Costanza Marini, PhD candidate in Linguistics

University of Pavia and University of Bergamo

What is Polysemy?

The discipline devoted to the study of word meaning is called *lexical semantics*. However, apart from the fact that even identifying what should count as a *word* is by no means an easy task, given the presence in the lexicon of inflected forms, compounds, as well as idiomatic and non-idiomatic multi-word expressions, we are often confronted with words displaying multiple meanings.

This property is called *lexical ambiguity* and according to Weinreich (1964) can be distinguished into two different phenomena: *contrastive ambiguity* (or *homonymy*) and *complementary ambiguity* (or *polysemy*). In both instances, we are dealing with homographic and homophonic lexical forms, which in the case of homonyms bear no relationship with each other and can be considered independent words, while in the case of polysemy can be traced back to the same polysemous lexeme by sense extension, similarity or even etymology. While homonymy is a rare and accidental phenomenon, "polysemy is pervasive in language and follows regular patterns" (Jezek 2016: 29).

The first scholar to discuss *regular polysemy* was Apresjan (1973), who identified several systematic patterns of meaning alternation in the nominal domain, such as: *material* vs. *countable object*, *container* vs. *content*, *product* vs. *producer* etc. These schemas of regular polysemy are often the result of a *metonymic transfer*, which ultimately allows us to refer to an object in terms of another, which is appropriately linked to the former by *conceptual contiguity* or *association* (Fauconnier 1984; Nunberg 1995; Cruse 2004).

While metonymy is responsible for most of the cases of polysemy in the nominal domain, metaphor is extremely productive as far as verb polysemy is concerned, with corpus studies showing that verbs make up 50% of all the metaphors found in text (Jezek 2016: 61).

This being said, how is polysemy encoded when it comes to lexicographic practice? After discussing a selection of traditional dictionary entries portraying homonymic and polysemic lexemes from different languages, the audience will be introduced to the Corpus Pattern Analysis lexicographic methodology (Hanks 2013) and to some of the digital resources tailor-made to encode verb polysemy that are relying on it: PDEV for English (Hanks & Pustejovsky 2005), T-PAS for Italian (Ježek et al. 2014) and CroaTPAS for Croatian (Marini & Ježek 2019).

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