

THEORETICAL PROBLEMS IN CONSTRUCTING A COGNITIVE-SEMANTIC MODEL OF POLYSEMANTIC WORDS (On the Material of Uzbek Lexis)

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Abstract. *Traditional Uzbek linguistics has largely approached polysemy as a ready-made inventory of dictionary meanings produced through metaphor and metonymy. This paper argues that treating polysemous words merely as lists of lexicalised senses fails to capture the internal, systematic organisation of meaning in the speaker's mind. Drawing on the systemic tradition in Uzbek linguistics (Jamolxonov; Ne'matov and Rasulov) and on cognitive semantics (Lakoff; Langacker), the study examines the theoretical difficulties involved in building a cognitive-semantic model of polysemantic words on the material of Uzbek lexis. Through the analysis of everyday Uzbek examples — the nouns tuz "salt" and bel "waist", the pair achchiq "bitter" / shirin "sweet", and the idiom boshi aylandi "to feel dizzy / to be bewildered" — it shows that the several senses of a word are not accidental homonyms but form a motivated, prototype-centred network grounded in embodied and culturally specific experience. The paper concludes that combining the systemic and cognitive frameworks offers a more adequate account of how polysemy is structured in the mind of the Uzbek speaker.*

Keywords: *polysemy, cognitive semantics, cognitive-semantic model, invariant and variant, prototype, network model, language and thought, Uzbek lexis.*

Introduction.

In courses on Uzbek linguistics, the polysemy of the word – the coexistence of several meanings in a single lexical unit – is usually studied within the traditional framework. That a single word may possess various figurative meanings, and that new meanings arise through metaphor and metonymy, is common knowledge. In contemporary linguistics, however, it is no longer sufficient to regard linguistic units simply as a ready-made component of the dictionary. Increasingly important is the study of linguistic units in connection with human cognition and with the way reality is represented in the mind – that is, the direction known as cognitive semantics.

Understanding polysemous words as nothing more than the lists of senses recorded in explanatory dictionaries cannot fully reveal the inner potential of language. What is required instead is the study of how such words are organised as a logical system in the speaker's mind, and through what patterns they generate new chains of meaning – in other words, the study of the word's cognitive-semantic model. This paper analyses the theoretical problems that arise in constructing such models on the material of Uzbek lexis, and traces how these questions are presented in the sequence of views found in standard textbooks. Particular attention is given to how the phenomenon manifests itself in everyday speech.

Polysemy and homonymy: the systemic view.

A review of the literature shows that the question of polysemy has been approached in different ways in the history of linguistics. In some of the stricter classical treatments, when a single phonological form carried two or more meanings, these tended to be described not as one word but as separate homonyms (cf. Irisqulov, 2005). From the standpoint of contemporary linguistics this position is debatable, since in

genuine homonymy there is no semantic or logical connection between the meanings, whereas in polysemy the meanings remain tied to a single common root.

In Uzbek linguistics the systematic nature of polysemy has been set out clearly in the works of H. Jamolxonov, X. Ne'matov and R. Rasulov. Within systemic analysis these scholars first of all distinguish the notions of language (*langue*) and speech (*parole*). A word has a stable, invariant core meaning in the language system, which speakers realise in various contextual guises (variants) in the process of speech. This may be illustrated with the everyday word *tuz* "salt". If the semantic development of the lexeme *tuz* is traced through the explanatory dictionaries, the following chain of meanings emerges:

1. The most basic meaning – the edible salt added to food (*osh tuz*). This is the invariant basis of the word.
2. Proceeding from the Uzbek way of life and its values, the word acquires the figurative sense of a kindness done to someone and the feeling of gratitude or indebtedness. Thus the proverb *falonchining tuzini yeb, tuzlig'iga tupurdi* — literally "having eaten someone's salt, he spat into the salt-cellar" — describes repaying kindness with ingratitude. Here the meaning has shifted from food to a moral relationship.
3. The same word expresses the substance and sense of an utterance, as in *bu gapda tuz bormi o'zi?* "is there any salt (i.e. substance, point) in these words at all?"

This example shows that it is mistaken to regard polysemy as mere accidental homonymy. The three meanings are not wholly separate words: all of them derive from a property of edible salt and have shifted in a coherent, logical way within human cognition. In everyday speech

these transfers are barely noticed, yet on analysis a deep, culturally grounded logic can be seen to underlie them.

Polysemy in antonymy and idiom.

Polysemy also affects the relations of antonymy and synonymy. A polysemous word may be opposed to one word through its primary meaning while, through a derived figurative meaning, entering into antonymy with a quite different set of words. For example, in *achchiq qalampir* “bitter pepper” – *shirin olma* “sweet apple” the opposition concerns real taste perceived through the organs of taste. In *achchiq gap* “bitter/harsh words” – *shirin gap* “sweet/kind words”, by contrast, speech has no taste: here the figurative meanings – speech that is pleasant or, conversely, hurtful to the human psyche – stand in antonymic relation.

The same pattern is clearly visible in idioms. The idiom *boshi aylandi*, literally “his head turned”, primarily denotes a physical state (dizziness). Yet it is applied equally to a person astonished by an unexpected event or bewildered in a difficult situation. Idiomatic polysemy, then, likewise arises from the transfer of experiences felt through one’s own body onto abstract notions.

The cognitive turn: embodiment.

Cognitive linguistics explains these processes through the workings of human cognition. Representatives of the earlier logical-philosophical tradition treated thinking as a system detached from the body, operating only with abstract logical symbols. G. Lakoff, however, argued against this view and showed that the concepts in the human mind are inseparably bound up with bodily and lived experience (Lakoff, 1988). That is, we build in the mind patterns that correspond to the way we first perceive and physically experience the external world.

The network model and the prototype.

Explaining how polysemous words are stored in the mind, Ronald Langacker proposes representing them as a single integrated network (Langacker, 1987). At the central node of this network stands the prototype – the basic meaning that first comes to mind when the word is uttered. All the remaining derived and figurative meanings are branches radiating from this central prototype. The model may be illustrated with the word *bel* “waist”.

When the word *bel* is uttered, the first pattern (prototype) that comes to mind is the middle part of the human body. This is the central member of the category. Because a person knows the structure of his own body well and constantly relies on that experience, he involuntarily compares surrounding objects to his own body, and new branches of meaning grow out of the central point. Thus we obtain, for geographical objects, *togʻning beli* “the waist of a mountain” (its mid-slope); for artefacts, *pichoqning beli* “the waist of a knife” (its mid-part); and, for clothing, *koʻylakning beli* “the waist of a dress” (its waistline). Multiplying such vivid Uzbek examples shows that cognitive modelling is a sound way to study the unity of human nature and language, and reveals how we understand the world and reflect it in language.

Conclusion.

Constructing a cognitive-semantic model of polysemantic words is one of the engaging problems facing young researchers in present-day Uzbek linguistics. The classical textbooks explain well the systemic regularities of polysemy in the language and the relations of invariant and variant. The cognitive theories of G. Lakoff and R. Langacker, however, help to show more precisely how these meanings are organised in the mind and how the speech community perceives reality. Further

research in this direction promises to shed still deeper light on the cognitive nature of polysemantic units in Uzbek.

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