

ENGLISH LEXICOLOGY

Lecture 4 Part 2:

Polysemy. Homonymy.

POLYSEMY in English

Questions for discussion:

- 1. Sources/causes of polysemy.**
- 2. Semantic structure of polysemantic words.**
- 3. Polysemy & context.**
- 4. Correlative words in different languages.**

Polysemantic/polysemous words – words possessing 2 or *more meanings/senses* (= *lexical-semantic variants*).

- **monosemantic words are rare:**
molecule, comma, megalopolis

FACTORS

determining the frequency of polysemy

extra-linguistic:



1) the period during which a word exists in the lg;

2) frequency of usage

linguistic:



1) mg of a word (*generic words: get, take etc.*);

1. **SOURCES of polysemy:**

1) a change in the semantic structure of a word in the process of lexical-semantic naming;

2) homonymy:

- ‘*ear*’

1) *part of human body/head* (from Lat. ‘*auris*’),

2) *upper part of plant (wheat)* (from Lat. ‘*acus*’)

2. The **semantic structure of a word** –
a *totality of all the mgs*
the word possesses.

mgs/senses of a polysemantic words

=

lexical-semantic variants (A.I.Smirnitsky)

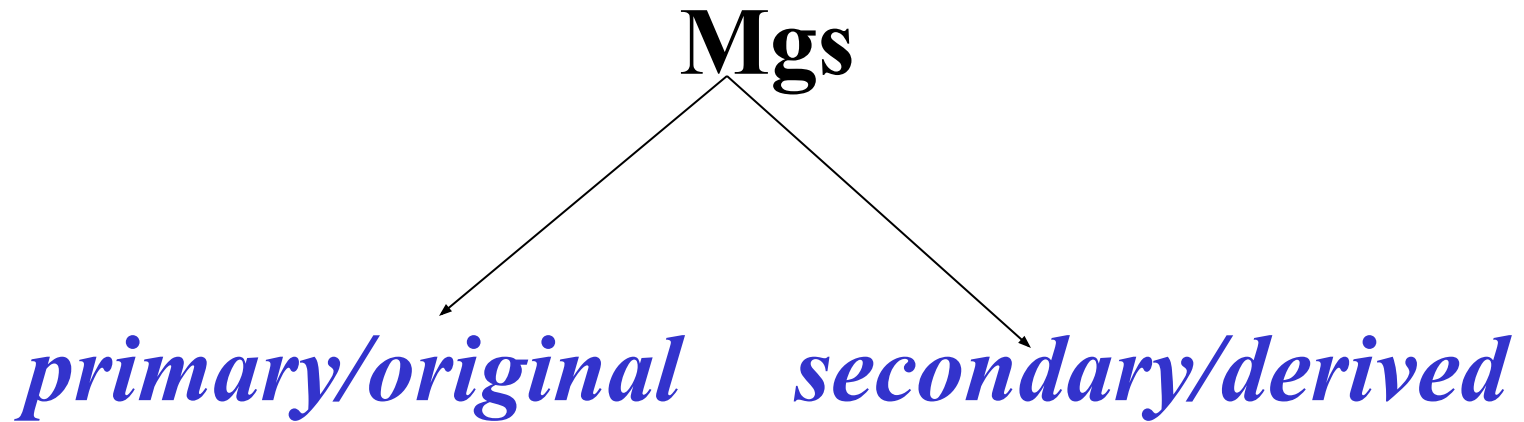
Semantic structure

diachronic approach

synchronic approach



Diachronic approach:



'table' 1) 'a flat slab of stone/wood'

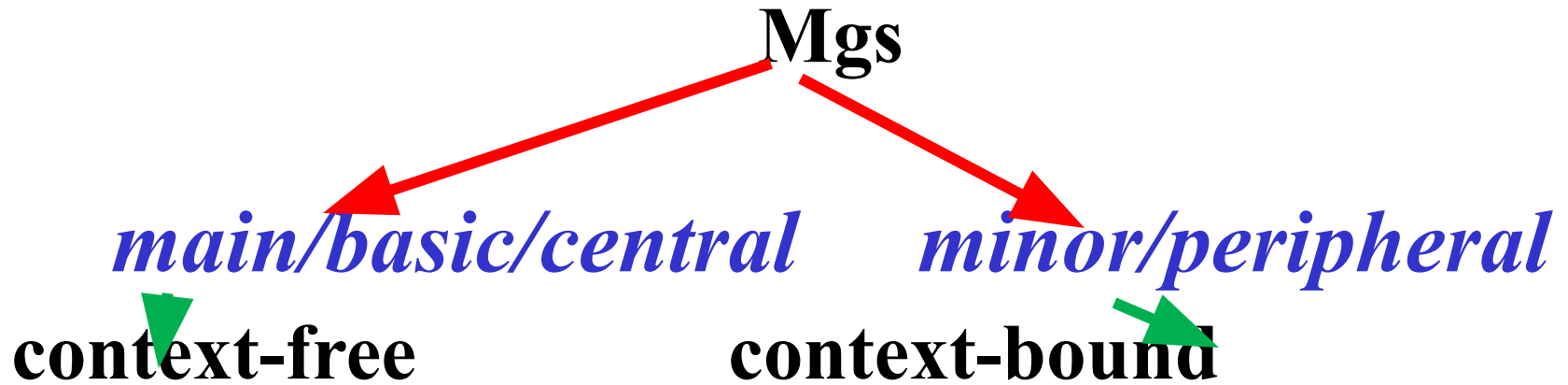
2) a piece of furniture

Synchronically:

polysemy – coexistence of different mgs of the same word in a certain historical period

- *frequency* of mgs occurrence in speech

Synchronic approach:



- style reference
- historical development (*'mantra'*, *'guru'*)

3. Polysemy & context

CONTEXT– the minimal stretch of speech determining each individual mg of the word

CONTEXT

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graph TD; A[CONTEXT] --> B[linguistic/verbal]; A --> C[extra-linguistic/  
context of situation];
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linguistic/verbal

*extra-linguistic/
context of situation*

Linguistic context

lexical

grammatical

'heavy' 1) load/table

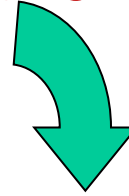
2) rain/wind/snow

3) industry/artillery

to *make* smb. do smth

to *make* a good wife

Extra-linguistic context



the mg is determined by the actual speech situation in which this word is used



‘sweet and lovely wall’

John is looking for the glasses.

The bill is large.

Polysemy:

- a linguistic universal
- a source of *ambiguity* in a lg
- pun:
 - *You missed my class yesterday.*
 - *Not in the least, sir, not in the least.*

4. Correlative words.

Correlative/correlated words – words of different lgs, *similar in lexical mg* (esp. in *denotational mg*)

- *no one-to-one correspondence* btw semantic structures of correlated p/semantic words in different lgs

‘Butterfly’

1. a flying insect with a long thin body and four large, usually brightly coloured, wings

2. the small metal part put on the back of a stud that keeps it in place

3. a person who is not responsible or serious, and who is likely to change activities easily or only be interested in pleasure

4. a swimming stroke in which you swim on your front and lift both arms forward at the same time while your legs move up and down together

Cf. bow-tie

‘Бабочка’

1. насекомое с двумя парами крыльев разнообразной окраски, покрытых микроскопическими чешуйками.

Cf. легкомысленная и непостоянная женщина

Cf. батерфляй

2. галстук в виде небольшого банта.



'table'



- 1) a piece of furniture
- 2) the persons seated at a table
- 3) the food put on a table, meals
- 4) a flat slab of stone or board
- 5) slabs of stone (with words written on them or cut into them)
- 6) *Bibl.* words cut into slabs of stone (the ten tables)

- 1) a piece of furniture
арх. застолица
- 2) the food, meals (сытний стол)
ср. плита
ср. скрижали

- ср.* заповеди
- 3) department, section, bureau

2 PROCESSES

of the semantic development of a word:

radiation

concatenation



**secondary mgs
proceed out of the
primary one**

**secondary mgs
develop like a
chain**

RADIATION:

'face'

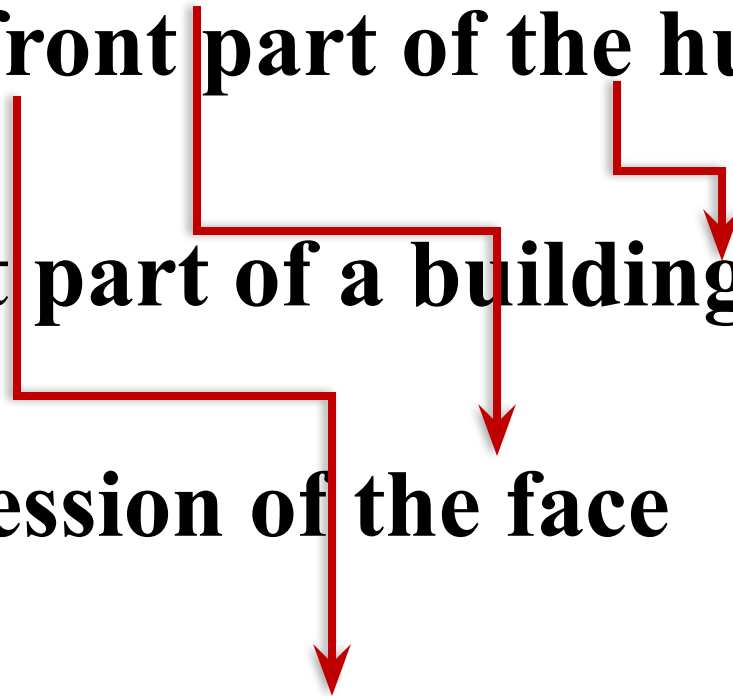


the front part of the human head

the front part of a building/watch

expression of the face

outward appearance



CONCATENATION:

'crust' — ~~hard~~ hard outer part of bread



hard part of anything (a pie/cake etc)



harder layer over soft snow



a sullen gloomy person

impudence



HOMONYMY in English

Questions for discussion:

- 1) Sources of homonymy**
- 2) Classification of homonyms**
- 3) Polysemy vs. homonymy**

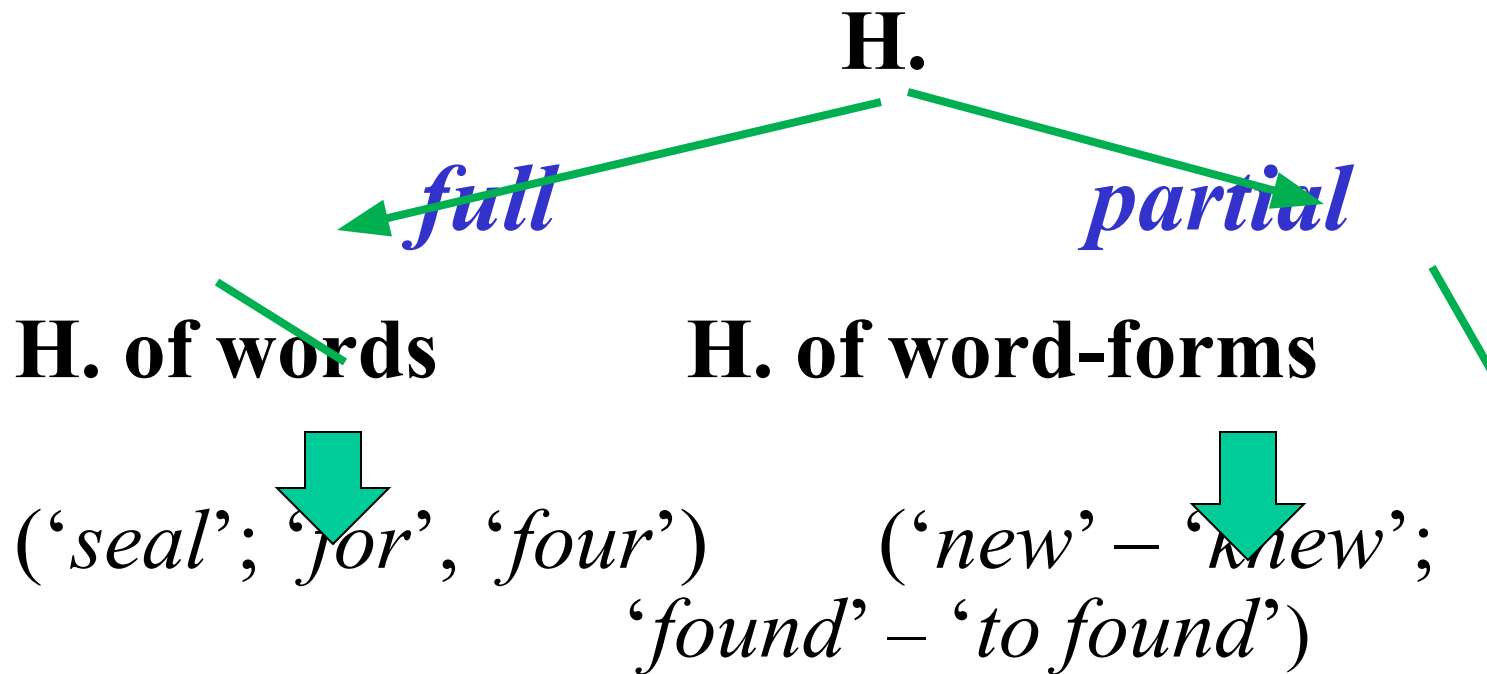
Homonyms – words identical in
sound-form but different in mg

SOURCES of homonymy:

- 1) change in pronunciation & spelling ('I' from 'ic' & 'eye' from 'eae');**
- 2) borrowings (Sc./It. *bank*; Lat./nat. *fair*);**
- 3) WF: shortening (*fan*), conversion (*seal*);**
- 4) split of polysemy (Lat. 'flos'/'florem'
→ 'flour' & 'flower');**
- 5) dialects & varieties of English (*vest, pants*)**

CLASSIFICATIONS of homonyms

1. Criterion: H. of all forms or some of them



2. Criterion: the type of mg in which H. differ

Homonyms

lexical

seal

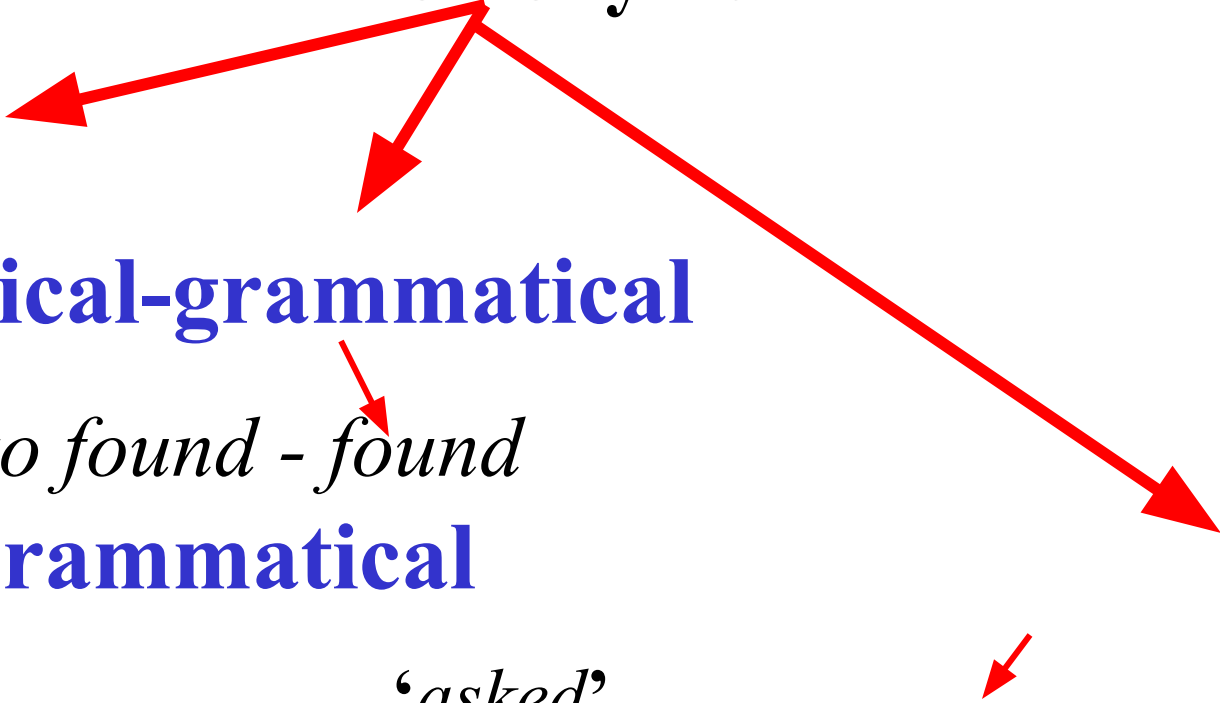
lexical-grammatical

to found - found

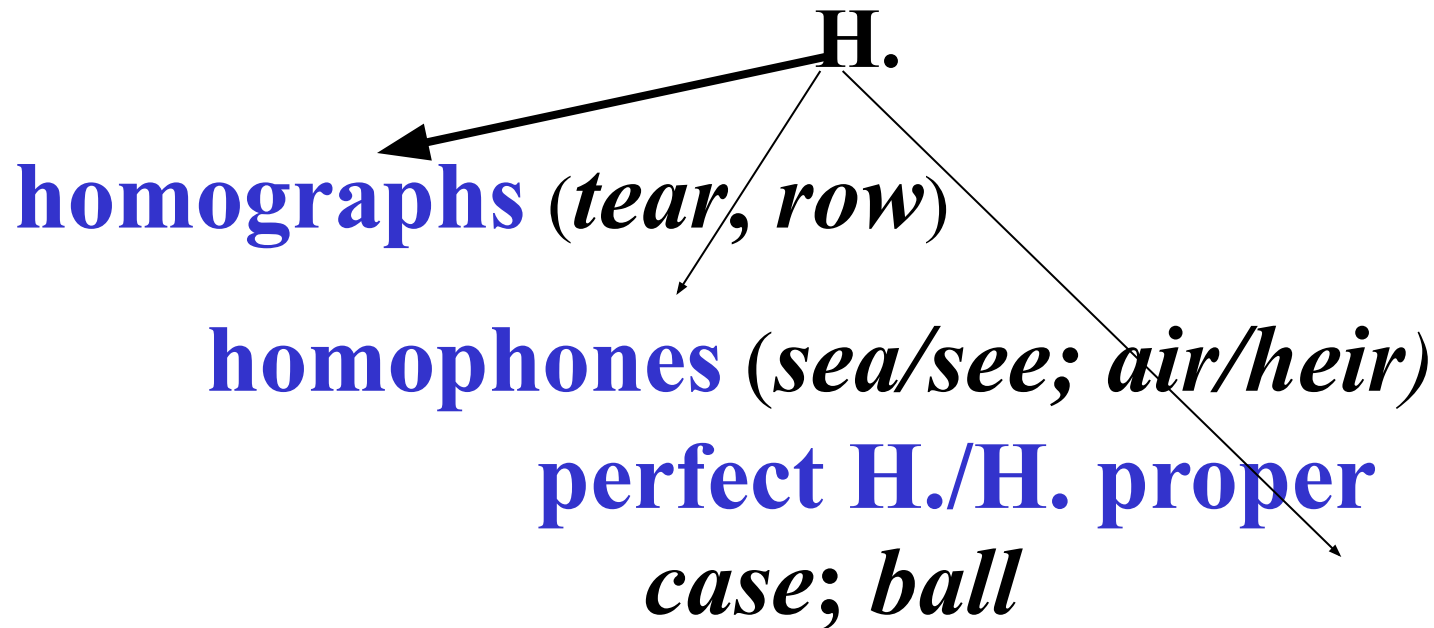
grammatical

'asked',

'brothers'/'brother's'



3. Criterion: type of the coincidence form



CRITERIA of differentiation btw polysemy & homonymy:

- 1) etymological;**
- 2) semantic (un/related mgs) -- subjective;**
- 3) spelling (for lex.-gram. & gram. homonyms);**
- 4) distribution (for lex.-gram. & gram. homonyms)**
- 5) lexicographic**

❖ p/semantic words: ‘economizing’ effect

□ homonyms: *an obstacle*?

• homonyms – source of popular humour:
‘The Importance of Being Earnest’