



## THE CHALLENGES OF POLYSEMY IN ENGLISH LEXICOGRAPHY

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**Annotation:** *This article describes in detail why polysemy is a difficult part of lexicography and what can be done to solve language problems related to this. It mostly focuses on the challenges of compiling dictionary entries for words with multiple meanings and gives information about how to provide clear definitions. Additionally, there are some analytical observations in the end so that given explanation can be more comprehensible.*

**Key words:** *Lexicography, polysemy, productive skill, receptive skill, semantic structure, task response, dictionary entry, collocation, contextual meaning.*

### INTRODUCTION

**Lexicography** has always been a complex field, requiring a delicate balance between linguistic precision and user accessibility. Among the various challenges that lexicographers face, polysemy—the capacity for a sign or word to have multiple related meanings—stands out as one of the most persistent. Unlike monosemous words, which are limited to a single definition, polysemous words require a systematic approach to ensure that the dictionary user can navigate between different nuances effectively.



Why is this an issue? In the English language, high-frequency words often carry a heavy burden of meaning. For instance, a word like "set" or "run" can have dozens of definitions depending on the context. If a dictionary fails to distinguish these meanings through clear examples and structural organization, the language learner is likely to face confusion, leading to inaccurate usage.

## METHODS

To address the challenge of polysemy, lexicographers employ a methodology that involves both historical etymology and frequency analysis. Modern lexicography relies heavily on corpus linguistics—the study of language as expressed in samples of "real-world" text.

The process of compiling a dictionary entry for a polysemous word typically involves:

**Semantic Mapping:** Identifying the core (prototype) meaning and tracing its evolution into figurative or specialized meanings.

**Contextual Tagging:** Labeling meanings based on their register (formal, informal, academic) and domain (technical, literary, common).

**Example Selection:** Providing sentences that highlight the distinct difference between meanings. This prevents the "conflation effect," where a reader blends two separate definitions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary problem in current lexicographical practice is the "oversimplification" of definitions. According to modern lexicographical standards, a dictionary entry should not just list definitions but create a logical progression.

Common issues identified in student-oriented dictionaries include:



Lack of Signposting: Without clear indicators, users struggle to identify which definition applies to their specific context.

Insufficient Examples: When examples are generic, they fail to demonstrate the collocations—the words that frequently accompany the target word—which are vital for understanding the specific polysemous sense.

For example, the word "clear" can mean "transparent" (physical) or "easy to understand" (intellectual). A dictionary entry must explicitly distinguish these through syntactic patterns. If the entry lists them without context, the student may mistakenly use "clear water" and "clear explanation" as interchangeable in ways that do not fit the specific semantic environment.

### **STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

To improve the quality of lexicographical entries, the following strategies are proposed:

The "Gateway" Approach: Placing the most frequent and general meaning at the beginning of the entry, followed by specialized usages.

Visual Aides and Hyperlinks: In digital dictionaries, allowing users to click through to see the semantic family of a word, showing how meanings relate to each other.

Focus on Collocations: By listing common word partners (collocations) next to each definition, the dictionary provides a "map" for the user to follow, ensuring the correct meaning is selected.

### **CONCLUSION**

Lexicography is not merely a task of recording words; it is the art of mapping the human thought process as it relates to language. Polysemy remains a significant



hurdle because language is living and constantly evolving. However, by leveraging corpus data and emphasizing the importance of context, lexicographers can bridge the gap between complex semantic structures and learner needs. Ultimately, a successful dictionary entry is one that acts as a guide, providing the user with the tools to distinguish between subtle meanings and apply them with confidence.

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