

THE PROBLEM OF MEANING SELECTION IN TRANSLATION STUDIES: ON  
THE EXAMPLE OF MULTIPLE MEANINGFUL WORDS

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***Annotation***

*This article analyzes the problem of meaning selection, one of the most complex issues in translation studies, on the example of multi-meaning words (polysemantic units). The phenomenon of polysemanticity is a natural feature of languages, which creates problems of semantic ambiguity and equivalence in the translation process. The article highlights the role of context, pragmatic factors, and cultural factors in meaning selection.*

**Keywords:** *translation studies, multi-meaning, polysemantic words, meaning selection, context, equivalence.*

***Introduction***

The translation process is not a simple word-for-word replacement, but a complex linguistic, cognitive and cultural phenomenon. During translation, the translator must take into account not only the lexical and grammatical differences between two languages, but also their semantic, pragmatic and cultural features. In this regard, translation theory pays special attention to the issues of correctly understanding the meaning of linguistic units and adequately expressing it in the target language.

In particular, the translation of polysemantic words poses serious problems for the translator. The fact that one linguistic unit has several interrelated semantic meanings creates the need to choose the correct meaning during the translation process. It is difficult for the translator to determine the appropriate equivalent for such units without a full analysis of the context. As a result, an incorrectly chosen meaning can lead to a distortion of the content of the text, the loss of the author's communicative intention and pragmatic effect.

In addition, cultural factors also play an important role in the translation of polysemous words. Some lexical units are associated with a specific national mentality, customs and social experience, and their meaning may not be directly transferred to another language. In such cases, the translator must have not only linguistic knowledge, but also intercultural competence.



Therefore, the problem of meaning selection in translation studies, especially in the case of polysemous words, is one of the current scientific issues. This article analyzes the impact of the phenomenon of polysemy on the translation process, the role of context and pragmatics in meaning selection, and issues of equivalence.

### **The linguistic essence of the phenomenon of polysemy**

Polysemy is one of the important semantic phenomena inherent in the language system, which means that a word has two or more semantically related meanings. The meanings of polysemantic words are usually formed as a result of metaphorical, metonymic or functional transfers, starting from the main (denotative) meaning. This process is closely related to the historical development of the language and speech needs.<sup>1</sup>

For example, the original meaning of the English word "head" was a part of the human body, but over time it also included such mobile meanings as "head of department", "head of the table", "mind, thought" (use your head). The Uzbek word "bosh" has also undergone a similar semantic development, and along with a physical organ, it is used in such meanings as "yetakchi" (chief specialist), "asosiy" (main issue), "baslang'ich" (home page). This shows that polysemy is a universal linguistic phenomenon.<sup>2</sup>

The phenomenon of polysemy creates special difficulties in the translation process. Because the equivalents given in the dictionary for polysemous words do not always correspond to the context. Which meaning of a word is activated depends on the speech situation, the surrounding lexical units, and the communicative purpose. Therefore, polysemy does not allow for automatic or mechanical selection of equivalents in translation.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the meanings of polysemantic words in different languages do not always fully correspond to each other. Some meanings that are widely used in one language may not exist at all in another language or may be expressed through a different lexical unit. This situation creates semantic imbalance in translation and requires a deep semantic analysis and creative approach from the translator.

### **The problem of choosing meaning in translation**

During the translation process, the translator must determine which meaning of a polysemantic word corresponds to a particular speech situation. This process is not limited to

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<sup>1</sup> Baker, M. (2018). *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> Catford, J. C. (1965). *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Komissarov, V. N. (1990). *Teoriya perevoda (Lingvisticheskie aspekty)*. Moskva: Vysshaya shkola.



the selection of lexical equivalents, but also requires a deep analysis of the functional and semantic load of the word in the text. When translating polysemantic units, the translator must take into account several factors at once.

In particular, the contextual environment plays an important role in choosing meaning. The lexical and grammatical units surrounding the word help determine which meaning is being activated. The type of text also determines the translation strategy: if imagery and emotional-expressiveness are prioritized in literary texts, then clarity and terminological consistency are important in scientific texts, and expressiveness and audience orientation play a key role in journalistic texts.

In addition, pragmatic purpose — that is, the author's intended purpose and the effect he wants to convey to the reader — is an important factor in choosing meaning. It is necessary for the translator to take into account in advance how the translated unit will be perceived by the audience. At the same time, the cultural background also plays an important role in translation, since some words with multiple meanings are associated with a specific cultural experience and mentality, and it is not always possible to directly transfer them to another language.

For example, the English word "light" is translated in such meanings as "turn on the light", "light bag", "light color" depending on the context. If the translator does not take the context into account sufficiently, the wrong meaning will be chosen, and as a result, the semantic integrity of the text will be violated.<sup>4</sup>

### **The role of context and pragmatics**

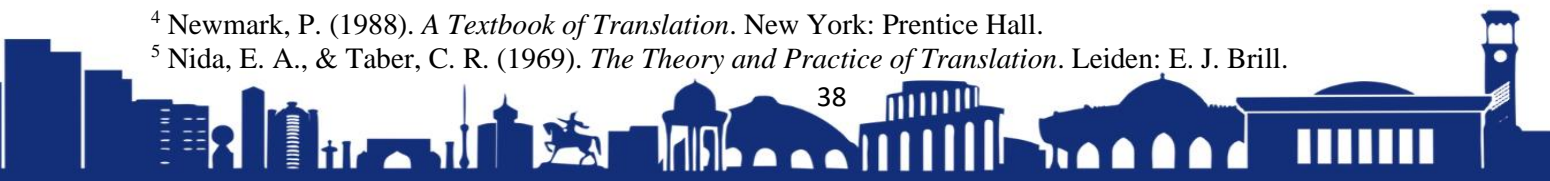
Context is a decisive factor in the selection of meaning in the translation process. In determining which semantic variant of polysemous words is activated, the lexical and grammatical units surrounding them are of great importance. The place of the word in the sentence, its syntactic and semantic relationship with other words serve to determine its exact meaning. Therefore, it is almost impossible to give a complete and adequate translation of a word taken out of context.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, pragmatic factors also play an important role in translation. The communicative purpose of speech, the author's intention, the intended audience of the text, and the socio-cultural characteristics of the audience directly affect the choice of translation strategy. The same lexical unit can acquire different pragmatic meanings in different communicative

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<sup>4</sup> Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. New York: Prentice Hall.

<sup>5</sup> Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1969). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.



situations. For example, if a polysemous word is used for an emotional or figurative purpose in a literary text, its neutral and precise meaning is chosen in a scientific or official text.

Pragmatics also affects how a translator interprets a text. The translator must consider not only the literal meaning of a word, but also its function in speech, its hidden meanings, and the intended effect of the author. In this regard, it is natural that the same word will be translated differently in different situations, which is explained by the translator's decision based on contextual and pragmatic analysis.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the problem of meaning selection in translation studies, especially in relation to the translation of polysemous words, is a complex and multifaceted process. The phenomenon of polysemy is a natural feature of languages, which creates problems of semantic ambiguity and equivalence in the translation process. Therefore, it is not enough to rely solely on lexical compatibility when translating polysemous lexical units.

The research revealed that the context, pragmatic factors, and cultural background are crucial in choosing the right meaning. In order to determine which meaning of a word is being activated, the translator must thoroughly analyze the general content of the text, the purpose of the speech, and the characteristics of the audience. Otherwise, an incorrectly selected meaning will lead to a distortion of the content of the text and an incomplete realization of the author's communicative intention.

Also, the fact that polysemantic words do not always have complete semantic compatibility in different languages requires a creative and flexible approach from the translator. Along with the linguistic knowledge of the translator, intercultural competence is also one of the important factors of successful translation.

In general, an in-depth study of the problem of meaning selection in the translation of polysemantic words serves to enrich translation theory, as well as to create high-quality and adequate translations in translation practice. The results of this study can serve as a theoretical basis for the development of approaches based on semantic and pragmatic analysis in translation studies in the future.

### **References:**

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