

THE CONCEPTUAL NATURE OF POLYSEMOUS WORDS IN THE LEXICON OF OGHUZ DIALECTS

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Abstract *This thesis examines the conceptual nature of polysemous words in the lexicon of Oghuz dialects within a cognitive-semantic framework. The study aims to explain how polysemy arises through metaphor, metonymy, and prototypical categorization within a system of concepts. Units of Oghuz regional speech serve as the material for comparative analysis, and semantic shifts are modelled by means of conceptual mapping. The scientific novelty of the work lies in proposing an integrated classification of polysemy grounded in dialectal concepts and their semantic dynamics.*

Keywords: *polysemy; concept; metaphor; metonymy; prototype; dialect lexicon; semantic extension.*

Main Text

Polysemy is defined as the stable combination of two or more planes of content within a single form of a linguistic unit. Its conceptual nature implies that these meanings are linked not by chance but through a shared cognitive basis — the internal structure of a concept. In Oghuz dialects, polysemy frequently originates in prototypical situations associated with everyday experience (the perception of body parts, economic activity, spatial and temporal orientation) and subsequently expands through metaphorical and metonymic transfers. For instance,

bosh (“head”), the name of a body part, acquires the meanings “leader,” “beginning,” and “upper part” in many Turkic dialects; this transfer rests on the isomorphic relation between the concept of “elevation on the body” and that of “primacy within a structure.” Dialectological observations show that polysemic distribution is considerably higher in the actively used core lexicon than in the peripheral layer — a phenomenon explained by the principle of economy in the language system. Cognitive semantics therefore treats polysemy not as a “list of meanings” but as a conceptual network in which a prototype occupies the centre and context-sensitive peripheral meanings lie at the edges [5; 7].

In delimiting the lexicon of Oghuz dialects as a distinct object of study, their historical and genetic foundation is of particular importance: these dialects trace back to the Oghuz branch of the Turkic languages while simultaneously preserving layers that both converge with and diverge from the standard norm of Uzbek. This dual condition is likewise manifested in polysemous words: on the one hand, the common-Turkic core meanings are retained; on the other, new semantic shades corresponding to regional experience emerge and reshape the internal hierarchy of the concept. For example, in names relating to the economy and the natural environment, meanings such as “trace,” “direction,” “method,” and “course of fate” accumulate around the concept of *yoʻl* (“road, way”), while in certain areas microsemes such as “a path running along an irrigation ditch” become activated. Although dialectal corpora have not been fully digitized, the material of regional dictionaries reveals that a substantial portion of polysemous units clusters precisely in socially practical domains — words connected with animal husbandry, irrigation, and dwelling structure. This clustering indicates that conceptual density is high in particular semantic domains: domains that

recur frequently in human experience “attract” more of the language’s polysemic resources, so that a single lexeme carries numerous closely related yet distinct meanings [1; 4].

In the conceptual analysis of polysemous words, a “concept” is a cognitive unit denoting a meaning centre formed on the basis of perception, experience, and cultural stereotypes, whereas polysemy is the systematic form in which meanings are distributed around that centre. The attributes (distinctive features) of a concept become activated in different contexts: the feature of physical firmness in the adjective *qattiq* (“hard”), for example, is linked within a single conceptual field to features of social resolve or emotional coldness, and polysemy arises. In Oghuz dialects the evaluative semantics of adjectives is strong: depending on context, *og’ir* (“heavy”) differentiates into the meanings “of great weight,” “difficult,” and “weighty, significant,” which are explained through a metaphorical bridge between the concept of “load” and that of “difficulty.” Cognitive research regularly records the typical directions of semantic extension: the shift from physical to abstract domains (PHYSICAL → ABSTRACT) is one of the most widespread, and it is expected to display a high frequency in dialectal speech as well. Such transfers are accounted for in conceptual metaphor theory by the principle of the embodiment of experience: abstract notions are frequently encoded through real, sensorily perceived experience [7; 8].

Metaphor-based polysemy is a semantic mechanism that relies on transferring the structure of one domain as a conceptual model for construing another. In Oghuz dialects, metaphor operates most often through spatial orientation, body parts, natural phenomena, and household objects, since these units are perceptually concrete and vivid and thus serve as anchors for abstraction. For example, the lexeme *ildiz*

“root”) moves from the sense of the underground part of a plant to meanings such as “nerve root,” “root of a problem,” and “ancestral root”; in this transfer the attributes “source” and “foundation” are retained as the conceptual centre. Metaphorical polysemy also plays an important role in terminology: the seme “root” is used consistently in biology and medicine, demonstrating that common-language units systematically develop secondary meanings in specialized fields. In a semantic-network model, metaphorical meanings frequently expand radially: several peripheral branches form around the core meaning, each reinforced by particular contexts [5; 8].

Metonymy-based polysemy is a mechanism that produces meaning transfer on the basis of relations such as contiguity, part–whole, cause–effect, and container–content within a single conceptual domain. In Oghuz dialects, metonymy is frequently activated in the names of household objects: the use of *qozon* (“cauldron”) to mean “food” and *dasturxon* (“ceremonial spread”) to mean “meal” is connected with economy of speech and pragmatic effect. For example, the shift of the lexeme *uy* (“house”) from the sense of “building” to “family,” “room,” and “household” is a metonymic one, in which the name of a physical place becomes the name of a social unit. Pragmatic studies note that metonymic transfers are especially frequent in oral speech: the greater the degree of meaning compression and reliance on context in rapid communication, the larger the share of metonymic designations. In this sense, metonymy is the intra-domain mechanism of polysemy: it is less imagistic than metaphor yet, owing to conceptual contiguity, it is often more stable and more stereotypical [4; 7].

The defining feature of polysemy grounded in prototypical categorization is that meanings are not equal in status: there exists a

“most typical” core and peripheries that recede from it. The core meaning of a lexeme occurs most often in speech experience, whereas peripheral meanings are activated by context, the specifics of a field, or stylistic need; for this reason the centre–periphery model of a polysemous unit is clearly visible in Oghuz dialects as well. For example, while the core meaning of the lexeme *ko‘z* (“eye”) is “organ of sight,” its periphery hosts meanings such as “spring, source” (*buloq ko‘zi*), “eye of a needle” (*ignaning ko‘zi*), and “to keep watch” (*ko‘z-quloq bo‘lish*); here the shared conceptual basis consists of the attributes “hole, opening” and “control, looking.” The number of collocational restrictions also increases in polysemous units: whereas the core meaning has broader combinability, peripheral meanings are often confined to fixed collocations, which enhances the effectiveness of corpus methods in identifying them. Prototype theory thus links polysemy with cognitive economy and the centrality of experience: a speaker takes the most typical case as the “standard” and interprets the remaining meanings in relation to it [6].

Describing the polysemous words of Oghuz dialects by conceptual fields entails systematizing them across semantic domains — distinguishing the bodily, spatial, social, economic, and emotional domains. Inter-domain transitions are realized chiefly through metaphor, and intra-domain extensions chiefly through metonymy; this distinction serves as a criterion in constructing a polysemic model. For example, the spatial domain (“up,” “front,” “inside”) is frequently linked with the social domain (“superior,” “prior,” “content”), while the economic domain connects with emotional evaluation; in Oghuz dialects such connections are rendered all the more vivid through folk imagery and pragmatic compression. General-linguistic observations show that one of the most active pairings in inter-domain transfer is “space →

abstraction,” and this pairing is confirmed by numerous corresponding examples in the Oghuz material as well. The conceptual-field model thus presents polysemy not as a set of isolated meanings but as an inter-domain map, thereby reconstructing the internal logic of the dialect lexicon [2; 5].

The research methodology consists of mutually complementary approaches — comparative-dialectological analysis, componential analysis, conceptual mapping, and contextual interpretation. Comparative analysis collates corresponding units in Oghuz dialects, literary Uzbek, and closely related Turkic languages, distinguishing the common core from regional innovations; componential analysis identifies the semes within each meaning and determines which are core and which peripheral. For example, the differing activation of semes in the meanings of *issiq* (“hot, warm”) — “of high temperature,” “convivial in atmosphere,” and “fresh (of news)” — is analysed, showing how a shared “activity, speed” attribute participates in each. In such analysis, indicators such as the number of collocations, the length of meaning networks, and the recurrence frequency of semes are important, enabling a quantitative assessment of the “density” of the conceptual network. The integration of methods accords with the complex nature of polysemy: confined to lexicographic glossing alone, conceptual links remain invisible; confined to cognitive interpretation alone, the historical strata of dialectal facts are insufficiently illuminated [1; 2].

Conceptual links can also be described formally: here the formation of meaning is expressed by the model “core seme + activated attribute = derived meaning” and acquires a structurally explicit form. For instance, conceptual formulas such as “head + primacy = leader,” “head + beginning = origin,” and “eye + opening = hole” describe polysemic

networks systematically and make it possible to register dialectal differences. Thus, the predominance of the “upper part” meaning of *bosh* in some areas and of the “leader” meaning in others is represented as a difference in attribute weight within the conceptual formulas. Attribute weights can be designated by a conventional coefficient ranging from 0 to 1: the attribute “primacy,” for example, is activated at a level of 0.8 in social contexts and the attribute “beginning” at 0.7 in temporal contexts — estimates that make it possible to model the network empirically. Naturally, such formalization does not turn natural language into “chemistry”; rather, it provides an orderly record of the observable aspects of semantic dynamics and creates operational units for subsequent corpus research [5].

Presenting the comparative analysis in tabular form makes it possible to compare the polysemous units of Oghuz dialects with literary Uzbek and parallel common-Turkic units, whereby the distinction between core and peripheral meanings becomes evident. The table provides the columns “lexeme,” “core meaning,” “metaphorical extension,” “metonymic extension,” and “conceptual basis,” with semantic directions recorded consistently in each row. The table below shows how conceptual bases operate and orders the dialectal shades of meaning. As the number of rows increases, it becomes possible to indicate the “degree of branching” of the polysemic network — for example, that a single lexeme has three to five principal directions of extension. The table enhances the verifiability of the semantic analysis, since a subsequent researcher can compare new material on the basis of the same parameters and reprocess the results [2; 3; 4].

Table. The conceptual branching of polysemous lexemes in Oghuz dialects (sample)

Lexeme	Core meaning	Metaphorical extension	Metonymic extension	Conceptual basis
bosh ("head")	body part	leader; beginning; upper part	head (counting unit for livestock)	primacy and elevation
ko'z ("eye")	organ of sight	control; attention	eye of a needle; spring source	opening and looking
yo'l ("road")	path of movement	method; direction; fate	trace; trail	movement and direction

From a historical and factual standpoint, the proliferation of figurative meanings in the development of the Turkic languages is connected with oral tradition, occupational lexicon, and channels of regional contact. Historical semantics explains the extension of a lexeme's meaning through social need, the appearance of new objects, and the re-specialization of old names; in Oghuz dialects, too, certain strata of polysemy connect back to the ancient Turkic heritage. Many words of common-Turkic origin have passed into both the literary language and the dialects, yet some meanings may remain active in a dialect while becoming passive in the literary language; this situation is regarded as the "historical memory" of a concept. Comparative dictionaries of the Turkic languages assemble numerous derivatives and shades of meaning around a single root, demonstrating the robustness of the historical strata of polysemy. In this sense, dialectal material serves as a "living laboratory" for historical semantics: it simultaneously reveals traces of ancient meanings and innovations that arise under the influence of modern life [1; 6].

Conclusion

In conclusion, the conceptual nature of polysemous words in the lexicon of Oghuz dialects is characterized by a stable harmony of radial branching around a core prototype, inter-domain metaphorical transfer, and intra-domain metonymic extension. The study shows that polysemy is not a random proliferation but a systematic process governed by the centrality of experience, economy of speech, and the need for cognitive mapping. In Oghuz dialects, the domains of economic activity, space, and bodily perception become especially active as conceptual anchors and serve as “bridges” in the transition to abstract meanings. Modelling polysemy through conceptual formulas and tabular parameters yields a verifiable description of semantic networks and refines comparative-dialectological conclusions. It is thereby scientifically substantiated that polysemy in the dialect lexicon, while inseparably connected with general-language semantics, forms distinctive conceptual configurations owing to regional experience.

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