



**THE PHENOMENON OF POLYSEMY IN ARABIC AND THE CHANGE OF WORD
MEANINGS**

Nigora Sabitovna Azimova

University of World Economy and Diplomacy

Teacher of the Department of Oriental languages

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

nigroraazimova1985@gmail.com

Abstract

The polysemy of words in the Arabic language and the change in the meaning of words are the result of the historical development of the Arab people. The formation of polysemantic words and the transition of the meaning of a word from one meaning to another were directly influenced by the social environment and worldview, culture and traditions of the Arab people. Other languages are also related to this phenomenon.

This article provides detailed information about the features of the phenomenon of polysemy in the Arabic language and the changes in the meaning of words in the Arabic language with examples.

Key words: polysemy, polysemantic words, monosemy, linguists, semantic meaning, expansion of meaning, narrowing of meaning.

Introduction

Polysemantic words denote objects and phenomena that are unrelated or only loosely related. However, their common feature is closeness of meaning, and the meanings of polysemantic words are based on exactly one meaning, that is, their meanings derive from a single primary meaning. They represent semantically subordinate meanings. Even if the meaning in polysemantic words changes, the precise similarity of the word form remains unchanged. "Polysemy arises not only from the connections between objects, phenomena, and concepts in reality, but also from the relationship between meanings." The mutual subordination of individual lexical meanings influences both the function and development of polysemantic words.

Polysemy is a common phenomenon in Arabic. Unambiguity is relatively rare in this language. It should also be noted that polysemy is a phenomenon characteristic of words widely used by native Arabic speakers. Polysemy has long been considered a phenomenon resulting from an imbalance between the limited number of speech signs—words—and the unlimited number of meanings that need to be expressed. In fact, "for each meaning, there must be a separate expression that conveys it, but this is impossible." Fakhriddin al-Razi and his followers explained the polysemy of words as follows: "Every meaning cannot be expressed by a single word, because the perception



of meaning can be unlimited. Since words are made of letters, and letters are few, their number is limited." A word formed from a limited number of something will also have a limited number of meanings. And a limited number of something cannot express an unlimited number of something. Otherwise, the number of things being expressed would also be limited. This is why there is a need for words with multiple meanings in language.

In Arabic, words with multiple meanings are called "al-asma ul-mushtaraka". Words with multiple meanings are called اللون, العين, الجون, which have different meanings.

The primary meanings of words created throughout the history of the Arabic language are primarily specific and expressive. Arabs gave concrete names to various objects and phenomena in the world around them. The transition from specific to abstract meaning is a simple type of transition from a historical perspective. The transition from the specific to the abstract through the expansion of the lexical-semantic-grammatical relationships of verbs is a characteristic feature of verbs, which, in turn, leads to a change in their syntactic-grammatical relationships.

We can give the following examples of such verbs:

امتطى – means “to ride a saddled animal”. Nowadays, it is also used to mean getting on a vehicle such as a bus or a ship.

ناضل – means “to compete with someone in marksmanship”. In fact, it simply means “to wrestle”.

استقى – means “to ask for a conclusion on Sharia issues”. This verb is also used to simply mean “to ask for advice on something”, and under the influence of Islam, its meaning has narrowed and become specific to asking questions on Sharia issues.

إتراد – means “to go in search of pasture and water”

استورد – means “to go to fetch water”. This verb actually means “to bring”, “to bring”.

The above verbs have expanded their range of objects over time.

When a certain word is transferred to an object as a noun or when the word has been used in relation to another object or phenomenon, the change in the subject-conceptual content of the word leads to the formation of new meanings in the words. In addition, when a word is used as a term, the name is transferred to a specific object, and the meaning of verb derivatives (infinitives, adjectives, etc.) changes from an abstract or general meaning to a specific subject-noun semantics.

Ancient Arab linguists noted that the use of a word in portable meanings also leads to a change in meaning.

In Arabic, the use of words in their original, literal meaning is called “الحقيقة” “al-haqiqa”. This concept was defined by Ibn Jinni as “the use of words in a manner consistent with their primary meanings”. The use of words in a figurative and figurative sense is called “المجاز” “al-majaz”.

The usual, universally accepted original meaning of a word is recognized as the correct meaning. If the figurative meaning is universally accepted and used in a usual way, it has the



quality of the correct meaning. Therefore, if the original, primary meaning of a word, that is, the correct meaning, is used less, it becomes the figurative meaning, and vice versa, if the figurative meaning is used more, it becomes the correct meaning.

In Arabic, the use of a portable meaning, i.e., transferring the meaning, is called "النقل" (an-naql).

The figurative use of a word in accordance with different perceptions paves the way for it to acquire a new meaning, in which its previous symbols and metaphors disappear, and the newly formed meaning becomes one of the equally valid and stable meanings of the word.¹

processes:

The first process is the slow independent growth, the gradual development of word meanings. In this case, when the context in which the word is used changes, the meaning of the word also changes gradually and imperceptibly.

In the second process, new meanings are given to old words that have partially or completely fallen out of use, and words are revived as a result of the use of these new meanings. However, these two processes are relatively limited within the framework of the Arabic language.

The third process is related to other languages, in which Arabic words acquire the meanings of words that are semantically similar to them in a foreign language.

Semantic change of words is classified according to the following:

1. Expansion of meanings

2. Narrowing of meanings

3. Mixing of meanings (metaphor, metonymy, i.e. the use of one word in place of another related word, for example, the use of the word "wallet" in the meaning of "money", the use of the word "table" in the meaning of "food", and synecdoche (i.e. calling the whole by the name of one of its parts and vice versa, calling the part by the name of the whole)).

In the narrowing of meanings, that is, in the reduction of meanings, the general, original meaning is transferred to the specific meaning. For example: (they were given classical, then modern meanings):

The word أَثْلَاقُ was used in ancient times to refer to all property, including domestic animals. Now it is used only in the meaning of household appliances - furniture.

غَنَمٌ - was used to denote all types of small cattle, later its meaning narrowed and now it means only "sheep".

وَلَدٌ - used to mean "child" regardless of gender, but over time the meaning of this word became more specific and began to be used in relation to the neuter gender, that is, "boy".

¹ Ibid



Many terms related to the Islamic religion were also formed through the narrowing of the meanings of words. In this case, the lexical meaning of the word before Islam was narrowed and adapted to a certain concept after the spread of Islam and changes in social life. For example:

حَجَّ - used in the sense of "going somewhere", "going", after Islam its meaning narrowed and began to be used only for performing the pilgrimage.

مُؤْمِنٌ - meant "one who believes in something". Now it is used in the sense of "a believer" who has believed in Islam.

In the expansion of meaning, the opposite of the above situation can be seen. In this case, the meaning of the word expands, and it moves from a narrow, private meaning to a broad, original meaning. For example:

سُفْرَةٌ - previously used only in relation to the food of a traveler. Now it generally expresses the meaning of "a table at which to eat".

سَجَّادَةٌ - used in the meaning of "prayer mat, prayer rug", but as a result of the expansion of the meaning, this word came to be used in relation to any "rug".

مَوْرِدٌ - previously used only in relation to a water source, now it expresses the general meaning of "source".

زَيْتٌ - used to denote olive oil, but is now used to refer to any type of oil.

زَمِيلٌ - used to mean "a person who rides or works with someone on the same camel". Over time, the meaning of this word expanded and is now used in the meanings of "colleague" or "classmate".

مُخَضَّرٌ - used to refer to a poet who lived in the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, and later to a person living in any of the two periods.

Three different phenomena related to the semantics of the word can be seen in the change of meanings. These are:

Metaphor

Metonymy

Synecdoche

Metaphor is the transfer of the name of one of the two objects to the other based on the similarity of the two objects.

Metonymy is based on the interconnection of phenomena, the fact that an object represents related phenomena. That is, in this case, instead of one word, another word related to it is used. For example:

يَمِينٌ - right hand - oath

صَفَّقَ - to throw a hand, to bless - to agree

وَضِيقَةٌ - salary, salary - position

قَهْوَةٌ - coffee - coffeehouse



رصاص – lead – arrows

حديد – iron – shackles

دخان – smoke – tobacco

قطن – cotton – a shirt made of yarn

حرير – silk – a silk shirt

Metonymy is a unique phenomenon in the Arabic language as a method of transfer, therefore, linguists have found that in the Arabic language, for example, since the sky is the cause of rain, it is called “مَطَرٌ” – rain, “سَمَاءٌ” – sky, or “غَيْثٌ” – because it is rain, and things that grow after rain are also called “غَيْثٌ”. It is emphasized that it is customary to call by the name of the cause, as it is called. The use of proper nouns as common nouns is also called metonymy. Relative nouns are often made from them. Such words are relatively rare in number. The following can be cited as examples of them:

أَجْرُمِيّ – “grammatical” and “أَجْرُومِيَّةٌ” – derived from the name of Ibn Ajrum (1273-1323), the founder of the famous and widespread school of Arabic linguistics in grammar.

طُفَيْلِيّ – “uninvited or unwelcome guest” and even “scoundrel, living at someone else’s expense” are also derived from the name of Tufail of Kufa, who was known and famous for his unkindness and unkindness.

عُرْقُوبِيّ – derived from the name of Urqub, known for his deceitfulness, deceit, and promise.

حَاتِمِيّ – derived from the name of Hatam, who came from the "Tay" tribe, who made a name for himself with his generosity.

حَوَاءٌ – “woman” is derived from the name of the mother Eve (the ancestor of women).

آدَمِيّ – “human”, “human being” and آدَمٌ – “man”, “human” are words derived from the name of Adam.

The second method consists in changing the ratio of words to objects, if necessary. In this process, people who know the literary language very well play a key role. In this case, the meanings do not undergo a real progressive development - only the existing lexicon is selected, and a new one is used from it.

The recognition of the similarity between ancient and new concepts, the fact that ancient, especially half-forgotten or completely forgotten words, accepted for further use not only by the public, but also by authoritative language institutions, do not differ in meaning from newly created words, are cases of successful transfer of words from one period to another.² Masalan:

مجلة – paper roll – magazine

صحيفة – a sheet of paper filled with writing – newspaper

قاطرة – the head camel in the caravan – locomotive

² Ibid



قطار – a caravan of camels – a train

أزمة – a year of poor harvest, a year of drought – crisis, tension

أرْبَةٌ – a knot – a tie

Also, changes in the meanings of words occur through the direct influence of other languages. Such changes consist in the semantic convergence of an Arabic word with a word that means the same name in a foreign language, and at the same time, Arabic words whose semantics have points of convergence with other languages, in many cases, can partially or completely copy the semantics of foreign words. For example, “متقاطع كلمة” – a crossword puzzle is called the English “cross-word”; “الأطفال روضة” - kindergarten with the French “jardin d’efants”, “عارية حقيقة” - naked truth (i.e. the true truth), “منظرة وردية” - pink glasses (that make everything look beautiful), and similar figurative foreign word combinations have the same character.

In conclusion, it can be said that polysemy is a common phenomenon in the Arabic language. Most words in this language have multiple meanings, and words with one meaning are a rarity. No matter which dictionary we open, we will be convinced of this..

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