

Christina Alm-Arvius¹

POLYSEMY: CONVENTIONAL AND INCIDENTAL CASES

1. Introduction

This paper is going to address the nature of *polysemy*, and particular interest will be paid to questions concerning conventional versus incidental – or pragmatic – occurrences of polysemy. Quite generally speaking, the notion of polysemy encompasses any meaning variation in lexical or grammatical elements that members of the speech community using the language – in our case English – will recognise and share. In other words, speakers of a language will understand polysemous shifts in words or longer expressions in roughly the same way, even if they cannot ordinarily be expected to be able to analyse and explain such meaning variation in a scientifically valid and defensible manner. Indeed, this has not proved easy even for professional language analysts, in spite of polysemy being an important aspect of both applied and theoretical

¹ Department of English, Stockholm University, SE106 91 Stockholm, Sweden; Christina.Alm-Arvius@English.su.se; <http://www.english.su.se>.

linguistics. It is a chief consideration in dictionary making – i.e. lexicography – as well as for many aspects of grammatical description², and translators and interpreters often come up against questions that are to do with differences in polysemous structures or potentials in source and target languages. In addition, theoretically oriented language studies must consider the nature and occurrence of polysemy, and this paper is focused on it.

In short, polysemy appears to be at hand when language users in general as well as language professionals of various kinds will agree that (i) one and the same lexeme³ or (ii) a specific grammatical item or construction type can be used to express meanings that are clearly *different* but also *related*. Accordingly, polysemous variation is different from connotative variation, because connotations⁴ are not generally shared but can differ in innumerable respects between language users as regards the understanding of the same language element or the same unique language instantiation.

In addition, polysemy must be compared to and distinguished from both monosemy and homonymy. In section 2 below the difference between polysemy and *homonymy* is briefly explained, and the relation between polysemy and *monosemy* is also indicated.

In the next section, 3, central dimensions of the pervasive linguistic phenomenon termed polysemy will be identified as well as

² The terms *grammar* and *grammatical* are here used in a specific and more traditional sense, not about a language system in general. An ordinary natural language has its own phonology, its grammar, and its vocabulary, or lexis. Also stylistic and discourse conventions, including registers and genres or text types, may be distinct from those of other languages.

³ A prototypical lexeme is a lexical word. Nouns, adjectives and main verbs make up the core of the category of lexical words, and they also have grammatical characteristics, manifested in sets of morphosyntactic forms and their potentials for occurring in compositional strings with internal syntactic structures. Idioms, multi-word constructions that are learnt and stored as wholes by users of a language, constitute another type of lexeme. (Alm-Arvius 2007a and 1998: 42–46)

⁴ Nowadays merely additional, individual associations to what words or strings represent will be called *connotations*. However, John Stuart Mill used the term in another way in *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive* (first published in 1843), as he contrasted connotation with denotation. According to his explanation of the term, connotation signifies indirect attribution, the implication that something has an attribute, or a set of attributes, because it is part of a class having a general name – what can be called a lexical item in more recent terminology; i.e. a vocabulary unit with an expression side (or a set of morphosyntactic forms constituting its expression side) that stands for a whole category. This makes Mill's use of connotation comparable to the notions of intension and sense. (Mill 2002: 19f; cf. Lyons 1995: 80–82, 1977: 174–176). See section 4 for a discussion and attempted definition of the terminological concept of sense.

pertinent distinctions within them regarding the character and occurrence of polysemous variation. Furthermore, our attention to the distinction between conventional polysemous variation and merely incidental, pragmatic changes in the meaning of lexical and grammatical elements prompts a discussion of the notion of *sense* in section 4. The occurrence of different entrenched and systematic uses of polysemes should be reflected in the information given in dictionary entries and grammar books, and the question is how such recurring meaning variants are most accurately described. After that, in section 5, discernable differences between various cases of, on the one hand, arguably conventionalised – i.e. lexicalised or grammaticalised – polysemy and, on the other hand, merely incidental or pragmatically induced polysemy will be considered. This will lead up to a general overview of different types of polysemous variation, and their positions along the *conventional – pragmatic* scale.

Moreover, it should be firmly pointed out here, in the Introduction to the paper, that the identification, analysis and description of polysemy are not in every case, or in every respect, unproblematic. Instead it is not always possible to decide whether an instantiation of polysemous variation represents a conceptual category that is conventionally included in a language, a regular and shared element in the linguistic repertoire of proficient users of it, or whether it should merely be considered an example of incidental polysemy. Any occurring types of polysemy are generally shared within a speech community, and there are not just conventionalised uses of polysemy but also generally recognised strategies for incidental polysemous variation. Occasionally it may even be open to discussion whether there is enough meaning variation in the use of an element to employ the notion of polysemy when enquiring into and trying to give an account of its semantic characteristics.

Such analytical and descriptive uncertainty appears to be an unavoidable result of the dynamics of a natural, living language. Since it is constantly utilised for various purposes by the active members of the speech community, and thus made to serve many different kinds of communicative needs, dynamic and practically triggered adjustment of the semantic potentials of a language is simply one of the key features of a natural language. Even if it is true that we learn a language – a most comprehensive and intricate communicative complex of linguistic features and constructions – from older or more proficient members of that speech community, it also always provides ways and means for motivated innovations, for instance new examples of polysemous variation.

2. Polysemy, homonymy and monosemy

As was pointed out above, polysemy occurs when a language unit has two or more meanings which are clearly *different* in some respect, although they are also *related* in other ways. Accordingly, polysemous variation must not be confused with homonymy, because homonyms just happen to share the same expression side, or signifier, while their senses, the concepts they signify, are unrelated. Both polysemy and homonymy are primarily synchronic phenomena, because speakers in general know and use their language as they have met with it and learnt it in particular during their childhood and youth. They do not know its history, the usually intricate chain of diachronic changes that stretch back in time, and which are only evidenced in written records of various kinds. All the same, the lack of semantic connections between homonyms is typically considered a result of them having different historical sources, or etymologies. Their forms would also have been different, and have just ended up being the same by chance. The noun *down*, representing fine soft feathers or hair, and *down* with a directional meaning – which is highly polysemous – are examples of this. (*COD* 1990: 352f)⁵

Clearly, the notions of polysemy and homonymy are both in the main associated with lexical words. Homonyms are different lexemes or just specific morphosyntactic forms of lexemes that for no discernable reason, or apparently quite arbitrarily, share the same phonological or orthographic expression sides, although their meanings are unrelated. As a result, homonyms should be recorded in different entries in dictionaries. In the following examples the homonyms are italicised. In the first sentence the interplay – or wordplay – between the homonyms takes on punning qualities.

- (1) They really made themselves heard in the sixties and seventies, but what is *left* of the *left* today?

The next two examples illustrate homophones, as these word pairs are just pronounced in the same way, while their spelling is different⁶.

⁵ Curiously enough, some dictionaries deal with them in the same entries. See e.g. *ALD* (2005: 459) and *Macmillan* (2002: 417).

⁶ See further Alm-Arvius (1998: 59-61).

- (2) a. The marsh hunters used nets to catch wild *fowl*.
b. No *foul* play is suspected.
- (3) They *too* should have *two* tickets for the show.

By comparison, the prototypically distinct but still related lexicalised senses of a polyseme are – or at least should be – dealt with in the same dictionary entry under the same headword, or citation form. This lexicographic practice will reflect the intuition of proficient users of a language.

- (4) There were no adults there, only children.
- (5) Her children are all adults now.

The noun *child* – *children* in the plural – can denote the category of human beings who are not yet biologically fully grown, and legally responsible, and it is then understood in contrast with its antonyms *adult/s* and *grown-up/s*. However, *child* can also be a near-synonym of *offspring*. These two senses of the lexeme *child* are exemplified above.

Moreover, the semantic inter-connection between potentially distinguishable senses of a polyseme sometimes unites them in the same instantiation. In the next two examples the ‘offspring’ sense and the ‘not-yet-adult’ sense of *child/ren* are just facets of the understanding of this word. (See also Alm-Arvius 1993: 355–359)

- (6) Is it possible to give birth to a child without pain?
- (7) My mother didn’t want to send her children to a boarding school.

The notion of polysemy is prototypically associated with meaning variation in the use of lexical words, in particular entrenched types of sense variation that will be recorded in lexical entries in dictionaries. But there is also incidental polysemy, as many contextually induced meaning changes will not, or simply cannot, be recorded in dictionaries. The following instantiations of *kitchen*, *street* and *lorries* focus in a metonymic way on the people associated with these locations or means of transport, and these readings will not be recorded in dictionaries as potentially separate, lexicalised senses of these noun lexemes. (cf. Alm-Arvius 2007b)

- (8) The hotel kitchen can cook all your favourite dishes.
- (9) The whole street could hear them.
- (10) The lorries are threatening to go on strike.

Consequently, the occurrence of polysemy – which can be either lexicalised or incidental – must also be compared with monosemy. This term is used to acknowledge the existence of lexemes that appear to have just one generally recognised or conventional sense. Distinguishable types of contextually or pragmatically triggered polysemous variation will be further discussed in section 5 below.

3. Dimensions of polysemous variation

The following kinds of meaningful dimensions of a natural verbal language are relevant when analysing, understanding and describing polysemous variation:

- Different *language functions*, or *types of meaning*

It is possible to distinguish many different types of meanings, but the following four seem between them to capture quite central functions of language communication: (i) *factually descriptive* meaning, (ii) *interpersonal* meaning, (iii) *affective* meaning, and (iv) *poetic* meaning. They are to do with variations in the *representational perspective* of a language message; that is, where its *experiential basis* is from the point of view of the people engaged in a communicative linguistic act: (i) in the outer environment, (ii) in the relation between the encoder(s) of a language message – the speaker(s) or the writer(s) – and the interlocutor(s) or addressee(s), (iii) in the attitudes or emotive reactions of the encoder(s), or (iv) in the expressive medium itself, the particular language used.

The first three language functions – factually descriptive, interpersonal, and affective meaning – are *extra-linguistically oriented*, as they are different ways in which language can relate to things out in the world, or at least outside the variegated form-and-meaning inventory that constitutes a language. The fourth function, the poetic one, is by comparison *intra-linguistically oriented*, as it draws on the formal and semantic potentials of a language. (Cf. Halliday

1996: 58f; Jakobson 1996: 12ff; Bühler 1982: 24–33, 1990: 24–39)

Practically all utterances have interpersonal meaning, since they are addressed to somebody else. Accordingly, a language message is a speech act, uttered to communicate with somebody else for some personal or social reason. (Yule 1996: 47–58; Nunan 1993: 36f, 65–67, 94–97; Austin 1975; Searle 1969)

- (11) This is a bitch, not a dog.
- (12) His secretary is a bitch.

The noun *bitch* is conventionally polysemous in English, and while the first of these two examples can be intended as a factual description, the second, originally metaphorical use of *bitch* will express a negative attitude.

The following string comes from a parody of the lyrics of a well-known popular song. It plays around with the original line “Itsy bitsy teeny weeny yellow polka dot bikini”, and since many speakers of English know it, the ironically coloured version below can be considered an instance of idiom breaking, a kind of punning.

- (13) He had an itchy bitchy tiny weenie hell-on-earth in a bikini! (IS 1)

This is thus an example of poetic usage, in a broad sense of this term.

However, linguistic communication typically occurs in whole stretches of spoken discourse or written texts. As a result, both the form and the contents of individual oral utterances and written sentences will be moulded by the context in which they are produced and received. Various extra-linguistic – or paralinguistic – factors can influence language practice, and also the internal global organisation of a verbal exchange will affect the choice of specific words and constructions⁷ and how they can be understood. Actual *textual*

⁷ Quite generally speaking, the notion of constructions can be contrasted with that of words, the difference being that the latter – word formations and their grammatical word forms – have internal morphological structure, while constructions have internal

meaning will be a typically intricate complex of the language functions that have been mentioned and exemplified above. In other words, they are analytical terminological categories, idealised abstractions based on observations of how language communication will or can function, quite generally. In instances of language use they will occur together, and be naturally intertwined. The meaning of a contextualised utterance, piece of oral discourse or written text will include and merge qualities associated with these analytical terms in a holistic fashion.

- *Different experiential domains*

Different sense potentials of a polyseme – i.e. apolysemous word or construction – tend to be experientially associated with a particular kind of situation, or a specific, identifiable experiential and cognitive domain. (Cf. Langacker 1987: 488, 2000: 2-7, 262) The English verb *swear* is polysemous, and the first formulaic string below makes us think of a law court, while the second one is about a personal, intimate relationship, and the third *swear* use is coordinated with its synonym *curse*, and voices a reaction against “bad language”.

(14) I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

(15) Swear that you’ll always love me!

(16) Please don’t swear and curse at me.

- *Sense relations*

The examples above illustrate how meaning variants of a lexical polyseme will be associated with different collocational tendencies and construction types. Such *syntagmatic*, or combinatorial, possibilities also involve grammatical characteristics. It is important to realise that

syntactic structure, or, whenever they include specific words with lexical features, rather an internal syntagmatic – i.e. lexico-syntactic – structure. Accordingly, there are both more schematic grammatical construction types and constructions which include specific lexical items. Some of the latter are idioms, and analytically they belong in the intersection between the categories of lexemes and constructions (cf. note 3 above).

polysemous variation in lexical units can be manifested through both *lexical* and *grammatical* qualities. These will interact in polysemous shifts, and as for instance Langacker has pointed out, it is not possible to distinguish clearly between lexical and grammatical qualities. Instead they appear to form a continuum (2000: 18–21).

The English verb *see* has a number of established senses (Alm-Arvius 1993). The primary sense of this lexeme is exemplified in (17). It rarely occurs in the progressive aspect, while the sense in (18), which need not include vision, is commonly realised in the progressive form. This is just one illustration of the important observation that the sense relations of a particular polysemous variant of a lexeme can concern grammatical patterns as well as lexical categories.

- (17) He could see the hotel down in the valley.
- (18) He has been seeing many doctors in the hope of recovering his eyesight.

Frequently used lexemes tend to be conventionally polysemous, and *make* is another example of this. As can be seen also in the strings below – which by no means exhaust the polysemous potential of *make* – a difference in the lexical content of senses can be accompanied by differences in grammatical classification and behaviour.

- (19) John has made dinner.
- (20) His latest novel has made him famous.
- (21) Her parents made her break up with him.
- (22) These candle holders make lovely presents.
- (23) These qualities will make him a good policeman.
- (24) The company is introducing a new make of car.

Distinguishable senses of a lexeme will have different valence structures, including the semantic roles of arguments. From a more general communicative and cognitive perspective, sense distinctions will be modulated by language functions and reflect relevant domain experiences (see above), as evidenced in the more global design of a written text or the gradual development of a stretch of oral discourse.

In addition, distinct established uses of a polyseme – defined as senses in the following section – will have different *meronymic* and *paradigmatic* associations. A paradigmatic set consists of potential substitutes; i.e. hyponymic, synonymous, and antonymous relations. Both these and any occurring meronymic relations may also be spelt out in syntagmatic arrangements, or be made manifest in larger textual or discourse structures.

4. The notion of sense

The term *sense* is an established one, but all the same it is not easy to pinpoint what it should be taken to mean; that is, how it should be consciously and constructively used in semantic studies. However, an overview of polysemous variation requires a discussion of and an attempt at trying to define this notion. I shall attempt this here, drawing on how the term has been explained and applied in semantic analyses.

A sense is understood to be a mental unit, a concept that is systematically integrated in a language, in our case English. It is expressed through a form, or set of forms, constituting its expression side, and it will have a whole complex of semantic and formal relations in the language. It is contrasted with the kind of extra-linguistic phenomena a lexical item or a construction can be taken to represent. A lexical word or an idiomatic construction *denotes* an experiential category, and when it is used in utterances, it can pick out one or more specific *referents* from this extra-linguistic *denotation*. In other words, a language internal sense and its extra-linguistic denotation are synchronically stable parts of a language system, while reference is dependent on unique utterances.

So it seems that a sense can be defined as a recurring and *established meaning potential* in a language. It is expressed in a specific formal way, phonologically and by means of grammatical form(s), and it will in significant ways be shaped by its relations to other senses. An overview of the various types of sense relations that can be found in a language was given in the preceding section. All this is in accordance with a structuralist type of analysis – which is generally accepted in linguistics. (Cf. Hurford, Heasley and Smith 2007: 29, 31, 34, 103; Hanks 2000; Lyons 1995: 76, 79–82; Frege 1952)

Every language, in our case English, has to be learnt by its users, even if human beings appear to be genetically predisposed to use language as a communication system in social contexts. In addition, its

senses are intertwined with human cognition and encyclopaedic experience in general. The people using a language constitute its speech community, and together they promote its continuing existence, and they also develop it in usually spontaneous interaction on the bases of their communicative needs. Even if we must allow for some variation in the conception and use of a sense, its communal and systematic character must be stressed. When we consider the character of a sense potential, it seems thus reasonable to focus on its recurrent, schematised or idealised quality, keeping in mind that a sense is a standardised semantic entity, caught up in a partly conventional, partly dynamic web of form-meaning relations.

Actually, the occurrence of polysemy provides us with analytical material for discussing and trying to decide which understandings of a word or construction can be considered to have a conventional sense status, and which special interpretations will only be the result of fluctuating or contextually idiosyncratic factors. A reasonable rule of thumb is that a sense should be possible to isolate from any particular and incidental stretch of discourse. There must be a stability, a recurring standardised character to a sense which makes it possible to recognise it also in a more context-independent way. Economical and broadly applicable explanations are favoured in science, and it seems advisable to adhere to this principle also when trying to establish which meaning patterns should be recognised as senses in a language. At the same time it seems unwise to strive for too high a level of generalisation or abstraction. It must be possible to conceptualise and exemplify the character of a sense by presenting a number of prototypical instantiations of it, and these should form a conceptual unity.

The analytical dimensions outlined in section 3 above appear to be useful here. In recognising a sense, and thus also conventional polysemous variation, it is reasonable to require that it exhibits its own, distinct characteristics as regards (i) the language functions, or types of meaning, that it is used to express, (ii) regular and easily identifiable domain connections, and (iii) a comparatively stable set of sense relations which is different from that of the other senses of the polyseme.

An important aspect of sense identification is to consider what information about words and constructions should be given in dictionary entries and in grammar books. In particular I would advocate that the convention of lists with discretely presented and numbered senses that is now used in dictionary entries to account for polysemous variation in the use of lexemes be refined so that also any regularly occurring combinations or fusions of conventional senses are recognised and described. In fact, this seems to be a requirement for a valid description

of polysemy, given the central status of *sense intersection* or *sense-to-sense scalarity* also in more stable networks of polysemous variation. (Alm-Arvius 1993: 356–359)

Other factors concern how prominence hierarchies among senses should be captured in a valid way. For instance: how important is frequency for deciding that a certain recurring meaning type should be considered a primary sense potential of a lexical word, a multi-word idiom, or a grammatical item or construction? How important is literal versus figurative qualities for determining which sense or senses dominate in the semantics of a polyseme? Is a central position in relation to other senses a key quality? That is, is the status of a sense in a polysemous network dependent on how obviously it shares meaning features and structures with the other senses?

The present lexicographic practice of building up an entry by listing and numbering the senses of a lexeme is in many ways clear and pedagogical. Nonetheless, it tends to be an unfortunate simplification, in particular since it cannot adequately capture overlaps between senses, and illustrate the variability that will occur also in the application of what can be considered a recurring sense potential. Perhaps development of computational lexicographic descriptive tools can help in working out ways of improving the presentation of polysemy in dictionary entries.

In his doctoral thesis, Colin Freeman Baker (1999: 236) mentions an interesting distinction in the analysis of polysemous senses and sense networks, that between *lumpers* and *splitters*. The former strive to bring together meaning patterns in an economical way, while the latter strategy allows for more detailed recognition of polysemous variation. I would suggest that these could sometimes function as complementary approaches, allowing us to compare and contrast the results, so as to reach the most defensible and accurate descriptive solutions. Even so, the general scientific principle of striving for descriptive economy and idealised but still valid overviews in theoretical models should largely be adhered to. The most important thing ought to be the identification of recurring and clearly standardised patterns in the use of polysemes. These can be recognised as senses, and can then be descriptively contrasted with merely incidental types of or occurrences of polysemous shifts. Faithful attendance to empirical observations should then make it possible also to discern changes in polysemy structures, including the detection of seemingly *emerging senses* as well as cases where a sense potential appears to be dropping out of use.

5. Types of polysemy

5.1. Conventional and incidental polysemy

As has been pointed out, polysemy is the technical term for any generally recognised meaning variation in the use of some form-meaning unit in a natural verbal language. In other words, polysemous differences in the interpretation of a word or a construction can only be said to occur when the members of the speech community agree on them. Such agreement can be observed in the actual and practical use of a language, and it should also be possible to establish by asking proficient speakers of it to comment on the meaning and acceptability of specific examples.

As was discussed in section 4, polysemous differences can be either conventional or incidental. Conventional polysemy means that a lexeme or a grammatical element has more than one established sense, and it can then be called a polyseme. Prototypical polysemes are lexical words, and this is reflected for instance in the choice of examples in this paper.

Also incidental polysemous variation should be generally recognised, not just connotative meaning aspects. In contrast with polysemous shifts, connotations are not shared by the users of a language, but are merely part of individual understandings. They are the result of personal experiences and reactions, or arise from the merely possible – not necessary – incorporation of contextual features.

Conventional polysemy means that a lexeme or a grammatical element has more than one entrenched type of interpretation, termed a sense potential in the preceding section. It would appear easy to see that a lexical word can have different but related senses. All the same, language users seem not to be spontaneously aware of many cases of lexical polysemy. However, when they are presented with examples of regular polysemous variation in the application of a particular lexical word, they recognise it, and readily agree that this is how it can be used to express different meanings. The verbs *run* and *see* are common in English, and both are highly polysemous (see e.g. *Macmillan* 2002: 1242–1245, 1282–1284; Alm-Arvius 1993). A few established senses of each of them are exemplified below.

- (25) The fox *ran* quickly into the wood.
- (26) This road *runs* through the park.
- (27) Suddenly the machine stopped *running*.
- (28) The local party will *run* the campaign.
- (29) Their economy department will *run* an eye over the budget.
- (30) Some stars can be *seen* with the naked eye.
- (31) There's nothing there. You are just *seeing* things!
- (32) Joan has been *seeing* a therapist about her eating disorder.
- (33) The nurse felt to *see* if the sheet was wet.
- (34) I'll call him to *see* that it is arranged.
- (35) They *see* this as the future of the business.
- (36) He didn't *see* that it was a joke.

The common lack of intellectual or analytical awareness of the existence of polysemous variation actually supports it being different from homonymy. Homonyms are seen to be different words, while a lexical polyseme is considered one word. This corresponds to the lexicographic principle for including conventional uses of a polyseme in the same dictionary entry, while homonyms should be dealt with in separate entries⁸.

The intuition of language users concerning these matters is no doubt connected with the observation that potentially different senses of a lexeme may both be included in one and the same instantiation. In other words, potentially separate senses can be combined or even inextricably *fused* in particular occurrences of a polyseme. *See* as a synonym of *judge* or *interpret* need not involve the reception of actual visual impressions, but can just represent a mental experience. However, these two potentially separate senses of *see* can also be nothing but facets of the meaning of one and the same *see* instance. (Cf. also (7) in section 2 above)

⁸ *Svensk ordbok*, published in 1986 by Esselte, follows however a strictly formal strategy based on traditional word class categorisation. It means that homonymic pairs are placed in the same entry if they belong to the same word class and have formally identical morphosyntactic forms. By comparison, polysemously related uses of the same lexeme are dealt with in separate entries if they can be categorised as belonging to different word classes. Accordingly, *by*, 'village', and *by*, 'gust of wind', are found in the same entry (p. 169), and so are *fjäll*, 'mountain where no trees can grow', and *fjäll*, 'scale (as on the skin of fish or reptiles)' (p. 301). By comparison, the prepositional and adverbial uses of *bredvid*, 'beside', are given in two different, consecutive entries. This is of course counter-intuitive, and a more valid presentation of for instance these words would be the obvious choice if ordinary practical knowledge of the difference between polysemous variation and homonymy is taken into account.

- (37) I *see* their attitude as rather worrying.
- (38) There are different ways of *seeing* the inkblot in a Rorschach test.

Also many more grammatical elements are conventionally polysemous. The instantiations of *should*, *will*, and *must* in the first sentence below are deontic, while these modals have an epistemic meaning in (40).

- (39) You *should/will/must* do as you are told.
- (40) The letter *should/will/must* have reached them by now.

The different types of *it* uses in the following strings exemplify how functional variation in the application of such straightforwardly grammatical items is tied to the kinds of constructions they occur in.

- (41) That's my book. Please give *it* to me.
- (42) *It's* raining and cold outside.
- (43) *It* is important that laws are clearly written.

In (41) the deictic pronoun *it* refers anaphorically back to the noun phrase *my book*. In clauses like (42) *it* is commonly analysed as merely a prop subject, because English requires that the subject slot is filled in such constructions. By comparison, (43) exemplifies the use of anticipatory *it*, signalling that the clause also has an extraposed notional subject, here the declarative subclause *that laws are clearly written*.

5.2. Incidental metonymy

As was outlined in section 4, prototypical conventional polysemy is manifested by the occurrence of more than one entrenched sense of the same lexeme or grammatical element. However, there are also regular patterns of incidental or pragmatic polysemous shifts. Even if the results of such polysemous variation are often not recorded in dictionaries, their occurrence is still predictable and natural. The following strings contain instances of regular domain-specific sorts of *metonymic* shortcuts. They

illustrate how a place or a period of time can be taken to include the people associated with it, or how a container can stand for the contents.

- (44) Wall Street wants Washington to prioritise opening China's markets to American exports.
- (45) The shop refunded the money.
- (46) A decade which venerated both Dr Spock and Marilyn Monroe was not a simple one.
- (47) You need to finish the plate before you leave the table.
- (48) They had drunk the whole bottle.
- (49) We had a hot creamy casserole for dinner.

These metonymic readings are explicitly and firmly supported by collocational combinations. People, not places or time periods, can want something, refund money or venerate somebody. Similarly, foods are eaten and edible liquids are drunk, but we do not ordinarily consume plates, bottles or casseroles. (See also Alm-Arvius 2003: 162f)

Using the name of a producer for a product is another regular type of metonymy. In (50) the surnames of two famous artists have been converted into common, countable nouns representing paintings made by them, and in (51) the same polysemy creating strategy is used to refer to the writings of the founders of a couple of classical psychoanalytical theories.

- (50) There are several Gaugins and two van Goghs in the museum.
- (51) How common is metaphor in Freud and Jung?

In the next example the clipped name of a famous school for art, design and crafts in the Weimar Republic is used for the kind of architectural style associated with it. The full name was Staatliches Bauhaus, and this established use would appear to combine place-for-people metonymy with producer-for-product metonymic shifting.

- (52) His favourite architectural style is Bauhaus.

The use of *mouth* in (53) connects to the metonymic pattern discussed above, although it is more complex and seems to involve a series of metonymic shifts, starting from the synecdochical use of

mouth for a whole person, and then proceeding to language production which is also metonymically associated with this body part.

(53) We had to listen to a lot of mouth.

Attributing features that really describe reactions or qualities in backgrounded experiencers to the thing experienced also has a metonymic character. (Cf. Baker 1999: 21–23)

(54) They were witty and insightful comments.

(55) It was a most sad evening.

(56) This awe-inspiring trip down the caves is worth doing.

There are obvious metonymic shortcuts in the following strings as well, and they are of a more incidental or unpredictable character. Especially the last one depends on contextual knowledge, as it means ‘which sex the baby who is going to be born in March is’.

(57) *This website sells* organic products.

(58) He was *called the hat* because he always wore one.

(59) One baby is due in March and the other one in May, and we know *which sex March is*.

Polysemous alternation between countable and uncountable senses of nouns that can represent either a mass or specific exemplars of a category occurs regularly in English.

(60) I prefer coffee, but you can have tea. Waiter, a coffee and two teas, please.

Some such shifts are lexicalised, but others are incidental, and some seem quite innovative. The term grinding, or the universal grinder, has been used for the conversion of count nouns into uncountables, as in the example below, which describes the unpleasant sight following a traffic accident involving a dog. (Saeed 2009: 288; Copestake and Briscoe 1996: 37-43)

(61) There was dog all over the road.

5.3. Collocational tailoring and coercion

We can also note that the kind of meaning adjustment that I have termed *collocational tailoring* is very frequent⁹. It stands for the interpretative adjustment and specification that a semantically dependent item undergoes when it is collocated with a word that has a richer and more complex sense potential. The main principle in this kind of incidental meaning variation is that a more specific word meaning will dominate a more general one, and specify its meaning so that the two together can represent a certain thing or situation in an experientially regular way.

- (62) *A big mouse* is much smaller than a *small elephant*.
- (63) The poster should be *on the wall*, not *on the table*.
- (64) *People hunt* in different ways than *wolves*.

In collocational tailoring we see how encyclopaedic domain knowledge is included in language understanding. The adjective *old* denotes age, and adjusts this generalised lexicalised import in relation to the specifying sense contents of a nominal collocate.

- (65) The gift was wrapped in an *old newspaper*.
- (66) This website sells *old cars*.
- (67) This is an *old mountain range* with no volcanoes.
- (68) White dwarfs are *old stars*.

Especially nouns will affect the understandings of adjectives, verbs and prepositions that they can be collocated with. The reason for this is obviously that nouns often stand for complex phenomena with a great many expected, or at least possible, features, and the sense potential of predicative items or modifiers will just constitute a part of this composite whole. However, it is important to realise that it is not word class adherence as such that determines the direction of collocational tailoring. The rule is instead that the item with more meaning – i.e. the item with more specifying features, internal structure

⁹ Cf. Allerton (1982: 27f), where the expression “semantic tailoring” is used. Langacker’s term *accommodation* (2000: 151f, 262) also concerns how the meanings of elements are adjusted to a particular surrounding, but this appears to be a wider or more general notion, as it can be used about contextual influence at any level.

and associative potential – will decide how a semantically more general word content will be interpreted.

- (69) She likes to wear glittering things.
- (70) The top of the desk was smooth and white.
- (71) It is much cooler at the top of the mountain.

Also the kind of contextual semantic enrichment that has been labelled *coercion* can be explained in a similar way. A *book* is something that is ‘written’ or ‘read’. These agentive verbal notions will be added as a matter of course in the understanding of constructions like the following. The more specific interpretation depends on the broader context the string occurs in; that is, on the kind of experiential domain that it deals with. (Cf. Pustejovsky and Bouillon 1996: 135-158)

- (72) I have finished/started the book.
- (73) I enjoyed the book/film/meal.

Different types of domain knowledge associated with the senses of *film* and *meal* respectively make us interpret *enjoy* in partly other ways when either of these nouns occurs as the head of a direct object complement with this verb. The core ‘experiencing-pleasure’ component is what all these understandings of the verb share, but it is in each case modulated and enriched by specific encyclopaedic domain knowledge.

5.4. Value reversal and emotive colouring

Furthermore, I have suggested the term *value reversal* for changes in the emotive load of words and expressions along the positive – negative scale. The occurrence of some such semantic shifts is no doubt lexicalised, and can be found in dictionaries.

- (74) You shouldn’t take pleasure in evil, in *wrong and wicked* deeds.
- (75) Her performance was *delightfully wicked*.
- (76) *Aggressive* children need to be taught self-control.
- (77) He is a *wonderfully aggressive* rugby player.

Even if the default feeling associated with a vocabulary unit is negative, it can in certain contexts be used to represent a positive quality, or at least appear to express a seemingly ambiguous moral attitude or a personally coloured reaction. Again we see how encyclopaedic or pragmatic knowledge of a specific domain can affect the reading of a word.

Similarly, there are collocationally or contextually induced negative shifts in the emotive colouring of words that are generally considered to stand for something positive.

- (78) Her mother seemed irritatingly perfect, much too kind and good.

Some instances of value reversal have not been considered frequent or entrenched enough to be recorded in dictionaries. They show that such polysemous switches constitute a more general communicative strategy, which reminds us of the typical instability of the denotative range and the referential capacity of affective items. This no doubt reflects the complexity and flexibility of human emotive reactions and even moral judgments. Such words do not deal with brute facts, which are simply there in nature regardless of what we would like to see. Instead they are to do with human desires and social interaction. Consequently, the contents of such experiences are not based on stable and factually occurring natural kinds – things that are beyond human control – and their character cannot be inter-subjectively determined through truth-conditional testing of propositions that describe them.

Clearly, *irony* also involves value reversal.

- (79) “That’s good, so interesting”, he said with a nasty, ironic sneer.

Indeed, there are no clear or stable denotative ranges for affective lexical units. Their application will vary with personal feelings for things or people even in the language use of the same individual. Somebody’s *darling* on one occasion can be abused by the same speaker as an *idiot* or a *jerk* in another communicative situation. (Alm-Arvius 1993: 34–36)

Various kinds of *emotive colouring* can be pragmatically introduced in a certain context of use.

- (80) She managed to say “sweetie” in a way that suggested ridicule and dislike, and even her way of pronouncing my name seemed loaded with questionable attitudes.

5.5. Metaphorisation

Metaphorical meanings are in many cases emotively coloured even when the corresponding literal content can be factually descriptive. An attitudinal quality is a regular part of some lexicalised uses.

- (81) He’s *too green* for this job.
(82) My sister is *such a dog*.

In addition, it is interesting to note that metaphorical applications are commonly lexicalised, and thus recorded in dictionaries. This can be compared to many instances of metonymic shifts. As has been suggested, also many metonymies that can be categorised as examples of regular polysemous patterns need not be part of the general vocabulary of a language, for instance English. However, there are of course also seemingly new or incidental metaphorical uses.

- (83) She was a bright summer’s day.
(84) The ballroom was a sea of formal evening wear.
(85) In the Second World War Churchill mobilised language and made it fight.

Metaphorisation works through a generalising extension of a sense potential, or a whole sense complex, into another experiential or cognitive domain than that associated with the usually literal source contents. In other words, only some of the features and the structure of the source sense(s) are carried over into the metaphor. In analyses using the explanatory models of cognitive science, this is described as mapping from a source to a metaphorical target. (See e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1999)

- (86) This was during the deepest freeze of the Cold War.
(87) A deep, soft and warm voice floated out of the telephone.
(88) These were dark, sick days, with no light on the horizon.
(89) He seems very down. Do you know what is eating him?

- (90) This house is an upstairs-downstairs world, and I stand on the landing.

In several of the examples given above – notably (85), (86), (88) and (90) – there are *expanded metaphor* conceptions. That is to say, a particular type of metaphorical domain connection is kept across a whole sentence or a significant part of it.

By contrast, the metaphors in the two textually linked sentences in (89), centring on the figurative meanings of these instantiations of “down” and “eating” respectively, draw on different experiential domains. The same appears to be true of the metaphorically used words in (87). These examples could be analysed as involving *metaphor mixing*, which has been frowned upon by prescriptively oriented language analysts. However, the combination of metaphorical images seems to function well in these contexts, just as in many other cases of so-called mixed metaphors, which are in fact common. (Cf. Alm-Arvius 2008: 16f) There is no feeling of semantic inconsistency, and the reason for this is no doubt that metaphorical meanings use only parts of some more specific literal source contents. The metaphorical extensions will thus seem compatible with each other and the overall message topic for instance in these examples.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the grammatical class and characteristics tend to be the same in a metaphorical application as in the source item. But because of the sense extension, coupled with a domain change, the difference between a metaphor and its source will be comparatively obvious. This can probably be connected with the observation that metaphor has been more discussed by language analysts than metonymy.

5.6. Metonymy: compacting meaning

Metonymy always involves a descriptive shortcut, a matter-of-course semantic incorporation of experiential phenomena found within the same domain, or contiguous set of domains, as those of the literal source contents. In other words, some denotata of the literal source sense and the targeted referent(s) of a metonymic use will practically co-occur. This probably explains why metonymic shifts tend to be interpretatively unproblematic, even if the intended referents are not directly or literally mentioned. In short, metonymy means that one part of an experience is

described by means of a word, or phrase, that really stands for another, closely related part.

- (91) There is a lot of *Beatles* in their style.
- (92) *Marbles* will not be made of *marble*, but of glass.

Metonymic highlighting results in a word or expression being loaded with more meaning than it has in its basic sense. This is a result of inheritance of meaning aspects associated with items that literally or more basically represent the additional features included in a metonymic use, and this explains why metonymic occurrences commonly involve grammatical category shifts. In (91) *Beatles* functions as an uncountable common noun having incorporated the special ‘music’ features that the pop or rock group called *The Beatles* are associated with¹⁰. The next example, (92), even illustrates how the additional features may with time come to constitute a sense of their own, because here the basic material meaning of *marble* is no longer included.

The kind of word formation called *conversion*, exemplified in (93), (94) and (95), can be considered a kind of metonymic shortcut.

- (93) The train will *platform* in five minutes.
- (94) All passengers were *fingerprinted*.
- (95) His report is a captivating *read*.

The line of thought behind a metonymic shortcut can be spelt out by applying what I have called the *expansion test*. (Alm-Arvius 2003: 155f) Such a more explicit and longer formulation will no longer be figurative, but it may appear unnecessarily long-winded or communicatively less effective. It helps us to see and explain why metonymy is so common, but also seemingly “more natural” and less conspicuous than metaphor extension. This is no doubt related to the contiguous association between the meanings, or the experiential phenomena, that are combined within one word or phrase in a metonymic shortcut.

¹⁰ *The Beatles* is a kind of proper noun as it refers to a unique group of musicians, and ordinary proper names do not have lexicalised senses in the same way as common nouns and other words that are regular parts of a language system. However, a well-known name like *The Beatles* is widely shared by language users, and this is no doubt why it easily lends itself for instance to metonymic alternation.

- (96) The table roared with laughter = ‘The people sitting at the table roared with laughter’.

Sets of constructions that can be used to deal with the same experience from different descriptive perspectives can be compared to alternations between metonymic shortcuts and longer, more explicit or detailed accounts. The similarity is that they provide language users with choices when it comes to highlighting or backgrounding situational information. Accordingly, they can, quite broadly speaking, be said to concern information structure decisions of various kinds.

5.7. Constructional perspective shifts

I have spoken of alternative constructions for representing a situation of the kinds exemplified below as *perspective* or *prominence shifts* (Alm-Arvius 2007b). These are conventional construction types for the use of especially lexical verbs.

- (97) The warm weather melted the ice.
(98) The ice melted.
(99) The fire burnt the house down.
(100) The house burnt down.
(101) His hands felt the rough surface.
(102) He felt the rough surface.
(103) He felt that the surface was rough.
(104) The surface felt rough.

Sometimes a word sense is not regularly connected with the construction it is used in on a particular occasion, or in a specific written text. All the same, such seemingly incidental variation in the grammatical construction of an item may well appear to be appropriate and acceptable in a certain communicative context. (Cf. Goldberg 2006, 1995)

- (105) He was breathing.
(106) He was breathing the polluted air.
(107) He was breathing her hair, sweet perfumed shampoo.

5.8. Domain shift

The examples below would appear to be similar to both collocational tailoring and metaphorical extensions. More specifically, they seem to involve more pronounced meaning changes than collocational tailoring, and in contrast with collocational tailoring they are often separate conventional senses of a lexical unit. Like metaphorical extension the contents of these uses have shifted over to another domain compared to a more basic or at least polysemously related application, but in these cases the situational switch is not as drastic as the contrast between a metaphorical target and its source. As exemplified below, such polysemous variants often both or all have concrete descriptive meanings. In all, they appear to make up a category of their own, and I have labelled it *domain shift*. (Alm-Arvius 2007b)

- (108) The little children were *playing* in the garden.
- (109) They *played* cards after dinner.
- (110) The boys prefer *playing* football to doing their homework.
- (111) Albert Einstein *played* the violin.
- (112) *Play* that song again, Sam.
- (113) Let's *play* some records from the fifties.
- (114) He *played* a trick on me.
- (115) I don't think he ever *played* Shakespeare, not even Hamlet.
- (116) The roses are *red* and *white*.
- (117) Her hair is *red*.
- (118) Which is healthier, *red* or *white* meat?
- (119) Do you like your coffee *black* or *white*?
- (120) The parcel was *light*.
- (121) We put on *light* clothes, tees and shorts, and had a first *light* meal.

5.9. Interpersonal signals

Another quite common type of polysemous relation is that between idiomatic interpersonal expressions like the following and compositional collocations containing the same words with literally descriptive or affective meanings. Verbal *interpersonal signals* of these kinds – e.g. greetings, farewells and thanks – constitute conventionally

expected behaviour in certain domains involving social and linguistic interchange. They stand for expected or even morally recommended types of speech acts in certain types of cultural contexts. Moreover, the fact that these expressions are lexicalised and used as wholes means that the words in them tend not to have an individual status. This is noticeable from both a phonological and semantic point of view. They can be run together and clearly pronounced as one element, and they will be felt to express just one interpersonally oriented sense.

- (122) *Good morning*, John.
- (123) Mr Smith said “*Good day*” and left.
- (124) It was a *good day* for us all.
- (125) *How do you do*; nice to meet you.
- (126) *How does he do it*, I wonder.

It is also worth noting that their interpersonal sign function will connect them with also largely conventional paralinguistic gestures with the same kind of interpersonal function, for instance a raised hand directed at the addressee(s) when greeting someone, usually more at distance, or shaking hands when being introduced or meeting someone again or thanking someone.

5.10. Grammatical polysemy

The occurrence of polysemy among grammatical words or word forms has also been mentioned. This kind of polysemous variation is connected with different construction types or the constituent functions that grammatical items can have in syntactic strings. An additional set of examples of a *grammatical polyseme* is given below. They concern the semantico-syntactic function of *since*, which can have temporal as well as causal senses. With the former type of meaning it indicates a point of time in the past and its connection with a stretch of time pointing “forwards”. *Since* with temporal meaning can function as a subordinator introducing an adverbial clause, as a preposition, or as an adverbial, but the last type may be analysed as a pragmatically induced clipping of either of the other two temporal applications. Causal *since* is synonymously related to *as* and *because*, which can in principle replace it in this subordinator slot, although they will not have quite the same stylistic value.

- (127) Martin has suffered from migraine *since* he was teenager.
- (128) Mobile phone sales have doubled *since* last year.
- (129) I have not met him *since*.
- (130) He found it impossible to get a good night's sleep *since* there was constant partying in the upstairs flat.

These examples illustrate how polysemous variation in the use of a grammatical word also involves the kinds of phrasal or clausal constructions that they are realised in. Moreover, it is clear that a grammatical polyseme set consists of systematically integrated senses with predominantly factually descriptive meaning. The relation between *grammatical construction based senses* will be discrete rather than potentially fuzzy and intersecting.

5.11. Punning and zeugma

The types of meaning that are oriented to phenomena, relations and reactions outside the language system itself – the factually descriptive, interpersonal, and affective functions – can thus all play a part in polysemous variation. By comparison, the poetic function seems only at work when playing with the potential ambiguity of lexemes or the constructions they can occur in. Punning and zeugma are two poetic devices that can be used for rhetorical purposes, to attract attention and amuse, for instance in advertisements, headlines and jokes, and they exploit the possibility of interpreting language uses in two distinct ways. The first example below exemplifies *zeugma*, as the object complements “her explanation” and “one of her paintings”, which are syntactically combined by “as well as”, require different interpretations of the verb *buy*. With the first of these complements, “her explanation”, the verb takes on a metaphorical sense, while it expresses its literal sense with the concrete noun phrase “one of her paintings”.

- (131) I bought her explanation as well as one of her paintings.

The next example contains a complex *pun* exploiting the homonymy of *sole* and the polysemous difference between the metaphorical idiom in the second sentence and the here suggested, but ordinarily unexpected, literal compositional meaning of this expression. More specifically, this incidental and humorous compositional interpretation of “There were strings attached” constitutes an instance of

external idiom breaking, since the idiom retains its canonical form, although a non-idiomatic reading is also contextually introduced by the preceding sentence.

- (132) The little old woman who lived in a shoe wasn't the sole owner. There were strings attached.

There is another occurrence of idiom breaking in the example below, and it again shows the punning character of this kind of wordplay. Idiom breaking works by contrasting the established meaning of a conventional expression, here a book title, with an incidental reinterpretation of it. Typically the exploited idiomatic sense is figurative, and the other, contextually induced interpretation is literal and compositional.

- (133) *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* is a famous novel by Alan Sillitoe, and Richard Bradford's biography of Sillitoe is called *The Life of a Long-Distance Writer*.

More specifically, *The Life of a Long-Distance Writer* is an example of *internal idiom breaking*, since it does not contain the same words as the well-known book title that it still partly mimics in a parallelistic manner. (See Alm-Arvius 2007a)

6. Conclusion

In section 3 it was pointed out that differences in domain connections and types of meaning can make uses of a word, and the strings they occur in, interpretatively distinct, although they can still be seen to be related. These semantic distinctions are often coupled with collocational and constructional differences.

Collocational tailoring is the result of contextual adjustment in the understanding of an item with a comparatively general sense potential to the richer or more detailed contents of a collocate. The semantically more specific and dominant word is commonly a noun, and the tailored item can be a verb, an adjective, or a preposition that collocates with this noun. Members of the classes of main verbs and adjectives tend to have more general senses, and thus wider denotative ranges out in the world, than the nouns they are used with, and the applicational generality and

flexibility of prepositions in relation to their noun arguments will be even more pronounced¹¹. In the following examples the italicised words are collocationally tailored by neighbouring words with more detailed and dominating senses.

- (134) a. The cat was rescued from a *tall* tree.
b. Of course a *tall* girl can wear high heels.
- (135) a. The eagle *flew* out over the sea.
b. The balloon rose and *flew* away.
c. Our plane *flew* at treetop level.
- (136) a. There were stacks of books *on* the table.
b. There was a big world map *on* the wall in his study.

However, the in many ways different readings of *legs* in *the legs of a spider* and *the horse's legs* show that it is not word class as such that determines the direction of collocational tailoring. Instead the principle is that a semantically more general sense, here that of *legs*, will be adjusted to a semantically richer and more specific sense, in these noun phrases *spider* and *horse* respectively.

The polysemous variation resulting from collocational tailoring will not be so noticeable. It is just a consequence of a more general sense, representing a more wide-ranging experiential quality or domain, being adjusted to fit a more specific sense or the kind of specific phenomenon that it stands for.

The meaning differences are bigger in *domain shifts*. Here the polysemous relation will be fairly obvious, but often neither or none of the readings involved in this kind of polysemy appear non-literal or figurative. The polysemous contrasts involved in domain shifts can be established senses, but there are also incidental, merely contextually or pragmatically induced cases of this type of polysemy.

- (137) a. Mary used to *sing* in the church choir.
b. The sun was rising, and the birds started to *sing*.
- (138) a. The bride wore a long *white* dress.
b. You should only drink *white* wine with fish.

¹¹ This typical difference in semantic load or specificity is reflected in the number of members these word classes have. The fact that there are not so many prepositions is directly connected with them having general senses that can take on many different kinds of contextual meanings. By comparison, the class of nouns has many members, also many more than the other lexical classes of verbs and adjectives, and it also readily accepts new ones, for instance for new experiences or inventions.

- (139) a. Rain water steadily *dripped* on to the floor.
b. Vines *dripped* from the terrace of the house.

In *metaphors* the distinction between a backgrounded, more specific and typically literal source meaning and the intended target is quite clear. The figurative character of the metaphorical target shows that it deals with a different domain of thought or experience than the source.

- (140) His grey eyes *held a frosty smile*.
(141) He was *a shadow of his former self*.
(142) Marriage can be *a bumpy road to an unknown destination*.

So there is a scalar increase in the contrast between the domains involved (i) from collocational tailoring, where they can and do logically and experientially coexist, (ii) over the clearly different, but not yet figuratively bi-dimensional polysemy relations included in the category of domain shifts, (iii) to the striking incompatibility between the prototypically literal source and the figurative target of a metaphor. Furthermore, collocational tailoring is a pragmatic or contextual phenomenon, while both domain shifts and metaphorical uses are commonly conventional, even if there are also incidental occurrences of these more noticeable types of polysemous variation.

The change from a source reading to a metaphorical interpretation somehow involves imaginative manipulation of factually descriptive meaning, and often also a boosting of affective meaning. In the sentence below metaphoricity is combined with *hyperbole*, a kind of trope that typically thrives on drastic imagery.

- (143) I froze to ice and my heart stood still for ages.

Quite generally speaking, obvious differences in the *emotive colouring* of a lexical word or multi-word expression can also be considered a kind of polysemy. It occurs both incidentally and as a result of an entrenched use. It is also sometimes coupled with a shift of domains, notably in metaphors. Moreover, antonymous switches in the affective content of words produce the kind of polysemy I have termed *value reversal*. In the strings below it arguably co-occurs with collocational tailoring¹².

¹² Cf. the terminological notion *discourse prosody*, sometimes called *semantic prosody*, in Stubbs (2001: 65f, 88, 105-108, 198-206).

- (144) Mr Humble was *arrogantly clever*.
- (145) The hero is *impressively cruel* and *enticingly wicked*.

Also a transfer from a factually descriptive or affective type of meaning to some sort of interpersonal function can result in words expressing different, polysemously contrastive contents. *Interpersonal signals* such as *cheers*, *bottoms up*, *so long*, and even *till I see you again* are learnt and used as idiomatic wholes that are appropriate to say in certain situations. Their senses are largely interpersonal, but speakers may still feel a reflection of a polysemously connected descriptive content. (Cf. Leech 1980: 16f)

- (146) *Cheers* and *bottoms up* to you all!
- (147) The boy uttered a cheer of joy and determination.
- (148) I hope it won't be so long till I see you again.
- (149) Then he shouted "*So long till I see you again*".

In *metonymic* shortcuts a word or phrase representing a focal part of a situation or phenomenon is used to describe some other part of it. In other words, metonymy arises through experiential connections within one and the same domain. It means that a language element is made to express additional meaning, and this sometimes means that there is inheritance not only of lexical characteristics but also of grammatical features, resulting in a change of grammatical category. Synecdoche is a kind of metonymy.

- (150) Nowadays *an iron* is not made of *iron*, but of a lighter metal.
- (151) *The pen* is mightier than *the sword*.
- (152) You should ask *upstairs*; they will know. (upstairs = 'the peopleworking/living upstairs')
- (153) The statement was well *worded*. (*to word* = 'to formulate in words')

Metonymic variants are sometimes conventional, or lexicalised, but there are also patterns for regular types of merely incidental polysemous variation. In addition, there are contextually specific, that is – at least apparently – new, incidental metonymic shortcuts. These are made possible and communicatively appropriate because of the foregrounding or highlighting of a particular quality or connection in a

unique universe of discourse. Such examples are not predictable, but still motivated, and supported by quite general communicative principles.

- (154) Frank Sinatra was called *Ol' Blue Eyes*.
- (155) Foucault spoke of psychoanalysts as *hired ears*.
- (156) *9/11* means the attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001.

Perspective or prominence shifts like those exemplified below are like metonymy in that they concern a change of presentation of the constitutive parts of one and the same experiential domain. The information about a scenario can be arranged in different ways, selectively foregrounding and backgrounding specific parts of it.

- (157) The sausages should fry gently.
- (158) You should fry the sausages gently.
- (159) The frying should be gentle.
- (160) The door opened.
- (161) Someone opened the door.
- (162) The door was opened.

Prototypical examples of such constructional alternatives are conventional, but occasionally words can be used in constructions that they are not ordinarily associated with. The next two examples, found on the Internet, have obvious metonymic qualities. Applying the expansion test, the first one can be explanatorily paraphrased as ‘My wife flirted so that she became silly’, and the second one can be taken to mean ‘Annie managed to get into the cockpit... by flirting’.

- (163) My wife flirted herself silly... (IS 2)
- (164) Annie flirted herself into the cockpit with Pilot Sean.
(IS 3)

The construction in the following string is basically the same as in (164), but in this case the directional phrase has metaphorical qualities.

- (165) ...until she has unwittingly flirted herself into the
Unredeemable realm of old maids,... (IS 4)

This paper has looked into polysemy in English, the nature of different types of polysemous variation, and the occurrence of conventional versus incidental polysemy. A quite general conclusion, supported also by the last few Internet examples, is that this is a complex and pervasive phenomenon where conventional resources and innovative potentials interact in a flexible and dynamic way. There are a number of identifiable types of polysemy shifts, and taken together they show how systematic, entrenched language structures constantly connect to and draw on the rich and intricate set of human experiential perspectives to be able to meet our communicative needs. Our expressive verbal capacities are not trapped in or restricted to the established form-sense structures in a language system, nor are they solely the result of our general embodied psychology. The study of polysemous variation suggests instead that both the stabilising form-sense conventions in a language and the overflowing world of extra-linguistic meaning bases are needed and at work in verbal communicative activities.

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ABSTRACT

Polysemy: Conventional and Incidental Cases

Key words: conventional polysemy, incidental polysemy, regular polysemy

Polysemy is a key question in the field of semantics. Empirical observations, analysis and description of polysemy are important for theoretical considerations and development as well as for applied linguistics, e.g. lexicography.

Polysemy occurs when a lexical unit or a construction is used to represent *different* but also *related* meanings. Polysemous variation is either conventional and systematic or the result of merely incidental, contextually induced meaning shifts. A polyseme has one or more distinct and entrenched sense potentials, but they sometimes combine or fuse in actual language use. In addition, there are more general types of regular polysemy that are only pragmatically instantiated, as well as idiosyncratic and unpredictable meaning changes. By comparison, a monosemic element has only one conventional sense, while homonyms just happen to be formally identical although their meanings are not related.

Important factors in polysemous variation are (i) the occurrence of different types of meaning, or language functions, (ii) differences in experiential domain connections, and (iii) differences in sense relations. The following types of polysemous variation have been recognised: collocational tailoring, domain shift, metaphor, metonymy, perspective shift, value reversal, irony, emotive colouring, interpersonal signal, and idiom breaking.