

THE POLYSEMY OF COMPOUND WORDS IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGE SYSTEMS AND THEIR USE IN TEXTS

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Abstract. This study examines the nature of polysemy in compounds in different language systems, with a particular focus on their use in real texts. Compounds, formed by merging two or more morphemes, often exhibit multiple meanings that may vary depending on linguistic, cultural and contextual factors. The study offers a comparative perspective by analyzing polysemic compounds in English, Russian and Turkic languages, describing both their structural and semantic differences. By conducting a cross-linguistic evaluation, the article reveals recurring trends in semantic broadening and assesses how polysemy in compounds affects interpretation, translation, and textual clarity. Furthermore, it examines how such compounds are employed in literary works, media, and everyday communication to create expressive or layered meanings. The findings highlight the critical role of polysemous compounds in multilingual communication and cognitive processing, providing practical insights for language scholars, educators, and translators.

Keywords: Polysemy, compound words, meaning, language systems, English, Russian, Turkic languages, cross-linguistic analysis, semantics, texts

I. Introduction

In modern linguistics, the study of word meaning plays an important role in understanding how language works. One of the key concepts in this area is polysemy, which means that a word or phrase can have multiple related meanings. While this concept is often discussed with simple words, compound words—which are formed by joining two or more words—can also be polysemous. These words may change their meanings depending on the context in which they are used. As stated by V.A. Plungian, “polysemy is a fundamental property of the lexical system, where one form can represent different but related meanings depending on usage” [1]. This shows that polysemy is not just a random feature but a regular part of language structure and development. Compound words are common in many languages, such as English, Russian, and Turkic languages. These compounds are often flexible in meaning and may be interpreted in different ways in real texts. For example, in English, the compound word *bookworm* may describe someone who loves reading, but in a different culture or context, it might be misunderstood or translated differently. Therefore, understanding how compound words are used in authentic communication helps us better analyze translation, interpretation, and language learning. This article focuses on the polysemy of compound words in English, Russian, and Turkic

language systems. It aims to compare how compound polysemy appears in different languages and how these words function in real texts such as literature, media, and everyday conversation. The study also highlights the practical importance of this knowledge for linguists, translators, and language teachers.

II. Methodology

This research is based on a comparative linguistic analysis of compound word polysemy in three language systems: English, Russian, and Turkic languages (such as Uzbek or Karakalpak). The main goal is to identify how compound words with multiple meanings function in different cultural and linguistic environments. The study uses a qualitative approach, which means that the data is studied in depth rather than being measured by numbers. A number of authentic texts were chosen from literature, newspapers, and online articles in each language. These texts were analyzed to find compound words that show polysemy, and to explore how their meanings change based on context. The research also uses semantic analysis to study how meaning develops and shifts. Semantic structures were compared to determine which types of polysemy are common and how they differ across languages. For example, the compounds *snowball effect* (English), *белый билет* (Russian), and *oq yo'l* (Uzbek) were analyzed for both their literal and figurative meanings. According to G. D. Gachev, language always reflects a unique cultural worldview, and compound words especially carry “compressed cultural information” that needs to be decoded carefully during analysis [2]. For this reason, the study also includes a cultural-linguistic perspective, where the background and cultural values connected with compound meanings were considered. This multi-step analysis helps us to better understand not only the structure of compound words but also their deeper meanings in real-life usage. The methodology also supports teachers and translators in developing better tools for explaining complex word meanings.

III. Results

The analysis of compound words in English, Russian, and Turkic languages revealed several important results. First, polysemous compound words are common in all three language groups, but they differ in structure, usage, and cultural meaning. For example, in English, the compound *cold war* does not refer to temperature, but to a political conflict. Similarly, in Russian, *чёрный рынок* (black market) carries a figurative meaning. In Turkic languages, compounds such as *qora kunlar* (dark days) also have metaphorical meanings beyond their literal components. One major result of the study is that context plays a key role in understanding the correct meaning of a polysemous compound word. In all three languages, the same compound word may change its meaning depending on the surrounding words and situation. This supports the idea by Charles Fillmore, who stated that “word meaning is never fixed but shaped by frames of experience and culture” [3]. Another finding is that cultural background influences how compound words are formed and understood. In Turkic languages, compound words often reflect

traditional values or national images (e.g., *oq yo'l* meaning “safe journey” but literally “white road”), while in English, compounds are often more abstract or technical (e.g., *firewall* in computing). The data also showed that compound word polysemy is widely used in literature and media to create layered meanings and emotional effects. Writers often choose polysemous compounds to express irony, symbolism, or hidden messages. In this way, compound words help enrich the style and depth of texts.

IV. Discussion

The results of the study show that compound word polysemy is a widespread and meaningful phenomenon in different languages. However, the way polysemous compounds are understood and interpreted depends not only on grammar but also on culture, context, and background knowledge. This section discusses how these factors influence meaning and why they are important for linguists, translators, and language learners. In English, many compound words have become part of everyday speech with extended meanings. For example, *brainstorm* no longer only refers to a mental storm but means “to generate ideas quickly.” In Russian, the compound *серое вещество* (grey matter) is often used metaphorically to mean intelligence. Turkic languages also show similar examples, such as *temir odam* (literally “iron man”) to describe someone strong or emotionless. These examples support the theory of semantic extension, where the original meaning of a word changes or develops over time. As noted by Stephen Ullmann, “semantic change is often motivated by metaphor and the human tendency to relate new ideas to familiar concepts” [4]. This explains why compound words become polysemous—they are used creatively and take on new meanings in different contexts. Another important point is the role of cultural worldview. Different cultures tend to develop different metaphors in their compound words. For instance, while *white* in English can mean purity (*white lie*), in Turkic culture, it often symbolizes goodness and safety (*oq yo'l*). Such symbolic values are often embedded in compound words, making their interpretation culture-dependent. In translation and language education, it is important to teach not only the literal meaning of compound words but also their possible figurative and polysemous uses. This helps learners understand deeper meanings in texts and avoid misinterpretations. It also helps translators choose the most appropriate equivalent in the target language.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of polysemy in compounds in English, Russian, and Turkic languages shows that these words carry multiple related meanings shaped by context, culture, and usage. Polysemic compounds enrich language by allowing speakers and writers to express complex ideas, emotions, and cultural values succinctly. The research highlights the importance of understanding both the literal and figurative meanings of compounds for effective communication, translation, and language learning. It also emphasizes that cultural background

strongly influences how compound words are formed and interpreted. Future studies could expand on this research by including more languages and exploring how digital communication affects the evolution of compound word meanings. Overall, recognizing the polysemy of compound words helps improve linguistic analysis and supports better teaching and translation practices.

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