted that whereas the basic meaning is representative of the word table in isolation its minor meanings are observed only in certain contexts, e.g. “to keep the table amused”, “a piece of contents” etc. Thus we can assume that the meaning “a piece of furniture” occupies the central place in the semantic structure of the word table. As to other meanings of this word it’s hard to grade them in order of their comparative value. Some may, for example, consider the second and the third meanings (“the persons seated at the table” and “put food on the table”) as equally “important”, some may argue that the meaning “put food on the table” should be given priority [ 21; 253-254 ]. As viewed synchronically there is no objective criterion to go by, it may be found difficult in some cases to single out even the basic meanings as two or meaning of the word may be felt as equally “central” in its semantic structure. If we analyse the verb to get, e.g., which of the two meanings “to obtain” (get to London, to get into bed) shall we regard as the basic meaning of this word?

A more objective criterion of the comparative value of individual meanings seems to be the frequency of their occurrence in the speech. There is a tendency in a modern linguistics to interpret the concept of the central meaning in terms of the frequency of occurrence of this meaning. It a study of five million words made by a group of linguistic scientists it was found that the frequency value of individual meanings is different.

Of great importance is the stylistic stratification of meanings of a polysemantic word as not only words but individual meanings to may differ in their stylistic reference. Stylistic (or regional) — status of monosemantic words is easily perceived. For instance, the word daddy can be referred to the colloquial stylistic layer, the word parent to bookish. The word movie is recognizably American and barnie is Scotish. Polysemantic words as a rule cannot be given any such restrictive labels. To do it we must state the meaning in which they are used. There is nothing colloquial or slangy or American about the word yellow denoting colour, jerk in the meaning of “a sudden or stopping movement” as far as these particular meanings are concerned. But when yellow Is used in the meaning of “sensational” or when jerk is used in the meaning of “an odd person” it’s both slang and American [ 10; 47-48 ].

Stylistically neutral meanings are naturally more frequent. The polysemantic words worker and hand, for example, may both denote “the man who does manual work”. But whereas this is the most frequent and stylistically neutral meaning of the word worker, it is observed only in 2.8% of all occurrences of the word hand, in the semantic structure of which the meaning “a man who does the manual work” (to hire factory hands) is one of its marginal meanings characterized by colloquial stylistic reference. Broadly speaking the interdependence of style and frequency in meanings is analogous to that existing in words.

It should be noted that the meaning of the highest frequency value is the one representative of the whole semantic structure of the word. This can be illustrated by analyzing the two words under discussion. The meaning representative of the word worker is undoubtedly “a man who does manual work” [ 21; 258 ].

In conclusion, polysemy viewed synchronically is understood as co-existence of various meanings of the same word at a certain historical period and the arrangement of these meanings in the semantic structure of the word.

polysemy language context

1.3 Polysemy and its Connection with the Context

In modern linguistics context is defined as the minimal stretch of speech necessary to signal meaning for words. This is not to imply that polysemantic words have meanings only in context. The semantic structure of the word has an objective existence as a dialectical entity which embodies dialectical permanency and variability. The context individualises the meanings, brings them out. It is in this sense that we say that meaning is determined by the context. The meanings representative of the semantic structure of the word and least dependent on context are sometimes described as free or denominative meanings.

Against the background of linguistic thought as it has developed in modern linguistics we define context as the minimal stretch of speech necessary to signal individual meaning of words. There are several types of context: linguistic and extra-linguistic (non-verbal) contexts.

Linguistic context include lexical and grammatical context. These two types of contexts are differentiated depending on whether lexical or grammatical aspect is predominant in making the meaning of the word explicit. The interaction between lexical and grammatical aspects in the semantic structure of the word is most complex and needs special comments.

1. Lexical context is best illustrated by the fact that there are groups of words in any language that are semantically compatible only with certain classes of agents. Lexical incongruity of words often serves to make the necessary meaning clear narrowing down the various potential meanings of the word, and no ambiguity arises.

The verb to run, for instance, has primarily the meaning ‘to move swiftly or with quick action’, as a stream, wagon, person; with words denoting something written, inscribed, worded, or the like the verb run means to sound (eg. This is how the verse runs); with agents denoting various plants the verb run is synonymically correlated to grow — to become bigger; with agents denoting engines or machines by which physical power is applied to produce a physical effect, the verb to run means — to turn off the engine (to leave the engine running).

In all the examples given above the meaning of the verb to run is signaled by the lexical meanings of the nouns in the position of the subject. The predominance of the lexical contexts in determining the meaning of the verb in such uses is quite evident.

Examples of lexical contexts which operate to convey the necessary meaning of a polysemic word may be given in numbers. Resolution of structural ambiguity by lexical probability is a frequent occurrence.

Compare also the following variant meanings of the adjective green which has primarily the meaning ‘of the colour green’: green walls, green wound, green memories — variation in meaning in each case is signaled by the lexical meaning of the noun involved in a given syntagma. The adjective heavy in its primary sense means ‘weighty, not easy to lift, of great weight’ [ 4; 126-127 ].

In combination with words denoting natural phenomena heavy means violent: heavy storm, heavy rain, heavy snow. Not less characteristic are such uses of the adjective as: heavy work, heavy style, a heavy sky, with a heavy heart—the meaning of the adjective in each case is signaled by the lexical meaning of the noun with which it occurs.

Further typical examples of lexical context determining the word meaning will be found in the distribution of various classes of adjectives.

Observe, for instance, the use of the following phrases with the adjective warm whose meaning in each case is signaled by the lexical meaning of the noun involved: warm milk, warm climate, warm clothing, warm welcome, warm temper, warm support, warm imagination, warm colours.

As can be seen from above examples, the lexico-semantic variation of the adjective warm makes it synonymous with such words as mild, heated, cordial, enthusiastic, eager, keen, responsive.

2) Grammatical context. Instances are not few when the individual lexical meaning of a polysemic word is determined by the grammatical structure in which it occurs, syntactic patterns in the main. Familiar examples of grammatical context will be found in cases like the following:

1) The horse stopped drinking.

1. The horse stopped to drink.

In the first example stop+ing — finish doing something, in the second—stop+to+ infinitive — stop temporarily in order to.

Highly indicative in this respect are verbs of generic force, such as do, make and the verbs of the ‘move and change’ class: go, come, grow, get, fall, run, take, turn.

In grammatical contexts it is the grammatical structure of the context that serves to determine various individual meanings of a polysemantic word. One of the meanings of the verb to make, eg. “to force, to enduce”, is found only in the grammatical context possessing the structure to make somebody do something or in simpler terms this practical meaning occurs only if the verb make is followed by a noun and the infinitive of some other verb (to make somebody laugh, work, etc. ) [ 5; 182-183 ].

In a number of contexts, however, we find both the lexical and grammatical aspects should be taken into consideration. The grammatical structure of the context although indicative of the difference between the meaning of the word in this structure and the meaning of the same word in a different grammatical structure may be insufficient to indicate in which of its individual meaning the word in question is used.

Dealing with linguistic contexts we consider only linguistic factors: lexical groups of words, syntactic structure of context, etc. There are cases, however, when the meaning of the word is ultimately determined not by this linguistic factors, but by the actual speech situation.

The noun ring may possess the meaning “a circle of precious metal” or “ a call on the telephone”; the meaning of the verb to get in this linguistic context may be interpreted as “possess” or “understand” depending on the actual situation in which these words are used. It should be pointed out, that such cases, though possible, are not actually very numerous. The linguistic context is by far a more potent factor in determining the word-meaning.

It is of interest to note that not only the denotational but also the connotational component of meaning may be affected by the context. Any word which as a language unit is emotively neutral may in certain context acquire emotive implications. Compare, e.g., fire in to ensure one’s property against the fire and Fire! as a call for a help. So the peculiar lexical context accounts for the possibility of emotive overtones which are made explicit by the context of situation [ 10; 16-17 ].

Instances are not few when the meaning of a word is signaled by the context much larger than a given sentence or by a whole situation of the utterance, in other words, by the actual situation in which this word occurs. Numerous examples of such utterance will be found in syntactic structures including idioms of different types.

Another important aspect to consider is sociocultural group which refers to the fact that the language used by a sociocultural group is closely connected with its values, attitudes and beliefs. Consequently, learning a language involves understanding and interpreting the culture of which it is part. It is important, therefore, for pupils to develop the ability to interpret texts from perspectives other than their own. Some of the activities to deal with sociocultural context are the following: asking pupils to compare words and expressions used in various English-speaking contexts with those used in their own language context; pupils comment on the sociocultural associations of lexis in a given text; quizzes; true or false questions; explaining newspaper headlines, advertisements, graffiti.

The two or more less universally recognized main types of linguistic contexts serve to determine individual meanings of words are the lexical and grammatical contexts. These types are differentiated depending on whether the lexical or grammatical aspect is predominant in determining the meaning.

Meaning should always be understood as involving the relation of language to the rest of the world and such meaningfulness is an essential part of the definition of language.

Chapter II. Practical Usage of Polysemy in Teaching English

2.1 Polysemy in Teaching English on Intermediate Level

Practicing polysemy is distinguishing between the various meaning of a single word form with several but closely related meanings (head: of a person, of a pin, of an organization). In my opinion the most important aspect of vocabulary teaching for intermediate learners is to foster learner independence so that learners will be able to deal with new lexis and expand their vocabulary beyond the end of the course. Therefore guided discovery, contextual guesswork and using dictionaries should be the main ways to deal with discovering meaning. Teachers can help students with specific techniques and practice in contextual guesswork, for example, the understanding of discourse markers and identifying the function of the word in the sentence .

In my opinion the most important aspect of teaching polysemy for learners is to foster independence so that learners will be able to deal with new lexis and expand their vocabulary beyond the end of the course. Therefore guided discovery, contextual guesswork should be the main ways to deal with discovering meaning.

Intermediate level includes the 5th — 9th form pupils. They already have some basic knowledge in studying a foreign language. If pupils have had good achievements in language learning, they are usually interested in the subject and work willingly both in class and at home. The desire to learn depends fully on the teacher’s ability to involve each pupil in language activities during the lesson. Pupils give preferences to those exercises which require thinking [ 1; 61].

Exercise 1

Give all the meanings you know to the following verbs, illustrating them with examples: to get; to go; to bring; to make; to do; to let; to buy; to begin; to feel.

Exercise 2

The noun leg has several meanings: 1) one of the long parts of your body that your feet are joined to; 2)one of the series of games in a football competition played between two teams; 3) one of the upright parts that support a piece of furniture; 4) the part of your trousers that covers your leg; 5) one part of a long journey or race.

Match the meanings of the word face with the sentences given below:

1. One of the legs on the table was a bit wobbly.
2. Here, pull up your pant legs and let me see if your knees are hurt.
3. The legs of my jeans were covered in mud.
4. Leeds will have to win the second leg if they are to go forward to the finals.
5. The men looked pensive as the carriage approached the final leg of the trip to the big house on the hill.
6. When this can expand no further, it splits and is rolled off, like a nylon stocking from a leg.
7. Raise the leg a fraction higher and repeat this tiny movement 15 times, holding each raise for 1 second.
8. Officers then shot Mao in the leg several times and he collapsed.
9. Breathing through his mouth, he manipulated his probe between her legs.

10) Another screaming beast collapsed on broken hind legs.

Exercise 3

Define the meaning of the noun head as used in the sentences below. How many different meanings did you find?

1. According to Rice, the head of the planning committee, the project is 25% completed.
2. Collins suffered severe head injuries in the accident.
3. He turned his head to kiss her.
4. I picked up a hammer and hit the head of the nail as hard as I could.
5. Hwang is head of the local Communist Party, and is also a farmer.
6. People going out in conditions like this need their heads examined.
7. She was outside cutting the dead heads off the roses.
8. She saw her father, a head above the rest of the crowd.
9. Keep arms hanging, head down and neck and shoulders relaxed.

Exercise 4

How many meaning of the following words do you know? Name them:

head, bench, to feel, to dress, hand, leg, power.

Exercise 5

Match the idiomatic expressions of the noun head with their meaning.

1. heads up!
2. heads will roll;
3. to be/fall head over heels in love;
4. to be/stand head and shoulders above somebody;
5. to give somebody their head;
6. to hold up your head;
7. to go over somebody's head;
8. to keep your head above water;
9. to put your heads together;

10)to turn/stand something on its head;

1. to discuss a difficult problem together;
2. to be too difficult for someone to understand;
3. to manage to continue to live on your income or keep your business working when this is difficult because of financial problems;
4. to be much better than other people;
5. to show pride or confidence, especially in a difficult situation;
6. to make people think about something in the opposite way to the way it was originally intended;
7. to give someone the freedom to do what they want to do;
8. to love or suddenly start to love someone very much;
9. used to say that someone will be punished severely for something that has happened;
10. used to warn people that something is falling from above.
    1. Polysemy in Teaching English on Advanced Level

This stage includes 11th — 12th forms. Pupils can realize the importance of studying language more thoroughly. However, their attitude to foreign language depends on the achievements they have attained during the previous years of studying the subject. While explaining the material, teacher should take into account everything: pupils age, the material they deal with, their previous knowledge, etc.

So, the exercise should be of various kinds, they have to be creative and develop pupils critical thinking and memory. Teacher should encourage his/her pupils, get them interested in learning the language on deeper level [1, 62 ]. Below, there are exercise, which are suitable for this level of language learning. They will help pupils to adopt more material, to be able to differentiate polysemantic meanings of the words through the context of the sentences.

Exercise 1

Comment on the meaning of the following adjectives in the given phrases.

Bad — behaviour, boy, case, day, debt, dream, experience, faith, guy, habit, idea, luck, mood, name, news, press, publicity, shape, situation, start, taste, temper, thing, things, time, way, weather.

Bitter — argument, attack, battle, blow, cold, conflict, debate, disappointment, dispute, end, enemy, experience, fight, flavour, irony, laugh, memory, opponent, pill, rival, smile, struggle, taste, tear, wind, winter.

Fresh — air, approach, basil, blood, bread, breeze, election, evidence, face, fish, flower, food, fruit, herb, idea, look, meat, parsley, produce, salmon, start, thyme, water, weight.

Good — chance, condition, day, deal, example, faith, fortune, friend, health, idea, job, life, luck, man, news, night, part, performance, place, position, practice, quality, reason, sense, service, shape, start, thing, time, use, value, way, work.

Green — bean, belt, bottle, card, field, form, grass, hill, leave, light, onion, paper, pasture, pepper, revolution, room, salad, shoot, space, tea, water.

New — era, generation, government, home, idea, job, law, legislation, life, member, owner, product, school, system, technology, town, version, world, year.

Old — age, boy, brother, child, daughter, day, friend, generation, day, lady, man, people, school, sister, son, woman.

Round — face, figure, head, neck, robin, table, trip.

Thick — carpet, cloud, fog, forest, glass, hair, skin, skull, smoke, soup, wall.

Thin — air, cotton, face, finger, forest, ice, line, lip, mist, sheet, skin, slice, paper, thread, veneer, voice.

Exercise 2

Paraphrase the italicized words and phrases by those given below the sentences:

1. From the tower, you can see for miles.
2. Having a child makes you see things differently.
3. He could see a great future for her in music.
4. I don't know. We'll just have to see how it goes on Sunday.
5. I have to see my teacher about my grades.
6. I just can't get her to see reason!
7. I'll be seeing her tomorrow night.
8. I'll call him and see how the job interview went.
9. I saw Jane while I was out.
10. I see what you mean.
11. It will be interesting to see if he makes it into the team.
12. Leave the papers with me and I'll see what I can do.
13. More money must be invested if we are to see an improvement in services.
14. Mr. Thomas is seeing a client at 2:30.
15. Please see that the lights are switched off before you leave.
16. See press for details.
17. See you Friday - your place at 8:30.
18. The moment we saw the house, we knew we wanted to buy it.
19. The results are shown in Table 7a (see below).
20. We're going to see 'Romeo and Juliet' tonight.

to notice or examine someone or something, using your eyes; to notice that something is happening or that something is true; to be able to see; to find out information or a fact; to find out about something in the future; to see how things go; used to tell you where you can find information; see above/below; to understand something; to see reason/sense; to watch a television programme, film; to consider something; used to say that you will try to help someone; used to say goodbye; to visit or meet someone; to meet someone by chance; to have an arranged meeting with someone; to see someone to discuss something; to imagine that something may happen in the future; to make sure.

Exercise 3

Supply the missing words by using those given at the end:

1. She didn’t want to get……. .
2. More and more people are getting ………to e-banking.
3. I don’t want to get………… in some lengthy argument about who is to blame.
4. He was the last person I would expect to get …….. ….. in something like this.
5. Most teenagers would rather get ….. and ……. with their friends.
6. I hate summer vacation. The children get ……… my feet all day long.
7. I do the dishes every day, so I’m …… ….. it.
8. The parcel must have got ……… in the post.
9. Why doesn’t she ….. a …….? They even don’t speak.
10. He only took the job to get ……… in the pension fund.
11. We got ……….. to working together.
12. Don’t ………..— I like Jenny.
13. Paul always ……… ……….. whenever he has to give a presentation.
14. We get in ………. by e-mail.
15. I was still in New York trying to ……. a ……. to Paris.
16. Take an umbrella or you will ……. …….. .
17. I ...... ……. Because he hadn’t told me his plans.

Fired; hip; involved; lost; mixed up; out … about; under; used to; contact; vested; accustomed; get me wrong; gets nervous; get wet; get a divorce; get a visa; got angry.

Exercise 4

Match the following definitions of the word make by the phrases given below:

1. to make encouraging noises;
2. a match made in heaven;
3. to make a fortune;
4. to make a living;
5. to make believe;
6. to make or break;
7. to make a comparison;
8. to be of your own making;
9. to be made of stone;
10. to make a booking.
11. to earn a lot of money;
12. to earn money one’s need to live on;
13. to imagine that something is true when it is not so;
14. to be very successful or to fail completely;
15. to say things which suggest what your attitude is;
16. to show similarities between two persons or things;
17. a marriage between two people who are exactly right for each other;
18. not to show any emotions or pity for somebody;
19. problems that are of your own making have been caused by you and no one else;
20. to make an arrangement to travel by train, use a hotel room etc at a particular time in future.

Exercise 5

Define the meaning of the word table in the sentences below. How many meanings did you find?

1. A single bed sheet makes a good-sized tablecloth for an average rectangular table and you can choose exactly the colour you want.
2. All of it was sold from commercial operations so compact that they frequently fitted on a two-foot-square folding television table.
3. He led them, a procession of six, to a table right next to a platform.
4. He puts it flat on the table and opens the cover and shows me the copyright.
5. Helium, the next element in the periodic table, contains two electrons encircling a nucleus containing two protons.
6. I hurried back to the table and sat down.
7. She looked down at the kitchen table.
8. Table 2 shows how prices and earnings have increased over the last 20 years.
9. The tables were turned in the second half, when Leeds United scored from the penalty spot.
10. The offer on the table is a 10% wage increase.

Exercise 6

Discuss the meanings of the phrases given below. Make up sentences with them:

by hand — done or made by a person rather than a machine;

hand in glove — closely connected with someone, especially in an illegal activity;

to give a hand — to help with something;

to have a hand in something — to influence or be involved in something;

good with your hands — skilful at making things;

on hand — close by and ready when needed;

a bird in the hand — used to say that it’s better to keep what you have than to risk losing it by trying to get more;

a safe pair of hands — someone you can trust because they are sensible;

a hand grenade — a small bomb that you throw;

to know something like the back of one’s hand — to know something very well;

to live from hand to mouth — to have only just enough money to buy food;

to overplay one’s hands — to behave too confidently because you think you are in a stronger position than you actually are;

second hand — the long thin piece of metal that points to the seconds on a clock or watch;

the left hand doesn’t know what the right hand is doing—used to say that one part of a group or organization doesn’t know what the other parts are doing;

to wash your hands of something — to refuse to be responsible for something any more.

Exercise 7

Match the definitions of the word back with the sentences given below:

1. part of the body;
2. less important side;
3. part of seat;
4. book/newspaper;
5. a defending player.
6. Keep your head up and your back straight.
7. To avoid back problems, always bend your knees when you lift heavy objects.
8. Their best player was flat on his back in hospital.
9. He kissed her on the back of her head.
10. Her window faced the backs of the houses.
11. He rested his arm on the back of the sofa.
12. Paul scribbled his address on the back of an envelope.
13. The sports pages are usually at the back.
14. Two men were sitting in the back of the car.
15. Anna stood with her back to the window.

2.3 Lesson plan

Form 9-B

Topic “The verb to get and the range of its meanings”

T.: You know that a lot of words in English language are polysemantic. It means that one and the same word may have a lot of meanings. So, we should be attentive as to translating the text, writing, speaking. It is obvious that we should take into account the significance of the context. Now I shall present you a variety of meanings of the verb to get.

I. Phonetic warm up.

T.: Now we shall practice tongue twister with sounds [g] and [k]: cap-gap; cow-go; come-gum; crown-groan; class-glass; coat-goat; curl-girl. Then we shall pronounce each word separately and after that you will read this tongue twister one after another:

Gertie's great-grandma grew aghast at Gertie's grammar.

II. Lexical warm up.

T.: What is the primary meaning of the word to get? What other meanings of the word to get do you know? Make up several sentences with this word.

III. Warming up activity.

T.: Let’s guess the answer to the riddles which include the word to get:

1. What gets wetter as it dries? (A towel)
2. What's black when you get it, red when you use it, and white when you're all through with it? (Charcoal — вугільний олівець)
3. I give you a group of three. One is sitting down, and will never get up. The second eats as much as is given to him, yet is always hungry. The third goes away and never returns. ( Stove — піч, fire, smoke)
4. I live in a busy place in the city,

I'll let you stay with me for awhile,

If you don't feed me, I can get you into trouble.

What am I? (A parking meter)

IV. Speaking activity.

T.: And now, let’s discuss proverbs and sayings with the verb to get which are worth learning or at least mentioning:

Get a name to rise early, and you may lie all day. — Створи собі репутацію людини, що рано встає і потім хоч цілими днями валяйся у ліжку.

Get what you can and keep what you have; that's the way to get rich. — Вмій втримати те, що маєш — ось запорука багатства.

Get anything given — run being beaten. — Дають щось — бери, а б’ють — тікай.

V. Reading activity.

Pre-reading. T.: Before you will read this text tell me what meanings of the verb to get do you remember?

While-reading. T.: Now you will read a letter including word to get. Fill in the gaps with the suitable preposions:

I don't recommend it as it can get you ….. an embarrassing situation if you're not careful but then I was persuaded by a good friend of mine. I am referring to the time I returned to my old school some fifteen years after I had left. The friend had been invited to speak as the guest of honour at some function or other at the school. He had been so insistent on my going that I couldn't really get ….. of it. Mind you, I had got ….. quite well at school but I wasn't really looking forward to coming face to face again with certain of the teachers. There was one in particular who must have been getting ….. because he'd seemed pretty ancient when I was there.

Post-reading.T.: What is this letter about? Who is narrator? What doesn’t he recommend? What is his attitude to teachers?

VI. Vocabulary practicing.

T.: A lot of words in English language are polysemantic. It means that one and the same word may have more than one meaning. For example, the word take has fifty one meanings. You should guess the meaning from the context. You must have noticed it while translating different sentences. The bright example of polysemantic word is the verb to get. So let’s study its meaning.

The first meaning is “діставати”. For example:

Can you get this book for me?

2) “брати, одержувати”. For example:

Olena gets private Math lessons two times a week.

3) “заробляти”. For example:

Sonya gets a living working a nurse at the hospital.

4) “доставляти, приносити”. For example:

Would you be so kind to get me a chair?

5) “примушувати, переконувати”. For example:

I got him to speak at last.

6) “розуміти, збагнути”. For example:

I don't get you. You are talking too quickly.

7)“діставатися, добиратися; досягати, потрапляти”. For example:

He got home early after the night shift.

8) “мати, володіти”. For example:

I have got a big cottage that was gifted by my father.

9) “бути змушеним, мусити”. For example:

I have got to go immediately.

10) (з герундієм означає початок дії або її одноразовість). For example:

They got talking about the latest changes in the climate.

T.: The verb to get can also be combined with prepositions and get quite a different meanings which you just can’t guess from the context. You should learn it by heart. For example:

to get about — поширюватися (про чутки);

to get at — досягти, добратися до;

to get away — піти геть, утікати;

to get in — входити, потрапити;

to get up — вставати, підводитися.

VII. Writing.

T.: In this exercise you should match the sentences with their meanings:

1) “Alan is really intelligent but sometimes he has problems getting his ideas across.

2) “Why can’t you and your sister get along? Everyone else gets along with her just fine!”

3) She soon found that it wasn't easy to get ahead in the movie business.

4) We had to use public transport to get around.

5) Why is he always getting at me?

6) The three men got away in a stolen car.

7) I'll talk to you when I get back.

8) I don't earn a huge salary, but we get by.

9) He was followed by a group of reporters trying to get down every word he said.

10) The theatre was already full, and we couldn't get in.

to get across; to get along; to get down; to get ahead; to get around; to get in; to get at; to get away; to get back; to get by.

VIII. Summing up

T.: To sum up, let’s repeat what we have learnt during our lesson.

P1: We have learnt different meanings of the word get.

P2: We discussed interesting proverbs and sayings.

Conclusions

Language tends to change in time and space. These universal characteristics of language are permanent interest of scholarship. The most important function of any language is to carry the meaning. But as we know not only the sound-form but also the meaning of the word is changed in the course of historical development of a language. It happened under the influence of many factors. Change of meaning is affected through association between the existing meaning and the new one. This association is generally based on the similarity or the contiguity of meanings. Due to numeral changes of meaning such a phenomenon as multiplicity of word meanings or polysemy appeared.

In my investigation I touched upon the problem of polysemy in diachronic and synchronic dimensions. Diachronic approach considers polysemy as historical change in the semantic structure of the word resulting in new meanings being added to the ones already existing and in the rearrangement of these meanings in its semantic structure. While synchronic one understands it as a co-existence of the various meanings of the same word at a certain historical period and the arrangement of these meanings in the semantic structure of the word. As the semantic structure is never static the relationship between the diachronic and synchronic evaluation of individual meanings of the same word may be different in different periods of the historical development of language. Diachronic and synchronic ties are closely interconnected as the new meanings are understood thanks to their motivation by the older meanings.

Polysemy is characteristic of most words in many languages. All the lexical and lexico-grammatical variants of the word taken together form its semantic structure or semantic paradigm. The phenomenon of polysemy was broadly investigated in the historical development of the language. The word “polysemy” comes from Latin, but the roots of the concept of polysemy lie in Greek philosophy.

Polysemy is inherent in the very nature of words and concepts as every object and every notion has many features and a concept reflected in a word always contains a generalisation of several traits of the object. Some of these traits or components of meaning are common with other objects. Hence the possibility of using the same name in secondary nomination for objects possessing common features which are sometimes only implied in the original meaning. A word when acquiring new meaning or meanings may also retain, and most often retains the previous meaning.

Although only in the nineteenth century Bréal turned to polysemy as a phenomenon of language use, language acquisition and language change. The linguist wanted to establish semantics as a new branch of general linguistics, independent of etymology and lexicography. Bréal stated that new meanings of words eliminate old ones or exist with them in parallel. It means that the main source of the polysemy is the semantic innovation. Many other famous linguists were engaged in the studies of meaning and polysemy.

This research also highlights the significance of polysemy in grammar. Most grammatical forms are polysemantic. It is sometimes maintained that the case of grammatical polysemy can be observed in various structural meanings inherent in the given form, one of them being always invariable, found in any context of the use of the form. The semantic structure of polysemantic words is not homogeneous as far as the status of individual meaning is concerned. Some meanings are representatives of the word in isolation, others are perceived only in certain contexts. Context is a minimal stretch of speech necessary to determine individual meanings.

In the conclusion, I can say that the problem of polysemy may cause difficulties during the translation or communication. To overcome them pupils need to see and practice words in context, since it is the context that allows them to understand the meaning of the word.

The problem of polysemy is mainly the problem of interrelation and interdependence of various meanings of the same word. Though it is the object of confusion and one of the most controversial problems in linguistics. It is of great importance in studying English as it presents the diverse meanings of expressive layer.

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