

POLYSEMANTIC METAPHORS AND THEIR MANIFESTATIONS

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Abstract

Metaphor and polysemy, deeply interconnected linguistic phenomena, illustrate the dynamic ways in which language evolves and adapts to human cognition and culture. This article explores metaphorical polysemy, focusing on how a single word develops multiple meanings through metaphorical extensions. By examining examples from English, Uzbek, and other languages, it highlights the role of metaphorical mapping in enriching the lexicon and facilitating communication. Challenges related to ambiguity and cultural variation are addressed, and practical strategies for teaching, translation, and computational applications are proposed.

Keywords: Metaphorical polysemy, cognitive linguistics, semantics, metaphorical mapping, cross-linguistic variation.

Introduction

Metaphor and polysemy are foundational to the complexity and richness of human language. When a word acquires multiple, interrelated meanings through metaphorical extension, it provides insight into how linguistic form interacts with cognition and culture. For example, the word head signifies not only the physical part of the body but also a leader, as in head of the department. Such extensions emerge through metaphorical mappings, wherein abstract concepts are understood through concrete experiences.

Cognitive linguistics and semantics have devoted considerable attention to metaphorical polysemy, analyzing how conceptual metaphors shape meaning and structure. By examining these phenomena, we can better understand language evolution, cross-linguistic variation, and cultural influences. This article explores metaphorical polysemy from theoretical and practical perspectives, illustrating its impact on language teaching, translation, and computational linguistics.

Metaphor is central to the creation of polysemous meanings. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory argues that humans comprehend abstract domains (e.g., time, emotions) by mapping them onto concrete domains (e.g., space, objects). This process often leads to metaphorical polysemy, enriching the lexicon and enhancing communication.

Take the word root, for instance. Its primary meaning refers to the underground part of a plant. Through metaphorical extension, it also signifies origin, as in the root of the problem, and connection, as in roots in one's heritage. These meanings reflect the metaphorical mapping of physical grounding onto abstract ideas of origin and connection.

Cognitive linguistics emphasizes the structured nature of metaphorical mappings, which link source domains to target domains. Kövecses (2010) highlights common metaphors, such as



"KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT," evident in phrases like she shed light on the issue or a brilliant mind. These mappings create systematic relationships between literal and metaphorical meanings, fostering polysemy.

Moreover, metaphorical mappings often arise from universal human experiences, such as spatial orientation or bodily sensation. For example, high spirits and low mood derive from the metaphor "EMOTIONS ARE VERTICAL SPACE," where elevation corresponds to positive feelings and descent to negative ones.

Words across languages exhibit metaphorical polysemy, often expanding from concrete to abstract meanings. In English, the verb grasp moves from physical action (grasp a rope) to mental comprehension (grasp an idea). Similarly, the Uzbek word ko'z (eye) extends from its anatomical sense to denote attention or insight, as in ko'zi ochiq (literally "open-eyed," meaning well-informed).

Nouns frequently exhibit metaphorical richness. The English word bridge refers not only to a physical structure but also to abstract connections, as in building a bridge between cultures. In Uzbek, the word yurak (heart) exemplifies polysemy, encompassing meanings of courage (yurak qilmoq, "to be brave") and affection (yurakdan gapirmoq, "to speak from the heart").

While metaphorical polysemy reflects universal cognitive patterns, its manifestations differ across cultures. The English word window metaphorically extends to window of opportunity, reflecting the cultural association of openings with chances. In contrast, Japanese uses ma (間), meaning "interval" or "space," metaphorically to indicate timing or opportunity, such as ma o miru ("to see the right moment").

In Uzbek, spatial metaphors shape polysemy in culturally specific ways. For example, tepaga ko'tarilmoq (to rise upward) denotes both physical elevation and advancement in status or success. These variations highlight how metaphorical mappings are shaped by cultural and linguistic contexts.

Ambiguity is inherent in polysemy, particularly in contexts where multiple meanings are plausible. For instance, the word charge in English can refer to a financial cost (a service charge), an accusation (facing charges), or electrical energy (battery charge). Contextual clues are essential for disambiguation, but they can still lead to misinterpretation.

Metaphorical polysemy often relies on contextual cues to clarify intended meaning. For example, bright in bright idea metaphorically denotes intelligence, while in bright light it retains its literal sense. Misunderstanding the context can obscure communication, especially for non-native speakers or in translation. Cross-linguistic differences in metaphorical mappings complicate translation. Translators must navigate variations in cultural associations and idiomatic usage. For example, translating the English expression time flies into Uzbek might require adapting it to vaqt qush kabi uchadi (time flies like a bird), maintaining the metaphor while aligning with cultural expectations.

Understanding metaphorical polysemy can enhance language instruction by fostering semantic awareness and communicative competence. For example, teaching the metaphorical extensions of foot (e.g., foot of a mountain, footnote) helps learners grasp how physical concepts extend to abstract domains.

Visual aids, conceptual diagrams, and context-based examples are effective strategies for teaching polysemous words. Highlighting cross-linguistic parallels, such as the use of spatial



metaphors for time in English and Uzbek, can also deepen learners' understanding of metaphorical mapping.

Metaphorical polysemy poses both challenges and opportunities for translators. Strategies such as dynamic equivalence (Nida, 1964) prioritize the functional and emotional impact of the source text. For instance, translating break the ice into Uzbek as muzni eritmoq ("melt the ice") preserves the metaphor's intent while adapting it to the target culture.

Metaphorical polysemy exemplifies the dynamic relationship between language, thought, and culture. By extending the meanings of words through metaphorical mapping, languages enrich communication and reflect shared human experiences.

This article has explored the theoretical foundations, linguistic manifestations, and practical applications of metaphorical polysemy, highlighting its significance in understanding language evolution, teaching, and translation. Addressing the challenges of ambiguity and cultural variation requires continued research and innovation. As linguistic and technological advancements unfold, metaphorical polysemy will remain a vital area of inquiry in linguistics and related disciplines.

References

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