**Polysemy In The Semantic Field Of Movement In The English Language**

**Introduction**

One of the long-established misconceptions about the lexicon is that it is neatly and rigidly divided into semantically related sets of words. In contrast, we claim that word meanings do not have clear boundaries.1 In this paper we will give proof of the fuzziness of meaning through an analysis of the semantic field of MOVEMENT in the English language. We will show that many MOVEMENT verbs belong not only to several subdomains within the field of MOVEMENT, but also to various semantic domains through metaphorical extension.

Before dealing with the double or even triple membership of MOVEMENT verbs, let us first present the model on which our description of the lexicon is based, the Functional-Lexematic Model (Martín Mingorance, 1984, 1985a,b; 1987a,b,c; 1990a,b).

**1. The Functional-Lexematic Model**

The FLM integrates Coseriu’s Lexematics (1977), Dik’s Functional Grammar (1997a) and some fundamental principles of cognitive linguistics. Following Faber and Mairal (1998: 4-5), the two main objectives of this model are, on the one hand, the construction of the linguistic architecture of the lexicon of a language, and on the other hand, the representation of knowledge based on the linguistic coding of dictionary entries.

The FLM establishes three axes of analysis: the paradigmatic, syntagmatic and cognitive axes. The elaboration of the paradigmatic axis entails the structuring of the lexicon in semantic domains —each corresponding to a basic area of meaning,2 and the organization of lexical domains into hierarchically constructed subdomains elaborated on the basis of shared meaning components A subdomain is “a subdivision of semantic space derived from the factorisation of the meaning definition of its members”3 (Faber and Mairal 1998: 6). Word definitions are built according to Dik’s method of Stepwise Lexical Decomposition. This means that the definition structure of each lexeme consists of the nuclear word —the archilexeme— and a series of semantic features which mark its distance from the preceding members of the subdomain.

Following Faber and Mairal (1999), the domain of MOVEMENT is organised into four subdomains. The first subdomain describes generic movement, while the other subdomains subsume lexemes which denote movement in a number of contexts: liquid, atmosphere and land. Cutting across this major configuration of the domain, the parameters of manner and direction introduce further divisions within each subdomain.4 For instance, these parameters traverse the following subdomains within the subdomain lexicalizing generic movement:

1. Direction:

To move towards a place/person/thing

To move back

To move up

To move down

2. Manner:

To move quickly

To move slowly

To move smoothly

To move in a circular manner

As an example of a subdomain structured paradigmatically, we have selected the subdomain To move down:

fall: to move down from a high position/the sky/a tree.

plunge: to fall suddenly a long way from a high position.

plummet: to fall very quickly from a high position.

come down: to fall (rain/snow) heavily.

descend: to move down a slope/stairs (fml).

The verbs indented to the right (plunge, plummet, come down) are defined in terms of the verb immediate above them (fall), which thus becomes their definiens. They are basically differentiated from one another in terms of manner. The other archilexeme of this subdomain is descend.

The construction of the syntagmatic axis implies the analysis of the complementation patterns of each lexeme using predicate frames as integrated formulae.

The following types of information are captured in predicate frames:

(i) the form of the predicate

(ii) the syntactic category to which it belongs

(iii) its quantitative valency, i.e. the number of arguments that the predicate requires

(iv) its qualitative valency, i.e. the semantic functions of the arguments and the pertinent selection restrictions

(v) the meaning definition

Predicate frames describe a state of affairs and specify the relationship between the predicate arguments (represented by the variable x). Each argument is characterized by a selection restriction —described in terms of binary semantic features— and fulfills a semantic function (Agent, Experiencer, Goal, Recipient, etc.).

Consider the predicate frame of the verb bow:

[ (x1: prototyp. human)Ag (x2: prototyp. part of the body)Go ]Action

DEF = to bend your head and upper body as a greeting or as a sign of respect.

This frame describes an Action and specifies the relationship between a human argument, performing the function of Agent, and an argument fulfilling the function of Goal and semantically marked as part of the body (head).

The elaboration of the cognitive axis entails the formulation of the predicate conceptual schemata, which are cognitive constructs encoding semantic, syntactic and pragmatic information and representing our knowledge about the lexical unit in question. Conceptual schemata are codified at three levels: lexeme, subdomain and domain.

**2. Polysemy of MOVEMENT verbs**

Many MOVEMENT verbs fall within several subdomains. This double/multiple membership may be accounted for on the following grounds:

a) The meaning component focalised

b) The genus of the lexeme

c) The metaphorical extension of the verb

Let us examine each of these factors.

2.1. Focalization of a meaning component

We have used Dik’s (1997a) pragmatic functions of Focus and Topic to account for some instances of polysemy in the semantic field of MOVEMENT. These functions specify the information status of the constituents of the predicate within the communicative setting in which they occur, and they are assigned to the constituents after the assigning of semantic and syntactic functions. The Topic is the entity about which the predication predicates something in the setting in question, whereas the Focus refers to the most relevant information in the setting:

(1) As for Mary (Focus), I don’t care for her (Topic).

The application of such functions to the paradigmatic description of the lexicon is based on the organization of the lexicon at three levels: domain, subdomain and lexeme. In consonance with this idea, we may formulate various levels of focalization:

Level of focalization 1: Domain

Level of focalization 2: Subdomain

Levels of focalization 3, 4, ... : Lexeme

A domain stands for the level of focalization number 1. It performs the function of Focus in that it represents one of the basic areas of meaning.

A subdomain represents the level of focalization number 2 in that it focuses on an area of meaning within a domain.

The following levels of focalization are formulated at lexeme-level. This means that the lexemes of a subdomain represent different levels of focalization based on the meaning hierarchies within the subdomain.

What is most relevant is that what is Focus on a level becomes Topic on the level below. Then a domain, which performs the function of Focus on the level of focalization number 1, becomes topic at subdomain-level in that it presents the given information, since all the subdomains of MOVEMENT lexicalize the concept of movement. Therefore, the archilexeme of the lexical field, move, which performs the function of Focus at domain-level in that it codifies the nuclear meaning of the domain, becomes Topic at subdomain-level, since it is the definiens of the archilexeme of each subdomain.

Similarly, a subdomain, which acts as Focus on the level of focalization number 2, becomes Topic at lexeme-level, since all the lexemes in the subdomain share the nuclear information formalised by the subdomain. Then, as we move down in the semantic hierarchy which characterizes the internal structure of each subdomain, what is Focus in the meaning definition of the archilexeme (level of focalization number 3) becomes Topic in the meaning definition of its hyponyms (level of focalization number 4). For example, if we take the subdomain analysed above, To move down, the definiens “to move down” acts as Focus in the definition of fall (the archilexeme), and as Topic in the definition of plunge, plummet and come down, the function of Focus being performed by the semantic parameters of manner and place in that they individuate the members of the subdomain.

Let us now consider the functions of Topic and Focus in the case of lexemes belonging to several subdomains. Here the function of Focus applies to a particular meaning component, which thus becomes especially relevant. The verbs whizz and zoom involve quick movement, thus belonging to the subdomain To move quickly. But they can also denote movement through the air:

(2) The bullets whizzed past.

Then, these verbs belong to the subdomain To move quickly or To move through the air depending on which parameter is highlighted, whether manner or medium.

Similarly, the verbs circle and whirl refer to circular movement in the air. If the manner component is focalized, then the verbs fall in the subdomain To move in a circular manner. If the focus is on the medium, then the verbs belong to the subdomain To move through the air.

The table below shows the double membership of these verbs.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| VERB | FOCUS | DIMENSION | MEANING |
| whizz  zoom  circle  whirl | Manner | To move quickly  To move in a circular manner | To move (an engine/device) very quickly with a loud whistling noise  To move (a vehicle/an aircraft) very quickly with a loud buzzing/humming noise  To move in a circular manner in the air  To turn round in the air very quickly |
| whizz  zoom  circle  whirl | Medium | To move through the air | To move very quickly through the air with a loud whistling noise  To move very quickly through the air with a loud noise  To fly around in circles  To move very quickly in a circular manner through the air |

**2.2. Genus of the lexeme**

Many verbs describe generic movement. Verb membership is then determined by the semantic parameter of medium or direction, or by the parameter specifying the nature of the subject/object.

The table below presents the verbs whose membership is influenced by the medium parameter.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| VERB | MEDIUM | DIMENSION | MEANING |
| dart | Air  Land | To move through the air  To move quickly using one’s feet | To fly suddenly and quickly (insects)  To run suddenly |
| dive  plunge | Air | To move down through air  To move down through air  To move downwards | To move down through air quickly and steeply  To move down through air suddenly a long way  To fall suddenly a long way from a high position |
| dive  plunge | Water | To move in/down below the surface of a liquid  To cause sb/sth to move in/down below the surface of a liquid | To move head-first down into water  To cause sth to move down into water quickly and violently |
| sink | Air  Water/  Liquid/  Substance | To move down through air  To move in/down below the surface of a liquid | To move down through air  To move down below the surface of a liquid/ soft substance |
| glide | Water  Air  Land | To move over liquid  To move through the air  To move smoothly | To move (boat) quietly and smoothly across water  To fly quietly  To move quietly and smoothly in an effortless way |

The verb dart describes sudden movement in air and on land:

(3) He darted across the room.

(4) Bees were darting from one flower to another.

The verbs dive, plunge and sink designate downward movement in air and water:

(5) She plunged into the swimming-pool.

(6) The falcon plunged towards its prey.

Sink, as the general term, denotes movement in a wider variety of contexts:

(7) Helen sank into water/mud/an armchair.

However, we postulate that the verbs dart, dive and sink prototypically describe movement in a given medium: dart is prototypically associated with air, and dive and sink with water. Our claim is supported by the fact that the medium parameter need not be syntactically present:

(8) She dived from the bridge and rescued the drowning child.

(9) The aircraft-carrier, hit by a torpedo, sank at once.

Further, as we will show below, sink has a metaphorical projection onto FEELING, which codifies the metaphor Emotion = Liquid (Goatly 1997):

(10) When he crashed, his heart sank at the thought that he might die.

Finally, glide refers to quiet/smooth movement in a wide range of contexts (water, air, land):

(11) The cruiser glided across the sea.

(12) An owl glided over the fields.

(13) The snake glided towards its prey.

As mentioned above, the domain of MOVEMENT is marked by the semantic parameter of direction, which can determine verb membership. The lexemes jump, vault, leap, hop and spring are subsumed under various subdomains depending on whether they denote forward or upward/downward movement over an obstacle:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| VERB | DIRECTION | DIMENSION | MEANING |
| Jump  Vault  Leap  Hop  Spring | Forwards | To move forwards quickly/suddenly | To move forwards quickly using your legs  To jump onto sth with your hands on it  To jump energetically a long distance  To jump on one foot (sb)/with both feet (birds/small animals)  To jump suddenly |
| Jump  Vault  Leap | Over sth | To move across/over/  through | To move over sth quickly using your legs  To jump over sth with your hands on it  To jump over sth energetically |
| Jump  Spring  Hop | Up/Down | To move up/down using one’s feet | To move up/down quickly using one’s feet  To jump suddenly  To jump on one leg |

(14) Robert jumped one metre/over the fence/out of the shadow.

(15) Carol sprang at him/to her feet.

Finally, as shown below, verb membership can also be determined by the parameter describing the nature of the subject or object.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ARGUMENT | SEMANTIC SCOPE | VERB | DIMENSION | MEANING |
|  | Human/  Object | shake  tremble  quiver | To move from side to side/back and forth/up and down repeatedly | To move quickly from side to side/ up and down  To shake un-controllably/ slightly  To shake slightly |
|  | Part of the body | shake  tremble  quiver | To move one’s body | To move one’s body quickly from side to side/up and down  To shake un-controllably/slightly  To shake slightly |
| Subject | Human  Boat | sail | To move towards a place  To move over liquid | To travel to a place by ship  To move (boat) over the sea |
|  | Object | rise  fall | To move upwards  To move downwards | To move upwards through air  To move down from a high position/the sky/a tree |
|  | Vehicle/  aircraft | plunge  plummet | To move in/downwards below the surface of a liquid  To move downwards through air | To move (vehicle) below the surface of water  To move down through air very quickly |
|  | Human | rise  fall  plunge  plummet | To move one’s body by raising it  To move to the ground | To stand up (fml)  To move to the ground from force of weight / loss of balance  To fall suddenly a long way from a high position  To fall very quickly from a high position |
| Object | Object | swing  lift  raise  bend | To move from side to side/back and forth/up and down repeatedly  To cause stb/sth to move up  To move in a different direction | To move regularly from side to side/back and forth  To cause sb/sth to move up  To lift sth  To turn in a curve/angle |
|  | Part of the body | swing  lift  raise  bend | To move a part of one’s body | To move regularly from side to side/back and forth  To move a part of one’s body upwards (esp. head/arm/leg/foot)  To move a part of one’s body upwards  To move a part of one’s body downwards |

The verbs shake, tremble and quiver may be found with a subject argument semantically characterized as human or as concrete. But they can also take an object denoting a part of the body via the metaphor Body part = Human (Goatly 1997):

(16) Mark was so nervous that his knees were shaking.

Sail typically occurs with a subject semantically characterized as boat. Its use with a human agent results from a metonymical process (content for receptacle):

(17) They sailed the Mediterranean.

Rise designates upward movement of both human and concrete entities, but the prototypical argument is human, as shown in the restricted use of rise with human subjects when it describes body movement:

(18) She rose to greet me.

Fall, plunge and plummet, which denote downward movement, may also occur with human and concrete entities:

(19) He fell off the horse.

(20) The vase fell from her hand.

Lastly, the verbs swing, lift, raise and bend take an object semantically marked as object or part of the body:

(21) She lifted her head when I came in.

(22) The suitcase is too heavy for him to lift.

**2.3. Metaphorical extension of the lexemes**

The verbs creep and escape fall within various subdomains because of their metaphorical extension.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| VERB | SUBDOMAIN | MEANING |
| Creep | To move in a particular way | To move quietly and slowly in order to get to a place without being noticed |
|  | To move slowly | To move (light/shadow/mist) very slowly, so that you hardly notice it (lit.) |
| Escape | To move off/away from a place/thing/person | To leave a place after doing sth illegal |
|  | To move out of a place | To move (gas/liquid) out of an object/a container |

Creep typically describes a person’s slow movement towards a place and thus falls primarily within the subdomain To move in a particular way, which refers to movement on land. Yet it also belongs to the subdomain To move slowly through a process of personification (Object/Substance=Human), whereby a concrete entity semantically marked as “light/ shadow/ mist” is seen as a human entity. The meaning components speed —“slowly”— and secrecy —“without/hardly being noticed”— are basic to the definition of both verbs.

On the other hand, escape falls in the subdomains To move off/away from a place/ thing/ person and To move out of a place. This double membership obtains from the metaphorization of liquid as a human entity:

(23) Gas is escaping from this hole.

**3. Interfield membership of MOVEMENT verbs**

We have so far analysed the intrafield membership of a set of MOVEMENT verbs, i.e. their grouping under several subdomains within the semantic domain of MOVEMENT. We will now focus on the verbs’ interfield membership, i.e. their projection onto other semantic fields.

The relations of a semantic domain with others codify metaphorical processes, thus showing that lexical structure is governed by conceptual structure., or, in Sweetser’s words (1990:25), “much of meaning is grounded in speakers’ understanding of the world”. Indeed, each language is equivalent to a particular conceptual system by means of which we interpret our environment, and this conceptual organization is reflected in the lexicon. This means that metaphor is not only a cognitive but also a linguistic phenomenon. Metaphorical processes are encoded in the lexicon and must thus be integrated in a lexical model.

Therefore, the codification of metaphorical processes in the lexicon not only tells us a great deal about how we understand and construct reality but also reflects the internal organization of the lexicon.

Below we sketch the metaphors codified in the domain of MOVEMENT, which establish connections with the semantic fields of COGNITION, SPEECH, CHANGE, FEELING and ACTION.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| MET. PROCESS | TYPE METAPHOR | METAPHOR | LEX. EXPRESSION | TARGET DOMAIN |
| Reification | Concretization | Idea = Object | swing, revolve, stuff  cram, shove | COGNITION |
|  |  | Words = Object | raise, drop, pass | SPEECH |
|  |  | Ideas/Words = Cloth | spin, weave | SPEECH |
|  | Place/Space | Activity = Place | rush, leave, quit abandon | ACTION |
|  | Orientational | Health = Up | fall, sink | CHANGE |
|  |  | Pitch = Up | rise, raise, sink, lower drop | CHANGE |
|  |  | More = Up | jump, rise, raise, fall sink, plunge, plummet come down, lower drop, sink | CHANGE |
|  |  | Importance/Status = Up | rise, climb, come down | CHANGE |
|  |  | Happy = Up | fall, sink, lift | FEELING |
|  |  | Activity/Process = Movement forward | push, prod | ACTION |
| Personification |  | Emotion = Sense expression | shake, tremble, shiver shudder, quiver | FEELING |
|  |  | Idea = Human | slip, escape | COGNITION |
|  |  | Body part = Human | fall, sink | FEELING |

Following Goatly (1997), the metaphorization of abstract entities can obtain through a process of reification or personification. Reifying metaphors fall into three categories:

(i) Concretizing metaphors, which codify the representation of abstract entities as objects or cloth/clothes (first row).

(ii) Orientational metaphors, i.e. equations linked to the notion of place/space (second row).

(iii) Metaphors related to the notion of orientation. Abstract concepts such as health, pitch, happiness, amount and rank are seen as entities on a vertical axis (up/down)5.

The last set of equations codify the personification of abstract entities.

Note that some verbs codify several metaphors, e.g. rise, fall, sink, lower. In this regard, we may affirm that the intrafield membership correlates with the interfield double membership.

**Movement and change**

The projection of MOVEMENT onto CHANGE touches upon verbs denoting an increase or decrease in amount or degree, thus linking MOVEMENT to CHANGE, since the semantic parameters of amount and degree traverse the domain of CHANGE. The connection between both semantic fields obtains from a set of orientational metaphors (cf. above):

(24) He has risen to the position of manager.

(25) Share prices have plunged.

**Movement and feeling**

MOVEMENT verbs also extend to FEELING. This extension results from the codification of several metaphorical processes:

- the metaphorical representation of a feeling (happiness) on an up/down scale:

(26) Whenever I feel down, Martha lifts my spirits.

(27) Peter’s face fell when I broke the news to him.

- the personification of body parts. This metaphor interacts with the previous one (cf. example above).

- the metaphorical structuring of emotions as sense expressions. The verbs shake, tremble,shiver, shudder and quiver describe body movement as expression of an internal emotional state (anxiety, fear, disgust). This metaphorical process can be explained by the fact that emotions have corresponding physical effects on the experiencer, and these effects have come to represent the emotion that caused them:

(28) He trembled like a leaf at the sight of the tiger.

**Movement and cognition**

The metaphorical projection of MOVEMENT into COGNITION results from a process of reification or personification of abstract entities. On the one hand, ideas can be metaphorized as objects moving in/into (revolve, penetrate) or out of somebody’s mind (slip, escape):6

(29) The importance of her decision did not penetrate at first.

(30) His surname has slipped my mind.

(31) There is a major point which seems to have escaped you.

To use Halliday’s terminology (1994:117), the last examples are instances of the please-type metaphorical structuring of mental processes. Mental processes can be represented either as like-types or please-types. This means that I like X is equivalent to X pleases me. Then, It has slipped my mind/It has escaped me has the same meaning as I have forgotten it.

Ideas can also be seen as objects which are pushed into someone’s mind:

(32) He stuffed my head full of strange ideas.

Following Reddy (1993), the verbs stuff, cram and shove lexicalize an aspect of the conduit metaphor, which explains the conceptualization of communication as the transfer of thoughts bodily from one person to another.

MOVEMENT AND SPEECH

The verbs raise, drop, pass, spin and weave show the extension of MOVEMENT to SPEECH. Ideas can be communicated like objects being moved: raise (a subject, an objection), drop7 (a hint, remark), pass (a sentence, remark):

(33) You shouldn’t drop hints about promotion to your boss.

Words can also be metaphorically seen as strands of thread that the speaker puts together to produce a coherent message:

(34) The old sea captain sat by the fire spinning yawns.

**Movement and action**

The connection of MOVEMENT with ACTION is established though the metaphorization of activities as places. Activities can be described as if they were linear motion. It is then possible to move into (rush) or away from an activity (leave, quit, abandon):

(35) They abandoned the game because of the rain.

On the other hand, causing an activity is causing movement forward:

(36) She pushed me into taking the job.

**Conclusion**

The semantic analysis of the field of MOVEMENT has shown that words are embedded in a set of rich semantic relations. The focalization of a meaning component and the genus of the lexeme account for the extension of a few MOVEMENT verbs to other subdomains within the domain (intrafield extensions). On the other hand, the metaphorical processes encoded in the semantic domain of MOVEMENT account for the projection of many verbs onto other semantic fields (interfield extensions), thus giving proof of the linguistic significance of metaphor.a

**Notes**

1 This assumption is found in some semantic theories (i.e. prototype semantics).

2 By working upwards from the definitional structure of primary lexemes, Faber and Mairal (1997) have identified eleven semantic domains corresponding to basic conceptual categories: EXISTENCE, MOVEMENT, POSITION, CHANGE, PERCEPTION, FEELING, COGNITION, POSSESSION, SPEECH, SOUND, and GENERAL ACTION.

3 The concept of subdomain is based on Geckeler´s (1971) concept of lexical dimension.

4 See appendix for the configuration of the paradigmatic axis of the semantic domain of MOVEMENT.

5 Lakoff and Johnson’s Experiential Hypothesis (1980: 267-268) postulates that most abstract concepts arise from our preconceptual bodily experiences as infants —like the experience of up and down— by metaphorical projection.

6 Note the conceptualization of the mind as a place. As Romelhart (1993:89) points out: “We use a spatial world to talk about the mind”.

7 This verb codifies the conduit metaphor (cf. above).

8 The verbs in brackets are an example of the type of verbs falling in each subdomain.

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