

FUNCTIONAL LABELLING WITH POLYSEMIOUS VERBS

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Abstract. *The paper examines the role of systemic-functional analysis in the interpretation of polysemous verbs. Polysemous verbs may exhibit ambiguity in that the same form realizes multiple senses. A specific linguistic context, such as a clause, as an explicit lexical and syntactic environment, resolves the ambiguity. The analysis of a number of English examples is presented to illustrate that certain senses of the given verb may presuppose a distinct process type, from a systemic-functional point of view, and that the immediate syntactic environments differ considerably.*

Key Words: *polysemy, systemic-functional analysis, process type*

1. INTRODUCTION

Polysemy is a semantic phenomenon and a common property of lexemes, which presupposes the realization of a number of senses by a single lexical unit. Multiple senses result mainly from semantic extension, which is mostly metaphorical; such is the case, for instance, with the verb *ignite*, whose secondary meaning [TO CAUSE TO HAVE STRONG FEELINGS ABOUT SOMETHING] results from the metaphorical extension of the primary meaning [START BURNING OR EXPLODING] (e.g. *One of the teachers really ignited my interest in numbers / The bombs ignited a fire*). It may be argued that semantic modifications trigger changes in syntactic preferences of a word, so it is supposed that dissimilarity in meaning may suggest dissimilarity in syntactic features. This is to say that, depending on its senses, a single lexical unit may imply diverse functional configurations in the structuring of larger syntactic units.

2. THE ANALYSIS

The polysemous lexical units addressed here are of the verbal class. They are interpreted within a clause, to which experiential analysis is applied, with reference to the

systemic-functional model of 'clause as representation'. The analysis is to support the view that dissimilar senses of a single verb may realize unrelated process types, whereby other elements of the clauses, namely participants, are of a different category.

2.1. *Do and make*

Verbs *do* and *make* have a rather general meaning; in linguistic literature they are often termed lexically empty verbs. Their polysemy suggests equivalence to a range of verbs, such as *perform*, *produce*, *achieve*, *carry out*, *complete*, *create*, *construct*, etc. The meaning used in a given instance is specified on the basis of lexical information provided in the syntagmatic combination with other lexical units, i.e. in a collocation, the most immediate semantic context. Multiplicity of meanings of *do* and *make* implies difference in process types, which is to be demonstrated in the functional analysis below.

a) *do*

<i>After lunch</i>	<i>Elizabeth</i>	<i>did</i>	<i>the washing up</i>	Gloss:
Circumstance: temporal location	Actor	Process: material	Range: process	<i>washed the dishes</i>
<i>Dad</i>	<i>does</i>	<i>the garden.</i>	Gloss:	
Actor	Process: material	Range: entity	<i>waters/maintains</i>	
<i>I</i>	<i>will do</i>	<i>your hair</i>	Gloss:	
Actor	Process: material	Range: entity	<i>arrange a hairstyle</i>	

In these instances, the verb *do* functions as a material process. The main participant is the Actor performing/carrying out an action, which is embodied in the Range, either a process or an entity. With *do* as a material process, Range specifies the verb semantically, and could be regarded as the 'name' of the process.

<i>Connie</i>	<i>did</i>	<i>well</i>	<i>at school</i>	Gloss: <i>was</i>
Behaver	Process: behavioral	Circumstance: manner	Circumstance: location	<i>successful</i>

In combination with an adverb of manner, *do* realizes a behavioral process, with the Behaver as the main participant, and refers to the Behaver's performance or accomplishment. On semantic basis, the process is behavioral, but may incline towards intransitive abstract material process (Halliday 1985).

<i>Claudia</i>	<i>did</i>	<i>Elizabeth I</i>	<i>in the film</i>	Gloss: <i>played the part</i>
Token	Process: relational	Value	Circumstance: location	

This clause demonstrates the realization of the process of being. It might be viewed as intransitive material; still, the Value is clearly specified and, in the given situational context, it serves to identify the Token, since the entity *she* is identified as the entity *Elizabeth I*. It may be rephrased as *Claudia was Elizabeth I in the film*.

b) *make*

<i>I</i>	<i>made</i>	<i>a few phone calls</i>		Gloss:
Actor	Process: material	Range: process		<i>phoned</i>
<i>Science</i>	<i>has made</i>	<i>changes</i>	<i>in our lives</i>	Gloss:
Actor	Process: material	Range: process	Circumstance: location	<i>has changed</i>
<i>He</i>	<i>will make</i>	<i>us</i>	<i>an offer</i>	Gloss:
Actor	Process: material	Beneficiary	Range: process	<i>will offer</i>
<i>They</i>	<i>make</i>	<i>compost</i>	<i>of waste</i>	Gloss:
Actor	Process: material	Goal	Circumstance: manner	<i>produce</i>
<i>She</i>	<i>makes</i>	<i>bread</i>	<i>at home</i>	Gloss:
Actor	Process: material	Goal	Circumstance: location	<i>bakes</i>

The verb *make* predominantly refers to performing an action or producing an object. In this case, it acts as a transitive material process. When *make* is interpreted as [PERFORM], the object of the verb functions as Range, and names the performed process. The Beneficiary in an abstract material process is the indirect object, e.g. *us* in the clause *He will make us an offer*, for the benefit of whom the process is taking place. In the sense [PRODUCE], *make* realizes a concrete material process, with the result of the production as the Goal. Therefore, since the Goal is created in the process, the process is creative material.

<i>It</i>	<i>makes</i>	<i>a good book</i>	Gloss: <i>has the qualities of</i>
Token	Process: relational	Value	
<i>Four twos</i>	<i>make</i>	<i>eight</i>	Gloss: <i>equal</i>
Token	Process: relational	Value	

These two instances demonstrate that the verb *make* also realizes a relational process, in which one entity, the Token, equals, has the qualities of and is identified through another, which functions as the Value.

2.2. Other verbsa) *admit*

<i>None of these people</i>	<i>will admit</i>	<i>buying drinks illegally</i>
Sayer	Process: verbal	Verbiage

<i>They</i>	<i>rarely</i>	<i>admit</i>	<i>journalists</i>	<i>to the region</i>
Actor	Circumstance: manner	Process: material	Goal	Circumstance: location

In the first example, the verb *admit* realizes a verbal process, in the sense [DECLARE THAT IT IS TRUE], which refers to verbalizing one's agreement. The central participant is the Sayer and the content of one's admission is the Verbiage. On the other hand, in the second example, the verb realizes a material process of the abstract kind, in the sense [ALLOW SOMEBODY TO ENTER], with the Actor (*they*) as the main participant in the clause, who applies the process of admission to the Goal (*journalists*).

b) *blast*

<i>A blizzard</i>	<i>was blasting</i>	<i>drifts of snow</i>	<i>across the lake</i>
Actor	Process: material	Goal	Circumstance: location

In the sense [SEND OUT A SUDDEN, POWERFUL STREAM], the verb *blast* realizes a transitive material process, and the Goal is a nominal phrase denoting air or water. This is a manifestation of a dispositive material process, in which the Actor does something to the Goal. This is also the process manifested in the sense [MAKE A LOUD NOISE USING SOMETHING], when the Actor acts upon the Goal to produce a sound, as in the following instance:

<i>Drivers</i>	<i>blasted</i>	<i>their horns</i>	<i>in the heavy traffic</i>
Actor	Process: material	Goal	Circumstance: location

The verb *blast* is intransitive in the sense [MAKE A LOUD NOISE], which is illustrated by the following clause:

<i>Some western music</i>	<i>blasted</i>	<i>in the room</i>
Existent	Process: existential	Circumstance: location

Collocationally speaking, in this sense, the verb characteristically combines with nouns for inanimate objects. As processes of behavioral type are not typically ascribed to unconscious entities, the existential type agrees with the verb *blast* in the illustrated usage. The analyzed clause can also read *There was some very loud western music in the room*.

d) *circle*

<i>The long driveway</i>	<i>circled</i>	<i>around the vast lawn</i>
Existent	Process: existential	Circumstance: location

In the sense [FORM A CIRCLE], the verb *circle* suggests that an entity, the Existent, exists in the given spatial location in the form of a circle.

<i>Emily</i>	<i>circled</i>	<i>around her mother</i>
Actor	Process: material	Circumstance: location

Referring to the manner of moving, in the sense [MOVE AROUND IN A CIRCLE], the verb realizes an intransitive material process and usually requires a Circumstance of location. In the clause in which the verb designates the moving of an entity in a circle in order to surround another entity, the process is also of a material type, yet transitive, as the Actor, in effect, acts upon the goal. For example:

<i>The silent wolves</i>	<i>would circle</i>	<i>their prey</i>
Actor	Process: material	Goal

e) *concern*

<i>The growing number of refugees</i>	<i>concerns</i>	<i>agencies</i>
Phenomenon	Process: mental	Senser

This clause illustrates the sense [WORRY] of the verb *concern*. In this regard, the process is mental, as the Senser (*agencies*) experiences a feeling of anxiety about the phenomenon (*the growing number of refugees*). On the other hand, the following is an example of a relational clause, since the verb refers to the identification of the Token:

<i>Chapter 2</i>	<i>concerns</i>	<i>the methodological difficulties</i>
Token	Process: relational	Value

f) *engulf*

The primary meaning of the verb *engulf* is [COMPLETELY COVER OR HIDE SOMETHING]. In the following clause it realizes a material process:

<i>A landslide</i>	<i>engulfed</i>	<i>a block of flats</i>
Actor	Process: material	Goal

In its metaphorical meaning [STRONGLY AFFECTED BY A FEELING], the verb acts as mental process, in which the Sensor is emotionally affected by the Phenomenon, as in the following example:

<i>A feeling of emptiness</i>	<i>engulfed</i>	<i>him</i>
Phenomenon	Process: mental	Sensor

g) *feel*

<i>I</i>	<i>felt</i>	<i>that all my strength had gone</i>
Senser	Process: mental	Phenomenon: a projected clause

This clause contains the verb *feel* acting as mental process, for it is used in the sense [EXPERIENCE/BECOME AWARE OF]. The Phenomenon is not an entity, but a fact, which is represented in a projected clause, as the content of sensing.

In the sense [TOUCH SOMETHING DELIBERATELY WITH ONE'S HAND], the verb *feel* is of material type, since the Actor is acting upon the Goal, as demonstrated by the following configuration:

<i>The doctor</i>	<i>felt</i>	<i>his head</i>
Actor	Process: material	Goal

h) *feed*

The verb *feed* functions as a transitive material process in the senses [GIVE FOOD TO] and [PUT FOOD IN SOMEBODY'S MOUTH], with two respective configurations:

<i>We</i>	<i>fed</i>	<i>the cattle</i>
Actor	Process: material	Goal

<i>She</i>	<i>fed</i>	<i>him</i>	<i>a cookie</i>
Actor	Process: material	Beneficiary	Goal

Through semantic extension, the verb has acquired the sense [TO TELL SOMEBODY FALSE INFORMATION], in which it realizes a verbal process, the scope of saying being the Verbiage:

<i>The people around him</i>	<i>fed</i>	<i>him</i>	<i>terrible lies</i>
Sayer	Process: verbal	Receiver	Verbiage

i) *sound*

As a material process, the verb *sound* is used in the sense [MAKE A SOUND], e.g.

<i>The buzzer</i>	<i>sounded</i>	<i>in the office</i>
Actor	Process: material	Circumstance: location

In the sense [HAVE A SOUND OF CERTAIN QUALITY], the verb acts as an attributive relational process, in which the Carrier is ascribed a certain attribute:

<i>The creaking</i>	<i>sounded</i>	<i>very eerie</i>
Carrier	Process: relational	Attribute

j) *upset*

<i>The whole incident</i>	<i>had upset</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>terribly</i>
Phenomenon	Process: mental	Senser	Circumstance: manner

In the illustrated configuration, the verb *upset*, meaning [MAKE SOMEBODY FEEL WORRIED], functions as a mental process, in which the Senser feels worried about the Phenomenon. Conversely, in the sense [KNOCK OR PUSH SOMETHING OVER], the verb realizes a concrete material process, as the Actor acts upon the Goal. For example

<i>Don't upset</i>	<i>the piles of boxes</i>
Process: material	Goal

k) *wind*

Considering the clause

<i>The road</i>	<i>winds</i>	<i>uphill</i>
Existent	Process: existential	Circumstance: location

it may be concluded that the verb *wind* is an instance of existential process, in the sense [GO IN A DIRECTION WITH A LOT OF BENDS OR TWISTS]. The clause can be rephrased as a typical existential configuration containing *there + be*, e.g. *There is a road which winds uphill*.

The verb acts as a material process in the senses [WRAP AROUND] and [TURN A KEY/HANDLE TO MAKE OPERATE], as in the following instances:

<i>The pirate</i>	<i>was winding</i>	<i>the rope</i>	<i>around her waist</i>
Actor	Process: material	Goal	Circumstance: location

<i>I</i>	<i>wound</i>	<i>my watch</i>	<i>this morning</i>
Actor	Process: material	Goal	Circumstance: temporal location

3. CONCLUSION

In the process of communication, the multiplicity of meanings of words is seldom a hindrance. The understanding of the message conveyed is, for the most part, assisted by many contextual indicators, both linguistic and extralinguistic. Situational context provides important information for the interpretation of word denotation and reference. Syntactic structuring, from the functional viewpoint, may be considered as one of linguistic factors relevant for the explication of a word sense. Syntactic functions in the systemic-functional analysis represent semantic roles words perform in an actual clause. The functional labels are used to interpret the meaning of an item in a given instance and to show what part each component of the sentence plays (Halliday 1985: 31). As expounded in Halliday (1985: 37), the functions compose a configuration in which they are associated with each other to form the structure of a clause, which, essentially, embodies a kind of meaning.

As it can be seen in the examples analyzed above, diverse elements of meaning in sememes lead to different syntactic selections and manifold associations of functions. Additionally, it is evident that functional labelling of polysemous verbs depends not on the word class or lexical unit, but on the sense in which a verb is used in a given clause, namely on its sememe. Likewise, further clarification of process types and functions of clause components supports the interpretation of meaning of the analyzed verbs. It was expected that the analysis of the experiential configuration in clauses, i.e. identification of the process type and participants, would elucidate the semantic components of the illustrative examples. The examination of clause configuration and the identification of functions may be accepted as a possible course in the interpretation of polysemous words, as it may assist the establishment of the meaning realized within the given structuring of particular roles.

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ODREĐIVANJE FUNKCIJA KOD VIŠEZNAČNIH GLAGOLA**Violeta Stojić**

U radu se ispituje uloga sistemsko-funkcionalne analize rečenice u interpretaciji smisla višeznačnih glagola. Višeznačni glagoli mogu ispoljiti dvosmislenost usled postojanja više smislova ostvarenih istim oblikom. U užem jezičkom kontekstu, kakav je rečenica, kao konkretno leksičko i sintaksičko okruženje, ta dvosmislenost se razrešava. Analiza nekoliko rečenica na engleskom jeziku, sa težištem na glagolu, predstavljena je kako bi se ilustrovala pojava da zasebni smislovi određenog glagola mogu podrazumevati različitu vrstu procesa, sa sistemsko-funkcionalne tačke gledišta, i da se, stoga, njihova neposredna sintaksička okruženja mogu znatno razlikovati.

Ključne reči: *višeznačnost, sistemsko-funkcionalna analiza, vrsta procesa*