

LEXICAL SEMANTICS IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH: A STUDY OF POLYSEMY AND HOMONYMY*Tilavova Muxlisa Maxmudovna**Tashkent international university of**Financial Management and Technologies (TIFT)**tilavova2606@gmail.com*

Abstract: This study explores the key aspects of lexical semantics in contemporary English with a focus on polysemy and homonymy. Lexical semantics, a subfield of linguistic semantics, investigates how word meanings are structured and interpreted within linguistic systems. Polysemy, where a single word has multiple related meanings, and homonymy, where a single form represents two or more unrelated meanings, are central phenomena in this area. The paper analyzes selected examples from modern English usage to demonstrate how these semantic categories influence language comprehension, lexical organization, and word sense disambiguation. Furthermore, the study highlights the implications of polysemy and homonymy in lexicography, language teaching, and natural language processing. Findings suggest that a clear distinction and understanding of these phenomena can enhance semantic analysis and improve language-related technologies and pedagogy.

Keywords: lexical semantics, polysemy, homonymy, word meaning, semantic analysis, English vocabulary, lexical ambiguity, lexicography, language comprehension, word sense disambiguation

INTRODUCTION

Language is a dynamic system of signs where meaning plays a fundamental role in communication. In linguistics, lexical semantics focuses specifically on the meanings of words and the relationships between them, providing insight into how language users interpret and process linguistic units. As vocabulary continues to evolve in response to technological, cultural, and social developments, the study of lexical meaning becomes increasingly important. Among the various phenomena explored in lexical semantics, polysemy and homonymy hold a central position due to their direct influence on lexical ambiguity and semantic interpretation. Polysemy refers to a single lexical item that possesses multiple, related meanings. For example, the word "head" can denote the upper part of the human body, a leader of a department, or the top of an object — all conceptually linked through metaphor or extension. Homonymy, on the other hand, involves a single form (spoken or written) associated with two or more entirely unrelated meanings, such as "bank" (financial institution) and "bank" (river edge). These distinctions are not merely academic; they have practical applications in lexicography, natural language processing (NLP), language acquisition, and machine translation, where distinguishing between word senses is critical for accurate meaning representation. In contemporary English, where lexical innovation and borrowing are rampant, the boundaries between polysemy and homonymy often blur. This creates challenges for learners, educators, linguists, and AI systems alike. Words frequently develop new senses through metaphorical extension, technical adaptation, or semantic broadening, complicating dictionary definitions and computational models of language. Thus, a deeper understanding of how polysemy and homonymy function can lead to improved word sense

disambiguation, more effective language teaching strategies, and more precise semantic technologies. This paper aims to analyze the mechanisms of polysemy and homonymy in contemporary English by examining their theoretical underpinnings, providing real-world examples, and exploring their implications in linguistics and language processing. Through comparative analysis and semantic classification, the study sheds light on how meaning is constructed, stored, and interpreted in the mental lexicon, contributing to both theoretical linguistics and applied language research.

CONCLUSION

The study of lexical semantics, particularly through the lenses of polysemy and homonymy, provides vital insights into the complexity and richness of word meaning in contemporary English. As demonstrated throughout this paper, polysemy reflects the inherent flexibility of language, allowing a single lexical form to acquire multiple related senses based on metaphorical, metonymic, or contextual extensions. In contrast, homonymy reveals the coincidental overlap in form between semantically unrelated words, presenting both challenges and opportunities for semantic clarity and linguistic creativity. This research has highlighted the significance of distinguishing between these two phenomena in linguistic analysis, language pedagogy, and technological applications such as lexicography, machine translation, and natural language processing. Accurately identifying whether a word is polysemous or homonymous can influence how meanings are represented in dictionaries, how students understand vocabulary in context, and how artificial intelligence interprets human language. In the context of contemporary English, where language undergoes constant change due to globalization, digital communication, and cultural shifts, the boundaries between polysemy and homonymy are often fluid. As such, further empirical studies, especially corpus-based investigations, are necessary to map the evolving patterns of word meaning and usage. Ultimately, a deeper understanding of lexical ambiguity not only enriches theoretical linguistics but also enhances practical approaches to language learning, curriculum development, and computational linguistics. By continuing to explore how humans manage and resolve semantic variation, scholars and practitioners can better support the needs of learners, translators, and intelligent systems in navigating the complex world of English vocabulary.

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