



APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON OF POLYSEMY

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Abstract

The article provides an overview of approaches to understanding the phenomenon of polysemy, discusses the interpretation of the concept of lexico-semantic variant and its relationship with the concept of "meaning". The possibilities of an invariant approach to the organization of the meaning of a word are analyzed.

Keywords: polysemy, lexico-semantic variant, meaning, invariant.

Introduction

Scientists have been interested in the phenomenon of ambiguity since Antiquity. Democritus, in a dispute with Pythagoras about the origin of names (words), proves in four epicheiremes that names do not arise "by nature", but "by establishment". As one of the arguments (the first epicurem), Democritus cites "eponymousness", i.e. the fact that "different things are called by the same name" [1, pp. 345-346]. Calling the first epichaeireme polysemy, Democritus thus introduces the concept of polysemy (from Others-Greek. πολὺς "numerous" and σημαῖον "meaning"). However, the focus of attention of thinkers is not the phenomenon of the ambiguity of the name itself, but the problem of establishing or excluding a natural connection between a word and a thing, which in modern science has been transformed into the problem of the correlation of a word and a concept.

Aristotle in "Poetics" and in "Rhetoric" for the first time characterizes ambiguity, describing the connections of meanings within "words that have a double meaning" [2, pp. 1064-1112], in particular the formation of a metaphor. According to Aristotle, "metaphor is the transfer of a word with a changed meaning from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or by analogy" [2, p. 1097]. Aristotle illustrates the metaphor as "transfer from genus to species" with the following example: "And my ship is standing here," pointing out that "standing at anchor is a special kind of the concept of "standing" [2, p. 1097]. Another example demonstrates the "transfer from species to genus": "Yes, Odysseus did tens of thousands of good deeds", where the poet used the linguistic formula "tens of thousands" instead of the word "many" [2, p. 1097]. Aristotle thereby lays the theoretical foundations for the allocation of figurative meanings of the word.

The ways of forming figurative meanings of words are described in more detail in the interpretations of the style of the XVIII century, and the resumption of interest in the phenomenon of polysemy was noted already in the XIX century, when the need for an independent science of meaning – semantics was realized. During this period, the internal form of the word is studied (V. von Humboldt, A. Potebnya), general patterns of formation and evolution of word meanings (A. Darmsteter, G. Paul), historical lexicology is intensively developing. The achievements of semasiology are generalized and developed in



M. Breal's work "The experience of semantics, the science of meanings", 1897. [3, p. 382], where semasiology appears as a special branch of the science of language. The term "polysemy", appearing in the works of M. Breal, is fixed in scientific circulation and becomes the subject of discussion by linguists. Recognizing the important role of the phenomenon of polysemy in the language system, scientists define the essence of this phenomenon in different ways, identify the mechanisms of the development of polysemy from different points of view. In particular, the discussion is caused by the very fact of the existence of polysemy as a property of language units. According to the concept of M. Breal, polysemy is the law of multiplication of meanings (multiplication des sens), which includes such semantic processes as specialization, irradiation, distribution, narrowing, expansion of meanings, etc. A word, overgrown with new meanings, generates new units, while "not a single meaning disappears – this is what the contours of the structuring of language are seen in" [4].

The point of view that denies the phenomenon of polysemy as such can be traced in the works of A.A. Potebni. "The word in speech, – says the scientist, every time corresponds to a single act of thought, i.e., whenever pronounced or understood the word, it has one value" [5, p. 15].

L.V. Shcherba also believed that we are always "so much the words as the word has a phonetic values" [6] due to the unity of its form and content.

V.V. Vinogradov denies the possibility of expressing each specific idea by a separate word or root element, arguing this position by the fact that "the language is forced to carry an infinite number of meanings under certain headings of basic concepts" [7, p. 18], which results in the ambiguity of most words in the Russian language. V.V. Vinogradov characterizes polysemy as "synchronous or sequential compatibility of different meanings in the semantic structure of the same word" [7]. Definition of polysemy, formulated by V.V. Vinogradov, served as a starting point for subsequent studies of the semantic structure of a polysemous word.

The following can be considered a generally accepted definition of the concept of polysemy: polysemy is the presence of two or more genetically and semantically related meanings in a language sign. At the same time, the key characteristic is precisely the presence of a historically determined semantic relationship of the meanings allocated in the structure of the polysemant.

Currently, the semantic structure of a polysemous (polysemic) word is mainly represented in the works of scientists as "a set of meanings, or lexico-semantic variants (LSV)" [8, p. 26]. The term "lexico-semantic variant" was introduced into scientific use by A.I. Smirnitsky, meaning by it a two-sided language signs that acts in the unity of sound and meaning, preserving the immutability of lexical meaning within its inherent syntactic connections and paradigm [9, p. 42].

The reason for the development of lexico-semantic variants of the word are semantic shifts, the emergence of figurative meanings based on the correlation of one object or phenomenon with another through a common feature. In other words, there is a secondary nomination. The formation of derived values from the original ones without changing the shape of the sign is commonly called semantic derivation.



The nature of the connection of lexico-semantic variants in the semantic structure of a polysemantic word with each other, as well as with the main, direct-nominative, LSV can be different. Yu.D. Apresyan, referring to Darmsteter (1887), identifies three topological types of polysemy:

1) radial polysemy: all meanings of the word are motivated by the same - central - meaning, cf. motor valve VS bassoon valve VS heart valve VS pocket valve with a common component 'part of the object covering the hole in it';

2) chain polysemy (in its pure form is rare): each new meaning of a word is motivated by another – closest to it - meaning, but the extreme meanings may not have common semantic components, cf. left hand VS to the left side (= 'located on the side of the left 1 hand') VS left table pedestal (= 'located on the left 2 side, if the observer is facing the front side of the object') VS left parliamentary factions (= 'sitting on the benches on the left 3 relative to the Chairman of Parliament and politically radical') VS left parties (= 'politically radical') VS left bias (= 'politically radical only externally');

3) radial-chain polysemy (the most common case), for example, class

1 'category', cf. class of objects, 1.1 'social group', cf. working class, 1.2 'group of homogeneous objects within a certain systematics', cf. class of mammals, the class of destroyers, 1.3 'division of students', cf. The Soviet secondary school has ten classes, 1.3.1 'group of students of class 1.3 studying together', cf. The class laughed together, 1.3.1.1 'room for class 1.3.1', cf. spacious, bright classrooms of the new school, 1.4 'type of carriage or cabins with a certain degree of comfort', cf. cabins of the first class, 2'degree', 2.1 'measure of quality', cf. high class game, 2.1.1 'high quality', cf. show class, 2.2'degree of some civil ranks', cf. official ninth grade, adviser of justice of the first class" [10, pp. 182-183].

One of the controversial issues remains the interpretation of the very concept of the lexico-semantic variant and its relationship with the concept of "meaning". First of all, there is a problem of mixing the concepts of "lexical meaning of a polysemous word" and "a separate meaning of a polysemous word". In this regard, the arguments of A.N. Yakovlyuk that the duplication of the term "lexical meaning" by the term LSV is not completely justified [11] are not unfounded. A.N. Yakovlyuk, following I.V. Arnold understands by LSV the words "such a two-sided linguistic sign, which is the unity of sound and meaning, while maintaining the same lexical meaning within its inherent paradigm and system of syntactic connections" [12, p. 12].

The key to preserving the identity, unity of a polysemous word is the presence of an invariant - an abstract linguistic element that includes "a set of semantic components that, in one of their configurations, underlie all or a number of LSV that make up the semantic structure of a word in accordance with the intuition of an average native speaker" [13, p. 23]. Note that invariant theories of the organization of meaning are based on the general idea that language units have one meaning, which is transformed depending on contextual uses.

As A.D. Koshelev shows in his work, "the linguistic meaning (a set of customary meanings) reflects only one aspect of the semantics of a word – its static, current state ("how... the plant as it is in the herbarium" - according to the figurative expression of A.A. Potebni). By supplementing the circle of usual meanings with a cognitive meaning that provides semantic updating of the word, we turn the polysemant into a "living" unit of the mental lexicon" [14]. The opposition of the concept of invariant



to the concept of variant as a concrete realization of a linguistic unit is correlated with the dichotomy of language and speech: "an invariant is a unit of language, and a variant is its implementation in speech" [15].

The opposite point of view is that the linguistic unit does not always give the researcher the opportunity to bring together a variety of contextual uses, while the invariant meaning may be too abstract and so far from each of the specific uses of the linguistic unit that "the very need for its introduction (not to mention its explanatory capabilities) becomes at least not obvious" [16]. However, as E.V. Rakhilina writes, "if we consider an alternative to the invariant description traditionally proposed (for example, in explanatory dictionaries) a simple enumeration (in principle, an unlimited number) of values – a "list solution", then the question arises how a person generally navigates in this set and why all this diversity is covered by one linguistic unit. In other words, even if we accept that the possibilities of human memory are very great, almost limitless, and a person can remember as much as he wants a large dictionary, then why is this dictionary organized using polysemy relations, when it would be much more convenient for each sub value to have its own way of expression? Thus, both solutions to the problem of polysemy – invariant and "list" - have quite a long history and each have its own flaws" [16]. In this regard, of particular importance is the study of the phenomenon of polysemy (as a linguistic universal and the "main semasiological law of language development" [17]) from cognitive positions, which represent an intermediate way of describing polysemy: on the one hand, it is recognized that the invariant – this is only "some abstract idea associated with a given meaning" [16] and does not cover the entire variety of uses of a linguistic unit, and on the other hand, it is allowed to introduce an invariant meaning into a linguistic description, since an invariant can indeed exist in the mind of a native speaker.

Thus, despite the long history of the study of the phenomenon of polysemy, modern science still has a number of unresolved issues. At the same time, it is necessary to agree with the opinion of E.L. Boyarskaya that "the study of the mechanisms of the emergence and recognition of ambiguity leads not only to the comprehension of the essence of semantic processes, but also to the comprehension of the mechanisms of functioning of the human cognitive system as a whole" [18].

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