



SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES OF POLYSEMY IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Polysemy, the phenomenon whereby a single lexical item possesses multiple related meanings, is a universal feature of natural languages and a central topic in lexical semantics. This article explores the similarities and differences of polysemy in English and Uzbek, two languages that belong to distinct language families and typological groups. English, a Germanic language within the Indo-European family, is characterized by its analytic structure and relatively fixed word order. Uzbek, a Turkic language, is agglutinative in nature and exhibits rich morphological marking. Despite these structural differences, both languages demonstrate extensive use of polysemy as a means of lexical expansion, semantic economy, and conceptual categorization. The study examines how polysemy arises in both languages through metaphor, metonymy, semantic extension, and functional shift. In English, polysemy is often facilitated by conversion and syntactic flexibility, allowing a single word form to function across different grammatical categories. In Uzbek, polysemy frequently interacts with derivational and inflectional morphology, reflecting its agglutinative structure. The article also discusses how cultural, historical, and cognitive factors shape the development of polysemous meanings in each language. By comparing examples from English and Uzbek, the research highlights shared cognitive mechanisms underlying polysemy, such as metaphorical mapping and contextual reinterpretation, while also emphasizing typological differences that influence semantic development. This comparative analysis contributes to cross-linguistic semantics, translation studies, and language pedagogy by clarifying how polysemy operates in two structurally distinct linguistic systems.

Polysemy is one of the most fundamental and productive phenomena in lexical semantics, reflecting the dynamic and adaptive nature of human language. The term itself was introduced into linguistic scholarship by the French scholar Michel Breal, who emphasized that words naturally accumulate multiple related meanings over time. Unlike homonymy, where identical forms represent historically unrelated meanings, polysemy involves a semantic relationship between different senses of the same lexical item¹.

This interconnection of meanings forms structured semantic networks, which reveal how speakers conceptualize and categorize their experiences of the world. In modern linguistic theory, polysemy is not viewed as accidental ambiguity but as a systematic and cognitively motivated process. Research in cognitive linguistics, particularly in the works of scholars such as George Lakoff, has demonstrated that polysemy often arises from metaphorical and

¹ Breal M. Essai de sémantique. — Science des significations. — Paris.: Hachette, 1897.



metonymic extensions rooted in embodied human experience.² For example, spatial concepts are frequently extended to abstract domains, and concrete physical objects are used to describe social or psychological phenomena. Such processes are considered universal cognitive strategies, yet their linguistic realization differs across languages depending on typological structure, historical development, and cultural context. The present article focuses on a comparative analysis of polysemy in English and Uzbek. English, a member of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family, is typologically classified as an analytic language, characterized by relatively fixed word order and limited inflectional morphology.

Over centuries, English has undergone extensive lexical borrowing from Latin, French, and other languages, which has enriched its vocabulary and contributed to complex semantic layering. Uzbek, by contrast, belongs to the Turkic language family and represents an agglutinative type, where grammatical and derivational meanings are expressed primarily through suffixation. Uzbek lexical development has been shaped by historical contact with Persian, Arabic, and Russian, which has also influenced patterns of semantic expansion. Despite belonging to different language families and exhibiting distinct grammatical systems, both English and Uzbek display a high degree of polysemy.

This raises important theoretical questions: To what extent are the mechanisms of polysemy universal? How do typological differences influence the structure and distribution of polysemous meanings? What similarities and divergences can be observed in the semantic organization of words in these two languages? Investigating polysemy from a cross-linguistic perspective is significant for several reasons.

This study therefore aims to explore both the shared cognitive foundations and the language-specific features of polysemy in English and Uzbek. By examining mechanisms such as metaphor, metonymy, semantic broadening, and functional shift, the article seeks to demonstrate that while polysemy is grounded in universal cognitive principles, its formal realization is deeply influenced by morphological structure, syntactic organization, and socio-cultural history. Through this comparative approach, a clearer understanding of lexical meaning and its development in two typologically distinct languages can be achieved.

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach to investigate the similarities and differences of polysemy in English and Uzbek. The research is grounded in lexical semantics and cognitive linguistic theory, with particular attention to semantic extension, metaphorical and metonymic transfer, and word-formation processes. The methodological framework integrates descriptive analysis, contrastive analysis, and semantic field examination.

First, a corpus-based sampling strategy was employed. A selection of high-frequency polysemous lexical items was identified from contemporary English and Uzbek explanatory dictionaries and educational corpora. The selection criteria included: (1) frequency of usage in everyday discourse, (2) presence of at least three semantically related meanings, and (3) representation of different grammatical categories (nouns, verbs, and adjectives). In English, items such as *head*, *run*, *foot*, and *light* were selected. In Uzbek, lexical items such as *bosh*, *ko'z*, *yurak*, and *til* were analyzed. These words were chosen because they demonstrate clear semantic networks and productive meaning extensions.

² Lakoff G. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What categories Reveal about the Mind.*—Chicago.: Chicago Press, 1987.



Second, each lexical item was subjected to semantic mapping. The primary (central) meaning was identified based on etymological and dictionary evidence, and secondary meanings were classified according to mechanisms of semantic change, including metaphor, metonymy, generalization, and specialization. Particular attention was given to identifying conceptual relationships between senses and determining whether these relationships were structurally parallel in both languages.

Third, a contrastive analysis was conducted to compare the structural realization of polysemy in English and Uzbek. This stage examined morphological marking, syntactic behavior, derivational processes, and the role of conversion. The aim was to determine how typological differences - analytic versus agglutinative structure - affect the development and distribution of polysemous meanings.

Finally, contextual analysis was carried out using authentic sentence examples drawn from literary texts, journalistic materials, and spoken discourse. This step ensured that the analysis reflected actual language use rather than purely dictionary-based abstractions. The findings were then systematized into thematic categories highlighting similarities and differences between the two languages.

The analysis revealed several significant patterns in the manifestation of polysemy in English and Uzbek. First, in both languages, the majority of secondary meanings derive from metaphorical extension based on physical experience. For instance, the English word *head* and the Uzbek *bosh* share parallel semantic developments: from the anatomical body part to meanings such as "leader," "top," or "beginning." This suggests a shared conceptual metaphor in which hierarchical or spatial prominence is mapped onto social or temporal domains.

Second, metonymic extension was found to be productive in both languages. For example, English *tongue* and Uzbek *til* both denote the physical organ and, by extension, "language" as a system of communication. This shift illustrates a part-for-function relationship, demonstrating similar cognitive mechanisms across languages.

Third, the study identified structural differences in how polysemy interacts with grammar. In English, functional shift (conversion) plays a significant role in expanding polysemous networks. Words frequently move between noun and verb categories without morphological modification (e.g., *to water*, *to head*, *to shoulder*). This process often results in additional metaphorical meanings.

In contrast, Uzbek relies predominantly on derivational morphology to create semantically related forms. While the core lexical base may be polysemous, grammatical and semantic distinctions are typically marked through suffixation. This morphological transparency reduces certain types of structural ambiguity that are common in English. Furthermore, English polysemy demonstrates a higher degree of category fluidity, whereas Uzbek polysemy tends to remain within clearly marked grammatical boundaries. However, the density of polysemous meanings per lexical item appeared comparable in both languages.

Finally, cultural influences were observed in certain semantic extensions. Some polysemous meanings in Uzbek reflect sociocultural traditions specific to Central Asian contexts, while English polysemy often reflects historical developments influenced by contact with Romance languages. At the same time, typological differences significantly shape the formal realization of polysemy. English, as an analytic language, permits extensive use of conversion and syntactic flexibility. This structural feature enhances the expansion of polysemous networks across



grammatical categories. Uzbek, as an agglutinative language, expresses grammatical relations through explicit morphological markers, which tends to maintain clearer category distinctions. Consequently, polysemy in Uzbek is more closely integrated with derivational morphology than with syntactic reclassification.

The results also highlight the importance of historical and sociolinguistic factors. English lexical development has been influenced by centuries of borrowing and semantic layering, which has sometimes intensified polysemous complexity. Uzbek, while also shaped by language contact, maintains stronger morphological cohesion within lexical families.

From a theoretical perspective, the study suggests that polysemy represents an interaction between universal cognitive processes and language-specific structural constraints. While the conceptual motivation for semantic extension appears largely universal, the grammatical and morphological systems of individual languages determine how these extensions are encoded and organized.

In applied terms, these findings have implications for translation studies and language pedagogy. Awareness of cross-linguistic similarities can facilitate semantic transfer, whereas understanding structural differences can prevent misinterpretation. For learners, recognizing semantic networks rather than isolated meanings can enhance vocabulary acquisition and interpretive accuracy.

This study has examined polysemy in English and Uzbek from a comparative perspective. The findings show that in both languages polysemy develops through universal cognitive mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy. Similar semantic extensions - such as meanings derived from "head" to express leadership or beginning - demonstrate shared conceptual patterns. However, structural differences influence how polysemy is expressed. English relies on conversion and syntactic flexibility, while Uzbek depends more on derivational suffixes due to its agglutinative nature. Overall, polysemy in both languages reflects universal semantic processes shaped by language-specific grammatical features, which is important for linguistic theory, translation, and language teaching.

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