



Alicja Cuper

State School of Higher Education, Chełm

ORCID: 0000-0002-8891-9454

Some Facts on Homonymy in Polish

Homonymy w języku polskim: wybrane aspekty

Abstract

This paper focuses on the investigation into homonymy in Polish, taking into account the existing definitions of this phenomenon. It presents the origin of the word HOMONYMY together with its types with numerous examples. Some of the definitions have been exemplified via lexemes taken from other languages in order to clarify the notion of interlingual homonymy.

Key words: *homonymy, polysemy, entry, lexeme, interlingual.*

Abstrakt

Praca ta skupia swoją uwagę na analizie procesu homonimii w języku polskim, podając funkcjonujące definicje tego zjawiska. Prezentuje ona również pochodzenie słowa “homonimia” i przedstawia różne rodzaje homonimii. Niektóre z definicji opatrzone są przykładami z innych języków w celu głębszego zaprezentowania homonimii międzyjęzykowej.

Słowa kluczowe: *homonimia, polisemia, hasło, lexem, międzyjęzykowy.*

Introduction

Semantics is the branch of linguistics which mainly concentrates on the meaning of words, phrases and sentences. It is frequently described as the study of meaning communicated through language. (Saeed, 2009, p. 3)

To understand a sentence we must know much more than the analysis of this sentence on each linguistic level. We must also know the reference and meaning of the morphemes and words of which it is composed, naturally, grammar cannot be expected to be of much help here. These notions form the subject matter for semantics. (Chomsky, 2009, p. 112)

Cruse states that semantics has many areas among which are the following:

1. Grammatical semantics which studies aspects of meaning closely related to syntax.
2. Logical semantics which studies the relations between natural language and formal logical systems such as the propositional and predicate calculi.
3. Linguistic pragmatics which can be simply defined as the branch of linguistics that studies the way the context influences meaning.
4. Lexical semantics which studies the meaning of content words. (Cruse, 2000, p. 110)

The focus of this work is to analyse the phenomenon strictly connected with the word meaning or meanings, namely homonymy. Homonymy is often contrasted with the phenomenon of polysemy, which is associated with the word meaning as well.

The Stoics noticed that “a single concept can be expressed by several different words (synonymy) and that, conversely, one word can carry different meanings (polysemy)”. (Ravin and Leacock, 2000, p. 1) However, it was in 1897 when the term first appeared in Michael Breal’s *Essai de Semantique* (1897). In 1900 it was translated into English *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning* where a newly coined term appeared.

The new meaning of the word, whatever it may be, does not make an end of the old. They exist alongside of one another. The same term can be employed alternately in the strict or in the metaphorical sense, in the restricted or in the expanded

sense, in the abstract or in the concrete sense. In proportion as a new signification is given to a word, it appears to multiply and produce fresh examples, similar in form, but different in value. We shall call this phenomenon of multiplication Polysemia. (Breal, 1900, p. 139)

Although most of the psycholinguistic research has been focused on the comprehension of homonymy rather than polysemy (Klepousniotou, 2008, p. 1534), many linguists claim that most frequent words in English texts are polysemous. Falkum and Vincente explain this little attention towards polysemy as “the predominance of generative grammar with its focus on the sentence as the central unit of meaning. However, with the emergence of the cognitive grammar during the 1980’s polysemy emerged on the research agenda as a key topic in lexical semantics”. (Falkum and Vincente, 2015, p. 5)

Homonymy vs Polysemy

Both homonymy and polysemy are strictly connected with lexical ambiguity, since they both deal with multiple meanings of the word. The difference between homonymy and polysemy is as follows: the focus of the former is a word having several meanings which are unrelated while the focus of the latter is a word having several meanings which are related. In other words, “whereas homonymy (whether absolute or partial) is a relation that holds between two or more distinct lexemes, polysemy (multiple meaning) is a property of single lexemes”. (Lyons, 1995, p. 58)

M. L. Murphy and A. Koskela expand the definition of the two linguistic issues in the following way:

Homonymy and polysemy both involve one lexical form that is associated with multiple senses and as such both are possible sources of lexical ambiguity. But while homonyms are distinct lexemes that happen to share the same form, in polysemy a single lexeme is associated with multiple senses. The distinction between homonymy and polysemy is usually made on the basis of the relatedness of the senses: polysemy involves related senses, whereas the senses associated with homonymous lexemes are not related. (Murphy&Koskela, 2010, p. 79)

Basically, in homonymy most words share the same orthography and phonology, but are unrelated in meaning. An example could be the word

bank which means (i) 'financial institution' and (ii) 'land at river's edge'. Dictionaries have two different lexical entries for this word. In polysemy, on the other hand, words share not only the same orthography and phonology, but are also semantically connected. The word *book* is an example comprising several meanings: (i) 'a written text that can be published in printed or electronic form', (ii) 'a set of pages that have been fastened together inside a cover to be read', (iii) 'one of the parts that a very long book, such as *The Bible*, is divided into' (*The Book of Job*) (Cambridge Online Dictionary).

Additionally, to classify a word as homonymous or polysemous lexicographers take into account the etymology of a word. Words of distinct origin are claimed to be homonymous, whereas those from the same source are polysemous. However, this criteria is not always relevant, since there are instances of separate entries of two lexemes having a common origin. The form *pupil* has two different senses (i) 'part of the eye', and (ii) 'school child', and historically they have a common origin, but now they are semantically unrelated. Similarly, all dictionaries treat *flower* and *flour* as homonyms with separate listing, although originally they were the same word "the distinction between homonymy and polysemy is not an easy one to make. Two lexemes are either identical in form or not, but relatedness of meaning is not a matter of yes or no; it is a matter of more or less". (Kreidler, 1998, p. 52)

Many authors have claimed that lexical ambiguity should be represented as a continuum rather than a dichotomy:

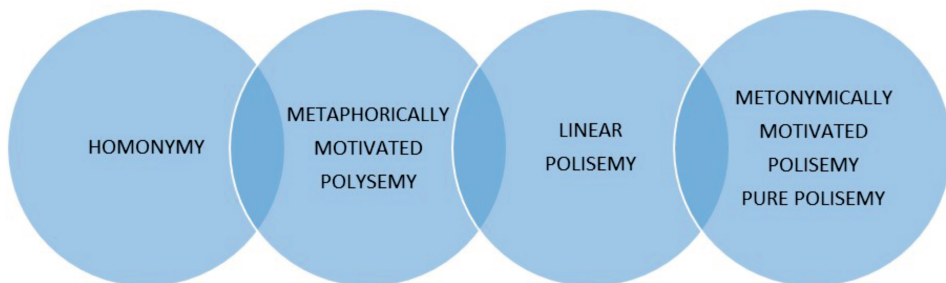
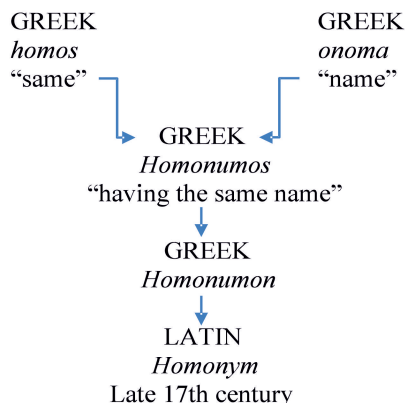


Figure 1: Lexical ambiguity (Lyons, 1977, p. 550)

Homonymy

The origin of the word:



Elżbieta Awramiuk defines homonymy in the following way:

Homonymy, in general terms, consists in expressing different meanings via the usage of the identical language form. The notions of 'form' and 'meaning' are connected with the theory of the language sign. The communication between people is strictly connected with the usage of different forms, both spoken and written. These forms constitute unilateral groups and only by the semantic interpretation (bilaterality) can we distinguish if we deal with one language entity or more. [...] Homonymy exists when two or more bilateral entities have the same form. (Awramiuk, 2011, p. 29)

On the other hand, Tomasz Krzeszowski (Krzeszowski, 2016, p. 106) distinguishes between true homonymy and partial homonymy. The former consists in unrelated meanings, orthographically identical forms and grammatical equivalents; the latter should fulfil the condition of at least one form identity, for example, *found* as the past simple of *to find* and *found* as the basic form of the verb *to found* meaning 'to establish'.

Homonymy as a linguistic phenomenon is the issue of interest for linguists and poses theoretical and practical problems. Linguists, across language boundaries, cannot provide the systematic classification of homonymy common for all languages. Theoretical problems are connected with divergent classification systems among languages, not coherent methods of analysis

and a broadly developed system of the description of homonymy (inflectional homonymy, lexical homonymy, syntactic homonymy, phraseological homonymy, homophony, homography, textual homonymy, interlingual homonymy, heterography, heteronymy). Practical problems arise when dictionaries are compiled by lexicographers since they are forced to adopt concrete practical solutions to organize words into entries. For example, in Polish the word *wieść* is both a verb and a noun having two separate entries in dictionaries (*wiedzie spór* – verb, *o dziwnych wieściach* – noun). Language users become aware of the existence of homonymy at school when confronted with reading and writing together with communicational misunderstandings while writing/reading and speaking/listening. Homonymy becomes the source of orthographical problems in distinction between proper names from common names (*Szwedka/szwedka*, *Prusak/prusak*). (Awramiuk, 2011, p. 32)

According to K. Wojan:

Homonymy represents language universals. The existence of homonymy in natural languages is of upper importance and at the same time the rule, based on the nature of language. [...] It is not a phenomenon that homonyms come into existence in the system of any language [...] but longlasting homonymy acceptance in any language is astonishing since the nature of the language is to delete any forms interfering with the fluency and homogeneity, and consequently, it stands in opposition to the fundamental language function, namely, communication. (Wojan, 2004, p. 73)

Additionally, Małgorzata Majewska (Majewska, 2002, p. 24) claims that homonyms are entities which differ in the idea of the content along with the idea of the expression. What is more, it is vital to remember that the written form constitutes the conventional system, whereas the phonemic realisation of a given entity depends on its phonetic position.

Pokaż mi gdzie jest Bródno.

Pokaż mi gdzie jest brudno.

J. Lyons (1977) underlines the potential of dual formal identity of words – phonemic substance identity and graphic substance identity and says that two words entities are formally identical in their phonemic substance on condition that they have the same phonological representation, whereas in graphic substance on condition that they have the same orthographic representation.

The division of homonymy in Polish

According to K. Wojan, homonymy in the Polish language comprises the following categories: morphological homonymy, lexical homonymy, phraseological homonymy, syntactic homonymy and phonemic homonymy. (Wojan, 2004, p. 74)

Morphological homonymy occurs when two or more lexical entries are identical in graphic representation, but manifest two or more different parts of speech. (Kaleta, 2011, p. 17)

- The word *piła* in Polish is both a verb and a noun (the former meaning past tense of the verb 'to drink' in the 3rd person singular, the latter meaning 'a device for sawing')
- The word *chory* in Polish is both a noun and an adjective (the former meaning 'a sick person, the latter describing 'the state of being ill')
- The word *koło* in Polish is both a noun and a preposition (the former meaning 'a circle', the latter describing 'the position of an object in relation to another object')
- The word *przepaść* in Polish is both a noun and a verb (the former meaning 'abyss', the latter 'to vanish')

Lexical homonymy occurs when two or more lexical entries represent the same part of speech. Małgorzata Majewska provides the simplest definition of lexical homonymy and states that lexical homonyms are words having the same pronunciation but different meaning. (Majewska, 2006, p. 17)

- The word *zamek* in Polish is a noun in all its entries meaning 'a device used for closing the door' and 'a castle'
- The word *kosztować* in Polish is a verb in all its entries meaning 'to try the taste of' and 'to cost'

Phraseological homonymy occurs when a phrase may acquire more than one interpretation depending on the classification of nouns forming it (proper names or common names).

- The phrase *Zielona Góra* is a proper name which is the name of a town in Poland, but *zielona góra* as a common noun meaning 'a hill covered with grass and trees'
- In the phrase *Wycieczki do Łazienek*, *Łazienki* is a proper name referring to an attractive place for tourists in Warsaw, but *łazienki* is a common noun meaning 'bathrooms'
- The phrase *No to Bach!* is a title of the article in a Polish magazine 'Polityka' devoted to the Bach Festival in Świdnica (*Bach* referring to the surname of a famous composer), however, *No to bach!* is

an onomatopoeic phrase mostly used with an exclamation mark often summerising great expectations which end up in a sort of misfortune

- In the phrase *dżem z Biedronki*, 'Biedronka' is a proper name referring to the name of a chain store, whereas 'biedronka' is a name of an insect (ladybird)

Syntactic homonymy is when the differences and ambiguity in meaning arise on the sentence level. The interpretation of such sentences is narrowed when analysed in context.

- *Podaj parasol Oli!* (one interpretation is 'Give the umbrella to Ola' and the other 'Give Ola's umbrella')
- *Zabójstwo znanego aktora wstrząsnęło opinią publiczną.* (one interpretation is 'a famous actor killed someone' and the other 'a famous actor was killed by someone')
- *Nie dawała mu spokoju zdrada żony.* (one interpretation is that 'he couldn't accept his wife cheating on him' and the other is that 'he couldn't accept his cheating on his wife')
- *Tu jest brudno!/ Bródno!* (the former referring to the district of Warsaw, the latter describing the state of place being dirty)

Phonemic homonymy is the state of phonetic identity of two or more lexical entries which differ in orthography, etymology and meaning. Phonemic homonymy is called homophony and according to Małgorzata Majewska (Majewska, 2006, p. 23), the phenomenon of homophony is superior to homonymy since it comprises all entries identical in terms of pronunciation:

- *Może/morze/może/* – maybe/sea
- *Bóg/Bug/buk/* – God/river's name
- *Miau/miał/m'au/* – purr/he had
- *Krzyk/kszyk/kşik/* – cry/common snipe

Additionally, Elżbieta Awramiuk (Awramiuk, 2011, p. 30) presents the homonymy of complex forms which consists in a bilateral sequence of sounds leading to various orthographic segmentations of a text, consequently, manifesting various meanings:

- */manastrɔjɛ/* – the interpretation depends on the speaker's message intention and the context
 - Ma nas troje.* – There are three of us in the family.
 - Ma nastroje.* – She is moody.
 - Ma na stroje.* – She has money to buy clothes.
- */marica/*
 - Marysia.* – the name of the woman.

Ma rysia. – She has a lynx.

Ma Rysia. – Her partner's name is Rysio.

– /nauk^jipɔp^jis/

Nauki po PIS. – teachings following the PIS's reign.

Nauki PO PIS. – teachings of two political parties.

Nauki popis. – display of the excellent knowledge.

Radosław Kaleta discusses the concept of homography, where two or more entries are identical in spelling, but different in pronunciation, meaning and etymology. (Kaleta, 2011, p. 21)

– *zamarzać*

1. /zamarzać/ – to get frozen

2. /zamażać/ – to dream of

– *cis*

1. /ćis/ – a plant

2. /c-is/ – musical term

– *rozmarzać*

1. /rozmarzać/ – to melt

2. /rozmażać/ – to encourage to dream

Interlingual homonymy

Interlingual homonymy appears across languages when two or more lexes constitute homonymous pairs in two or more languages. E. Awramiuk in her work *Impressive Function of Homonymy* presents a few examples of this phenomenon in Polish and English titles of articles in a Polish magazine 'Polityka'. (Awramiuk, 2011, p. 35)

– *Murem za Moorem* (P2004/32:89) – the title shows the phonetic similarity of the surname of the American director with a Polish word meaning *wall*. What is more, the title is based on a Polish idiom 'stać za kimś murem' (strongly support somebody's decisions) which enhances the impressive effect.

– *Od grata – non grata* (P2004/32:82) – the title can be associated with the time when Poland entered the EU and many people started to bring old cars on which the Treasury imposed excise tax. The form of a Polish word *grat* (meaning 'an old car') used in the title is identical with the word used in a Latin phrase *persona non grata* which means 'someone who is not welcome'.

– *Bushujący w kukurydzy* (P2006/8:74) – in this title *bushujący* which refers to the word *busz* is homonymous with the surname of the Ameri-

can president Bush. This example shows homonymy on the morpheme level.

- *Kieliszek cavy* (P2007/29:82) – this example presents phonemic homonymy of the words *kawa* and *cava*, the former is coffee, and the latter sparkling wine.

Linguists attach to interlingual homonymy the following division:

- Internal interlingual homonymy
- External interlingual homonymy
- Semantic interlingual homonymy

The definition of internal interlingual homonymy states that two lexemes should be identical in phonetic and graphic representations in at least two languages. What is more, these lexemes must constitute homonyms within their internal language systems. (Wojan, 2010, p. 270)

In Polish:

aura I

- the weather condition;
- the atmosphere of a place;
- the relations among people;

aura II

- illness symptoms;
- a part of astral body;

In Finnish:

aura I

- plough;

aura II

- the Aurojoki river;

aura III

- weather;
- the atmosphere of a place;

aura IV

- illness symptoms;
- a part of astral body;

In Russian:

аура I

- the atmosphere of a place;

аура II

- illness symptoms;
- a part of astral body;

In English:

aura I

– the state of mind, mood;

aura II

– the atmosphere of a place;

aura III

– the movement of air in an electrified point;

aura IV

– illness symptoms.

External interlingual homonymy is based on the existence of two or more identical lexemes in terms of phonetic and graphic representations, in at least two languages. However, these lexemes do not represent homonymy within their internal language system. Consequently, this phenomenon is often described as 'false friends'.

English word:

adapter – extension block

angina – angina pectoris

lunatic – crazy

magazine – journal

smoking – the act of smoking cigarettes

Polish word:

adapter – record player

angina – tonsillitis

lunatyk – somnambulist

magazyn – warehouse

smoking – suit

Semantic interlingual homonymy occurs when two or more lexemes are homonymous within their internal language systems but phonetic and graphic representations vary across languages. Additionally, they represent equivalent fields. (Wojan, 2007)

In Polish:

kaczka I

– a type of homebird;

– used in a phraseological phrase;

– play ducks and drakes;

kaczka II

– rumour, hoax;

kaczka III

– the container in hospital used for pissing;

– a line holder on a yacht;

– a duck plane;

In Finnish:

ankka I

– a type of bird;

– a male duck;

ankka II

- spread rumours

In Russian:

утка I

- a type of bird;
- a container for pissing;

утка II

- hoax;
- spread rumours;

утка III

- a duck plane.

The phenomenon of homonymy seems to be very regular, however, in Polish homophones appear more often than homographs. This fact is associated with the morphological nature of Polish. Linguists and lexicographers are highly interested in homonymy, although for language analysis it is very often viewed as troublesome on both theoretical and practical levels. What can be noticed on the basis of a few examples given in this article, homonymy is often used purposefully in its impressive function which is based on ambiguity triggered by common or proper nouns. Any language homonymous ambiguity makes the language more attractive, dynamic and humorous.

Bibliography

- Awramiuk, E. (2011). "Homonymia w funkcji impresywnej". In: *Białostockie Archiwum Językowe*, no 11.
- Bréal, M. (1900). *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning*. London: William Heinemann.
- Chomsky, N. (2009). *Selected Readings on Transformational Theory*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
- Cruse, D.A. (2000). *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Falkum, I.L. & Vicente, A. (eds.) (2015). "Polysemy: Current Perspectives and Approaches". In: *Lingua*, vol. 157.
- Kaleta, R. (2011). *Białorusko-polska homonymia międzyjęzykowa*. Warszawa: Wydział Lingwistyki Stosowanej.
- Klepousniotou, E. et al. (2008). "Making Sense of Word Senses: The Comprehension of Polysemy Depends on Sense Overlap". In: *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, vol. 34, no. 6.
- Kreidler, Ch.W. (1998). *Introducing English Semantics*. New York: Routledge.

- Krzeszowki, T.P. (2016). *The Translation Equivalence: Meaning and Translation*. New York-London: Peter Lang.
- Lyons, J. (1977). *Semantics, vol. 2*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Majewska, M. (2002). *Homonimia i homonimy w opisie językoznawczym*. Warszawa: Elipsa.
- Majewska, M.B. (2006). *Rzeczownikowe homonimy heterogeniczne. Analiza synchroniczna i diachroniczna*. Kraków: Lexis.
- Murphy, M.L. & Koskela, A. (2010). *Key Terms in Semantics*. New York: Continuum.
- Ravin, Y. & Leacock, C. (eds.) (2000). *Polysemy, Theoretical and Computational Approaches*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Saeed, J.I. (2009). *Semantics*. Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wojan, K. (2004). Wstęp do analizy międzyjęzykowych homonimów leksykalnych na przykładzie języków: polskiego, rosyjskiego i fińskiego. In: P. Czerwiński, H. Fontański (ed.). *Język rosyjski w konfrontacji z językami Europy w aspekcie lingwokulturoznawczym*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.

*Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Alicja Cuper, M.A. in English Philology – a faculty member of the English and American Studies Department (The State School of Higher Education in Chełm, Poland).
E-mail: suri7@op.pl*