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**The Misunderstanding of Word Meaning within a Context  
in English – Arabic Translation  
Polysemous Words : A Case Study**

The Case of First Year Master Students of English – University of  
Constantine

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master Degree  
in Applied Language Studies

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## ***Dedication***

*This Dissertation is dedicated to:*

- *My caring Mother and Father who hold all my love and gratitude.*
- *All my Dear Sisters and Brothers without exception.*
- *My most loving Brothers: Yasser, Abd Alhakim and Mohamed Idriss.*
- *My Dear Uncle and his Family for their unremitting help.*
- *My most loving supporters: My soul mate Fairouz, Fatima and Hanan.*

*The Dedication also extends to all my friends without exception.*

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*My thanks should also be expressed to my supervisor, I would like to acknowledge his precious help, understanding, kindness and patience despite the hard work that he has.*

*I thank **GOD** for having given me the patience and courage to fulfill this work.*

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## **Abstract**

The present research work provides insights to the understanding of polysemous words in English-Arabic translation in different contexts. This comes as a reaction to the belief that a vocabulary word has one meaning and one meaning only. What is sought in this research is to prove that this belief is contrary to the fact that a word may have different meanings in different contexts. To achieve this; a translation test was given to first year Master students of English at Mentouri University-Constantine. The test contains samples of English sentences, each consisting of a polysemous word given in a different context. The test aims at checking whether or not the sample subjects have the ability to cope with the phenomenon of multiplicity of word meaning. The results have proved to be positive in the sense that the majority of the informants have succeeded to understand the meaning of the polysemous words given. This understanding is due to the sociolinguistic approaches of contextualization which have the principle that language is best understood in its appropriate context.

## Translation of the Arabic Writing System

The following transcription has been used when representing Arabic script in this dissertation. The scheme is as in Saad (1982:4)

Arabic Sounds	Phonetic Transcription	Arabic Sounds	Phonetic Transcription
Consonants			
ء	ʔ	ض	d
ب	b	ط	t
ت	t	ظ	z
ث	t	ع	c
ج	j	غ	g̃
ح	h	ف	f
خ	x	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	d	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	هـ	h
ش	š	و	w
ص	s	ي	y
Vowels			
َ	a	ا	ā
ُ	u	و	ū
ِ	i	ي	ī

**Note:** The definite article will always be translated as | al- | in spite of the fact that it has a hamza | ʔ | in the Arabic system of writing. (الشَّادَة) | al-ššada | :double consonants.

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# Introduction

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## Introduction

### 1. Aim of the Study

“Words can take on an infinite number of meanings in novel contexts” (Pustejovsky, 1995:42). This phenomenon of the multiplicity of word meaning causes some difficulty in translation. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the students' mistakes through the misunderstanding of word meaning during the process of translating polysemous words from English into Arabic, since a polysemous word is known of having other meanings in addition to its common one which is called the core or conceptual meaning.

The selection of first year Master students learning English as a foreign language in the Department of English at Mentouri University-Constantine is done on the basis that those students are supposed to master the core meaning of some English polysemous words, as the words proposed in the given test. Also, they are supposed to be aware of the fact that a word may lose its core meaning in some cases, as Aitchison (1994:14) puts it:

It is proven by psycholinguistic studies that humans work from prototypes. They rank items within categories and so they do for word meanings. The most prototypical of word meanings is its core meaning and completely novel meanings are the least prototypical.

Students have to bear in mind that there are other meanings of a word beyond its common meaning which can only be understood in the context in which it occurs.

Misunderstanding polysemy sometimes poses problems in rendering the right translation of the target text. Take for example the verb “Break” in sentence like: “He broke the window”, its equivalent in Arabic is ‘هو كسر النافذة’ | huwa kasara al-nnāfidata | in

which the common meaning of the verb “Break” here is very well known as separating something into pieces. But if we use the same verb in another context and say for example: “they are determined to break the back of their task” which has the equivalent of: ‘إِنَّهُمْ مَصْمُومُونَ عَلَىٰ اِنِّجَازِ الْقَدْرِ الْأَكْبَرِ مِنْ مَهْمَتِهِمْ’ | ?innahum muṣamimūna calā ?injāzi al-qadri al-?akbari min muhimmatihim |, the literal meaning of the verb “Break” surely does not fit this context. The meaning of this verb, in this case, can be deduced from the context in which it occurs.

Because of these difficulties in understanding word meaning within a given context, despite its familiarity to students, the importance of practice, reading in foreign language and frequency of exposure to it is very important.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Translating English words seems to be easy when seeking for their equivalents in isolation in the target language (Arabic). But, this is not always the case since there are other meanings of the same word which can be raised in each use of this word in a given context. The essential issue is to find the exact equivalents in Arabic for the English polysemous words within a context when translating them. Students sometimes translate each word from English into Arabic by applying its core meaning into Arabic, because they may know only this meaning. Hence, this sometimes can be applied as with the word “Sound” in the example: “I like the sound of birds”. Its equivalent in Arabic is ‘أَحَبُّ صَوْتِ الطَّيْرِ’ | ?uhhibu ṣawta al-ṭṭuyūri |, but sometimes not, as in “Children sleep sound sleep”. Its equivalent in Arabic is: ‘يَنَامُ الْأَطْفَالُ نَوْمًا عَمِيقًا’ | yanāmu al-?aṭfālu nawman camīqan |. So, translating the word “sound” into its equivalent or the most typical counterpart in Arabic ‘صَوْتٌ’ | ṣawt | and say ‘يَنَامُ الْأَطْفَالُ نَوْمًا صَوْتِيًّا’ | yanāmu al-?aṭfālu nawman ṣawtiyyan | is wrong and, hence, an oddity can be noticed. So, the sentence

meaning will be distorted, because this word can not be translated without regard to the context in which it occurs.

In short, this study is based on the difficulties of understanding other meanings of the same word, mainly the case of polysemy, which first year Master students of English at Mentouri University-Constantine confront when translating words from English into Arabic.

### **3. Research Question**

Does multiplicity of word meaning, the case of polysemous words, represent serious problems to first year Master students of English in English – Arabic translation?

### **4. Hypothesis**

As a major step in the present research work we hypothesize if first year Master students of English at the University of Constantine first, master the core meaning of a polysemous word and understand its meaning in its linguistic context. Second, take into account the relation of a polysemouse word with other words in the sentence, since it is helpful in guessing its meaning, they would be able to produce a successful translation.

### **5. Means of Research**

In order to test our hypothesis and to obtain the required information, the present study is based on a test. The subjects (first year Master students of English, at Mentouri University-Constantine) who are participating in this study are asked to translate seven samples of English sentences into Arabic. Each sample contains three sentences containing a polysemous word which is supposed to be familiar to them, i.e., they know its core

meaning. This is done in order to test the students' ability to understand the other meanings of the polysemous words suggested for translation.

## **6. Structure of the Study**

This piece of research is divided into two chapters. The first chapter is about the literature review and it is about Translation and polysemy. This chapter attempts to shed some light on translation, then it deals with semantics taking one of its lexical structure which is polysemy, followed by some points of view concerning the word meaning, and ending up with the application of polysemy in English - Arabic translation. The second chapter is practical. It is devoted to the analysis of the test which is given to first year Master students of English in order to test their ability to translate English polysemous words into Arabic in different contexts, and the interpretation of the results obtained. A general conclusion is provided to end up the dissertation.

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# **Chapter One:**

## **Translation and Polysemy**

### **Introduction**

Because translation works to bridge the gaps between the social and cultural aspects of languages, in addition to overcome linguistic barriers, it has become the focus of the present studies. Since one of the aims of translation is converting the meaning of a given linguistic discourse from one language to another more than the words of the source language, it is worth pointing out to the field of semantics which is concerned with the study of meaning. The recent theories of lexical semantics made some distinctions between different types of lexical ambiguities and chose polysemy from other types. So, our main concern here lies on the shift from the core meaning of a given word to the contextual meaning. Such a shift is mainly relevant to translation. The first chapter which deals with translation and polysemy begins with throwing some light on translation, its definition, its types, and mainly semantic and communicative translation. Then it introduces its theories and problems with due reference to word translation. The chapter continues to deal with semantics and its definitions. In the lexical structure of semantics, the focus has long been on the notion of polysemy and some traditional views concerning it. Contrasting polysemy with homonymy is also highlighted in this chapter. The chapter goes on to deal with some scholars' points of view concerning the word meaning, and the distinction between the conceptual and the contextual meanings of a word. Finally, the chapter ends up with translating English polysemous words into Arabic and some suggestions are provided.

## 1.1 Translation

Translation is most commonly thought of as a practical activity that involves turning one language into another. Yet various definitions by many scholars are provided.

Ghazala (1995: 1-2), for example, defines it as follows:

As a subject, translation is generally used to refer to all the processes and methods used to convey the meaning of the source language into the target language. That is, the use of: (1) words which already have an equivalent in Arabic language; (2) new words for which no equivalent was available in Arabic before; (3) foreign words written in Arabic letters; and (4) foreign words changed to suit Arabic pronunciation, spelling and grammar.

For more illustration, this definition is supported by the following examples respectively:

1. “Speak” .....(يتكلم) | yatakallamu |
2. “Satellite”.....(قمر صناعي) | qamarun ṣinācī |
3. “Aspirin” .....(أسبرين) | ?asbirīn |
4. “Democracy” .....(ديمقراطية) | dīmuqrāṭiya | (Ghazala, 1995:2).

Another definition which is given to the term of Translation, and seems exhaustive, is that “it refers to both a process and a product” (Yowelly & Lataiwish, 2000:11).

As a process, it is a human activity which human beings do every time.

Translation as a product is what the translator produces while doing the process of translation.

According to Mehdi (2007) translation is the transfer of the text from the source language into the target language or more precisely, it is the process of finding out the closest equivalent of the source text in the target language.



Lawendowski (1978:267) writes “Translation is a transfer of meaning from one set of language signs to another set of language signs.”

### **1.1.1 Methods of Translation**

Theories of translation have suggested sharply different methods of translation, semantic translation is one.

#### **1.1.1.1 Semantic Translation**

Semantic translation is applied in various ways. This type of translation consists of subtypes. Literal Translation of Meaning: Direct Translation is one example.

##### **1.1.1.1.1 Literal Translation of Meaning: “Direct Translation”**

Literal translation of meaning also can be called a close or direct translation since it is the translation of meaning in context. It is very important in translating meaning as nearly, accurately, and clearly as possible. Furthermore, it takes into account the grammar, word order, the metaphorical and the special use of the target language. It is also described as “Full translation of meaning” (Ghazala, 1995:11).

Ghazala (1995) argues that this method is the best for literal translation since it views the literal meaning of a word as not one single, but different meanings which can occur in different contexts and various structures. This can be illustrated through the word “Run” which does not always mean: (يجري) |yajrī| in all contexts and structures. The meaning (يجري) |yajrī| is the most common meaning of the word “Run”, but it is not its literal meaning. The word “Run” in fact has various meanings in different contexts and each meaning is taken as a literal meaning as the following examples illustrate:

1. “To run in the race” (يجري/ يركض في السباق) |yajrī / yarkudu fī al-ssibāqi|

2. “To run a company” (يدبر شركة) | yudīru šarikatan |
  3. “In the long run” (على المدى البعيد) | calā al-madā al-bacīdi |
  4. “To run short of money” (ينفذ ما عنده من مال) | yanfudu mā cindahu min mālin |
  5. “To run round” (يطوف/ يقوم بزيارة خاطئة) | yaṭūfu / yaqūmu biziyrātin xāṭifatin |
- (ibid:11)

Each meaning of the word “Run” can be taken as a literal meaning in a given structure and context. So, to say that the word “Run” has only one literal meaning which is ‘جرى’ | yajrī | is not acceptable, because in example (02) which is “To run a company”, “Run” does not have two meanings, one is considered “literal” and the other “non-literal”, but in fact this word in this sentence has only one meaning which is ‘يدبر’ | yudīru |. So, if the word “Run” is translated in this context into ‘جرى’ | yajrī | and say:

‘جرى/ يركض شركة’ | yajrī / yarkudu šarikatan | is not a literal translation, but a wrong one because we can only say: ‘يدبر شركة’ | yudīru šarikatan | in this context (Ghazala, 1995).

Ghazala (1995) writes “literal translation is committed to the real meaning or meanings of a word or a phrase available in language [...]. In other words, literal meaning is both the metaphorical as well as the non-metaphorical use of a word” (ibid:12).

In this type of translation, Ghazala (1995) claimed that the literal meaning of a word is both denotative and connotative. Thus, this method of translation is the most appropriate among other methods because it deals with translating the real meaning of words or expressions in their linguistic context as exactly and nearly as possible without regard to their metaphorical or non-metaphorical use. This method is considered as direct, complete and adequate. So, according to Ghazala (1995) students are advised to use this method of literal translation (Direct Translation) as it is the most suitable, reasonable, convincing and orderly used type of translation.

### **1.1.1.2 Communicative Translation**

Communicative translation is “a communicative process which takes place within a social context” (Hatim & Mason, 1990 quoted in Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1999:21).

Shuttleworth and Cowie (1999) argue that in order for a text or a sentence to have a communicative function, this sentence or text has to be treated as a message not as a series of linguistic units only. Also the translator who is translating communicatively has to keep the same function or effect of the source language and to reproduce its effects on the new readers.

Also they argue that communicative translation is that which contrasts with Interlinear Translation, Literal Translation or Word -for- Word Translation, because it treats the words of the source text as one of the factors which are needed to be borne in the mind of the translator. Therefore, the translation which adheres too closely to the original text’s words, does not often achieve the same communicative function of the target text, but ends up with distorting its message.

### **1.1.2 Theories of Translation**

In dealing with theories of equivalence in the field of translation, Leonardi (2000) claims that the theory of equivalence is the most important issue in translation since hot debates have resulted in various theories concerning the concept of equivalence. These theories were a result of researches made by theorists and scholars like: Vinay and Darbelnet, Jakobson, Nida and Taber, Catford, House and finally Baker. Those theorists studied the concept of equivalence in relation to translation process using different approaches.

In her approach to translation equivalence, Baker (1992) for example, introduces the notion of equivalence at different levels and distinguishes between three types of equivalence. First, equivalence at word level and above word level which is required from the translator to be aware of a number of factors during the analysis of the source text such as: number, gender and tense. Second, in grammatical equivalence, she focuses on the grammatical rules which may vary from one language to another and hence cause some problems in finding direct equivalents in the target language. Also, she claims that, because of the grammatical structures diversity across languages, this may pose a change in carrying out the information from the source language into the target language. So, because of these changes and the lack of particular grammatical devices such as: number, gender, tense, aspect, voice and person in the target language, this may lead the translator to add or omit information in the target text. Third, textual equivalence which refers to the equivalence in both information and cohesion between the source and the target language texts. Fourth, the pragmatic equivalence which refers to the implicit meaning not what is explicitly said. So, the job of the translator here is to work out the implied meaning in order to achieve the source text message in a way that can be understood by the target reader.

In conclusion, the notion of equivalence is one of the most problematic areas in translation theory since it has caused many controversial points of view among theorists and probably will continue to cause hot debates within the field of translation theory. Hence, an extremely interesting discussion of the notion of equivalence in translation is probably Baker's (Leonardi, 2000).

In his approach to translation theory and practice, Larson (1991:01) writes “good theory is based on information gained from good practice. Good practice is based on carefully worked out theory. The two are interdependent.”

So, in this sense translation is a process which is based on the theory which is possible for abstracting the text's meaning from its forms and then reconstructing this same meaning with the different forms of the second language (Larson, 1991).

### **1.1.3 Translation Problems**

When translators start to translate, they may face some problems. These problems are difficulties which make them stop the process of translating to think, rewrite or use the dictionary in order to check the word meaning ...etc. Translation problems are the problems drawn by grammar, sounds, style and words. Concerning lexical problems (words), students face a great number of such problems when they are trying to translate. These lexical problems are due to the misunderstanding of words in a direct and clear way. The main lexical problems are: literal translation, synonymy, collocations, idioms, proverbs, and polysemy (Ghazala, 1995).

### **1.1.4 Word Translation**

Translators should focus on words when translating a sentence or a text because of some reasons. Newmark (1988:73), for example, puts it as:

All the same, we do translate words because there is nothing else to translate; there are only the words on the page; there is nothing else there. We do not translate isolated words; we translate words all more or less (and sometimes less rather more, but never not at all) bound by their syntactic, collocational, situational, cultural and individual idiolectal contexts. That is in way of looking at translation, which suggests it is basically lexical.

He also points out that, what most of the translators say is that translators should not translate words, but translate sentences, messages or ideas. In this way, he thinks that they are deceiving themselves since what the source language text consists of is words that are all that is on the page. So, what translators have on the page is words to translate and they have to account for each of them in the target language text. He goes on to state that he is not suggesting that translators, through his thought, translate words in isolation, but translate words taking into consideration what influence their meaning linguistically, referentially, culturally and subjectively.

## **1.2 Semantics**

Various definitions concerning the notion of semantics are provided.

According to Palmer (1976) semantics is defined as a technical term which refers to the study of meaning, hence, he views that meaning covers various aspects of language. He goes on to state that the way in which meaning should be described and what is meaning, there is no very general agreement on that since there are different points of view concerning the description of meaning.

Yule (2006) provides another definition for the notion of semantics in which he claims that this latter means the study of meaning at words, phrases and sentences levels. So, in semantic analysis, the focus is always on the conventional meaning of words more than the speaker's meaning when using them in a particular context (occasion).

When placing semantics in linguistics, Yule (2006) argues that this notion is concerned with the conventional meaning of words, phrases and sentences. Yule (2006:4) writes:

Semantics is the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and entities in the world; that is, how words literally connected to things. Semantic analysis also attempts to establish the relationship between verbal descriptions and states of affairs in the world as accurate (true) or not, regardless of who produces that description.

## **1.2.1 Lexical Structure in Semantics**

Here, the problem of meaning will be approached from the point of view of sense relation, taking polysemy as an example and contrasting it with homonymy in order to avoid the confusion between the two concepts.

### **1.2.1.1 Polysemy**

The concept of polysemy is defined by Palmer (1976) who argues that not only different words have different meaning, but also the same word can be assigned different meanings. The phenomenon is known as “polysemy” and such a word is called “polysemous word”.

In order to explain this definition, Palmer (1976) gives the following example in which the dictionary defines the word “flight” in at least the following ways:

1. Passing through the air.
2. Power of flying.
3. Air journey.
4. Unit of the air force.
5. Volley.
6. Digression.
7. Series of steps (ibid:40).

When considering these examples, the idea of metaphor starts to emerge once we are moving from one meaning to another, and the word appears to have both “literal” meaning and one or more “Transferred” meanings.

Blank (1999) points out that the origin of the term polysemy goes back to (1897) when Bréal wrote “Essai de Sémantique”, and he quoted the exact passage where the term polysemy appears:

Le sens nouveau, quel qu'il soit ne met pas fin à l'ancien. Ils existent tous les deux l'un à côté de l'autre. Le même terme peut s'employer tour à tour au sens propre ou au sens métaphorique, au sens restreint ou au sens étendu, au sens abstrait ou au sens concret [...] à mesure qu'une signification nouvelle est donnée au mot, il a l'air de se multiplier et de produire des exemplaires nouveaux, semblables de forme différent de valeur. Nous appelons ce phénomène de multiplication (la polysémie) (Bréal, 1897 quoted in Blank, 1999:147).

In his explanation of this quoted passage, Blank (1999) argues that polysemy occurs when a word denotes a new sense together with the old one. The usage of this word will vary, as he says, between a restricted sense and the intended one, and between an abstract sense and the concrete one. He goes on to argue that any new signification assigned to a particular word is more likely to produce other signification that is assigned to a same word. This phenomenon is called “Polysemy”.

Ghazala (1995), in his turn, defines polysemy as a phenomenon when a word is assigned other meanings more than its common one which is the more popular and called “core meaning”. In such a way this word is called “Polysemous Word”. To explain this definition he supports it with the word “Sound” as an example. This word has the core meaning of the noise from the mouth through the vocal cords, i.e, صوت | şawt | in Arabic. However, the other meanings are less popular than the core meaning and they are: (firm, solid, wise, valid, channel...etc).



### 1.2.1.2 Some Traditional Views on Polysemy

Siblot (1995) states that before the recent generative works, polysemy had been considered as a sense alternation, more clearly it is considered as a sense distortion from the original sense. So, as he sees it, a polysemous word is really “a Shifted Word”. Seeing or understanding polysemy from this angle, i.e., as a sense alternation is one of the oldest perceptions.

Aristotle (1995) criticized the notion of polysemy when he said “words of ambiguous meaning” (ibid:24). He also claims that, they (words of ambiguous meaning) are chiefly useful to enable the sophist to mislead his learners. Later on, the majority of philosophers denounced polysemy by considering it as a defect of language and a handicap to communication, understanding and clear thinking. However, Siblot (1995) contrasts this view and sees that the multiplicity of senses in the word should be accounted and not its richness.

Clare (1989) questions this phenomenon of the multiplicity of word meanings in a more or less descriptive way. She investigates its nature attempting to find out whether it is a curse or blessing in language. After her investigation she comes to the conclusion that:

Language cannot exist without ambiguities, which has represented both a curse and a blessing through ages [...] Language is a very complex phenomenon. Meanings that can be taken for granted are in fact only the tips of a huge ice berg [...] Signification is always ‘spilling over’, as John Lye says ‘especially in texts which are designated to release power [...] Signs [...] do not have a fixed significance, the significance exists only in the individual [...]’. It can be seen therefore that ambiguity in language is both blessing and a curse. I would like to say, together with Pablo Neruda ‘ambiguity, I love you because I don’t love you’ (Clare, 1989 quoted in Salhi, 2005:3).

### 1.2.1.3 Polysemy vs Homonymy

In his distinction between polysemy and homonymy, Palmer (1976) claims that we can say that a given word is polysemous when this word has several meanings, and we can speak about homonymy when there are several words with the same shape or form. The dictionary has to decide whether a particular word is handled in terms of polysemy or homonymy, because a polysemous word is treated as a single entry in the dictionary, whereas the homonymous word has a separate entry for each of the homonyms. However, according to Palmer (1976), we can not decide whether a word is homonymous or polysemous by merely consulting the dictionary because of different reasons. First, we can not make the same distinction in writing and speech. Second, the dictionaries base their decision up on etymology, and other reasons.

Weinreich (1964), in his distinction between the two types of lexical ambiguity, namely contrastive ambiguity and complementary polysemy, argues that we can speak about contrastive ambiguity when there is no relation between the different senses of a word, this is the case of “Homonymy”. He gives the following examples in order to illustrate this type of ambiguity:

1- a) Mary walked along the bank of the river.

b) Harbor bank is the richest bank in the city.

2-a) First we leave the gate, then we taxi down the runway.

b) John saw the taxi down the street.

The two meanings of each of the underlined words are not related to each other. So, in the dictionary each of the two words has two separate meanings and two distinct entries fore example: Bank<sup>1</sup>, Bank<sup>2</sup> and Taxi<sup>1</sup>, Taxi<sup>2</sup>.

### 1.3 The Word Meaning

It is almost certain that the majority of words in language have a primary meaning. Newmark (1981) argues that the core meaning is the first sense suggested by the word alone, completely out of context. The primary meaning of a word is generally provided in the dictionary entry, but he also argues that words do not always exist in isolation.

In a description to the situation of words Kripke (1982:55) puts it:

There can be no such thing as meaning any thing by any word. Each new application we make is a leap in the dark, any present intention could be interpreted so as to accord with any thing we may choose to do.

Through out this statement, he claims that assigning meanings to words is based on an arbitrary ground.

However, Kripke (1982) goes on to argue that any word could mean anything when it is put in a given context and so, in this way, dictionaries would be useless since there is no specific identity to words. Thus, words must be acquired with some devices that can account for the possible meanings that these words can point to in a well formed context.

Cruse (1986:50) writes “the meaning of any word form is in some sense different in every distinct context in which it occurs”.

According to Zaky (2000) a word meaning is best understood when it is used in a given sentence or phrase, in a particular context to achieve a particular effect. A word meaning can not only be known through an external object or idea that this word is supposed to refer to. He goes further arguing that the first type of word meaning is the meaning of reference and he provides different names for this type of meaning: conceptual meaning, denotative meaning, lexical meaning, referential meaning, and it is sometimes

referred to as a significance of a lexical item. The other types of meaning are: connotative meaning, stylistic meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning and collective types of meaning. The last five types of meaning can be classified under one general category which is “Associative meaning”.

In her approach to the types of word meaning Mwihaki (2004:138) states that:

Conceptual meaning is stable and invariable since it can be represented by means of a finite set of symbols, be they semantic features, semantic postulates or semantic rules. In contrast, associative meaning is variable and therefore unstable, since it owes its validity to socio-psychological and contextual factors.

She also claims that, the two categories of meaning, i.e., the conceptual meaning and associative meaning are related to grammatical and communicative competence respectively. Grammatical competence, on the one hand, is the knowledge that enables the person to form and interpret the linguistic expression. Communicative competence, on the other hand, is the knowledge that enables the person to communicate in an effective way by verbal means. In order for the person to be communicatively competent, he needs knowledge of the language system and the skills to use this system in different social situations and communicative settings (Mwihaki, 2004).

### **1.3.1 Conceptual and Contextual Meanings**

There is a difference between the conceptual meaning or the core meaning of a given word and between other types of meaning, i.e., associated or contextual meanings. The reason behind such a difference is that, the conceptual meaning of a word can be deduced in isolation from other linguistic or even non-linguistic contexts, whereas the associated meaning can be derived from the context of the occurrence of the word. This is

relevant to translation where it is easy for the translator to find the conceptual or the core meaning of a word. Hence this type of word meaning is not always telling in the case of translation, because it is often difficult to find out the lexical equivalent of a given item in translation, especially when translation takes place across two different languages.

So, the translator is supposed to translate the communicative function of the source language text, more than its significance. Thus, the translation should take place at the level of language use more than the level of usage ( Zaky, 2000).

#### **1.4 The Translation of Polysemous Words into Arabic**

Polysemy, as defined by Ghazala (1995), occurs when a word has one common meaning which is the “core or central meaning” and other meanings for the same word. This multiplicity of word meaning creates a problem especially in translation, because students may know only the core meaning of a word and translate it by its equivalent in Arabic. Students may know the common meaning of the verb “ break” as separating something into pieces, and use the word ‘كسر’ |kasara | as its equivalent in Arabic or ‘نكسِرُ’ | taksīrun | when the verb “Break” is used as a noun as in :

1- “The boy broke the window”

(كسر الولد النافذة) | kasara al-waladu al-nnāfidata |

2- “We expected the break of the lock.”

(توقعنا كسر القفل) | tawaqacnā kasra al-qufli |

Using the word ‘كسر’ |kasara | as an equivalent to the word “Break” is applicable to special expressions like:

3- “This job breaks the back”

(هذا العمل يكسر الظهر) | hadā al-camalu yaksiru al-zzahra |

Using the meaning of ‘هشتم / حطم’ | haṭṭama / haššama | as synonyms to the word ‘كسر’ | kasara | when translating the word “break” into Arabic is also possible in sentences like:

4- “The runner tried to break the world record.”

(حاول العداء تحطيم الرقم العالمي) | hāwala al-caddā?u taḥṭīma al-rraqmi al-cālamī |

5- “Why did you break his face”

(لماذا هشمت وجهه) | limādā haššamta wajhahu |

However, there are other meanings for the word “Break” in addition to the word ‘كسر’ | kasara | in Arabic as these examples will illustrate:

6- “Please, do not break your promise”

(من فضلك لا تخلف وعداك) | min fādlika lā taxlif wacdaka |

7- “the crowd broke when the match had ended”

(تفرق الجمهور عند انتهاء المباراة) | tafarraqa al-jumhūru cinda ?intihā?i al-mubārāti |

8- “She will break the news soon”

(سوف تفضي الأخبار قريبا) | sawfā tufšī al-?axbāra qarīban |

The students of course can not memorize all these meanings for the word “Break”. However, they have to bear in mind, when translating it, that there are other meanings for this word besides its common one. The same for the word “sound” which has other meanings that are mostly unfamiliar to students, and this can cause problems when translating it into Arabic (Ghazala, 1995).

In order to overcome the problem of translating a polysemous word, Ghazala (1995) suggested the following points that have to be considered:

1- Great number of English words are polysemous having several meanings. So, when students translate a word within a sentence using its common meaning and it seems strange, this indicates that the word has another meaning which is different from its common one.

2- The type of a text also is a guide in understanding the word meaning, for example a text about “Birds” the word “sound” is likely to be translated into its common meaning ‘صوت’ | şawt | .

3- The context in which words occur is also important in guessing the meaning of the polysemic word. This letter means that the translator while translating a sentence he has to look at the preceding and the following sentence or clauses, or the general context of the whole text.

4- Knowing the grammatical class of a word (verb, noun, adjective... etc) is also an indication to guess the word meaning. The word “sound”, for example, is known as a noun to students, so when it is used as a verb or adjective it acquires another meaning as in : “ Your suggestion sounds reasonable”, where the word “sound” is used as a verb and it is equivalent to the verb “seem” in this case. Its equivalent in Arabic is: ‘يبدو’ | yabdū | . However, in another example like: “It is a sound basis”, the word “sound” in this example is used as an adjective having the equivalent of ‘صلب’ | şalb | in Arabic. So, this example can be translated into:

‘(إنه أساس صلب) | ?innahu ?asāsun şalbun |

5- The relation of the polysemous word with other words in the sentence is also a guide in guessing its meaning. A good example would be the word “Break” which can be

combined with physical objects like: (Window, Door, Car, Hand...etc). So, when the word “Break” is combined with other unphysical words like: (Law, Promise, Dawn...etc), it acquires another meaning which needs to be discovered by students.

6- Using the word as a phrasal verb is also an indication to its polysemic nature, where the word can be followed by an adverb or preposition as these examples illustrate:

1) “You can not break with your family”, its equivalent in Arabic is:

(لا يمكنك ان تخاصم عائلتك) | lā yumkinuka ?an tuxāšima cā?ilataka | .

2) “The thief broke away from the police”, its equivalent in Arabic is:

(فرَّ اللص من الشرطه) | farra al-llišu mina al-ššurṭati | .

So, in conclusion, students must take into consideration the above suggestions in order to convey the intended meaning of the polysemous word in a given sentence for the sake of ending up with a good enough translation when translating polysemous words within a given context from English into Arabic (Ghazala, 1995).



## **Conclusion**

Translation is a hard work in that it is fully involved in the languages and cultures of two or more nations. A good translation is the one that results in an effective communication, but a bad one is a matter of failure in the communication of meaning which is central in any translation. As polysemous words are known of having other meanings than the common ones (core meanings), they pose problems especially in translation. So, in order to translate a word in a sentence or a text, the translator needs not only to know the common meaning of the word, but also to have good grasp of what this word means in a given context. Palmer (1976:4) says: “we wish to suggest that the words do not mean what they might obviously be thought to mean, that there is some other meaning besides the ‘Literal’ meaning of the words”.

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## **Chapter Two: The Students' Production of Polysemous Words in English-Arabic Translation**

### **Introduction**

This chapter aims at checking whether or not first year Master students of English at Mentouri University-Constantine master the core meaning of some English polysemous words and the other meanings carried out in different contexts, where the core meaning does not really make sense. This is done via the given test represented in sentences containing polysemous words proposed for translation from English into Arabic. The aim behind that is to measure the students' awareness of the multiplicity of word meaning phenomenon. And this is for the sake of using the correct word meaning which is the most suitable to a given context during the process of translating polysemous words. This chapter also intends to answer the question which is raised in this study, and to find out to what extent students at this level are aware of the different types of meaning a word may have.

### **2.1 The Test**

#### **2.1.1 The Sample**

The subjects of the present study are twenty one first year Master students from the English Department, Faculty of Letters and Languages, Mentouri University-Constantine. The subjects have been selected randomly from the four groups of first year Master English language. They are not representative since the number of the subjects is few and this is due to time constraints. The choice has fallen on those subjects at this level because of the following reasons:

- They are supposed to be familiar with translation since they have received translation courses from the second year at the University in both ways English/ Arabic/ English.

- They are also supposed to know what is meant by polysemy since they have been given lectures in semantics during this year explaining such a phenomenon.

### **2.1.2 Description of the Test**

The data are collected through the given test. The subjects are asked to translate seven samples of English sentences into Arabic. Each sample contains three English sentences containing a polysemous word. The suggested polysemous words, which are supposed to be familiar to the subjects, are: Break, Sound, Run, Give, Go, Take and Cut. However, the meanings of these words vary in each use between the core meaning and the other meanings depending on the context in which they occur. This is done in order to assess the students' production of English polysemous words when translating them into Arabic since it is the main concern of this research work, and also to highlight the translation difficulties brought about by polysemous words to students' translations.

## **2.2 Data Analysis**

Concerning the analysis of the students' data that are collected through the given test, each sentence sample is going to be analysed on its own.

### **2.2.1 Sample One**

In sample number one, the subjects are asked to translate three English sentences into Arabic. The sentences contain the word “Break” as a polysemous word. The English sentences are:

1. The thief broke the car.
2. The prisoner broke jail.
3. They are determined to break the back of their task.

Their equivalents in Arabic are:

1. كسر السارق السبارة | kasara al-ssāriqu al-ssayārata |

2. فرّ السجين من السجن | farra al-ssajīnu mina al-ssijni |

3. إنهم مصممون على إنجاز القدر الأكبر من مهمتهم

| ?innahum musammimūna calā ?injāzi al-qadri al- ?akbari min muhimmatihim |

In the first English sentence the word “Break” is used as a verb. It has the core or common meaning which is equivalent to the word ‘كسر’ | kasara | in Arabic when translating it in the first sentence. The results show that twelve subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the Arabic equivalent ‘كسر’ | kasara | for the English verb “Break” in their translation of the first sentence. Three subjects, out of twenty one, have produced the Arabic equivalent ‘حطم’ | hattama | in their translation. Only one subject has rendered the Arabic equivalent ‘خرّب’ | xarraba | for the verb “Break” in the first sentence. The last two words ‘حطم’ | hattama | and ‘خرّب’ | xarraba | are considered as synonyms of the Arabic word ‘كسر’ | kasara |. These results support our hypothesis in the sense that those subjects have mastered the core meaning of the verb “Break” which is suitable in the context of the first sentence when translating it into Arabic. There are five cases, out of twenty one, where the subjects have used the word: ‘سرق’ | saraqa | as an equivalent to the verb “Break” in Arabic. This is, may be, because they have related the word “Break” to the word “thief” or ‘السارق’ | al-ssāriqu | in Arabic who is known of his job of ‘burglar’. So, in this case, the subjects have taken into account the relation of the polysemous word “Break” with the word “thief” in the first English sentence when translating it. This falls into what has been hypothesized; hence, their translation resulted in conveying the intended meaning of the word “Break” in the wrong way.

In the second English sentence, the word “Break” is used as a verb, but its meaning in this case is not the core meaning. Its meaning depends on the context. The Arabic equivalent of the word “Break” in this sentence when translating it is ‘فَرَّ’ | farra | . The results show that four subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the Arabic equivalent ‘فَرَّ’ | farra | for the English verb “Broke”. Sixteen subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the Arabic equivalent ‘هَرَبَ’ | haraba | , which is a synonym to the word ‘فَرَّ’ | farra | . This supports our hypothesis that the subjects have understood that the core meaning of the verb “Break” which is separating some thing into pieces, which has the equivalent of ‘كَسَرَ’ | kasara | in Arabic when translating it, does not fit this context. Only one case, out of twenty one, where the subject has rendered the Arabic word ‘كَسَرَ’ | kasara | as an equivalent of the verb “Broke” in the second English sentence when translating it into Arabic. This is, may be, because this student thinks that in order for the prisoner to escape from the prison, he broke it.

In the third English sentence, the word “Break” is used as a verb, its meaning is not the core meaning, but another meaning for the same word which can be deduced from the context of its occurrence. Its equivalent in Arabic, in this case, is ‘إِنجَازٌ’ | injāzi | . The results show that only two subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the Arabic equivalent ‘إِنجَازٌ’ | injāzi | for the verb “Break”. This reveals that those two subjects have understood the word meaning in the context in which it occurs. Two subjects, out of twenty one, have provided the Arabic equivalents ‘الْقِيَامُ’ | al-qiyāmi | and ‘تَأْدِيَةٌ’ | ta?diyati | for the verb “Break” in the context of the third English sentence. The last two Arabic words ‘الْقِيَامُ’ | al-qiyāmi | and ‘تَأْدِيَةٌ’ | ta?diyati | are considered as synonyms to the Arabic word ‘إِنجَازٌ’ | injāzi | and this, in turn, shows that those two subjects also have understood the word meaning in the context of the third English sentence. Fifteen subjects,

out of twenty one, have produced different Arabic equivalents for the verb “Break” when translating the third English sentence between using the Arabic words ‘اجتياز’ | ?ijtiyāzi | , ‘وقف’ | waqfi | , ‘تخريب’ | taxrībi | , ‘كسر’ | kasri | , ‘انهاء’ | ?inhā?i | , ‘مخالفة’ | muxālafati | , ‘اختراق’ | ?ixtirāqi | . These results show that those subjects did not understand the meaning of the word “Break” in the context in which it occurs. That’s why their translation resulted in conveying the word meaning in a wrong way. There are two cases, out of the twenty one, where the subjects did not provide any translation, may be, because they did not understand the whole meaning of the sentence.

### 2.2.2 Sample Two

In sample number two, the subjects are asked to translate three English sentences into Arabic. The sentences contain the word “Sound” as a polysemous word. The English sentences are:

1. I like the sound of birds.
2. Your suggestion sounds reasonable.
3. Muslims have sound beliefs.

Their equivalents in Arabic are:

1. أحب صوت الطيور | ?uhību sawta al-ttuyūri |
2. يبدو اقتراحك معقولا | yabdū ?iqtirāhuka maqqūlan |
3. للمسلمين اعتقادات راسخة | lilmuslimīna ?ictiqādātun rāsixatun |

The meaning of the word “sound”, which is used as a noun in the first English sentence, is the core meaning which has the equivalent of ‘صوت’ | sawta | in Arabic when translating the first English sentence. The results show that fourteen subjects, out of twenty one, have used the most typical counterpart of the word “sound” when translating it in the

first sentence into Arabic using the word ‘صوت’ | sawta | . This supports our hypothesis that those subjects have mastered the core meaning of the word “sound”. One subject, out of twenty one, has used the word ‘لحن’ | lahna | as an equivalent to the word “sound” when translating the first English sentence, may be, because this subject relates the sound of birds to music. There are six cases, out of twenty one, where the subjects have used the Arabic words ‘نغريد’ | taḡrīda | and ‘زقزقة’ | zaqzaqata | as equivalents to the word “sound” when translating it in the context of the first English sentence. This, may be, because those subjects think that the last two words are the exact words that refer to the sound of birds.

In the second English sentence, where the word “sound” is used as a verb, its meaning is not the core one, but another meaning depends on the context. Its equivalent in Arabic in this sentence is ‘بدو’ | yabdū | . The results show that the majority of the subjects, nineteen out of twenty one, have rendered the exact equivalent in the context of the second sentence for the verb “sound” when translating it into Arabic, using the Arabic word ‘بدو’ | yabdū | . This falls into what has been hypothesized that those subjects have understood the word meaning in the context of the second sentence, and they have realized that the core meaning of the word “sound” ,in this case, does not fit this context. Two subjects, out of twenty one, have used the word ‘يظهرو’ | yazharu | as an Arabic equivalent to the word “sound” in the context of the second English sentence when translating it into Arabic. This is possible in this case since the word ‘يظهرو’ | yazharu | is a synonym to the Arabic word ‘بدو’ | yabdū | .

In the third English sentence, where the word “sound” is used as an adjective, its meaning is not the core one, but another meaning which has to be deduced from the context in which this word occurs. The Arabic equivalent of the word “sound” in the third



English sentence is 'راسخة' | rāsīxatun | . The result show that the majority of the subjects, thirteen out of twenty one, did not provide any translation. This is, may be, because they did not understand the meaning of the word “sound” in the context of the third English sentence. Only one subject, out of twenty one, has translated the word “sound” correctly, in which this subject have used the exact Arabic word which is 'اعتقادات راسخة' | ?ictiqādātun rāsīxatun | for the English phrase “sound beliefs”. Seven subjects, out of twenty one, have provided other equivalents in Arabic for the word “sound” in their translations between using the Arabic words 'ركائز' | rakāʔizun | , 'صائبة' | saʔibatun | , 'صحيحة' | sahīhatun | , 'قويّة' | qawīyyatun | , 'مشددة' | mušaddadatun | . This depends on each students' interpretation. One Subject has used the Arabic phrase 'عقائد صوتيّة' | caqāʔidun sawtiyyatun | for the English phrase “sound beliefs” in the case of translating the word “sound” in the third English sentence into Arabic. This is wrong since this subject has applied the core meaning of the word “sound” which is not suitable in this context.

### 2.2.3 Sample Three

In sample number three, the subjects are asked to translate three English sentences into Arabic. The sentences contain the word “Run” as a polsemous word. The English sentences are:

1. He runs in the race.
2. Because he was busy, he ran through the papers quickly.
3. It is a run of good luck.

Their equivalents in Arabic are:

1. يجري في السباق | yajrī fī al-ssibāqi |

2. لأنه كان مشغولاً، تصفح الأوراق بسرعة

| liʔannahū kāna maššūḡulan taṣaffaha al-ʔawraqa bisurcatin |

3. إنها فترة الحظّ الجيد | ?innahā fatratu al-hazzi al-jayyidi |

The meaning of the word “Run”, which appears as a verb, is the core meaning which has the equivalent of ‘يجري’ | yajrī | in Arabic when translating the first English sentence. The results show that most of the subjects, fifteen out of twenty one, have succeeded in rendering the correct meaning of the word “Run” in the first sentence and context when translating it into Arabic. This reveals that those subjects have mastered the core meaning of the word “Run”, and this supports our hypothesis. Four subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered other equivalents of the word “Run” between using the Arabic words ‘ينمي’ | yantamī |, ‘ينظم’ | yanzzamu |, ‘ينسب’ | yantasibu |. Those subjects have taken into account the relation of the word “Run” with the word “Race” in the first English sentence when translating it, this supports our hypothesis. Hence the word “Race” mislead the subjects in guessing the correct word meaning of the verb “Run” in this case, because they think that the equivalent of the word “Race” in Arabic is ‘سلالة’ | sulālatun |, or ‘عرق’ | cirqun |, that's why they have rendered the Arabic sentence:

‘ينمي/ ينظم/ ينسب لهذا العرق أو السلالة’ | yantamī / yanzzamu/ yantasibu li hādā al-cirqi ?awi al- ssulālati | for the English sentence “He runs in the race”. However, the Arabic equivalent of the word “Race” in this sentence is ‘سباق’ | sibāqun |. Two subjects, out of twenty one, did not produce any translation. This, may be, because of the misunderstanding of the context in which the word “Run” occurs, or they did not understand the meaning of the word “Race”.

In the second English sentence, the word “Ran through” which is used as a verb and followed by the preposition “through” has another meaning in this context beyond the core or the common one. The Arabic equivalent of this word in this case is ‘نصفح’ | tasaffaha |. The results show that nine subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the meaning of ‘نصفح’ | tasaffaha | as an equivalent of the word “Ran through” when

translating it in the second sentence into Arabic. This means that those subjects have understood the word meaning of “Ran through” in the context of the second English sentence and this supports our hypothesis. Two subjects, out of twenty one, have used the Arabic equivalent ‘ألقي نظرة سريعة’ |?alqā nazratan sarīcatan| when translating the word “Ran through” in the second English sentence, this can be applied in this context since the above Arabic expression is a synonym of the Arabic word ‘تصفح’ | tasaffaha |. This falls into what has been hypothesized in the sense that those subjects have understood the other meaning of the word “Run”. Five subjects, out of twenty one, have used the core meaning of the word “Run” in the context of the second English sentence when translating it into Arabic using the word ‘مر’ | marra |. This, may be, because those subjects did not understand the context clearly or they think that this word is also possible in this context. The other five subjects, out of twenty one, have used the Arabic equivalents ‘لم يجر اهتماما’ | lam yucir ?ihtimāman |, ‘يقلب الأوراق’ | yuqalibu al-?awrāqa |, ‘عابن’ | cāyana |, ‘قرأ’ | qara?a |, ‘ينقل بين الأوراق’ | yantaqilu bayna al-?awrāqi | for the English word “Ran through” in the second sentence when translating it. This, may be, because those subjects did not understand the context in which the word occurs, or it depends on each student's interpretation. One subject, out of twenty one, did not provide any translation, may be, because of the difficulty of understanding the word in the context of the second English sentence.

In the third English sentence the word “Run” does not have the core meaning, but another meaning in this case. The equivalent of this word when translating it into Arabic is ‘فترة’ | fātratun |, ‘مدة’ | muddatun |. The results show that most of the subjects, eleven out of twenty one, have produced the Arabic expression ‘ضربة حظ’ | darbatu hazzin | as an equivalent to the English expression “a run of good luck”. The subjects have produced this

equivalent, may be, because they think that the English expression means a period of luck which comes suddenly when it is not expected. Five subjects, out of twenty one, have provided the Arabic equivalent 'وقت' | waqtun | for the English word "Run" in the third English sentence, this means that those subjects discover that the core meaning of the word "Run" does not fit this context, and hence this supports our hypothesis. Two subjects, out of twenty one, did not provide any translation, may be, because they did not understand the context in which the word "Run" occurs. The other three subjects, out of twenty one, have produced different equivalents for the English word "Run" in Arabic which are 'درب من الحظ' | darbun mina al-hazzi |, 'موجة' | mawjatun |. This depends on how those subjects interpret the third English sentence.

#### 2.2.4 Sample Four

In sample number four, the subjects are asked to translate three English sentences into Arabic. The sentences contain the word "Give" as a polysemous word. The English sentences are:

1. I gave him a new book to read.
2. He gave himself up to the police
3. Does your back give you pain?

Their equivalents in Arabic are:

1. أعطيتُه كتابا جديدا ليقرأه | ?actaytuhu kitāban jadīdan liyaqra?ahu |
2. سلّم نفسه للشرطة | sallama nafsahu liššurtati |
3. هل يسبّب لك ظهرك ألما؟ | hal yusabbibu laka zahruka ?alaman ? |

In the first English sentence, the word "gave" appears as a verb and has the core meaning. Its equivalent in Arabic when translating it in this case is 'أعطيتُه' | ?actaytuhu |.

The results show that all the subjects, twenty one out of twenty one, have rendered the correct word meaning of the English word “gave” which is ‘أعطيتُه’ |?actaytuhu| when translating it into Arabic in the first sentence. This supports our hypothesis in the sense that the subjects have mastered the core meaning of the word “give”.

In the second English sentence, the word “gave” is used as a verb, followed by the preposition “up”, is assigned another meaning in the context of this sentence not the core one. Its equivalent in Arabic is ‘سَلَّمَ’ |sallama|. The results show that all the subjects have rendered the Arabic word ‘سَلَّمَ’ |sallama| in their translation of the second English sentence, because they have discovered that the core meaning of the word “gave” does not fit this context, since they have mastered its core meaning.

In the third English sentence, the word “gives” is used also as a verb and does not have the core meaning in this case, but other meaning. The equivalent of this word in Arabic in this context is ‘بَسَّبَبُ’ |yusabbibu|, “cause” in English. The results show that all the subjects have rendered the Arabic sentence ‘هَلْ بَوْلَمَكْ ظَهْرُكَ؟’ |hal yu?limuka zahruka| for the English sentence “does your back give you pain?” during the process of their translation. This also can be applied in this context, and proves the fact that the subjects have understood the word meaning of “give” in the context of its occurrence. Also they have realized that the core meaning of the word “give” does not make sense in this context and hence, this supports our hypothesis, because we can not say ‘هَلْ بَعْطَلِكْ ظَهْرُكَ أَلَمًا؟’ |hal yuctika zahruka ?alaman|.

### **2.2.5 Sample Five**

In sample number five, the subjects are asked to translate three English sentences into Arabic. The sentences contain the word “Go” as a polysemous word. The English sentences are:

1. I go to the cinema every Thursday.
2. The days go by so slowly.
3. a) I can not open this box. b) can I have a go?

Their equivalents in Arabic are:

1. أذهب للسّينما كل خميس | ?adhabu lissīnimā kula xamīsīn |
2. تمرّ الأيام ببطء شديد | tamurru al-?ayyāmu bibut?in šadīdin |
3. (أ) لا أستطيع فتح هذه العلبة | lā ?astatīcu fātha hadihi al-culbata |  
 (ب) هل لي بمحاولة؟ | hal lī bimuhāwalatin ? |

In the first English sentence, the word “go” appears as a verb and it has the core meaning. Its equivalent in Arabic is ‘أذهب’ | ?adhabu|. The results show that all the subjects, twenty one out of twenty one, have succeeded in rendering the correct equivalent of the word “go” in Arabic in this case. This supports our hypothesis that the subjects have mastered the core meaning of the word “go” in English, that’s why their translation resulted in conveying the intended meaning of the word in the right way.

In the second English sentence, the word “go” is also used as a verb, hence, in this case the word meaning is different from its meaning in the first English sentence, since it is followed by the preposition “by”. Its equivalent in Arabic is ‘تمرّ’ | tamurru| in this context. The results show that, fourteen subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the correct word meaning in the second sentence when translating it into Arabic, using the word ‘تمرّ’ | tamurru| as an equivalent of the English word “go by”. Seven subjects, out of twenty one, have produced the word ‘تمضي’ | tamdī|, when translating the second English sentence, as an equivalent of the word “go by”. This also can be applied since the words ‘تمرّ’ | tamuru| and ‘تمضي’ | tamdī| are synonyms. This supports our hypothesis that those subjects have understood the word meaning of “go” in the context in which it occurs.

In the third English sentence, the word “go” is used as a noun. The word in this case does not have the core meaning, but another meaning depending on the context of its occurrence. Its equivalent in Arabic is ‘محاولة’ | muhāwalatin | . The results show that only two subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the suitable meaning in this context for the word “a go” when translating it into Arabic, using the word ‘محاولة’ | muhāwalatin | as its equivalent. This falls into what has been hypothesized, in that those subjects have understood the word meaning of “a go” in the context in which it occurs. Other subjects have rendered different meanings of the word “a go” in the context of the third English sentence when translating it into Arabic. For example, five subjects, out of twenty one, have produced the Arabic sentence ‘هل أستطيع أن أحاول؟’ | hal ?astatīcu ?an ?uhāwila | for the English sentence “can I have a go?”. So, those subjects have succeeded in understanding the word meaning of “a go” in the context of its occurrence. But when translating it into Arabic, they did not pay attention to the grammatical class of the word “a go” which is used as a noun, that’s why they have said: ‘أحاول’ | ?uhāwila | instead of ‘محاولة’ | muhāwalatin | . Twelve subjects, out of twenty one, have produced the Arabic sentence ‘هل أستطيع أن أذهب؟’ | hal ?astatīcu ?an ?dhaba | for the English sentence “can I have a go?”. So, those subjects have applied the core meaning of the word “go” which means “Leave” in English and ‘أذهب’ | ?adhabu | in Arabic when translating the third English sentence and this, may be, because they did not pay attention to the grammatical class of the word “go” which is used as a noun not as a verb in the third English sentence or they think that the person, who has produced this sentence, is asking for the permission to leave. Two subjects, out of twenty one, did not provide any translation and this, may be, because they did not understand the meaning of the word “go” in this context.

## 2.2.6 Sample Six

In sample number six, the subjects are asked to translate three English sentences into Arabic. The sentences contain the word “Take” as apolysemous word. The English sentences are:

1. Who has taken my book?
2. She is good at taking off her teachers.
3. I could not take in every thing she said.

Their equivalents in Arabic are:

1. من أخذ كتابي؟ | man ?axada kitābī |
2. هي جيّدة في نَقْلِد أساتذتها | hiya jayyidatun fī taqlīdi ?asātidatihā |
3. لا أستطيع فهم كل ما قاله | lā astayyīcu fahma kulla mā qālahu |

In the first English sentence, the word “Take” has the core or the common meaning. Its equivalent in Arabic is ‘أخذ’ | ?axada |. The results show that all the subjects, twenty one out of twenty one, have rendered the correct word meaning of the word “take” in the first sentence when translating it into Arabic. This supports our hypothesis that the subjects have mastered the core meaning of this word.

In the second English sentence, the word “Take” does not have the literal or the core meaning, since this word is followed by the preposition “off”. This also must be taken into consideration by the subjects when translating the word “take” into Arabic. The Arabic equivalent of the word “taking off” in this case is ‘نَقْلِد’ | taqlīdi |. The results show that seven subjects, out of twenty one, have translated the word “taking off” in the second sentence correctly, which means that they have understood its meaning in the context in which this word occurs, and this supports our hypothesis. Three subjects, out of twenty one, did not provide any translation, may be, because they did not understand the word



meaning of “taking off” in this case. Two subjects, out of twenty one, have produced another Arabic equivalent of the English word “taking off” in the second sentence which is ‘احترام’ | ?ihtirāmi | in which they have said: ‘هي جيدة باحترامها لأساتذتها’ | hiya jayyidatun bi-?ihtirāmihā li?asātidatihā |. This, may be, because those subjects consider the relationship between the teachers and the students which is based on respect. Other subjects, nine out of twenty one, have rendered other meanings in Arabic for the word “taking off” when translating the second English sentence. The Arabic words are ‘إقناع’ | ?iqnaci |, ‘جذب’ | jadbī |, ‘استمالة’ | ?istimālati |, ‘استبدال’ | ?istibdāli |, ‘إزعاج’ | ?izcāji |, and this depends on each student's interpretation.

In the third sentence, the word “take” appears as a verb and does not have the core meaning as in the first sentence, but another meaning since we use it followed by the preposition “in”. Its equivalent in Arabic is ‘استجاب’ | ?isticāba | or ‘فهم’ | fāhma |. The results show that twelve subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the Arabic equivalents between using the words ‘فهم’ | fāhma | and ‘استجاب’ | ?isticābi | in the context of the third English sentence when translating it. This means that those subjects have understood the word meaning of “take in” in this context and this falls into what has been hypothesised. Five subjects, out of twenty one, have used the Arabic equivalents ‘تدوين’ | tadwīna | and ‘كتابة’ | kitābata | in their translation of the word “take in” in the third sentence, this, may be, because those subjects have imagined a situation where two persons are talking and one of them is taking notes. Two subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the Arabic equivalent ‘تحمل’ | tahammula | for the word “take in” when translating it in the third English sentence, and this, may be, because they have thought of a situation where two persons are blaming each other saying bad things. Two subjects, out of twenty one, did not

produce any translation, may be, because they did not understand the word meaning of “take in” in the context of the third English sentence since all the subjects have mastered its core meaning.

### 2.2.7 Sample Seven

In sample number seven, the subjects are asked to translate three English sentences into Arabic. The sentences contain the word “Cut” as a polysemous word. the English sentences are:

1. I cut the cake with a knife.
2. We need a cut in taxes.
3. He cut me off while I was talking on the phone.

Their equivalents in Arabic are:

1. أقطع الحلوى بالسكين | ?aqtacu al-halwā bissikīn |
2. نريد تخفيضاً في الضرائب | nurīdu taxfīdan fī al-ddrāʿibi |
3. فاطمني بينما كنت أتكلم على الهاتف | qātanī baynamā kuntu ?atakallamu ʿalā al-hātifi |

In the first English sentence, the meaning of the word “cut”, which appears as a verb, is not the literal or the core meaning. Its equivalent in Arabic in this case when translating this sentence into Arabic is ‘أقطع’ | ?aqtacu |. The results show that all the subjects, i.e., twenty one out of twenty one, have rendered the Arabic word ‘أقطع’ | ?aqtacu | in their translation. This falls into what has been hypothesized in that those subjects have mastered the core meaning of the word “cut”.

In the second English sentence, the word “cut” appears as a noun and it does not have the literal meaning this time, but another meaning for the same word in different

context. Its equivalent in Arabic is 'نخفيض' | taxfid | when translating the second sentence. The results show that sixteen subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the Arabic words between using: 'نخفيض' | taxfid | and 'خصم' | xasm | when translating the word "a cut" in the second sentence. This supports our hypothesis in that those subjects have understood the word meaning in this case and have discovered that its core meaning does not fit this context. One subject, out of twenty one, did not provide any translation for the second English sentence, many be, because he did not understand the context in which the word "a cut" occurs, since he mastered its core meaning. Three subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the Arabic equivalents 'مقاطعة دفع الضرائب', 'نفسبط' | taqsīt |, 'مقاطعة دفع الضرائب' | muqātacatu dafci al-ddarā?ibi | and 'وقف الضرائب' | waqfa al-ddarā?ibi |. This depends on the interpretation of each student. One subject, out of twenty one, has rendered the Arabic equivalent 'وقف سيارة أجرة' | waqf sayyārat ?ujra | when translating the English phrase "a cut in taxes" into Arabic and this because the word "taxes" misled him, because he thinks that 'taxes' in the second English sentence refers to 'cars'.

In the third English sentence, the word "cut" appears as a verb followed by the proposition "off", it does not have the literal or the core meaning in this case, but other meaning for the same word in a different context. Its equivalent in Arabic when translating this sentence is 'فاطعني' | qātacani |. The results show that twelve subjects, out of twenty one, have produced the Arabic equivalent 'فاطعني' | qātacani | when translating the word "cut me off" in the third sentence. This supports our hypothesis in that those subjects have mastered the core meaning of the word "cut" and they have understood its meaning in the context of the third sentence when translating it, taking into account that its core meaning does not fit this context. Five subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the Arabic equivalent 'أغلق السماعة في وجهي' | aḡlaqa al-sammācata fī wajhī | when translating the third

English sentence, may be, because they think that the participants are only the two who are talking on the phone. That's why they have rendered this equivalence, hence, there is another person who interrupted the one who was talking on the phone with his friend or some one else. One subject has rendered the Arabic equivalent 'أز عجنى' | ?azcajanī | for the English word "cut me off" when translating it in the third English sentence, this depends on how this student have understood the context in which the word "cut me off" occurs. Two subjects, out of twenty one, have rendered the Arabic equivalent 'انقطع الخط بينما كنت أنحدث معه' | ?inqataca al-xatu baynamā kuntu ?atahadatu macahu | when translating the third English sentence, this is wrong, because those two subjects did not take the pronoun "He", which is the subject and the doer of the action in the sentence, into account during their translation. That's why their translating resulted in conveying the intended meaning of the word "cut me off" in the wrong way. One subject, out of twenty one, has produced the Arabic equivalent 'تكلم عني بالسوء' | takallama canī bissū?i | when translating the English clause "He cut me off" in the third English sentence. This because this subject thinks in Arabic about what is called gossiping; which means that some one is talking about the bad things of the person who has produced the third English sentence in his absence. That's why this translation is provided.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion that one can draw from the analysis of the students' translations is that, most of students who were under investigation have mastered the core meaning of the polysemous words given in the test, and have succeeded in guessing the other meanings that those polysemous words can acquire in a given context. This proves the fact that first year Master students of English are aware of the multiplicity of word meaning phenomenon, and this in turn, answers the question which is raised in this study that multiplicity of word meaning phenomenon does not represent serious problems to students' translations. Only in some cases difficulties were raised once we are moving from the core meaning of a polysemous word to other meanings that this word may have depending on the context. So, students whether find difficulties in understanding the word meaning in a given context despite the fact that they have mastered its core meaning, or the relation of the polysemous word with other words in a sentence mislead them in using the intended meaning of the words suggested for translations.

## **General Conclusion and Recommendations**

The aim of this research work has been to check the mistakes done by first year Master students of English through the misunderstanding of word meaning during the process of translating English polysemous words into Arabic. The study specifically focused on the other meanings that a given word can acquire in a given context.

To achieve this aim, a translation test was given to assess the students' ability of understanding the correct word meaning in a given context during their translations. Also in order to be able to obtain a detailed picture about the students' awareness towards the different meanings a word may have. The results have shown that only few students faced difficulties, that are indentified in the course of our analysis of the students' translations, in understanding the word meaning. So, as far as our hypothesis is concerned the truth value of it has largely been confirmed.

Upon these results, we have reached the conclusion that multiplicity of word meaning, the case of polysemous words, does not really represent serious problems to students' translations if the suggested words are familiar to them. Finally what is recommended from the students is that, they have to know that a word in English can be used in different contexts (the case of polysemy), hence translated by the use of different words in Arabic. Also, they have to know that there is always a need to call attention to the context in which words occur and their relation with other words in a sentence or a text in order to end up with the use of the correct word meaning. Students when they fail to understand the word meaning in a given context despite its familiarity, they have to bear in mind that there is another meaning of this word beyond its common one. however if the

core or the common meaning of a polysemous word is applied in this case when translating it from English into Arabic, the meaning of the sentence will be distorted, as it is said “Do not look for the meaning of a word, look for its use” (Wittgenstein, 1953 quoted in Palmer, 1976: 30).

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# Appendices

## Appendix 01: The Test

Translate the following sentences into Arabic.

### *Sample 01:*

1. The thief broke the car.

.....

2. The prisoner broke jail.

.....

3. They are determined to break the back of their task.

.....

### *Sample 02:*

1. I like the sound of birds.

.....

2. Your suggestion sounds reasonable.

.....

3. Muslims have sound beliefs.

.....

### *Sample 03:*

1. He runs in the race.

.....

2. Because he was busy, he ran through the papers quickly.

.....

3. It is a run of good luck.

.....

### *Sample 04:*

1. I gave him a new book to read.

.....

2. He gave himself up to the police.

.....

3. Does your back give you pain?

.....

**Sample 05:**

1. I go to the cinema every Thursday.

.....

2. The days go by so slowly.

.....

3. a) I can not open this box. b) can I have a go?

.....

**Sample 06:**

1. Who has taken my book?

.....

2. She is good at taking off her teachers.

.....

3. I could not take in everything she said.

.....

**Sample 07:**

1. I cut the cake with a knife.

.....

2. We need a cut in taxes.

.....

3. He cut me off while I was talking on the phone.

.....

## Appendix 02: The Model Translation of the Test

### Sample 01:

1. The thief broke the car.

كسر السارق السيارة | kasara al-ssāriqu al-ssayārata | .

2. The prisoner broke jail.

فرّ السجين من السجن | farra al-ssajīnu mina al-ssijni | .

3. They are determined to break the back of their task.

إنّهم مصمّمون على إنجاز العُمر الأكبر من مهمّتهم | ?innahum musammimūna calā ?injāzi al-qadri al- ?akbari min muhimmatihim | .

### Sample 02:

1. I like the sound of birds.

أحبّ صوت الطيور | ?uhhibu sawta al-ttuyūri | .

2. Your suggestion sounds reasonable.

يبدو اقتراحك معقولا | yabdū ?iqtirāhuka macqūlan | .

3. Muslims have sound beliefs.

للمسلمين اعتقادات راسخة | lilmuslimīna ?ictiqādātun rāsixatun | .

### Sample 03:

1. He runs in the race.

يجرى في السباق | yajrī fī al-ssibāqi | .

2. Because he was busy, he ran through the papers quickly.

لأنّه كان مشغولا، نصفّح الأوراق بسرعه | li?annahu kāna maššgūlan tasaффaha al-?awrāqa bisurcatin | .

3. It is a run of good luck.

إنّها فترة الحظّ الجيد | ?innahā fātratu al-hazzi al-jayyidi | .

### Sample 04:

1. I gave him a new book to read.

أعطيتّه كتابا جديدا ليقرأه | ?actaytuhu kitāban jadīdan liyaqra?ahu | .

2. He gave himself up to the police.

سَلَّمَ نَفْسَهُ لِلشَّرْطَةِ | sallama nafsahu liššurtati | .

3. Does your back give you pain?

هل يَسببُ لك ظَهْرُكَ أَلَمًا؟ | hal yussabibu laka zahruka ?alaman | ?

### Sample 05:

1. I go to the cinema every Thursday.

أَذْهَبُ لِلسَّيْنِمَا كُلَّ خَمِيسٍ | ?adhabu lissīnimā kula xamīsin | .

2. The days go by so slowly.

نَمُرُّ الأَيَّامَ بِبطءٍ شَدِيدٍ | tamurru al-?ayyāmu bibut?in šadīdin | .

3. a) I can not open this box. b) can I have a go?

هل لي بمحاولة؟ | hal | b) | لآ أستطيع فتح هذه العلبة | lā ?astatīcu fātha hadihi al-culbata | a) |  
هل لي بمحاولة؟ | hal | b) | لآ أستطيع فتح هذه العلبة | lā ?astatīcu fātha hadihi al-culbata | a) |  
هل لي بمحاولة؟ | hal | b) | لآ أستطيع فتح هذه العلبة | lā ?astatīcu fātha hadihi al-culbata | a) |

### Sample 06:

1. Who has taken my book?

من أخذ كتابي؟ | man ?axada kitābī | ?

2. She is good at taking off her teachers.

هي جيّدة في تقليد أساتذتها | hiya jayyidatun fī taqlīdi ?asātidatihā | .

3. I could not take in every thing she said.

لا أستطيع فهم كل ما قاله | lā ?astatīcu fahma kulla mā qālatu | .

### Sample 07:

1. I cut the cake with a knife.

أقطع الحلوى بالسكين | ?aqtacu al-halwā bissikīni |

2. We need a cut in taxes.

نريد تخفيضاً في الضرائب | nurīdu taxfīdan fī al-ddrā?ibi | .

3. He cut me off while I was talking on the phone.

فاطعنني بينما كنت أنكلم على الهاتف | qātačanī baynamā kuntu ?atakallamu clā al-hātifi | .