



TYPES OF POLYSEMY OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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Abstract

The article examines the phenomenon of polysemy in phraseological units and aims to identify and classify the main types of idiomatic polysemy. The study analyzes the semantic mechanisms that lead to the development of multiple meanings in phraseological expressions and describes their structural organization.

Keywords: Idiom, polysemy, phraseology, idiomatic meaning; metaphorical transfer; metonymic shift.

Introduction

In contemporary linguistics, the study of phraseology occupies an important place within the anthropocentric paradigm, which emphasizes the relationship between language, cognition, and culture. Phraseological units are not merely fixed expressions of a language but complex semantic formations that reflect collective experience, cultural values, and conceptual models of reality. Within this framework, the investigation of polysemy in phraseological units has become increasingly relevant, as idiomatic expressions often demonstrate semantic flexibility and the capacity to develop several interrelated meanings.

Phraseological units play a significant role in representing conceptual and cultural knowledge. Their figurative basis frequently originates from culturally embedded images, historical experience, and social practices. As a result, idioms function not only as linguistic signs but also as repositories of cultural memory and symbolic interpretation. The semantic structure of phraseological units is therefore multidimensional, combining literal imagery, figurative meaning, and evaluative connotations. This complexity creates favorable conditions for the emergence and development of polysemy within phraseology.



Literature review

Idioms have long been recognized as one of the most expressive components of language, serving as repositories of cultural and historical experience. Idioms represent stable combinations of words whose meaning is not derived from the sum of their parts but from the collective usage and traditions of a speech community. A. V. Kunin emphasizes that idioms are not only linguistic but also cultural phenomena that reflect the mentality and social behavior of a nation [1]. Polysemy, or the existence of multiple related meanings within a single linguistic unit, is a central concept in semantic theory. Polysemy illustrates the dynamic and evolving nature of language, showing how meaning expands through metaphorical and contextual usage. Polysemy arises from human cognitive capacity to perceive similarity and analogy between different experiences. In idiomatic expressions, polysemy is particularly significant because idioms often develop additional meanings as they are used in varied social and cultural contexts. The same idiom can acquire new connotations while retaining its core image or metaphor. For instance, idioms related to emotions, work, or nature frequently extend their meanings in different languages according to national customs and cultural associations.

The study of language as a reflection of national mentality is grounded in the field of linguoculturology, which examines the interaction between linguistic forms and cultural concepts. Maslova defines linguoculturology as a discipline that studies how language embodies cultural values and expresses collective identity [2]. Wierzbicka also highlights the role of language in shaping thought patterns, emphasizing that linguistic expressions reveal the cultural norms and moral frameworks of their speakers [5].

Cognitive linguists such as Lakoff and Johnson [4] and Fillmore [3, 111-112] support this view through the theory of conceptual metaphor and frame semantics. They argue that meaning is structured through culturally specific conceptual frames, which influence how speakers perceive and interpret the world. From this perspective, idioms and their polysemy serve as cognitive models that reflect a nation's typical ways of understanding reality, emotion, and social behavior.



Research Methodology

The study employs a combination of linguistic methods that allow for a comprehensive examination of the semantic structure of phraseological units. Componential analysis is used to identify the semantic components that constitute idiomatic meaning and to determine how these components vary across different interpretations. This method helps reveal the internal organization of polysemantic structures.

Cognitive-semantic analysis is applied to explain the figurative motivation underlying idiomatic meanings. This approach focuses on conceptual mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy, which play a crucial role in the development of secondary meanings in phraseological units. By reconstructing the conceptual basis of idiomatic expressions, the analysis clarifies how semantic extensions emerge.

Contextual analysis is used to examine the functioning of idioms in authentic communicative environments. Through the analysis of discourse examples, it becomes possible to observe how specific meanings of polysemantic phraseological units are activated or modified depending on contextual factors.

Analysis and results

The analysis of phraseological material reveals that polysemy in phraseological units can be classified into several major types according to the semantic mechanisms that underlie the development of multiple meanings. The typology proposed in this study includes metaphorical, metonymic, evaluative, contextual (discursive), and cultural polysemy. Each type reflects a particular way in which idiomatic meaning expands or varies within the phraseological system of a language.

One of the most common mechanisms responsible for the development of polysemy in phraseological units is metaphorical transfer. In this case, the semantic extension occurs through the projection of features from one conceptual domain onto another. Metaphorical polysemy arises when the figurative image underlying an idiom becomes applicable to different conceptual situations.

Typically, metaphorical polysemy develops from concrete imagery toward more abstract meanings. Many phraseological units originate from everyday physical experience or observable situations, such as bodily actions, natural phenomena,



or social interactions. Over time, these concrete images serve as a basis for interpreting more abstract concepts, including psychological states, moral qualities, or social relations. As a result, the idiom may acquire several related meanings that share a common metaphorical foundation.

Another important type of polysemy is metonymic polysemy, which is based on semantic shifts within a single conceptual domain. Unlike metaphor, which involves the mapping between different domains, metonymy operates through associative relationships within the same domain of experience.

Metonymic polysemy often develops through relations such as cause–effect, part–whole, action–result, or instrument–activity. In phraseological units, these relationships allow one element of a conceptual scenario to represent another. For instance, an idiom originally referring to a specific action may later denote the result of that action or the state associated with it. This type of semantic extension preserves the conceptual coherence of the idiom while allowing the emergence of new interpretations.

Evaluative polysemy refers to the variation of emotional or axiological meaning within the semantic structure of a phraseological unit. Many idioms carry strong evaluative connotations that reflect cultural attitudes toward behavior, character, or social norms. Over time, these evaluative components may shift or diversify, producing several related interpretations.

In some cases, the same idiom can express positive, negative, or neutral evaluation depending on the communicative context. Such variation may arise through ironic usage, stylistic intensification, or pragmatic reinterpretation. Evaluative polysemy demonstrates that idiomatic meaning is not purely descriptive but also reflects speakers' attitudes and cultural value systems.

Contextual or discursive polysemy emerges when different meanings of a phraseological unit are activated depending on the discourse environment. The interpretation of an idiom often depends on the communicative situation, the speaker's intention, and the stylistic characteristics of the discourse.

Conclusion

The present study has examined the phenomenon of polysemy in phraseological units with the aim of identifying and classifying its principal types and describing the mechanisms that shape their semantic structure. The analysis demonstrates

that polysemy is an inherent and systematic feature of phraseological meaning rather than an occasional or accidental phenomenon. Phraseological units often develop several interrelated meanings that emerge through cognitive, contextual, and cultural processes.

The results of the study show that polysemy in phraseological units can be categorized into several major types: metaphorical, metonymic, evaluative, contextual (discursive), and cultural polysemy. Each of these types reflects a specific mechanism of semantic development. Metaphorical polysemy arises through conceptual transfer between domains and typically leads to the extension of meaning from concrete imagery to more abstract interpretations. Metonymic polysemy develops within a single conceptual domain through associative relations such as cause–effect, part–whole, or action–result. Evaluative polysemy reflects shifts in axiological meaning and demonstrates the role of emotional and cultural attitudes in idiomatic interpretation. Contextual polysemy highlights the influence of discourse environment on the activation of particular meanings, while cultural polysemy illustrates the role of national worldview and symbolic imagery in shaping semantic variation.

References

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