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MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF LEXICAL ITEMS IN SLAVIC LANGUAGES (POLISH AND UKRAINIAN)

The present paper is devoted to the analysis of the multiplicity phenomenon of common words, generally in Polish and Ukrainian. The author of the present paper analyses such issues as the process of selecting the appropriate meaning in multiple meaning word, the role of context in choosing the appropriate meaning of a word, the reasons of multiple meaning words' occurrence, etc.

Key words: lexical items, word meaning, polysemy, homonymy.

Стаття присвячена аналізу феномену багатозначності загальноживаних слів, головним чином у польській та українській мовах. Автор статті аналізує такі питання як процес вибору відповідних значень у багатозначних словах, роль контексту при виборі слова у відповідному значенні, причини виникнення багатозначних слів і т.д.

Ключові слова: лексичні одиниці, значення слова, полісемія, омонімія.

Статья посвящена анализу феномена многозначности общеупотребительных слов, главным образом в польском и украинском языках. Автор статьи анализирует такие вопросы как процесс выбора соответственных значений в многозначных словах, роль контекста при выборе слова в соответственном значении, причины возникновения многозначных слов и т.д.

Ключевые слова: лексические единицы, значения слова, полисемия, омонимия.

The article's principal aim is to present an analysis of the multiplicity phenomenon of common words in Slavic languages (generally in Polish and Ukrainian). The present study also attempts to answer the following questions:

- how do we select the appropriate sense of multiple meaning words?
- what is the role of context choosing the appropriate meaning of a word?
- can we assume that words are monosemic: having a single, highly abstract or general meaning?

Multiple meaning lexical items are words that have more than one meaning, related or unrelated. Trevor A. Harley [11] uses the term 'lexical ambiguity' to determine a word that can have two meanings. Paul Ricoeur [15, p. 106] assumes that the term 'ambiguity' is properly used "when one meaning alone of two possible meanings is required and the context does not provide us grounds for deciding between them." Steven Davis and Brendan S. Gillon [6] disagree with the idea that word meanings are fixed and inflexible, where multiple word entries in the lexicon deal with lexical ambiguity. The authors state that "the lexicon can be seen as a generative system, where word senses are related by logical operations defined by the well-formedness rules of the semantics" [6, p. 391].

We should be aware of all the potential ambiguities that are always present in languages. Frazier and Rayner [11, p. 181] argue that there is a difference between multiple meaning words (the meanings of which are unrelated, for example: in Polish *bal* 'ball' (e.g. : *bal kostiumowy* 'fancy-dress ball'), *bal* 'log', *bal* (also *bela*) 'bale', and *bal* 'B(ritish) A(nti)-L(ewisite) (BAL)' (see [7]); in Ukrainian (*skeptyčna mina* '(sceptical) face' and (*protytankova mina* '(anti-tank) mine', *vodjanapara* 'steam' and *para (čobit)* 'pair (of shoes)' (see [20]); in Russian *luk (rastenije)* 'onion (plant)' and *luk (dla strelby)* 'bow (for shooting)'; as well as multiple senses words (in which the senses are related, for instance: in Polish *pióro (ptaka)* 'feather' and *pióro (do pisania)* 'pen'; *źródło życia* 'source of life', *źródło wody* 'spring', *źródło lęku* 'source of fear', and *źródło prądu* 'current source', etc.); in Ukrainian *blyz'kyj* 'near / not far from', *blyz'kyj (druh)* 'close (friend)', and *blyz'kyj* 'soon'; in Russian *trojka (lošadej)* 'a three-horse carriage' and *trojka (otmetka)* 'third (school mark)'. Nevertheless, this dichotomy is not true and, in fact, it is difficult to determine whether we deal with multiple meanings or senses of a word. For the purposes of this study we assume that the concepts multiple meaning words and multiple senses words are synonymous.

In his paper Philip Edmonds [8] analyses a lexical choice process of a natural language generation system by means of which the word is chosen from a set of near-synonyms and achieves the necessary effects in the given context. The process in question depends on a clustered representation of lexical knowledge which is a link between a statistical model of word co-occurrence and a traditional knowledge-based model. The statistical model of word co-occurrence is used to show the conflict between a word and its context as well as to establish when a word use will be marked. Edmonds [8] spots the connection between this model and the knowledge-based model of lexical meaning (which verifies what kind of specific effects will occur) in order to show the differences among synonyms. The researcher adds that the model "clusters synonyms by their similarity and represents their differences along the dimensions explicitly, which follows directly from Saussure's paradigmatic view of lexis [...]" [8, p. 82].

Gordon H. Bower [3] calls the process of finding out the appropriate meaning of lexical concepts or the activation of lexical concepts as fine-tuning. The aim of fine-tuning process is to activate multiple meaning immediately after someone hears or reads an ambiguous word. Bower [3, p. 238] points out that

"In fact, multiple meanings are activated – even when a particular meaning is specified by the preceding semantic context, as in "spiders, roaches, and other bugs," or the preceding syntactic context, as in "I like the watch" vs. "I like to watch" [...]."

In cognitive psychology, multiple activation is considered as some form of automatic activation. Nonetheless, behaviorally the process becomes more complex, after we activate the multiple meaning. Our intuition suggests that only one meaning is possible in a given situation after a very short period of time. Some researches propose that unsuitable meanings become less accessible because of the mechanism that Bower [3, p. 239] names as mutual inhibition. They

claim that the activated appropriate meaning causes the declination of the inappropriate meanings. As a matter of fact, compensatory pattern is not discussed by these researchers (for further analysis see [3]).

Harley [11, p. 182] presents three main models, the aim of which is to determine how we select the appropriate sense in multiple meaning word:

The context-guided single-reading lexical access model. This model stresses the prominent role of the context, which in some way restricts the access process of multiple meaning words in that way that only appropriate meaning has a chance to have an access. However, the model under analysis does not explain how context acts in providing the relevant sense of multiple meaning words.

The ordered-access model. Individual meaning frequencies of multiple sense words influence the access process. For instance, in Polish, 'onion sets' sense of *dymka* is more frequently used than the 'cotton cloth' sense of this noun. First, we search for the most common sense of multiple meaning words not taking into consideration the context in which the word appeared to check whether it is adequate. If it is not acceptable, we should try to find out the less common meaning.

The multiple-access model presupposes that when a multiple meaning word is encountered, we activate all its senses, and the adequate one is selected regarding the context.

As noted by Harley [11], recent researchers are in agreement that when we encounter a multiple meaning word, all senses are activated. Furthermore, we use context to select the appropriate meaning of a word in a short period of time. Nowadays researchers focus their attention on three issues: "First, what effect does the relative frequency of the different meanings of the ambiguous word have on processing? Second, what is the effect of presenting strong disambiguating context before the ambiguous word? Third, how does context affect the access of semantic properties of words?" [11, p. 185].

At the present time there are available a number of techniques quite helpful in our analysis like on-line techniques, eye movement measures and primarily cross-modal priming. The study of eye movement, which is supposed to reflect online processing, seems to be especially promising. The researches have demonstrated that the time, which participants need to decode the sense of a multiple meaning word, depends on the fact whether the senses of the ambiguous word are relatively similar (balanced type of ambiguous words) or highly different (unbalanced type of ambiguous words) in frequency [11, p. 185].

According to Harley [11], if the context is clear, the ambiguous meanings of a word are considered as first step. It means that we have an access to all meanings immediately, and after that the context is quickly analysed to select one of them. If the apparent context precedes the ambiguous words, three models try to explain the phenomenon:

The selective access model. Preceding apparent context controls or limits access in a way that only correct meaning is accessed.

The reordered access model. Prior context influences the access phase in a way that the accessibility of the suitable meaning of the word is raised.

The autonomous access model. If the context precedes an ambiguous word, it has no effect on its access; senses are accessed exhaustively (for further discussion see [11]).

In fact, it is very difficult to predict how we might perceive lexical items in context, which influence the meaning expressed by a word in different ways. The meaning of a statement is exhaustively determined by its use. Looking through a dictionary, we can find that the majority of words have multiple meanings. This is the case of English most common words like verbs: *come, go, bring, put, etc.* or prepositions, e.g. : *of, to, from, on, in, at, etc.* In the Slavic languages under analyses, the number of multiple meaning lexical items is quite considerable too. Thus, we can presuppose that multiple meaning of words is omnipresent. On the other hand, in the book *On monosemy: a study in linguistic semantics*, Charles Ruhl [17] argues that we should initially assume that words are monosemic in English: having a single, highly abstract or general meaning. He underlines that "many examples of multiple meaning are the result of dubious assumptions about language: assumptions perhaps necessary for the practical work of making dictionaries, but damaging when carried over almost intact into linguistic theories on semantics" [17, p. 1].

As a matter of fact, Ruhl [17] was inspired by Uriel Weinreich's book *Languages in contact* [18] and his considerations regarding the verb 'take':

"When we contemplate the varieties of "meanings" which a word like *take* has in English (*take offense, take charge, take medicine, take notice, take effect, etc.*), we come to the conclusion that this is a case not of abnormally overdeveloped polysemy of a word, but rather of its semantic near-emptiness" [18, p. 180].

As suggested by Weinreich's [18], the verb 'take' possesses only one general meaning. However, one might criticise this idea and raise the question what theoretical postulations would be supportive to a semantic theory according to which only one meaning for the word under consideration exists? In order to answer this question, we shall consider Ullmann's three types of multiple meaning using Polish and Ukrainian data [17]:

Several aspects of one sense or shifts in application, e.g. : in Polish, *wysokie temperatury* 'high temperatures', *wysokie wymagania* 'high requirement', *wysokie drzewa* 'high trees', *wysokie chmury* 'high clouds'; and in Ukrainian, *zolote sonce* 'golden sun', *zlotyj charakter* 'golden character', *zoloti ruki* 'golden hands.'

Several senses of one word or polysemy. A word is considered to be polysemous, if it serves to express more than one distinct, established meaning [5]. According to Ricoeur ([15], see also [16, p. 3]), polysemy is the central concern of lexical semantics, and the study of it might reveal a number of significant questions to analyse.

In Polish, there are attested *język* 'tongue' as an organ of taste which as a rule is attached to the floor of the mouth and *język* 'language' as a system that is helpful in communicating with other people by means of voice sounds, gestures, and written symbols, the main purpose of which is to express ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc. *Zamek* 'castle' is usually considered to be a large old fortified residence (building or group of buildings) of a lord or noble and *zamek* 'lock' that means a mechanical device for securing a door, gate, etc. by means of a key, combination or keycard.

In Ukrainian, *nis* 'nose' that is the part of the human face which acts as the beginning of respiratory system tract and is used for breathing as well as for smelling things. Nonetheless, it is also attested *nis korabla* 'bow' that refers to the front part of a ship or boat. One more example to consider is the word *krapla*: *krapla dosču* means raindrop, but *krapla nadii* stand for drop of hope. It should be pointed out that in the case of *krapla nadii* we deal with the metaphor as a phenomenon of polysemy as well as language change [14]. Cornelia Müller [14] presents Lyon's point of view, according to which metaphor poses a number of problems for any formalization of the language semantic structure, and the reason for this lies on its lexical meaning extension (for further analysis see [14]).

In studies of polysemy, cognitive linguists pay special attention to a psychological conception of meaning. One of the aims of 'standard' cognitive linguistics is the need to explain the variations of meaning postulated within a polysemous lexical item [16]. In some polysemous relations we can spot a difference between *literal* and *figurative* meanings of a lexical item, i.e. it may involve metaphorical and metonymic relations as well as hyperbole. In cognitive science, the issue of polysemy and metaphoric or metonymic meaning relations is frequently raised in debates. Researchers try to use these tropes in understanding the relations between diverse senses of a lexical item. As noted by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson [13], the conceptual metaphor explains why we use the polysemous words as well as the systematicity of the polysemy. In fact, the systematic polysemy offers irrefutable evidences for the existence of the metaphor.

Murray Knowles and Rosamund Moon [12] stress that senses can be developed from an original meaning by different ways; however, frequently they can be arisen through figurative processes of metaphor as well as metonymy. Many polysemous words "have a basic meaning which refers to something concrete or physical, from which have developed further senses which are often metaphorical" [12, p. 13]. So, the researches confirm Weinreich's idea [18] that multiple words possess only one general meaning, but they refer to it as the core meaning.

Consider, for instance, one of the polysemous words in Ukrainian, i.e. *krylo*:

- the core meaning of this lexical item is 'wing' or animal's (bird, bat, insect) forelimb, usually developed for flying, the shape of which determines the types of flight of a particular animal;
- the metaphorical sense of 'wing' which stands for a part of an airplane that generates most of the lift for holding the plane in the air;
- the metaphorical sense of 'wing' which determines a part of a large building which is attached to the main part of it;
- the figurative sense, to be precise 'protection' or 'care', for example: *bratypid (svoje) krylo* 'to take care';
- the sense 'wing' used by military aviation forces to determine a unit of command;
- the sense 'flank' as a military term designating one of the edges of a military unit or formation;
- the sense 'wing' / faction, i.e. a political term that concerns a faction of a political movement;
- the sense 'sail' of a windmill, etc. (see [20]).

Thus, these data illustrate that evident connections between core and metaphorical senses of polysemous words exist. As Knowles and Moon [12] mention, generally the core meaning of a lexical item is its oldest and most common sense. In fact, there are attested cases in which the oldest, core sense is less common or even rare and/or restricted in use than a metaphorical one.

According to natural semantic metalanguage researchers, the phenomenon of polysemy can be analysed referring to a set of semantic primes (also semantic components, semantic features) [9]. Semantic primes are basic semantic atoms "which cannot be paraphrased in simpler terms" [10, p. 5]. As a consequence of polysemy or homonymy, a single lexical item sometimes provides two or more meanings. It causes that a single prime will sometimes have two or more alternative lexical realisations or allomorphs. For example, the concept 'small' is one of the semantic primitives postulated by Anna Wierzbicka [19, p. 35, 54]. In fact, she analyses two descriptors 'big' and 'small', pointing out that these concepts are normally not symmetrical: the concept 'big' is treated as, somehow, more basic (see [19, p. 54] for further discussion).

3. *Several words or homonymy as the simplest type of multiple meaning.* Prototypical homonyms are lexical items with identical pronunciation and spelling as well as unrelated meanings, usually due to the fact that words have different origins (cf. [2, p. 117]). In Dictionary of Polish homonyms [4] there are attested about 1500 entries. For example, *zgnily* (the past form of the verb *zgnić* 'decay', 3 pers. pl.) and *zgnily* (the adjective in the nominative sg.), *gra* (the present form of the verb *grać* 'to play') and *gra* ('a game', Nominative), etc. Jean Aitchison [1] labeled the process of homonymy as contrastive ambiguity, for the reason that we should select one of two quite different and sometimes unrelated for us meanings. It should be added that researches draw a distinction between homonymy and polysemy; nevertheless, in some cases, it is challenging to define the boundary between them. E.g. : in Polish *bez* 'without' (preposition) and *bez* 'lilac' (noun), *kawka* (diminutive form of the noun *kawa* 'coffee') and *kawka* 'jackdaw'; in Ukrainian, *kosa* 'braid', *kosa* 'scythe' and *kosa* 'spit', *lava* 'lava' and *lava* 'bench', etc.

In Polish, there are also attested homographs, i.e. lexical items that have identical spelling, but different pronunciation and meaning. Their number is limited in the language under consideration. Homographs are more frequent phenomenon in Russian, the reason is that this language has stress placed on different syllables, i.e. stress can serve as the only distinctive feature between words that have identical spelling, e.g. : *sórok* 'forty' and *sorók* (gen. pl. of *soróka* 'magpie'), *iris* 'iris' (flower) and *iris* 'toffee', *átlas* 'atlas' and *atlás* 'satin', *pláču* (1st pers. sg. of *plakat'* 'to cry') and *plačú* (1st pers. sg. of *platit'* 'to pay'), etc. In Ukrainian, homographs are also attested, for instance: *malá (dytyna)* 'a small (child)' and *mála ščastja* 'I was happy', *strilký* 'riflemen, pl' and *strilky (hodynnyka)* 'hand (of clock or watch)', etc.

Ullmann pays special attention to the first type of multiple meaning, i.e. shift in application (see [17]). He analyses the ability of words to make certain type of adjustments in different contexts. Consider the word *window*: it has various aspects in accordance with its material (wood, vinyl, steel, aluminum, fiberglass, etc.): some windows are energy efficient some of them not, some windows are common in industrial buildings, some are of residential use, etc. The question is whether the word under analysis should be given multiple meanings? Ruhl [17, p. 4] argues that "multiple perspectives are not solely provided by words; a difference of perceived meaning does not automatically require different lexical

meaning. A linguistic theory must have ways of determining when multiplicity is inherent in a word, and when it is supplied by other words or even extralinguistically.” For the purpose of this article, we shall assume that lexical items have single unitary meanings; however, if a word possesses apparent variations in meaning, its meanings are correlated by general rules (see Ruhl’s Monosemic Bias [17]).

One might also think over why there are attested multiple meaning words in a variety of languages. The fact is that Slavic languages have been influenced by many other languages over its long history. Some of the reasons of multiple meaning words’ occurrence are the following: i. words with identical spelling but different meanings might have come from different sources, i.e. as a result of borrowings from foreign languages; ii. disintegration or split of polysemy, i.e. the semantic structure of the lexical item breaks into several parts; iii. phonetic changes in the history of language development; iv. as a result of word-formation processes by means of which homonyms arise, etc. [7].

Consequently, we have presented in brief selected models of lexical access. As Harley [11] points out, early models in question have been replaced by connectionist models. From the facts presented above we might predict that the access of the meaning of multiple words relates on the frequencies of the existing alternative senses of a word and the extent to which context controls or limits the alternatives. When an ambiguous lexical item appears, we activate all its meanings, and the context is used to choose the appropriate sense.

It is worth pointing out that the process of lexical access is affected by a number of factors like frequency, repetition, age-of-acquisition, word length, the existence of similar lexical items, the physical and semantic similarity of preceding items, as well as stimulus quality [11].

In this study we have presented three types of multiple meaning on the base of Polish and Ukrainian data, i.e. shifts in application, polysemy and homonymy. Polysemy is one of the central concern of lexical semantics and a remarkable phenomenon to explore multiple meaning lexical items and metaphoric or metonymic meaning relations for cognitive linguists. As Knowles and Moon [12] maintain, senses can be developed from an original meaning by different ways; however, as a rule they can be arisen through figurative processes of metaphor as well as metonymy. Homonymy is the simplest type of multiple meaning and is labeled by Aitchison [1] as contrastive ambiguity, because of the fact that we should select one of two quite different and sometimes unrelated for us meanings.

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