

A STUDY OF THE STUDENTS' ERRORS IN THE LEXICAL ASPECTS IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Students are admitted to the English Department of the college of Arts after having studied English for eight years in primary and secondary schools .At college , they continue studying English for another four years . Many students , however , fail to recognize or/and produce certain aspects of language ,although they might be considered as advanced learners of the language . Some of them continue to make errors related to language forms and meanings , being unable to recognize the relationship among various forms and meanings especially in certain contexts .

An analytic study of these errors , connected with the lexical aspects (i.e., *polysemy & synonymy*) in English , may prove pedagogically valuable in identifying these errors and in suggesting remedy .

The present study attempts to identify this pair of lexical aspect in English with respect to form and meaning : Polysemy and Synonymy . Such identification may help to investigate whether the above categories influence third-year students' acquisition and comprehension of various lexical aspects in English . Accordingly , the present study comprises four sections :

Section One is devoted to the definition and limitation of the problem of the lexical aspects in English (i.e., *Polysemy & Synonymy*) . The section also outlines the hypothesis , the procedure followed , the data collected and used in this investigation , and the significance of such a study for Iraqi advanced Learners of English and for those teaching and writing texts for this purpose .

Section Two identifies this pair of lexical aspect . It surveys the ideas of sameness and multiplicity of meanings and touches on their main features and branches The section focuses on the contextual relationships between this pair of lexemes as well as considerations such as homonymy, hyponymy , autonomy ,metaphor , and ambiguity.

Section Three deals with the experimental work . A diagnostic test is constructed to find out the types and number of errors made by

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those students of the English Department , College of Arts / University of Baghdad in the area of the lexical aspects of free morphemes in English . The test is divided into two main parts : the first is linked with the skill of recognition and the second with that of production . Each part is further subdivided into various degrees of facility and discrimination levels and with respect to the relationship existing between the form and the meaning Thus , the results can be summarized : a. Iraqi third-year students at the English Department , College of Arts are better at recognition than at production of lexical aspects (*i.e., Polysemy & Synonymy*) . b. Female students are comparatively higher in language competence than male students in both the recognition and production parts of the test .

Section Four presents the final conclusions which the analysis of students'

performance on the test fields . Some recommendations are suggested for learning and teaching of the lexical aspects which may be of value to non-native learners and to text-book writers who prepare valuable books for the college students in different Iraqi Universities .

SECTION ONE

1.1 The Problem

Morphemes are language forms that are considered as bundles of phonological , semantic and syntactic properties . Consequently , they are viewed as semantic realizations . Semantics does not tackle these English aspects with their maximum meanings and their formal categories in isolation . Rather , the basic concern of semantics is to deal with the relationship existing among them since the speaker's desire is to master and use these semantic realizations correctly to convey a particular meaning (Lyons ; 1979 : 427-428) .

However , there is a correlation between forms and meanings indicated that can be summarized in the following table :

Table (1)

Distribution of the Lexical Aspects

	<i>Lexical Aspects</i>	<i>Meanings</i>	<i>Formal Categories</i>
1	<i>Polysemy</i>	<i>Many</i>	<i>1</i>
2	<i>Synonymy</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Many</i>

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As illustrated above , the relationship among these lexical items (i.e., Polysemy & Synonymy) is rather complex . Thus some problems are encountered in their use by non-native speakers . One of the basic problems relates to Polysemy where a morpheme carries two or more meanings . For example , " ear " is an organ of hearing and " ear " is a piece of corn ; " weeds " are ' wild useless plants ' and also mourning garments worn by a widow ' " red " is a certain color ' and also a state of embarrassment ' when the lexeme is entailed in a suitable expression .

The second lexical aspect is Synonymy which is another source of difficulty . For example " hate " , " dislike " and " loathe " which though sustain degrees of lexical differences , are roughly taken as synonyms . Some synonyms belong to different dialects when , for instance , American English ' fall ' and ' cowshed ' refer to the same respective meanings in British English " autumn ' and ' barn ' . Another problem encountered is that of list shown in the highly formal expressions of ' pass away ' and ' conceive ' in contrast with the current words of ' die ' and ' pregnant ' .

There is also another loose sense of ' synonymy ' --- a sense that is often exploited by dictionary markers . For example , some possible synonyms may be

' adult ' , ' ripe ' and ' grown up ' . Non-native learners often tend to treat all these as being replaceable . (See Quirk ; 1983 : 115)

1.2 The Hypothesis

Due to the intricate difficulties implicit earlier in the lexical distinctions , it is hypothesized that even Advanced Students of English as a foreign language are liable to make mistakes in the course of ' polysemy ' and ' synonymy ' .

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The researcher intends to find out what errors Iraqi Advanced Students make in dealing with the lexical aspects (i.e., synonymy & polysemy) in English , and what areas these errors occur frequently as well as if there are sex differences in making such errors . Besides , this study aims at identifying what hazy area to non-native learners and to suggest procedures and methods that clarify this area .

1.4 Procedure

The following steps are to be pursued :-

A. Surveying the available literature concerning the formation of these lexical entities (i.e., polysemy & synonymy) .

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B. Making a diagnostic test to be applied to a limited number of the Iraqi Advanced Learners of the college of arts to collect actual data of their errors in recognizing and forming this pair of lexical aspects .

C. Analyzing the students' errors and difficulties in order to identify possible solutions for overcoming of these errors .

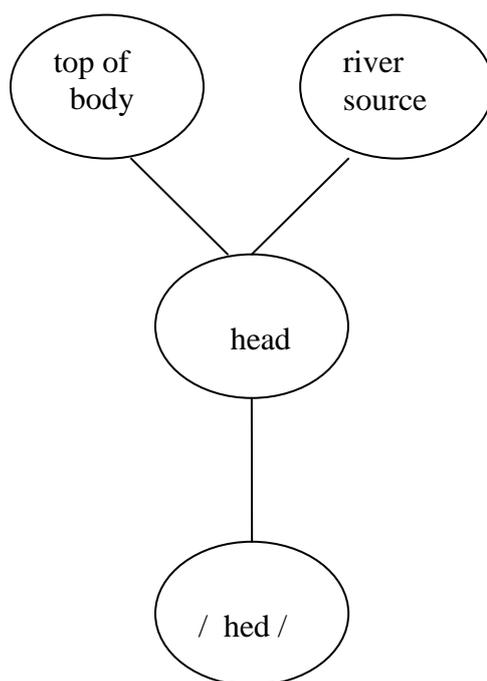
1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is hoped to be valuable enough for the non-native learners of English in speaking and writing the foreign language . It is expected also to be helpful to the researchers who are interested in semantics in particular and language in general .

SECTION TWO

2.1 Multiplicity of Meaning / The Concept of Polysemy

Polysemy is a term used in semantics analysis to refer to a lexical item which has a range of different meanings , e.g., " head " may refer to the ' top of body ' or to the ' river source ' , as illustrated below :-



Yet , polysemy seems to be a necessary feature of human language although it entails to a certain amount of redundancy . It causes the lexical and semantic expansion required by language users .

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2.1.1 Polysemy & Homonymy

There is a great deal of controversy over the relationship between polysemy and homonymy .The issue is further complicated by the existence in the literature of two more terms ,i.e., homophony and homography . Lyons (1977) devotes a whole section for a thorough discussion of this issue . For the purpose of the present study however , a more straight forward and somehow simplified definitions of these terms will be attempted in order to avoid any confusion that may result from dipping too deep into the subject .

The basic problem involved in the distinction between 'homonymy 'and ' polysemy ' is simply whether we have two separate lexemes with distinct meanings , which happen to have identical forms or whether we have a single lexeme that has several meanings . The difference can be demonstrated with two examples : (1) 'bank 1 ' financial institution and ' bank 2 ' side of the river ' are homonyms ; whereas , 'mouth' with its different meanings the mouth of a creature or opening of a caveetc. will be considered as a case of " polysemy " because the different meanings of the lexeme 'mouth' are metaphorical or figurative extensions of the first meaning .

2.1.3 Polysemy and Metaphor

Without polysemy , Anderson (1974 : 181) maintains , there would be no metaphor . In his opinion metaphor is one of the principal factors which performs a very important part in semantic change , e.g., ' foot ' terminal part of the leg is extended through metaphor to the lowest part of a mountain .

Most linguists see that metaphors can be drawn in several ways , e.g., the expression galaxy of beauties seems to be dependant upon artistic comparison with the natural beauty of the ' milky way ' . The extension of the sense of the human foot to the base of the mountain (i.e., the foot of the mountain) , seems motivated by another expression having perhaps less artistic reasons .

Cannon (1980 : 50) observes that we can describe metaphor as a special case of words out of the normal context . The meaning with metaphors can be derived by drawing on our knowledge of the ' context ' . such items may prove so far from their normal use cannot be drawn .

2.1.3 Polysemy and Ambiguity

'Ambiguity ' is a term referring to a word or sentence which expresses more than one meaning . the degree of the ambiguity of an

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utterance depends upon the number of constituents as well as the number of readings assigned to a constituents .(Pyles ; 1970 :220-21).

This semantic term may be either structural , e.g., Visiting speakers can be awful , which may interpreted as : (1) It is awful to visit speakers , or (2) Speakers who visit are awful . , or ' lexical ' such as the item ' cat ' which has the potential meaning of being ambiguous in several senses , for example , (1) our cat chases mice . , (2) Right after the elephants came a big cat ., (3) You cannot trust her , she is a cat . , (4) If she wants to cat around let her .

According to Nilson (1978 : 211) , " Lexical Ambiguity " is easier than " Structural Ambiguity " since it can be explained just by finding the word that has multiple meanings ,i.e., ' polysemy ' .

2.2 Sameness of Meaning / The Concept of Synonymy

Synonymy is a term used in semantics to refer to a major type of sense –relation between lexical items which have the same or nearly the same meanings , and the relationship between them is one of synonymy . Brook (1974 ; 217) suggests that synonymy is used for choosing favorable words in order to describe our own actions whereas , we keep unfavorable ones to describe the actions of others , and that presents a common source of humor in plays and novels ; we may describe as " naughty " actions which others would describe as ' wicked ' . Most college students need to increase their store of such words in order that they may express complicated ideas in direct language and to be able to understand formal English .

Nesfield (1947 : 217) suggests that synonymy provides a way to express fine aspects of meaning , it is sometimes not easy for foreign learners of English since they are likely to make mistakes by attempting to increase their vocabulary .

2.2.1 Types of Synonyms / Lexical & Grammatical Synonymy

Saumjan (1971 ; 300) believes that synonyms can be classified as grammatical and lexical synonyms which are different in what is considered ' invariant ' and also ' variant ' , denoting (+) for invariability and (-) for variability . The contrast between these two types is illustrated in the following table :-

Table (2)
Types of Synonymy

<i>Types</i>	<i>Grammatical Items</i>	<i>Lexical Items</i>
<i>Grammatical Synonymy</i>	—	+
<i>Lexical Synonymy</i>	+	—

Most linguists see that grammatical synonymy may be subdivided into the structure of the transformational field , e.g., ' peaceful policy ' ----- " Policy of peace ' and the ' hierarchy ' of grammatical structure , e.g., ' went by way of the wood ' ----- ' went through the wood ' .

2.2.2. Synonymy and Context

Synonymy is a context-dependent concept . Semantic studies of synonymy have emphasized the importance of ' context ' in dealing whether a set of lexical items is synonymous . For example , in the context : ' What a nice of flowers . ' , the items , ' range ' , ' selection ' , ' choice ' , are almost synonymous ; yet , in a context like : ' His of knowledge is enormous ' . only ' range ' can be used with a different set of synonyms , e.g., ' breadth ' (Crystal; 1987 : 299)

2.2.3 Synonymy and Hyponymy

Jackson (1980 ; 118) sees that hyponymy is a paradigmatic relation between words which refers to the inclusion of the meaning of one word in that of another . It implies a super ordinate and subordinate relationship . For example , the meaning of ' scarlet ' is included within the meaning of ' red ' ; it is a hyponym of ' red ' . The meanings of ' tulip ' daffodil ' , and ' rose ' are hyponyms of flowers .

Crystal (1987 ; 150) claims that hyponymy is the relationship between specific and general lexical items ; and the former is included in the later , such as a ' cat ' is a hyponym of animal ; a ' chair ' of furniture and so on .

Most linguists suggest the possibility of defining the relationship of synonymy as a symmetrical hyponymy . Thus , synonymy as a special case of hyponymy , has the additional property , i.e., symmetrical relationship . (Crystal ; 1979 ;455)

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2.3.4 Synonymy versus Antonymy

Synonymy and antonymy are concerned with sameness and oppositeness of meaning respectively . So , ' liberty ' and ' freedom ' are said to be synonyms ; whereas , ' captivity ' could be classed as antonyms . Lyons (1979 ; 460) suggests that it is possible to realize two kinds of antonymy . One kind is illustrated by the pair of opposites ' tall ' and ' short ' . To say that somebody is ' not tall ' does not necessarily imply that he is ' short ' , and to say that is not ' short ' does not necessarily mean he is ' tall ' . These are gradable antonyms . The other kind is represented by the pair of words 'buy' and 'sell' . These words are classed to be converses of each other .

SECTION THREE

3.1 The Test

This section is devoted to the discussion of the diagnostic test which is constructed to find out the areas of weakness and strength that the third-year students / college of arts manifest in dealing with these lexical considerations (i.e., polysemy and Sy.)

The purpose of this test is to pin-point the lexical problems in this area with the aim of suggesting solutions to such problems .

3.2 Pilot Administration

The purposes behind pilot administration are to estimate the time needed for the final administration of the test , to get a clear idea about arrangements and requirements for the final administration making any necessary modification of the test in order to determine the suitability of the test and to have a clear idea of the scoring scheme .

After being validated , the test was tried out on (30) students chosen randomly for the pilot study which has revealed that some lexical items are very difficult to recognize and produce .

3.3 Means of Test Evaluation / Test Validity & Test Reliability

The method utilized in determining the validity of this test is through submitting it to the jury . Every member of the jury was given a copy of the test and allowed enough time for studying and recording his impressions . Then their opinions were analyzed and the test items were modified by dropping and adding some items because such items had no discrimination power . As a result , the final form of the test was firmly approved .

There are several ways for estimating the reliability of a test . One way to measure reliability is to submit the same test on more than one occasion and then compare each student's performance on both testing , i.e., a test is reliable ' if it remains stable regardless of the changing

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of those who give it and those who take it . " (Al-Ham ash and Younis ; 1980 : 200).

3.4 Students' Sample

Arabic is the native language of all the examinees who were at the third year classes of English from which three sections were chosen randomly . They fall into 20 male students and 20 female students whose ages ranges from 20 to 21 years . No one had studied abroad . None of them had taken private lessons in English .

3.5 Statistical Procedure

" Percentages " is the main procedure that has been recommended to use in this test .

SECTION FOUR

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Iraqi Advanced Learners are significantly better in recognition than in production . This supports the commonly accepted assumption that the recognition ability of the students is higher than that of production .

Meaning is such a complex subject that it includes the relationship between language and thought , and language and reality . As a result , complexity of the meaning is one of the most prominent factors responsible for students' errors made in this area .It can be suggested that lack of practice is one of the possible factors responsible for most students' errors in Polysemy and Synonymy . This is clear in the inability of the most the students to recognize the juxtaposition of polysemy vs. synonymy .

Third female students manifest significantly higher competence in recognizing and producing English lexical aspects of free morphemes . This point supports the findings of McCarthy (1954; 340) .

In the light of the findings arrived at this study , some valuable and useful recommendations to English teachers and text-book writers for students can be suggested : (1) In teaching the lexical aspects of free morphemes , it is necessary to start with the pair combined ' Polysemy ' vs. ' Synonymy ' . In other words , they should work out a definite strategy when dealing with semantic and syntactic aspects of lexemes in found in English . (2) An obvious distinction between polysemy and homonymy should be drawn by teachers and text-book writers with simple illustrations and relevant exercises . (3) It is advisable to increase the students' experience of words and their potential meanings to have a wider range to choose from . The researcher suggests two ways of doing this . Words have meanings

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because of their accepted ' referents ' . The first type of meaning can be taught by improving the students' word-power through the study of synonymy and antonymy . Thus , exercises which link words together in meaning and require substitution of elements of the same word-class in sentences lead to legitimate means of increasing the students' experience of lexemes . The second type of meaning can be largely related to the choice of ' context ' . The meaning of some items can be taught through the use of real objects or pictures to teach meanings by relating them to their referent .

With regard to the production skills , at the level of the underlying meaning , the students need practice in expressing themselves , i.e., in the way to say what they mean with the language resources available to them . The work done on guided composition techniques is useful at this stage . The students require practice in controlled expressions with the gradual removal of structural and semantic weight .

APPENDICES

Appendix (A) / The Provisional Test :

I // *Polysemy & Homonymy*

i. Write two different sentences on each word of the following so as to show different meanings :-

1. mouth 2. face 3. bank 4. cat

ii. Choose the correct word :

5. This of glass is broken . (pain ; pane)

6. suitcase is this ? (who's ; whose)

7. The factory is very muddy . (sight ; site)

II // *Synonymy*

iii. Suggest a suitable synonym for each of the underlined words in the following passage :-

Iraq is now in the process of speeding up educational development .

The most important step taken this direction is the decision to provide free (8)

Education for all . Another important decision is the abolition (9) of Private Education .

Free education is not an easy decision to take . The state has to pay for all the requirements (10) of Iraqi schools at all educational stages .

iv. Each of the following items starts with a pair of synonyms . Place the appropriate synonyms in the following sentences below :-

11. old/antique The furniture suited the house .

12. shining /bright It was aday and the sun was

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13. liberty / freedom The of the parties and the of speech are the source of

Appendix (B) / The Test

The Recognition Part :-

(A) Polysemy :

i // Choose the correct word :

1. Butchers sell (meat , meet , mete)
2. She cut the cloth with a of scissors . (pear , pair , pare)
3. Would you raise your hand ? (right ; rite ; write)
4. Fuad is long to touch the ceiling . (too ; to ; two)

(B) Synonymy :

ii // Fill in the blanks with the most correct item

6. The sun is (sparking ; polished ; bright ; shining)
7. of women is one of the aims of our modern society .
(Liberty ; Emancipation ; Freedom ; Release)
8. Eating food is preferable . (fresh ; modern ; fashion ; new)
9. I watching the program because it is very interesting .
(amuse ; please ; enjoy ; delight)
5. is a very nice plant . (You ; Ewe ; You)
10. The Egyptians used hieroglyphic writing .
(past ; antique ; old ; ancient)

The Production Part

(A) Polysemy :

iii // Use each of the bold items below in another sentence to show the different meaning :-

11. He is strong enough to carry that heavy **case** .
12. My older brother always keeps his money in the **bank** .
13. She's going to the **shop** to have some sugar .
14. I hammer the **nail** in .
15. The title of this **book** is interesting .

iv // Suggest a new suitable synonym for each of the underlined words in the following paragraph :-

Iraq is now in the process of speeding up (16) ional development . The most important step (17) in this direction to provide (18) education for all .

Another important decision is the abolition(19)of private(20) education .

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