

Error Analysis of the Difficulties the Students of the Department of English of the College of Arts at Basrah University Encounter in Understanding the Contextual Meaning of English Polysemes

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Abstract

The present paper sheds light on a very important subject in reading comprehension, which is polysemy. The existence of two or more meanings attached to one English word form may confuse students of English in the process of arriving at the intended contextual meaning. Third – year students' ability to make use of linguistic clues in guessing meaning is tested by asking them to translate thirty sentences involving fifteen polysemes. The statistical results have shown that third – year students of English encounter serious difficulty in understanding contextual meanings of polysemes although they studied reading comprehension in their first and second years at the department of English. The researchers, thus, suggest that surmounting such a difficulty involves increasing the students' vocabulary and developing their guessing ability.

An Error Analysis Study of the Difficulties the Students of the Department of English of the College of Arts in Basrah University Encounter in Understanding the Contextual Meanings of English Polysemes

1. Defining Polysemy

There are different definitions of polysemy; they differ in their phrasing not in content. Gruzitis and Barzdins (2006: 1) define polysemy as 'the use of existing lexemes to communicate about and name concepts'. This definition emphasizes the use of one lexeme to express and refer to new concepts. In the sense that a certain word having one meaning may be used at a certain instance as a polyseme, i. e. to express more than one meaning. The multiplicity of meanings of a polyseme is referred to by Raukko (n. d: 358) who defines polysemy as the existence of a certain word having two or more meanings.

For Tyler and Evans (2001: 95), a polyseme is a single linguistic form 'associated with a number of related but distinct meanings or senses'. In this definition, the meanings of a polyseme are in some way related. The way in which the different meanings are related is not mentioned.

In what sense the meanings of a polyseme are related? Do they belong to the same semantic field? Do they share some of their semantic features? Are they grammatically and contextually related? The above mentioned definitions do not provide answers to these questions. It is hoped that an answer to each one of them is provided in the current paper.

2. Polysemy and Miscommunication

The misuse of a polysemous word can result in miscommunication or confusion. As an example of this is the verb 'shoot' which has two distinct meanings. The utterance 'I want to shoot somebody' may be interpreted in two different ways. It may either mean that someone wants 'to shoot some footage of' a person or that someone wants 'to shoot somebody with a gun'. What determines the use of each one of these two meanings is the context. If it is produced, for example, by a film producer, the first meaning is the intended one (Parent, 2009: 3-4).

The same goes to the word 'light' in the sentence 'Mary is wearing a light coat'. The adjective 'light' has two meanings. It either means 'not heavy' or 'not dark' (Ibarretxe Antunano, 1999: 14). The situational environment in which this utterance is used shows the intended meaning.

Moreover the co-text, i. e. the linguistic environment of a polyseme may indicate its intended meaning. For instance, the word 'foot' means 'foot of the mountain' when the word mountain is linguistically or physically present (Parent, 2009: 72-73). Similarly, linguistic clues are present to identify the meaning of 'bridge' in the following utterance:

Although the designer of this particular bridge has passed away, he would have been pleased to see it in its final form, connecting false teeth with the natural ones.

The word 'bridge' has 'a dental sense'. This meaning cannot be arrived at unless the sentence is read to the end (Ibid: 4).

Co – text is also important for the interpretation of the meaning of the adjective 'fast' whose meaning is identified depending on the noun it modifies. For example, if it modifies the word 'programmer' it means 'the programmer who programs quickly'. If it modifies the word 'plane' it means 'a plane that flies quickly'. When it modifies the word 'scientist' it means 'a scientist who publishes papers quickly, who performs experiments quickly, who observes something quickly, who reasons, thinks or runs quickly, (Lapata, 2001: 1).

3. Vocabulary Learning and Polysemy

Vocabulary learning is crucially important in language learning, in general, and reading comprehension in particular (Saragi et al, 1978: 72; Tani, n. d: 4-5). The vocabulary of unfamiliar texts is, definitely, a challenge to learners (Koren, 1991: 1). Even if the learner Knows '3, 600 word forms (with a far higher number of meanings... there will be a dozen or more unknown words on each page of the material' (Saragi et al, 1978: 72). Schmitt (2000: 5) asserts that knowing the meaning and form of a word is not enough. The learner should master all the meanings, written and spoken forms, collocations, grammatical behavior, register, association and frequency of a word.

The learners' inadequate knowledge of vocabulary may cause many difficulties. The learners, therefore, should master all words' properties including the existence of more than one meaning for one linguistic form, i. e. polysemy. (Elliott, 2001: 76-81). Studying polysemy is 'indispensible for accurate reading and language acquisition' (Tani, n. d: 4-5).

A polyseme is complex. The more meanings a polyseme has, the more complex it becomes (Raukko, n. d: 358). The multiplicity of meanings of a polyseme can be a source of confusion for learners. Meaning sometimes breaks down completely if the learners fail to arrive at the intended meaning. When they 'encounter known forms with unfamiliar meanings', they 'misinterpret the sentence because they assume that the familiar meaning they know is the only meaning'. Thus, learners must learn how to make use of context whether linguistic or situational, in order to arrive at the intended meaning (Parent, 2009: 4-8).

The language teacher should first focus on 'increasing the size of the learners' recognition vocabulary'. When their recognition vocabulary becomes large, they are taught how to guess from context (Nation, 1993: 118). Taking into consideration that 'most beginning English language and literature students are not really prepared for their university studies with respect to the size of their receptive and productive vocabularies and with their language acquisition strategies (Tschirner, 2004: 1).

Since knowing a word entails knowing its 'grammatical properties, collocations, functions and appropriate use' (Wei, 2007: 94), learning how to guess meaning from context is considered 'the most important vocabulary learning strategy and an essential part of any vocabulary learning program' (Nation and Waring, nid: 4-5) New vocabulary is presented in context. Context in this respect means a 'story or sentence in which the item occurs' (Hismanoglu, 2010: 55).

4. The Test

The test on which the study is based is conducted at the Department of English at the College of Arts, Basrah University. The subjects are (60) third – year students. They are asked to translate (30) sentences involving (15) polysemous words (see appendix 1). Each one of these words is used twice in two sentences with two different meanings. All the sentences involve linguistic clues that can help students identify the intended meanings.

The first polyseme is 'flat' It is used as an adjective meaning 'smooth and level, with parts that are raised above the rest (Oxford Wordpower, 1999: 289) in sentence no (1).

1. We sat down on a big flat rock.

The word 'rock' that follows the adjective 'flat' is a linguistic clue that helps students arrive at the intended meaning since being level is a feature that can be used to describe a rock.

The word 'flat' is used as a noun in sentence (16) meaning 'suite of rooms (living room, bedroom, kitchen, etc) on one floor of a building as a residence' (Hornby et al, 1963: 378):

16. Who lives in the top flat?

In fact, the linguistic clue to the intended meaning is the verb 'lives' in the sense that a flat is a place where people can live in'. The grammatical positions of 'flat' in sentences (1) and (16) are also linguistic clues that can help students identify the intended meaning.

The second polyseme is the word 'like'. It is either a verb meaning 'to find sb/sth' or a preposition meaning 'similar to sb/sth' (Oxford wordpower, 1999: 438-439).

These two meanings are used in sentences (2) and (17) respectively:

2. I like your dress-it's a beautiful colour.

17. He cried like a baby when they told him the news.

The parts of speech to which each one of these two meanings belong and the positions of the polyseme 'like' in each sentence work as clues to the intended meaning.

The polyseme 'light' is a noun meaning 'something that produces light, e. g. an electric lamp' (Oxford wordpower, 1999: 438) in sentence (3):

2. There must be someone at home - the light is on in the kitchen

It is also an adjective meaning 'having little weight' (Merriam Webster's collegiate Dictionary, 1998: 673). In sentence (29):

29. It's light, a child can lift it.

The linguistic context shows the meanings of 'light' in both sentences. The meaning of light in sentence (3) is related to the words 'on in the kitchen'. The noun position of 'light' is also a clue to its meaning. The adjective 'light' in sentence (29) is semantically related to the verb 'lift'.

The polyseme 'rest' can be a verb meaning 'relax, sleep or do nothing after a period of activity' (Oxford Wordpower, 1999: 633) as in sentence (4):

3. If you're tired, we'll stop and rest for a while.

It can also be a noun meaning 'what remains, the remainder' (Hornby et al, 1963: 839) as in sentence (18):

18. We'll eat some of the butter and keep the rest of it for breakfast

The word 'tired' in sentence (4) is a linguistic clue to the meaning of the verb 'rest' and so are the words 'eat', 'butter' and 'breakfast' to the noun 'rest' in sentence (18). The grammatical position of each one of them can also help students in guessing the intended meaning.

The polyseme 'bank' is a noun meaning 'establishment for keeping money and valuables safely' (Ibid: 63) in sentence (9):

9. Hospital blood banks have saved many lives.

The word 'blood' is a clue to the meaning of 'bank' in this sentence. In sentence (23), the word 'bank' is also a noun meaning a 'sloping land or earth, often forming a border or division' (Ibid):

23. They sat on a grassy bank at the edge of the field.

All the words that precede and follow the polyseme 'bank' can help in guessing its intended meaning.

The polyseme 'suit' is a noun meaning 'set of articles of outer clothing of the same material' (Ibid: 109) in sentence (8):

8. He is wearing a dark suit

It is also a verb meaning 'be convenient to or right for' (Ibid) as in sentence (22):

22. Will it suit you, if I come around at three?

The verb 'wearing' in sentence (8) is a clue to the meaning of the noun 'suit'. In addition, the grammatical positions of the polyseme 'suit' as a noun and as a verb make the intended meaning clearer.

The polyseme 'close' is a verb meaning 'shut' (Ibid: 175) in sentence no. (5):

4. Did you close all the doors and windows?

It is also an adverb meaning 'near' (Ibid: 174) in sentence no. (19):

The positions of 'close' in these two sentences are the main clues to meaning. The nouns 'doors' and 'windows' in sentence (5) and the verb 'lives' in sentence (19) are linguistic clues to the intended meanings.

The polyseme 'please' is an interjection and a verb. When it is used as an interjection, it is 'a polite form of request' (Ibid: 742). If it is used as a verb, it means to 'make somebody happy, to satisfy' (Oxford Wordpower, 1999: 564). These meaning are used in sentences (6) and (20) respectively:

5. Can we go now, please?

20. It's difficult to please everybody.

The positions of the polyseme 'please' in these two sentences clarify the intended meaning in each one of them.

The polyseme 'object' is a verb meaning 'say that one is not in favour of something or be opposed to make a protest against' (Hornby et al, 1963: 668) in sentence (10):

10.I strongly object to being treated like a child.

It is a noun in sentence (24) meaning something that can be seen or touched, material thing' (Ibid: 667-668):

24- What's that little object?

The grammatical positions of the verb and noun 'object' can help students arrive at the intended meaning.

The polyseme 'party' in sentence (15) is a noun meaning 'gathering of persons by invitation and for pleasure', but in sentence (30), it means 'body of persons united in opinion in support of a cause especially in politics, (Ibid: 709):

15. We are giving John a party for his birthday.

30. I read a book about the Socialist party.

The words 'birthday' in sentence (15) and 'socialist' in sentence (30) are linguistic clues to the intended meaning.

In sentences (7) and (21), the polyseme 'match' used:

(7) She lit her cigarette with a match

(21) Who's going to referee the football match.

In sentence (7), the word 'match' is a noun meaning 'short piece of wood, pasteboard, wax taper, etc., with a head made of material that bursts into flame when rubbed on a rough or specially prepared surface (Ibid: 606). The words 'lit' and 'cigarette' that precede the word 'match' are supposed to help students arrive at the intended meaning.

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In sentence (21), the word 'match' means 'contest' or 'game' (Ibid). This meaning can be easily arrived at if the meanings of the words 'football' and 'referee' which precede the polyseme 'match' are known.

The polyseme 'right' is used as an adverb in sentence (14):

(14) Turn right at the crossroads.

It means 'to the right hand or side' ((bid: 850). But in sentence (28), 'just morally good required by law or duty, (Ibid).

28. It's difficult to know what is the right thing to do in this situation.

The verb 'turn' in sentence (14) can be a clue to the meaning of the adverb 'right'. The meaning of the sentence (28) as a whole may suggest the intended meaning of the word 'right'.

The polyseme 'view' is a noun meaning 'an opinion'. It also means 'something to be looked at, especially a stretch of natural scenery (Ibid: 116). These two meanings are used in sentences (11) and (25) respectively:

11. The only view from my bedroom window is of some factory chimneys.

(25) What are your views on free university Education?

The linguistic clues to the intended meaning of 'view' in the above – mentioned sentences are 'window' in sentence (11) and 'on free university education' in sentence (25):

The polyseme 'sentence' occurs in sentence (13) and (27):

13. The sentence of the court was three-years imprisonment.

27. A paragraph is a group of several sentences dealing with one main idea.

In sentence (13), the word 'sentence' is a noun meaning 'statement by a judge, etc. of punishment' whereas in sentence (27), it means 'words especially with subject and predicate that form a statement (Ibid: 904). The linguistic environment of sentence (13) which includes the words 'court' and 'imprisonment' is a clue to the intended meaning. The word 'paragraph' in sentence (27) clarifies the meaning of the word 'sentence'.

The polyseme 'fast' is used as a verb in sentence (12):

12. Muslims fast during Ramadan.

It means 'go without food' or without certain kinds of food, especially as a religious duty' (Ibid: 360). The words 'muslims' and 'Ramadan' that precede and follow it indicate the intended meaning.

In sentence (26), it is used as an adverb meaning 'quickly' (Ibid):

26. This train travels fast and stops at few stations.

The intended meaning is indicated by the linguistic environment including the words 'train', 'travels' and 'stations'.

5. Statistical Analysis and Discussion

The present paper is based on normal distribution statistical tests. The first test examines the difference between two mean values. The researchers hypothesize that \bar{X}_1 and S_1^2 are the mean value and variance of the sample respectively consisting of n_1 which is selected from a normal distribution whose mean is μ_1 and variance is δ_1^2 . In addition, \bar{X}_2 and S_2^2 represent the mean value of another sample consisting of n_2 which is selected from a normal distribution whose mean value is μ_2 and variance is δ_2^2 . The aim is to examine the null hypothesis ($H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$) as opposed to any other alternative hypothesis. Thus, we use.

$$Z = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{S_1^2}{15} + \frac{S_2^2}{15}}} \quad (\text{Al_Mashhadany and Hirmiz, 1989:429-430})$$

If the resultant value of Z is bigger than its expected value, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is adopted. But, if the resultant value of Z is less than its expected value, the null hypothesis is adopted. That is to say, there is no difference between the mean values of the two samples; the difference is due to coincidence.

In table (1), the meanings of each polyseme are classified into two types: familiar and unfamiliar meanings. This classification is based on the number of errors committed by the subjects in the test.

Table (1) shows that the students have committed (577) errors out of (900) errors in identifying the unfamiliar meaning of the polysemes in the test. This indicates that more than (28) students have failed to grasp the intended meaning of at least one polyseme. This also shows that less than 36% of the students could not arrive at the intended contextual meaning.

As to familiar meanings, table (1) shows that out of 900 renditions, (175) errors have been committed. In other words, less than (12) students have failed in identifying the familiar meanings of polysemes. This also indicates that more

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than 80% of the students could provide the intended meanings. The aim is to find out whether there is a significant difference between the mean values of erroneous familiar and unfamiliar meanings or not. In other words, the null hypothesis indicating that the errors of familiar and unfamiliar meanings are equal will be tested as opposed to the alternative hypothesis which indicates that the mean value of unfamiliar meaning is bigger than that of familiar meanings, because of the students' inability to use context to infer the intended meaning.

$$H_0 = \mu_1 = \mu_2$$

$$H_1 = \mu_1 > \mu_2$$

In table (1):

$$Z = \frac{38.46 - 11.67}{\sqrt{\frac{(13.24)^2}{15} + \frac{(10.88)^2}{15}}} = 6.055$$

Since the expected value of Z is (1. 645) as far as the test is one-sided and since the resultant value of Z is bigger than this, we reject the null hypothesis and adopt the alternative hypothesis.

Table (1)

Total Number of Errors According to Type of meaning

No	The polysemes	Familiar meanings (number of Errors)	Unfamiliar Meanings (number of Errors)	Total Number of Errors
1	Flat	32	42	74
2	Like	3	16	19
3	Light	8	52	60
4	Rest	1	22	23
5	Bank	12	42	54
6	Suit	19	34	53
7	Close	Zero	31	31
8	Please	7	57	64
9	Object	39	47	86
10	Party	8	45	53
11	Match	12	50	62
12	Right	11	23	34
13	View	8	46	54
14	Sentence	4	51	55

15	Fast	11	19	30
	Mean value	11.67	38.46	50.13
	Standard Deviation	10.88	13.24	19.08
	Total	175	577	752
	Percentage	23.27%	76.73%	100%
	Pass Percentage	80.56%	35.89%	

The second test involves examining the difference between the errors of the second type. In an attempt to find out whether or not there is a significant difference between the mean values of erroneous familiar and unfamiliar meanings.

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$$

$$H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$$

Table (2) shows that there are (101) errors of type two out of (175) in familiar meanings. In the sense that 57% of the errors are of type two.

Table (2)

Number of Errors of familiar Meanings According to types of Errors

No	The polysemes	Type one (Omission)	Type Two (providing wrong meaning)	Type three (Interference)	Total
1	Flat	9	22	1	32
2	Like	Zero	2	1	3
3	Light	8	Zero	Zero	8
4	Rest	1	Zero	Zero	1
5	Bank	5	7	Zero	12
6	Suit	2	17	Zero	19
7	Close	Zero	Zero	Zero	Zero
8	Please	3	4	Zero	7
9	Object	12	25	2	39
10	Party	4	4	Zero	8
11	Match	4	8	Zero	12
12	Right	6	5	Zero	11
13	View	4	4	Zero	8
14	Sentence	3	1	Zero	4

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15	Fast	8	2	1	11
	Mean value	4.600	6.73	0.333	11.67
	Standard Deviation	3.46	8.08	6.17	10.88
	Total Number	69	101	5	175
	Percentage	39.4%	57.7%	2.9%	100%

Table (3) indicates that there are (192) errors of type two out of (577) errors in unfamiliar meanings. That is to say, one – third of the errors are of type two:

$$Z = \frac{12.8 - 6.73}{\sqrt{\frac{(8.99)^2}{15} + \frac{(8.08)^2}{15}}} = 1.945$$

Since the expected value of Z is 1.96 as far as the errors are two – sided and the resultant value of Z is less than its expected value, we adopt the null hypothesis which indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean values of familiar and unfamiliar meanings of type two. Logically, when a student fails to arrive at the intended meaning, he/she tries to resort to guessing which may result in providing wrong meanings.

Table (3)

Number of Errors of unfamiliar meanings According to types of Errors

No	The polysemes	Type one (Omission)	Type two (providing wrong meaning)	Type three (Interference)	Total
1	Flat	26	13	3	42
2	Like	6	4	6	16
3	Light	1	23	28	52
4	Rest	3	5	14	22
5	Bank	32	6	4	42
6	Suit	22	8	4	34
7	Close	2	17	12	31
8	Please	10	27	20	57
9	Object	23	24	Zero	47
10	Party	3	2	40	45
11	Match	14	9	27	50
12	Right	8	9	6	23
13	View	16	27	3	46

14	Sentence	35	2	14	51
15	Fast	2	16	1	19
Mean value		13.53	12.80	12.13	38.46
Standard Deviation		11.56	8.99	11.84	13.24
Total		203	192	182	577
Percentage		35.2%	33.3%	31.5%	100%

The third test involves examining the mean values of a random sample in a normal population. Let's consider $X_1, X_2, X_3, \dots, X_n$ measures of elements of a random sample selected from population with normal distribution and mean value μ and variance σ^2 . If \bar{X} and S^2 are the mean value and variance of the sample respectively, we can adopt the null hypothesis indicating that there is no significant difference between the mean value of the sample and that of the population as opposed to any alternative hypothesis:

$$Z = \frac{\bar{X} - \mu}{S / \sqrt{n}} \quad (\text{Ibid: 427-428})$$

Table (2) shows that there are (5) errors of type three out of (175) errors of familiar meaning. On the percentage level errors are less than 3%. The opposite is true to unfamiliar meanings. Table (3) indicates the occurrence of (182) errors out of (577) in unfamiliar meanings. That is to say, 31.5% of the errors of type three are of unfamiliar meanings. In other words, one third of the students have failed to arrive at the intended meanings. They have, instead, used the familiar meanings which are contextually inappropriate.

We attempt to test the null hypothesis which indicates that the students, errors of type three are not significantly different from null in both familiar and unfamiliar meanings:

$$H_0: \mu = 0$$

$$H_1: \mu > 0$$

Choosing this hypothesis is due to the fact that if the students know the meaning of a certain word, they do not need context in the process of identifying the intended meaning. They provide the appropriate meaning with no effort. They may also use this meaning inappropriately in other contexts. The result of the test of familiar meanings is as follows:

$$Z = \frac{0.333 - 0}{0.617}$$

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$$\sqrt{15}$$

$$Z=2.09$$

Since the theoretical value of Z is 2.33 as far as the test is one-sided and the resultant value of Z is less than its expected value by 0.01, we accept the null hypothesis indicating that the mean value of type three errors of familiar meaning is not significantly different from null.

As to unfamiliar meanings:

$$Z = \frac{12.13 - 0}{\frac{11.84}{\sqrt{15}}}$$

$$Z=3.968$$

We reject the null hypothesis and adopt the alternative hypothesis indicating that the mean value of type-three errors is bigger than null. This is due to the fact that identifying unfamiliar meanings requires the use of context.

The fourth test is goodness of fit. It is one of the uses of chi-square distribution. The aim of this test is to show how frequency of a certain phenomenon fits the expected frequency.

We hypothesize that $e = 1, 2, 3 \dots K$. represents the observed frequency at i level of the levels of random variant X which is independent and E_i represents the expected frequency at that level. Thus, the T-standard of the null hypothesis indicating that there is significant variance between the observed frequency and the expected frequency at level i of the variant X is as follows:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^k \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i} \quad (\text{Ibid: 456-457}).$$

The hypothesis is that if the students can identify the intended meaning using context, their errors will be systematic on word level and the mean is (38.46). This is against the alternative hypothesis which indicates that the students encounter difficulty in using context in the process of identifying the intended unfamiliar meanings.

H_0 : The number of errors is systematic

H_1 : There is a significant variance in identifying meaning.

Table (4) shows the resultant value of χ^2 which is 64.6 since the value of χ^2 at freedom degree ($k = (15-1)14$) and level 0.05 equals $\chi^2 = 23.685$ and it is less than 0, 05.4, the resultant value, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and adopt

the alternative hypothesis (H₁). This shows that the students encounter serious problems in understanding contextual meanings.

Table (4)

Test of Goodness of Fit of Errors of unfamiliar meaning

No	The polysemes	Number of Errors Q _i	Expected Number of Errors E _i	Q _i - E _i	(Q _i -E _i) ² /E _i
1	Flat	42	38.46	3.54	0.33
2	Like	16	38.46	22.46-	13.12
3	Light	52	38.46	13.54	4.77
4	Rest	22	38.46	16.46-	7.04
5	Bank	42	38.46	3.54-	0.33
6	Suit	34	38.46	4.46-	0.52
7	Close	31	38.46	7.46-	1.45
8	Please	57	38.46	18.54	8.94
9	Object	47	38.46	8.54	1.90
10	Party	45	38.46	6.54	1.11
11	Match	50	38.46	11.54	3.46
13	View	46	38.46	7.54	1.48
14	Sentence	51	38.46	12.54	4.09
15	Fast	19	38.46	19.46-	9.85

$$\chi^2 = 64.60$$

The fifth test involves examining the independence of sentences and types of errors. This test is one of the applications of distribution which is concerned with showing whether the levels of two factors are independent from each other

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^k \sum_{j=1}^m \frac{(O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2}{E_{ij}} \quad (\text{Ibid: 456-457}).$$

O_{ij} represents the observed frequency belonging to the level i of factor A and j of factor B. E_{ij} represents the expected frequency belonging to level i of factor A and j of factor B:

$$E_{ij} = \frac{O_i \cdot O_j}{n} \quad (\text{Ibid: 463}).$$

Table (5) presents the relation between types of meaning and types of errors. The null hypothesis involves that the types of errors are independent from types of meanings against the alternative hypothesis

emphasizing the dependency of types of errors on types of meanings

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H₀: Types of errors are independent from types of meanings.

H₁: There is harmony between types of errors and types of meanings.

Table (5)

Test of Independence of Types of Meanings and Types of Errors

Types of meanings	Type one (omission)	Type Two (providing wrong meaning)	Type three interference	Total
Familiar meanings	69	101	5	175
Unfamiliar meanings	203	192	182	577
Total	272	293	187	752

$$E_{11} = \frac{(272)(175)}{752} = 63.30$$

$$E_{12} = \frac{(293)(175)}{752} = 68.18$$

$$E_{13} = \frac{(187)(175)}{752} = 43.52$$

$$E_{21} = \frac{(272)(577)}{752} = 208.7$$

$$E_{22} = \frac{(293)(577)}{752} = 224.8$$

$$E_{23} = \frac{(187)(577)}{752} = 143.48$$

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(69-63.3)^2}{63.3} + \frac{(101-68.18)^2}{68.18} + \frac{(5-43.52)^2}{43.52} + \frac{(203-208.7)^2}{208.7} + \frac{(192-224.8)^2}{224.8} + \frac{(182-143.48)^2}{143.48} = 65.689$$

The resultant value of χ^2 is 65.689 whereas the expected value of degree of freedom $2 = (3-1)(2-1)$ and significance level 0.05 equals $\chi^2 = 5.991$. This is less than the resultant value. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis and adopt the alternative hypothesis.

6. Conclusions

The statistical results show that third-year students of English encounter serious difficulties in recognizing the multiplicity of meanings of English polysemous words. They are unable to make use of linguistic context to arrive at

the intended meanings. Student, mostly, resort to omitting words having unfamiliar meaning or using familiar meanings in inappropriate contexts.

Table (6)

Types of Erroneous Meanings

No	Polysemes	Intended Meaning	Totally irrelevant	Semantically related
1	flat	(level) مسطح	(heavy) ثقيلة (hard) صلبة	(surface) سطح
	flat	(suite of rooms) شقة	(outdoors) العراء (time) زمن (meadow) السهل	(floor) الطابق (ceiling) السقف (balcony) الشرفة
2	like	(to find something pleasant) يحب	-	ارغب (want)
	like	(similar to) مثل	-	-
3	light	something that produces light) ضوء	-	-
	light	(having little weight) خفيف	(easy) سهل	-
4	rest	(relax) يرتاح	-	-
	rest	(the remainder) بقية	(diet) الرجيم	البعض (some) (part of) جزء من
5	bank	(establishment for keeping money) مصرف	(donations) التبرعات (ward) ردهة (center) مركز (station) محطة	الأموال (money)
	bank	(sloping land) جرف	(group) مجموعة (vacuum) فراغ (sweets) حلويات	مكان (place) منطقة (area) مساحة (space)
6	Suit	(outer clothing) بدله رسمية	(sweet) حلويات	ثوب (dress) قميص (shirt) سروال (pants) قبعة (hat) تنوره (skirt)
	Suit	(be convenient) يناسب	(run) نركض (annoy) يضايق	-

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Table (6) Continued
Types of Erroneous Meanings

No	Polysemes	Intended Meaning	Totally irrelevant	Semantically related
7	Close	(shut) يغلق	-	-
	close	(near) قرب	(loyal) يخلص (aloof) منطوي من عزل (committed) ملتزم (inside) داخل (hard) صعبة	-
8	please	(a polite form of request) رجاءً	-	(pardon Sorry) عفواً (I apologize)
	please	(make somebody happy) يُسعد، يرضى	(ask) تطلب (happen) تحدث (help) تساعد (forgiveness) للسماح (Apology) الاعتذار	عذراً (be happy) يبتهج
9	Object	(make protest against) يرفض	(anger) غضب انفعال (material) المادة (adjective) صفة (I face difficulty) أواجه صعوبة (right) صحيحاً	-
	Object	(something that can be seen or touched) شيء	(subject) الموضوع (subject) الفاعل (material) المادة	-
10	Party	(gathering of persons by invitation) حفلة	-	(present) هدية
	Party	(body of persons united in opinion) حزب	(circle) حلقة المجتمعات الراقية	-

Table (6) Continued
Types of Erroneous Meanings

No	Polysemes	Intended Meaning	Totally irrelevant	Semantically related
11	Match	(a piece of wood that bursts into flame when rubbed) ثقاب	(watching) المشاهدة	، ولاعة (lighter) قداحة (box) علبة (ash) رماد
	Match	(game) مباراة	-	(field) ملعب (football players) لاعبي كرة قدم (competition) مسابقة (team) فريق
12	Right	(to the right hand side) يمينا	(red light) الضوء الأحمر	(left) يساراً
	Right	(morally good) صحيح	(evident) الواضح (the best) الأفضل (good) جيد (hard) الصعبة	-
13	View	(something to be looked at) مشهد	(voice) صوت (side) الجانب (look) النظرة	(balcony) شرفة (window) نافذة
	View	(an opinion) رأي	(voice or vote) صوتك (bank) البنك	(ideas) الأفكار
14	Sentence	(statement of punishment) حكم	(production) نطق	(law) قوانين
	Sentence	(words that form a statement) جملة	-	(line) سطر
15	Fast	(go without food) يصوم	-	(eat after fasting) يفطر
	Fast	(quickly) بسرعة	(late) متأخر (continue) يواصل	-

Some students provide wrong meanings which are either totally irrelevant or semantically related to the intended meaning.

Some of the erroneous equivalents belong to the same semantic field of the intended meaning.

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They are as follows:

1. The adjective 'flat' meaning 'level' is misinterpreted as 'surface'. Both these words are included within the semantic field of 'surface'. 'flat' meaning 'apartment' is semantically – related to the words 'floor', 'ceiling' and 'balcony', since they all belong to the semantic field of 'buildings'.
2. The verb 'like' meaning 'find' satisfactory' (Hornby et al, 1963:) is related to the verb 'like' in 'would like'.
3. The noun 'rest' meaning 'the remainder' is semantically – related to its erroneous equivalents 'some' and 'part of'.
4. The word 'bank' meaning 'establishment for keeping money' is semantically related to the word 'money'. The erroneous equivalents 'place', 'area' and 'space' are related to the word 'bank' meaning 'a sloping land'.
5. The semantic field of 'clothes' include the word 'suit' meaning 'outer clothing' and its erroneous equivalents 'dress', 'shirt', 'pants', 'hat' and 'skirt' as well.
6. The word 'please' is a polite form of request. It is included within the same semantic field of polite expressions 'pardon' and 'sorry'. The verb please is related in meaning to its erroneous equivalent 'be happy'. Both include the semantic feature 'happy' but direction differs. Making somebody happy is different from making oneself happy.
7. The word 'party' meaning 'gathering of persons by invitation' is in the same semantic field of 'birthday' with the word 'present'.
8. The words 'match' meaning 'a piece of wood that bursts into flame when rubbed', 'lighter', 'ashes' and 'box' are related in meaning. The 'lighter' has a flame. 'Ashes' are the remainder after something has been burnt and 'box' is the place where matches are put.
9. The words 'right' and 'left' represent directions. They are within the same semantic field.
10. The word 'view' meaning 'something to be looked at' is semantically-related to 'balcony' and 'window'. The word 'view' as 'an opinion' is related to 'ideas'.
11. The noun 'sentence' meaning 'a statement by a judge' shares the same semantic field with 'laws'. 'Sentence' meaning 'words that form a statement' is in the same semantic field with 'line'.
12. The word 'fast' meaning 'go without food as a religious duty' is related to 'eating after fasting'. Both of them are in the semantic field of 'fasting'.

All these errors show the process of meaning analysis that occurs in the students' minds in order to arrive at the intended meaning. They have tried to infer meaning but their attempts have been in vain.

Moreover, mistranslating 'object' as 'subject', view as 'voice' or 'vote' and match as 'watch' shows the effect of the pronunciation of the original word on choosing an equivalent.

Some of the students misuse the co-text of the polysemes such as interpreting 'right' as 'red light' in

Turn right at crossroads

The giving-direction structure of the sentence and the word 'crossroads' bring to the students' minds the red light of the traffic lights.

Just like the adjective 'flat', the adjectives 'heavy' and 'hard', can be used to describe 'the rock in

We sat down on a big flat rock

This is why; they have been used inappropriately as equivalents to 'flat'.

Some of the polysemes used in the test have more than two meanings such as the word 'fast' which also means 'steady' (Hornby et al.,: 359). This third meaning is also used inappropriately interfering with the intended meaning the same goes to the word 'close' which means 'intimate' when it collocates with the word 'friend'. This third meaning is used as an equivalent to 'close' regardless of the linguistic context which does not include the word 'friend'.

The polysemes dealt with in the present paper show that the two meanings of the polysemes do not belong to the same semantic field but they appear in distinct contexts. They are only related by sharing the same form. The two meaning of a polyseme may belong to the same part of speech such as 'view', 'match', and 'sentence'. Others belong to different parts of speech such as 'please', 'close' and 'fast'.

In short, it appears that polysemy can be source confusion to third-year students of English, although they studied reading comprehension in their first and second years at the department of English. They are unable to make use of the linguistic and grammatical clues present in the sentences to arrive at the intended meanings. Thus, increasing the students' vocabulary and simultaneously developing their guessing skills should be given the priority in teaching reading comprehension.

Error Analysis of the Difficulties the Students of the Department of English of the College of Arts at Basrah University Encounter in Understanding the Contextual Meaning of English Polysemes

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Appendix I

Translate the following sentences into Arabic:

1. We sat down on a big flat rock.
2. I like your dress-it's a beautiful colour.
3. There must be someone at home-the light is on in the kitchen.
4. If you're tired, we'll stop and rest for a while.
5. Did you close all the doors and windows?
6. Can we go now, please?
7. She lit her cigarette with a match.
8. He is wearing a dark suit.
9. Hospital blood banks have saved many lives.
10. I strongly object to being treated like a child.
11. The only view from my bedroom window is of some factory chimneys.
12. Muslims fast during Ramadan.
13. The sentence of the court was three years' imprisonment.
14. Turn right at the crossroads.
15. We are giving John a party for his birthday.
16. Who lives in the top flat?
17. He cried like a baby when they told him the news.
18. We'll eat some of the butter and keep the rest of it for breakfast.
19. He lives close to the church.
20. It's difficult to please everybody.
21. Who's going to referee the football match?
22. Will it suit you, if I come around at three?
23. They sat on a grassy bank at the edge of the field
24. What's that little black object?
25. What are your views on free university education?
26. This train travels fast and stops at few stations.
27. A paragraph is a group of several sentences dealing with one main idea.
28. It's difficult to know what is the right thing to do in this situation.
29. It's so light, a child can lift it.
30. I read a book about the Socialist party.

تحليل أخطاء للصعوبات التي يواجهها طلاب قسم اللغة الانكليزية في كلية الآداب جامعة البصرة في فهم المعاني السياقية للكلمات الانكليزية المتعددة المعاني

الخلاصة

تُلقي هذه الدراسة الضوء على موضوع مهم جداً في مادة القراءة والاستيعاب وهو تعدد المعاني فاشترك معنيين أو أكثر بكلمة واحدة قد يُربك طلاب اللغة الانكليزية وهم يحاولون التوصل إلى المعنى السياقي المراد لذلك تم اختبار قدرة طلاب المرحلة الثالثة على استخدام المؤشرات اللغوية لتخمين المعنى عند ترجمتهم لثلاثين جملة تحتوي على خمسة عشر كلمة متعددة المعاني وتظهر النتائج الإحصائية إن طلاب المرحلة الثالثة يواجهون صعوبة في فهم المعاني السياقية للكلمات المتعددة المعاني على الرغم من أنهم درسوا مادة القراءة والاستيعاب في المرحلتين الأولى والثانية في قسم اللغة الانكليزية وتفتقر الباحثان للتغلب على مثل هذه الصعوبة زيادة خزين مفردات الطلاب وتطوير قدراتهم على تخمين المعنى.