



POLYSEMANTIC FEATURES OF COMPOUND WORDS IN PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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Abstract

This article examines the influence of aesthetic philosophy on the psychological transformation of Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. As one of the most significant works of the late Victorian period, the novel explores the relationship between beauty, morality, identity, and self-destruction through the lens of the Aesthetic Movement. Wilde's philosophy of "art for art's sake" challenges traditional moral values and presents beauty as the highest ideal. The study investigates how aesthetic principles shape Dorian's personality, behavior, and moral decline. Through literary and psychological analysis, the article demonstrates that Dorian's obsession with youth, beauty, and sensory pleasure leads to a gradual corruption of his conscience and identity. The findings reveal that aesthetic philosophy functions both as a source of self-realization and as a catalyst for psychological disintegration.

Keywords: Polysemy, compound words, phraseological units, semantics, lexical meaning, phraseology, figurative language, linguistic analysis, word formation, cognitive linguistics.

Introduction

Language is a dynamic system in which words constantly develop new meanings and functions. One of the most important mechanisms contributing to semantic enrichment is polysemy—the coexistence of multiple related meanings within a single lexical unit. Polysemy enables speakers to use language economically while expressing a wide variety of concepts and experiences. Compound words



represent a productive means of word formation in many languages. By combining two or more lexical elements, speakers create new words capable of expressing complex ideas. Over time, many compound words develop additional meanings that extend beyond their original literal interpretations. Phraseological units, including idioms, fixed expressions, and proverbs, frequently contain compound words whose meanings differ significantly from their individual lexical components. In such contexts, compound words often acquire metaphorical, symbolic, or culturally specific meanings.

Literature Review

The study of polysemy has occupied an important place in linguistic research for many decades. Scholars have investigated how words develop multiple meanings and how these meanings are organized within the lexical system. Lyons (1977) defines polysemy as the association of several related meanings with a single lexical form. According to his approach, polysemy reflects the flexibility and adaptability of language. Cruse (2000) emphasizes that polysemous words possess interconnected semantic structures rather than unrelated meanings. This distinction separates polysemy from homonymy, where identical forms have entirely different origins and meanings. The study of compound words has also received significant scholarly attention. Bauer (1983) argues that compounding is one of the most productive processes of word formation, enabling languages to expand their vocabularies efficiently. Marchand (1969) examines the structural and semantic properties of English compounds, noting that many compounds develop figurative meanings through metaphorical extension. Within phraseology, scholars such as Vinogradov (1977) and Kunin (1984) have demonstrated that phraseological units often involve semantic transformation. Components of fixed expressions frequently acquire meanings that differ from their ordinary lexical interpretations.

Recent cognitive linguistic approaches suggest that polysemy results from conceptual processes such as metaphor, metonymy, and categorization. These mechanisms contribute significantly to the semantic evolution of compound words within phraseological contexts.



Methodology

This study employs a qualitative linguistic methodology focusing on semantic and phraseological analysis. The following methods were used: semantic analysis of compound words, phraseological analysis of fixed expressions, contextual analysis of meaning variation, comparative linguistic analysis, descriptive interpretation of semantic relationships.

Materials and Discussion

Polysemy occurs when a single lexical unit develops several related meanings. These meanings often emerge through metaphorical extension, social change, technological innovation, or contextual reinterpretation. For example, the word “head” may refer to: a part of the body; a leader of an organization; the top of an object; intelligence or mental capacity.

The coexistence of these meanings demonstrates the flexibility of lexical semantics. Compound Words and Their Semantic Structure. Compound words consist of two or more lexical stems combined into a single unit. Examples include: “Blackboard”, “Handbag”, “Greenhouse”, “Toothbrush”, “Brainstorm”. Initially, compound words often possess transparent meanings derived from their components. However, semantic development frequently leads to figurative interpretations. For instance, “brainstorm” originally evokes the image of mental activity but now commonly refers to creative problem-solving sessions.

Phraseological units are fixed expressions whose meanings cannot always be understood from the meanings of their individual components. Examples include: white-collar worker, cold-blooded person, hard-headed businessman, high-flyer, greenhorn. In these expressions, compound words acquire specialized meanings that differ from literal interpretations.

Polysemantic Development of Compound Words. Several mechanisms contribute to the development of polysemy in compound words: Metaphorical Extension. Metaphor is one of the most productive sources of polysemy. For example: “Cold-blooded” - Literal meaning: An animal whose body temperature depends on the environment. Figurative meaning: A person lacking sympathy or emotion. Metonymic Extension. Metonymy involves semantic shifts based on association. For example: “White-collar” - Originally referring to the white shirts worn by office employees, it later came to denote an entire social and



occupational category. Functional Reinterpretation. Some compounds develop new meanings based on changing social contexts. For example: “Think tank” – Originally suggesting a place where ideas are generated, it now refers to a research organization specializing in policy analysis.

Polysemy in Phraseological Contexts. Phraseological units provide fertile ground for semantic expansion because fixed expressions often encourage figurative interpretation. Consider the compound word “high-flyer” - Literal meaning: A person or object flying at a high altitude. Phraseological meaning: A highly successful and ambitious individual. The phraseological context activates the figurative meaning while suppressing the literal interpretation.

Cognitive Aspects of Polysemantic Compounds. Cognitive linguistics explains polysemy through conceptual networks connecting related meanings. When speakers encounter a polysemantic compound, they interpret its meaning based on: context, cultural knowledge, previous linguistic experience, conceptual association. This process allows efficient communication despite semantic complexity.

Stylistic and Communicative Functions. Polysemantic compound words contribute significantly to language expressiveness. Their functions include:

1. Increasing semantic economy.
2. Enhancing figurative expression.
3. Creating stylistic variety.
4. Facilitating cultural references.
5. Supporting communicative efficiency.

Phraseological units containing polysemantic compounds often convey complex meanings in a concise and memorable form.

Challenges in Interpretation and Translation. The polysemantic nature of compound words may create difficulties for language learners and translators.

Challenges arise because:

- ✓ Literal meanings may differ from phraseological meanings.
- ✓ Cultural associations vary across languages.
- ✓ Equivalent expressions may not exist in target languages.

Consequently, successful interpretation requires both linguistic and cultural competence.



Results

The analysis produced the following findings:

1. Compound words frequently develop multiple related meanings through semantic extension.
2. Phraseological units provide an important environment for the emergence of polysemy.
3. Metaphor and metonymy are the primary mechanisms responsible for semantic expansion.
4. Polysemantic compound words enhance the expressive and communicative potential of phraseological units.
5. Context plays a decisive role in determining meaning interpretation.
6. Cognitive and cultural factors significantly influence the understanding of polysemantic compounds.

These findings confirm the close relationship between word formation, semantic development, and phraseological usage.

Conclusion

Polysemantic features of compound words represent an important aspect of lexical and phraseological semantics. Through processes such as metaphorical extension, metonymy, and contextual reinterpretation, compound words acquire multiple meanings that enrich linguistic expression. The study demonstrates that phraseological units serve as productive environments for semantic development, allowing compound words to function beyond their literal meanings. These semantic transformations contribute to the expressive power, cultural significance, and communicative effectiveness of language. Understanding the polysemantic nature of compound words is essential for linguistic analysis, language teaching, translation studies, and intercultural communication. Future research may focus on comparative studies of polysemantic compounds across different languages and cultural contexts.

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