

Demonstrating Homonymy in English and Arabic as an Ambiguous Lexeme

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ABSTRACT

This research paper contains very important information about homonymy in Arabic and English which are gathered to be presented contrastively as much as possible. In addition to some other relevant terms of the topic like ambiguity which illustrated with its three kinds.

As well as, it includes some significant titles which are represented by sources of homonymy its kinds with reference to excluded case of metaphor. Then its very important to refer to Arabs' analysis of homonymy nature in Arabic. It also signifies the resolution of context which interferes to be very important linguistic element to interpret the meaning of homonymous words.

Translation list

Vowels

Consonant symbol	Arabic equivalents	symbol	Arabic equivalents
'	ء	a	أ
a	ا	I	ي
b	ب	u	و
t	ت	a	فتحة
th	ث	i	كسرة
j	ج	U	ضمة
h	ح		
Kh	خ		
D	د		

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Dh	ذ
R	ر
S	س
Sh	ش
S	ص
d	ض
t	ط
Z	ظ
6	ع
gh	غ
f	ف
q	ق
K	ك
L	ل
M	م
H	ه
W	و
Y	ي

(Moosa,1998:xv)

1.1 The Problem of the Research:

Many students and even post graduate students do not realize very obvious point and phenomenon which raises ambiguity in sentences. It is represented by homonymy. Translation may be confused to interpret a sentence because there shall be two unrelated meaning for one utterance in the same sentence. As well they not identify its kinds and how it is composed in English further with ignoring the distinction between it and polysemy.

On the other hand, Arabic also contain a condition like that in English which students of Arabic ignore. Furthermore there is a misconception which arises to defy the reality of homonymy considering it a metaphorical meaning, in addition to disregarding its sources. Consistently there seems vast confusion between homonymy and polysemy in Arabic which may raise some false conceptions. Many teachers, students and readers are just fond of reading and studying English, there should be studies, essays and surveys about Arabic and its non-stop treasures.

Moreover, there is a serious negligence of context resolution which is adopted by teachers, students and researchers. It is very important in deciding which meaning of a homonymous words is used both in Arabic and English.

1.2 The Aim of the Research:

This research aims at investigating the contrastive accounts and views between homonymy in English and Arabic under the light of useful references accounts and other important aims can be introduced that homonymy demonstrates that language is economical.

Furthermore, there are secondary aims to be allocated. Firstly, is to show how ambiguity can arise from homonymous lexeme in sentence in English with reference to the traditional types of homonymy. Secondly giving descriptive analysis for both homonymy in English and Arabic to know how they can be composed in these language. And thirdly is to indicate that metaphorical meaning will not be called homonymy. It is something to be excluded.

As well as, the determination of meaning of words or (homonymy lexemes) can be resolved by the two kinds of context.

1.3 The Limits of the Research:

This paper is concerned with the study of semantics for both English and Arabic superficially but further conducting a study to contrastive philology within the borders of the study of meaning in these languages.

1.4 The Value of the Research:

This paper is very important and because it contains valuable information about linguistic titles for both Arabic and English like homonymy, ambiguity and the types of context which are very difficult to deal with in books. They are put in this paper in a systematic order to be read and recognized.

1.5 The Hypothesis

This paper hypothesize the following estimates:

- 1- It assumes that ambiguity can arise in sentence by means of homonymous lexeme which leads to the confusion of determining the meaning.
- 2- Homonymy may be considered a point of similarity between Arabic and English in terms of language is economical.
- 3- It illustrate that one homonymous utterance in Arabic may have more nine related and unrelated meaning whereas in English it may not exceed two or three.

- 4- It allocates that sources of homonymy in English are quite linguistic, which in Arabic may remarkably seem social.
- 5- Metaphorical meaning must be a matter of argument in discussing words multiplicity of meanings.
- 6- Context has the vast majority of deciding words meaning in English and Arabic.

Section Two

2.1 Linguistic Ambiguity

Many words have more than one meaning and even complete sentences may allow for several readings (i.e., meanings or interpretations), the technical term for this phenomenon is ambiguity; ambiguity is an expression or utterance which is ambiguous if it can be interpreted in more than one way; the notion of ambiguity can be applied to all levels of meaning: to expression meaning, utterance and the communicative meaning (Lobner.2002:39).

However this area of linguistic investigation is notorious, it give rise to very different approaches to produce that description and structure. For some, the only relevant issues are syntactic ones and for the others the "meaning component" is primary (Yule,2003:103).

2.2 Kinds of Linguistic Ambiguity

Ambiguity is ubiquitous in English and other languages. It exists at all levels of language (from phonetic to structure to semantics etc). Linguistically speaking distinguishes three types

of linguistic ambiguity lexical, grammatical and phonetic. Each one of these types needs some comments (Sigar,1999:11).

2.2.1 Lexical Ambiguity

Lexical ambiguity springs from the presence of multiplicity of words meaning, either words that have more than one unrelated meanings or the words which have more than one related meanings this topic renders the two typical phenomena homonymy and polysemy. Homonymy is a matter of one lexeme having several unrelated meaning, while polysemy the one which has to interrelated meanings. Thus lexical ambiguity is the same lexical form has various meanings (Lobner,2002:43).

Hence, the lexemes "bank 1" and "bank 2" mean respectively "side of a river" and "financial institution" do not show any interrelated or connection between them and ambiguity can rise in a sentence (Lyons,1999:146).

Whereas the word "neck 1" = "part of body" "neck 2" = "part of shirt" and "neck 3" = part of bottle" in spite of their slight interrelation of meaning. Ambiguity is no more found in a sentence and the interpretation can be indentified from the context (ibid:147).

Though the lexeme "port" can raise ambiguity in the following sentence:

1- They passed the port at midnight.

Respectively it may be meant "a harbor" or a "certain sort of fortified wine" and this way ambiguity arises (Lyons,1979:397).

2.2.2 Grammatical Ambiguity

A grammatical ambiguity sentence is any sentence which is assigned (by a generative grammar of language system) more the one which is taken into account according to structural analysis at the grammatical level of analysis.

Three points should be made immediately about the definition of grammatical ambiguity. The first of these is that not every grammatically ambiguous sentence will in fact be interpretable in more than one way (ibid:400).

Under the light of this respect grammatical ambiguity is like lexical one as in the following sentence:

2-

hey drank the port at midnight.

T

This sentence includes homonymy enough to be ambiguous but can not be interpretable, because some elements of sentence contributed in conveying the message (ibid).

The second point is that the definition of grammatical ambiguity depends upon some particular grammatical models of the language-system. And the third point to which readers attention is draw, that there is nothing in the definition of grammatical ambiguity which excludes the possibility that a sentence may be both lexically and grammatically ambiguous (ibid).

Consequently, there are two kinds of grammatical ambiguity, phrase-structure ambiguity which can be illustrated by the following sentence:

3-

nn short the man with a stick.

A

That it depends on the homonymy of the prepositional phrase which can be interpreted either "she used a stick to shoot the man" or "she shot the man with stick" (ibid:401).

On the other hand, the transformational ambiguity neither includes or implies surface – structure. A sentence is transformationally ambiguous (with some respect to given transformational grammar) as in such a sentence:

4-

lying planes can be dangerous.

F

This has two interpretations either "planes which are flying can be dangerous" or "to fly planes can be dangerous". It is related to the deep structure of sentence (ibid:403).

2.2.4 Phonetic Ambiguity

This type of ambiguity is due to the phonological structure of language. It may result in spoken language from the phonetic structure of the sentence and it may happen in connected speech that two breath – groups of sound made up different words become homonymous and this way, potentially are ambiguous (Ullmann,1962:156).

This kind of ambiguity can be represented by the following sentences:

5- The sons raise meat.

6- The sun's rays meet.

In short, phonetic ambiguity occurs in language as result of phonological factors. It arises in the sound system of language (ibid).

Section Three

3. Homonymy

Sameness of meaning is not very easy to deal with, but there seems nothing inherently difficult about difference of meaning. Not only do different words have different meanings, it is also case that the same words may have a set of various meanings (Palmer,1981:100).

Therefore homonymy is one of the well – know term which is used to describe relationships between words in language (Yule,2003:120), homonymy are words (lexemes) which have quite separate meanings, but which have accidentally come to have the same form as in the following words like "bat 1" (used in sport), "bat 2" "used to refer to a flying creature", "race 1" "contest of speed", "race 2" "ethnic group" and "mole 1" "on skin", "mole 2" "small animal" (ibid:121).

On the other hand, Arabs have the priority in demonstrating homonymy in Arabic, they name it "AL-Mushtarak AL-Lafzi", all Arab linguists agree to define it as the one utterance that has two or more different meanings (Abd AL-Rahman,1998:292).

3.1 Arab Role in Demonstrating Homonymy

In fact, homonymy is a phenomenon that could not be denied in Arabic, English and other languages, although it was discredited by earlier Arab scholars and linguist, but most of them and especially Arabs signify that it belongs to reality. It is interesting and significant to refer to their contributions in this domain (AL-Zaidi,1987:141). Consequently linguists like "Abu AL-Aba's AL-Mubarak, AL-'Sma'i', Abu Ubaid AL-Yazidi, Abu AL-'Umaithil and Kira' AL-Naml refered to homonymy by the heading

"Ma'tashabaha lafzuhu Wa 'ikhtalafa ma'nah". Then come the interpreter AL-Tusi to indicate that "AL-'Asma' AL-mushtarakah" are nouns which have two or more unrelated meanings but at the same time they share the same utterance (Abd AL-Rahman,1988: 244).

Whereas Kira' AL-Naml's volumes who calls them "AL-Munjid fi AL-Lughah" gather homonyms in lexicographical order including: parts of body, categories of animals, birds, weapons and the sky with its relevant (ibid).

Many of Arab linguists agree that homonymy something is real, they interpret it according to the theory which indicates that meaning of words are includable and unlimited in number while the utterances are limited, thus when meanings are distributed on them, homonymy should occur (Abd AL-Rahman,1998:293).

Therefore, the word "ain" in Arabic refers to many related and unrelated denotations which some modern linguists classify it into two logical order. It means naturally "eye of human" or eye which is as known its conceptual meaning, they signify that the former springs from two things derivation or (source) and (non – source) thus "AL-'ain AL-mu'ainah" which means "eye which checks" is something derived from "ain", but when it is taken into account to be compared with the meaning of "eye of human", there is a vivid interrelation between the meanings of the two utterances and this way they can be considered polysemous lexemes rather than homonymous (ibid:296).

While the (non – source) branch denotes the words or lexemes which are not derived from the base " 'ain" like " 'ain" which means the "cash money", " 'ain" as "ahl AL-dar" meaning "the owners of a house" (ibid).

When a comparison is made between the meaning of "'ain" as "eye" and " 'ain" as "cash money" there seems no obvious connection or interrelation between them, then and only they can be considered as homonymous lexemes (ibid).

Whereas, the latter is one which refers to the metaphorical meaning or simile that " 'ain" means " 'ain AL-shai' " which means "the best of something", "AL-'ain A:L-rabi'ah" "an observer" and "AL-jasus" "spy". Undoubtedly when the function meaning of " 'ain" is compared to the meaning of "AL-jasus", there sounds a vivid interrelation between the two meanings because the "spy" and the "eye" share somehow similar function (ibid:297).

3.2 Kinds of Homonymy

There are two formal types of homonymy they are :

- a. Total homonymy: two lexemes that share all distinctive properties (grammatical category, grammatical properties, the set of grammatical forms, sound form and spelling) like the word "bank" which means either "financial institution" or the side of a river" (Lobner,2002:43).
- b. Partial homonymy: it occurs if two lexemes with different unrelated meanings coincide in some but not all of their grammatical forms, for instance, the verb "lie 1" (lay, lain) and "lie 2" (lied, lied) which can give rise ambiguity in some context (don't lie in bed), but can be distinguished in others (he lay \ lie in bed), finally homonymy can be related either to the sounds form or spelling (ibid).

Considerably polysemy is also can be regarded as a partial homonymy as with noun "light" which means "certain sort of visible radiation" but also "electric lamps", "traffic light" and "illuminated

area", likewise the different readings of "light" which corresponds to the opposite "heavy" and "difficult" are somehow interrelated although the relation is harder to define (ibid:44).

3.3 The Distinction Between Homonymy and Polysemy

The distinction between homonymy and polysemy is not always clear. However one signification can be found in the typical dictionary entry for words. If a word has multiple meanings (polysemy) then there will be a single entry with a numbered of the different meanings of the word, but ones which have related meanings like "face", "foot" and "head" are polysemous, where as words like "bank" and "mole" each one has two separate meanings (Yule,2003:121).

Lyons (1979:551) refers that the major distinction between homonymy and polysemy is that homonymy has several unrelated meanings while polysemy is with many interrelated meanings. Thus it will lead the native speaker's feeling that some words are originally connected and other are not.

3.4 Source of Homonymy

There are various ways through which homonymy can arise in English. Among these ways the following are most important ones:

3.4.1 Sound (Phonological) Change

The great majority of homonymy arise through sound change. Sound change is considered to be the most common cause of homonymy (Ulman,1962:176).

It leads to the establishment of homonyms that homonymy and syncretism and the merging of inflectional categories are normal results of sound change. Homonymy may result from a change in pronunciation or spelling (sigar,1999:20).

This process result in the coincidence of two or more words which once had different forms. For instance, old English "mete" and metan have changed and become homonymy in Modern English "meat" and "meet"; Old Norse "rase" and French "race" have changed and become homonymy in modern English "race" which means "nation, bred" and "running" (ibid).

3.4.2 Meaning (Semantic) Change

Meaning likes any other aspect of language, changes in the course of time. It may change more rapidly than syntax and phonology. Sometimes the extension of the meaning of a lexeme may lead to the splitting of that lexeme into two homonyms. When two or more meanings of the same word diverge sufficiently to the extent that there seems to be no obvious connection or interrelation between them, they will be regarded as two separate lexemes (i.e. homonymy). In this relation, when the single senses lose their connection, homonymy begins and the word and its meanings will be divided into two (Sigar,1999:21).

Furthermore, when divergent pronunciations have not caught on two different spelling are standardized for different meanings for example the noun "flour" has split into two homonyms in Modern English "flour" "finely ground seed of a cereal" and "flour" meaning "bloom" (ibid).

On the other hand, as Ullmann (1962:78) cites the same from may be popularly regarded as two without differentiation of form such as "sole" "name of fish" and "sole" as "sole of shoe".

3.4.3 Coincidence

A vast number of homonyms can be brought about as a result of simple coincidence. In fact, coincidence is regarded as the main cause of homonyms by many scholars. They claim that the existence of homonyms is merely coincidence (Sigar,1999:21). This type of homonymy can be illustrated by such pairs a "weed" "a wild plant" and "weed" "window's garment " which are from quite different roots (ibid:22).

However, there is another type of coincidence that some words come to be coincided in sound – change like these examples: "yearn" which means "to desire" and "yearn" "to mourn" and "vice" "fault" and "vice" "clutching instrument" (ibid).

3.4.4 Foreign Influence

Foreign influence is meant the influence of a language in another language through borrowing. English, like any other language borrows a lot of words from other languages. As a result, sometimes this process can lead to establishing homonyms in English (ibid).

Respectively, Ullmann (1962:180) remarks that many words taken from abroad such as "race" "mail", "male" ...etc. have increased the number of homonyms in English, hr describes this process as follows:

"when a loan – word becomes firmly established in its new surroundings, it will be adopted to the local phonetic system and

will thenceforth take part in the normal sound change; it may thus come to coincide with other words in the receiving language".

Therefore changes to coincidence of homonyms are increased by borrowing; this type of homonyms can be exemplified by such pairs as "gate" "entrance"(from English "gent"), "gate" "road" and "street" (from Old Norse "gata") and "strait" from (Middle English "stregt") and "straight" comes from (Old "estreit", Latin "strictus") (Sigar,1999:22).

3.4.5 Dialects or Varieties Language

Sometimes, different dialects or varieties of language may lead to establishing homonyms in English. For example the word "cot" mean in British English "bed of baby" and in American means "cheating or cribbing" and in same case with the following word: "biscuit", "braces", "corn", "fender", "hood" and "pavement". And another good example of this type of homonyms is the word "base" which has different unrelated meaning in army, chemistry, mathematics, electrical engineering, cosmetics and art (ibid).

3.4.6 Zero Derivation

Derivation is regarded as a major process of words formation. It is of two types: derivation by affixation and derivation by zero morpheme the latter is a lexical rule for conversion or changing word – class for a base – form without any change of form (ibid:23).

Certainly, zero – derivation lead to establishing of homonyms in English. For instance the verbs "waitress" and "helicopter" are like many words in English can be justified according to this condition (ibid).

3.4.7 Euphemisms

Some homonyms can arise through euphemisms. For instance, the nouns "bull" meaning "male typically bovin animal". And "bull" rubbish, nonsense" are a perfect example of this type of homonyms. The latter sense is an euphemistic elliptical form of metaphorical pejorative "bullshit". It can also be illustrated by words like ass "arse" crust "Christ" and sugar "shit" and so on (ibid).

3.4.8 Ellipsis

Ellipsis is the omission of parts of words. It is related to the feature of "pro – formation" (the use of pronouns and similar forms that replace verbs and other parts of speech) (Palmer, 1981:38).

But ellipsis is seemingly another factor which might sometimes gives rise to establishing homonyms in English. The one of the end – rhymes in rhyming slang often results in homonyms. For instance, china "crockery" and china "mate" from plate and "whistle" "instrument for producing sharp sound" and "whistle" meaning "suit" can serve as good examples of this type of homonymy (sigar,1999:23).

3.5 Sources of Homonymy in Arabic

Undoubtedly, not only English homonyms spring from different linguistic sources, but Arabic ones are also departing from both linguistic and social references, they are:

- 1- The various usages of words between Arab tribes dialect; that one tribe uses a word to refer to a particular concept while same word is used to refer to different thing at another tribe and this

way homonyms are aroused in Arabic (Abd AL-Rahman,1988:146).

- 2- The metaphorical manipulation of special groups of Arabic words. The researchers and linguists considered this source the most important one of homonyms in Arabic. It is not necessary for the metaphorical occurrence to be meant or intentional, however it comes by chance or contradictions of contexts among speakers such as the meaning of the word " 'ain" "AL-jasus" when it is used to mean "spy" (AL-Zaidi,1987:146).
- 3- The change of people's social and their mental states: since language is a social and living activity, it submits to different developmental and folkloric influences during time. And since language depends on the flourish development of civilizations and culture, some words acquire denotations that is not connected with its original or previous one, then they come to be regarded as two separate words with one utterance but are different in meaning (ibid:147).
- 4- The terminological, religious and denotative development of words meanings has great priority to the appearance of homonymy in Arabic. Islam on the other hand either develops some utterances or adds new meanings to words which are found in the Eve – glorious Qur'an. It includes new denotations of words and utterances which have never been uttered by Arabs before (ibid).
- 5- Borrowing foreign words: it occurs when a foreign lexeme comes to be used in Arabic and there is same word with the lateral formation or image which completely has different meaning. Then they accidentally share the same image with unrelated meanings, such as the 'Farisi' word (Old Iranian) "hub"

meaning "a container is made of clay to cool water" while the Arabic one "hub" means "love" (ibid:148).

- 6- The linguistic and phonetic development of words formulas: it takes place when two words are originally different in meaning and sound form, then a development happens to their sounds or letters resulting to make them similar in form but with different meanings and they might be unified in one lexeme (AL-Zaidi,1987:146).
- 7- Some modern linguists and scholars add another source of homonymy that when a child misunderstands or misuses a word to refer to a particular thing which is not the word that denotes it, he will normally add a new false denotation to that word, then it can be having two unrelated meanings (ibid).

3.6 The Exclusion of Metaphor

Two descriptions or meanings may be indicated by one utterance. The former refers to the real meaning (i.e. the conceptual meaning) and the latter denotes the metaphorical meaning or the contextual meaning. Furthermore, a word which mean something in domain of linguistics, comes to be used in the domain of relation to describe something else (Abd AL-Rahman,1998:291).

Explicitly metaphor is concepts, notions models and pictures from one domain (the source domain) are borrowed for the description of contents in another domain (the target domain) (Lobner,2002:25).

However, this phenomenon can be illustrated by the following sentence:

8- The swaggering, fast talking dealmakers threw around grand projects and big figures as if the money would never stop flowing.

By the way, the underline word "flowing" in this sentence is not always used with the word "money" domain, but it is used to denote metaphor. It would never be called homonymy even if its meaning was completely different (ibid:54).

3. 7 The Refutation of Homonymy in Arabic

Most of Arab linguists agree that homonymy is a real phenomenon in Arabic, but some of them on the other hand, assert its refutation underlying two points. Firstly they assert that homonymy differs from metaphorical denotations. The former is based on reality, while the latter being a metaphorical meaning governed by the different use of utterance from condition to another (Abd AL-Rahman,1988:242).

Thus, they assume that meanings of words can be classified into two, one is real and the other is metaphorical. This category is adopted by diachronic linguist who do not depend on the actual use of words in their observation and description (AL-Zaidi,1987:145).

Secondly, other scholars on their part, find out a way to negate the presence of homonymy. They propose that the denotations of words meanings are changed according to derivation of verbs and other contents of language and this investigation is not considerably precise because words are said normally with different meanings (Abd AL-Rahman,1988:246).

Section Four

4. The Resolution of Context

The process of composition yields one or more meaning of sentences and words, when they come to be interpreted in their contexts departing from the level of expression meaning to the level of utterance meaning, they might be modified and this way context raises its primacy. Since sentences and words actually fulfill or be sources of ambiguity, but further they originate the resolution of context (Lobner.2002:47).

But every word in a dictionary undoubtedly has its real meaning that owns it through history while, according to context the case is different that it would be manipulated to give various denotations. It results from the context of situational use of words in everyday language. In other words, people give words meanings and denotations that they have never indicated before and can be interpreted according to context of situation (Abd AL-Rahman,1988:25).

In discussion of emphasizing resolution of context, there are two kinds of context non – linguistic context (context of situation) and linguistic context (the co-text) (Yule,2003:129).

4.1 Non-Linguistic Context (Context of Situation)

This type of context is perhaps the most important one. It refers to all aspects of situation in which language events take place. The term of context of situation is associated with two scholars, first with an anthropologist who is Malinowski and later by a linguist whose name is Firth, both of them are concerned with starting meaning in terms of context in which language is used in a particular situation (Palmer,1981:51).

They believe that description of a language could not be completed without some reference to context of situation in which it is operated (ibid:56).

Hence, words are considered alternative means of encoding various messages (i.e. Meanings) or its interpretation (Lyons,1979:46).

According to this sort of context, a homonymous lexeme like "bank" on a wall building, will lead someone's attention that the concept which is meant is the "financial institution". The interpretation is recognized by the physical surroundings like locations or speakers' situation (Yule,2003:129).

4.2 Linguistic Context (The Co-Text)

The term of linguistic context refers a word which is the set of other words used in the same sentence or phrase. It has a strong effect on words meanings. It leads to the meaning of a word or its interpretation by some linguistic and structural elements within a sentence (ibid).

Thus for example the following sentence seems ambiguous including homonymy like "letter":

9. John wrote a letter.

That it is typical, sentence has two interpretations according to the lexeme "letter", but it is no more ambiguous by the following additions in the same sentence:

10- John wrote a letter to Patty.

Consequently, additions like "to" and "Patty" shall certainly lead to identification of which letter is written and the meaning

could be delivered precisely depending on the set of words of the word "letter" like "to" and "Patty" (Lobner,2002:48).

Section Five

5. The Conclusion

Throughout dealing with this research paper, there are many conceptions to be concluded:

- 1- A
ambiguity arises from homonymous lexemes which leads to be confused to translate interpret a sentence.
- 2- A
According to utterances, it seems lexical and phonetic, while the grammatical ambiguity springs from the homonymity of the whole sentence that any sentence which can be interpreted into two meanings is ambiguous.
- 3- H
Homonymy in English is total when its meanings are unrelated but they are interrelated it may be called a partial homonymy or polysemy.
- 4- O
On the other hand, homonymy in Arabic does not result from ambiguity or something like it. It is attributed to the duality of language that meanings are distributed on utterances, homonymy must occur because meanings of words are unlimited in number. This feature corresponds the feature of language which is economical. Thus, homonymy in Arabic is concerned with reality.
- 5- T
To realize homonymy in Arabic and its types, it can be obvious

from analyzing meanings which some of them come from source (derivation) and other are not they come from metaphor or simile.

- 6- Homonymy in English results from linguistic sources while one in Arabic springs from social developments and the different cultures.
- 7- Since, it is a reality in Arabic, it could not be refused by derivation or expressing words metaphorically.
- 8- Context is very important means to decide meanings of words both in Arabic and English especially context of situation by which meanings of words can be realized according to the physical surroundings.

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