## Polysemy in Modern English

## Polysemy

- Is the plurality of meanings
- A word that has more than one meaning is called polysemantic


## Polysemy

- Monosemantic words (words having only one meaning) are few in number (mainly, scientific terms)
- The majority of English words are polysemantic (the number of meanings ranging from 5 to over 100)
- The commoner the word, the more meanings it has


# Polysemy is typical of English 

- due to the monosyllabic character of the English vocabulary
- due to the predominance of root words


## Polysemy

- Exists in the language, not in speech
- Any word used actually has only one meaning which is referred to as contextual


## Polysemy

- The sum total of many contexts in which the word may occur permits to observe and record cases of identical meaning and cases that differ in meaning
- The analysis of the word's recurrent meanings enables to make up its semantic structure


## Semantic structure

- Is a structured set of interrelated meanings which come together due to the proximity of notions they express


## Table

- a piece of furniture
- the persons seated at a table
- the food put on a table, meals
- a thin flat piece of stone, metal, wood, etc.
- an orderly arrangement of facts, figures, etc.
- Etc.


## Semantic structure

- In every language the combination of meanings is specific and often depends on the grammatical categories characteristic of the part of speech to which the word belongs:
- English nouns combine individual and collective, countable and uncountable variants
- English verbs - transitive and intransitive lexico-semantic variants,
- Etc.


## Semantic structure

- An organized set of recurrent variants and shades of meaning a given sound complex can assume in different contexts together with their emotional colouring, stylistic peculiarities and other typical connotations


## Polysemy

- Is inherent in the very nature of words and notions as they always contain a generalization of several traits of the object
- Some of the traits prove to be common with other objects
- There is a possibility of identical names for objects possessing common features


# Approaches to the Study of Polysemy 

- Diachronic
- Synchronic


## Diachronically

- Polysemy is the growth and development (change, in general) of the word's semantic structure
- A word may retain its previous meaning(s) and acquire one or several new meanings at the same time


## Diachronically

- The primary meaning is the source (often etymological) meaning of the word which gave rise to the secondary meanings
- The secondary meaning is the meaning derived from the primary meaning, dependent on it and somehow subordinate to it


## Table

- Primary (Etymological, Old English): a flat slab of stone or wood
- Secondary: all the rest


# Semantic development of a word 

- Radiation (радиальное развитие, расхождение)
- Concatenation (последовательное соединение, сцепление, каскад)


## Radiation

- The primary meaning stands in the centre and the secondary meanings proceed out of it like rays (each secondary meaning may be traced to the primary meaning)


## Radiation

Face, n

- Primary: the front part of the human head
- Secondary:
- the front part of a building,
- the front part of a watch,
- the front part of a playing card, etc.


## Concatenation

- Secondary meanings of a word develop like a chain, which makes it difficult to trace some of the meanings to the primary one


## Concatenation

Crust, n

- Primary: hard outer part of bread
- Secondary:
- Hard part of anything (a pie, a cake, etc.)
- Harder layer over soft snow
- A sullen gloomy person
- Impudence (дерзость, наглость, нахальство, бесстыдство, etc.)


## Polysemy

- In most cases both ways of semantic development are combined
- When the word meanings diverge so much that the logical link is lost, there develops the so called split polysemy which gives rise to homonymy in the language


# Polysemy: the Synchronic Approach 

- Synchronically polysemy is defined as the coexistence of various meanings of the same word at a certain historical period of the development of the language


## Synchronically

- The basic (central) meaning (criteria of differentiation):
- occurs in various and widely different contexts
- is frequent in speech
- is stylistically neutral
- Table: a piece of furniture


## Synchronically

- Minor (marginal) meanings (criteria of differentiation):
- occur in only a few contexts
- are infrequent in speech
- may have a stylistic colouring
- Table: a group of people seated at a table (to keep the table amused)
- Table: an orderly arrangement of facts, figures, etc. (table of contents)


## Polysemy

- The problem of interrelation and interdependence of various meanings of the same word
- The semantic structure of a polysemantic word is not homogeneous: some of the word meanings are recognized in isolation, others are perceived only in certain contexts
- The semantic structure of correlated polysemantic words of different languages is never identical: the basic meanings coincide, while the marginal meanings diverge


# Homonymy in Modern English 

## Homonyms

# - Words different in meaning 

 but identical in sound and spelling
## Sources of Homonymy

- Split polysemy (divergence of word meanings so that the logical link is lost)
- Leveling of grammar inflexions (different parts of speech become identical in their outer aspect : care, n from «caru» and care, v from «carian»)
- Conversion (slim - to slim, water - to water, etc.)


## Sources of Homonymy

- Affixation (the same affix is added to the same stem twice to form two different words: read-er - a person who reads vs read-er - a book for reading)
- Shortening (abbreviation):
- bio- (a combining form with the meaning of «life») in «biology», «biometrics» vs bio (a shortening from «biography»)
- cab (a shortening from «cabriolet», «cabbage», «cabin»)
- COD («Concise Oxford Dictionary» and «cash on delivery»)


## Sources of Homonymy

- By accident (two words coincide in their development):
- bear (from OE beran, to carry) vs bear (from OE bera, an animal)
- fair (from Latin feria) vs fair (from OE fager, blond)
- base (from French base, Latin basis) vs base (from Italian basso, Latin bas)


# Classification of Homonyms: according to the spelling and sound form 

- Perfect homonyms
- Homophones
- Homographs
(classified by Walter Skeat)


## Perfect homonyms

- Words identical both in sound and spelling
- School - школа vs school - косяк рыбы
- Flounder - камбала vs flounder затруднительное положение


## Homophones

- Words identical in their phonetics but different in their spelling
- Night vs knight
- Nose vs knows
- I vs eye


## Homographs

- Words identical in their spelling but different in their phonetics
- Bow [bau] - поклон vs bow [bou] лук
- Tear [tia] - слеза vs tear [tea] рвать на части


# Classification of homonyms: according to the grammatical meaning 

- Perfect (absolute)
- Homoforms
(classified by A. Smirnitsky)


## Perfect (absolute) homonyms

- Words which are identical in spelling, pronunciation and grammar form (such homonyms always belong to the same part of speech)
- Spring (the season of the year) vs spring (a leap) and spring (a source)


## Homoforms

- Words coinciding in their spelling and phonetics but having different grammatical meaning (such words always belong to different parts of speech or different categories of the same part)
- Reading (Participle 1, gerund, verbal noun)
- Lobby (v) vs lobby (n)
- Etc.


# Classification of perfect homonyms by I. Arnold 

- Criteria:
- Lexical meaning
- Grammatical meaning
- Basic forms
- Paradigms


## Group 1

- Homonyms identical in their grammatical meanings, basic forms and paradigms but different in their lexical meanings:
- Board (council) vs board (a piece of wood sawn thin)


## Group 2

- Homonyms identical in their grammatical meanings and basic forms but different in their lexical meanings and paradigms :
- Lie - lied - lied vs lie - lay - lain


## Group 3

- Homonyms identical in their basic forms but different in their lexical meanings, grammatical meanings and paradigms:
- Light, n (lights) vs light, adj (lighter, lightest)


## Group 4

- Homonyms different in their basic forms, their lexical meanings, grammatical meanings and paradigms but identical in on of the forms of their paradigms:
- Bit, n vs bit, v (from bite)


## Patterned homonyms

- Homonymous words having a common component in their lexical meanings (homonyms formed by conversion or leveling of grammar inflexions)
- Such homonyms are different in their grammatical meanings and paradigms but identical in their basic forms: warm - to
warm


## Thank you for your attention!

