

A Comparative Analysis of Metonymy, Meronymy, and Polysemy in English and Sindhi Languages

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Abstract

The study aimed to comparatively analyse metonymy, meronymy, and polysemy in English and Sindhi by documenting the metonymous, meronymous, and polysemous nature of words in both languages. Metonymy, meronymy, and polysemy are important aspects of language that play an essential role in understanding how words are associated with different objects and how multiple meanings are acquired. These linguistic phenomena are examined to explore the similarities and differences between the two languages with reference to these semantic relationships. The methodology adopted a qualitative analysis. The data was collected from a diverse corpus of English and Sindhi texts. The findings illustrated the ways in which metonymy, meronymy and polysemy are employed in these languages, elucidating their cultural and linguistic nuances. This study will also contribute to the understanding of the Sindhi language in the broader global linguistic context. It will also encourage further research on such linguistic devices in other languages.

Keywords: Comparative Analysis, English, Sindhi, Metonymy, Polysemy, Frame Semantics.

Introduction

Language is an organised system of communication that carries dynamic, complex systems to convey meaning through various linguistic devices. Such linguistic devices create impact, shape language, and emphasise ideas. The three important devices of language are metonymy, meronymy, and polysemy, which make language complex. Metonymy is a term referring to the substitution of one word for another on the basis of association or proximity between them, while meronymy refers to the relationship between a part and a whole. Polysemy is a word that carries multiple related meanings. The aim of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of these linguistic phenomena in English and Sindhi, and to investigate their similarities, differences, and cultural implications. This issue has been highlighted by considering the complex nature of linguistic structure across different languages. Exploring the use and demonstration of metonymy, meronymy, and polysemy in Sindhi and English can provide valuable insights into how these languages are encoded and how meaning is conveyed. Furthermore, the Sindhi and English languages are part of different language families; Sindhi is one of the ancient languages of the world, it is pre-Sanskrit Indo-Aryan Indus valley civilization language, it sprung about 1100 A.D

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(Ali, 2009, P. 13-14) and English is a member of Germanic branch of Indo-European (Denison & Hogg, 2008, P.8). Previous studies have shed light on the importance of metonymy, meronymy and polysemy in various languages, but no one has worked on English and Sindhi, so this research will be a valuable contribution in field. Some studies say that Polysemy is a universal phenomenon that reveals the economic, creative, and flexible aspects of human language and reflects the cognitive approach people use (Salih & Karim, 2024). However, there is a lack of comprehensive comparative analyses exploring these phenomena in both languages. Some studies have focused on individual aspects, such as metonymy in English or polysemy in Sindhi, but there is a gap in research examining these three phenomena together. Therefore, this research builds upon existing literature and aims to contribute to the field by providing a comparative analysis of metonymy, meronymy and polysemy in English and Sindhi.

Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To investigate the manifestations of metonymy, meronymy and polysemy in the English language.
2. To examine the manifestations of metonymy, meronymy and polysemy in the Sindhi language.
3. To compare the similarities and differences in the use of metonymy, meronymy and polysemy between English and Sindhi.
4. To analyse the cultural and linguistic implications of these semantic relationships in both languages.

Research Question

The central research question guiding this study is:

How do metonymy, meronymy and polysemy manifest in English and Sindhi languages, and what are the similarities, differences, and cultural implications of these phenomena?

Significance

This research holds significant implications for both theoretical linguistics and cross-cultural communication. By comparing metonymy, meronymy, and polysemy in English and Sindhi, we can better understand the universality and cultural specificity of these phenomena. The findings of this study may also assist in language teaching and translation, enabling better comprehension and interpretation of expressions in both languages. Moreover, the comparative analysis provided valuable insights into the role of language typology in shaping semantic structures and communication patterns.

Literature Review

A comprehensive review of the existing literature was conducted to gain a theoretical understanding of metonymy, meronymy, and polysemy in both English and Sindhi. This involved studying scholarly articles and relevant linguistic theories to establish a foundation for the analysis. Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one thing is associated with another, providing mental access to the latter. It is a phenomenon in which one entity is used to refer to another related to it. Meronymy is a part-whole relationship in which one part belongs to another, such as the body and the hand. It is a relationship where a term denotes its constituent part of the denoting term. Furthermore, polysemy refers to two or more associated meanings with a single linguistic term. It is a term whereby a single word has multiple meanings. The study of metonymy, meronymy and

polysemy has been extensively explored in various linguistic traditions. Scholars such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have proposed conceptual metaphors that rely heavily on metonymic extensions, a process in which a word acquires new meanings through part-whole or association relationships without altering its core conceptual base. Cruse (1986) and Miller (1993) have examined the role of meronymy in lexical representation which represents how words and their meanings are stored in the mental lexicon, such as polysemous words (bank, book, run, etc.) show multiple senses in the mental lexicon of a person and semantic networks which is a web of interconnected meanings where there are many senses of a word connected to others through relations like polysemy, metonymy, and meronymy.

Polysemy has been extensively studied by scholars such as Pustejovsky (1995) and Apresjan (1974), who have delved into the multifaceted nature of word meanings. However, some studies directly compare the use of these phenomena across languages. Salih & Karim (2024) compare English to the Kurdish language in selecting body parts, namely mouth, heart, and eye, for the process and the ways of human body words. This study of the semantic extension of polysemy in both languages explores the process and the reasons for meaning extension. Similarly, S. Rajendran (2006) did a contrastive study of verbs of communication in English and Tamil. The study revealed that, despite differences in the makeup of argument structure and their realisation in the surface structure, there is a universal tendency in the expression of communication. In English, there is more use of verbs by lexicalising certain shades of meaning to denote a particular type of communication. Additionally, Alireza, Amirsaeid, and Elham (2019) studied polysemy in four negative nonverbal prefixes in Persian using principled polysemy analysis in AntConc. The findings indicated that only three of the four prefixes studied showed polysemy, suggesting their centrality in the network of meaning. Research on metonymy has a history of more than 2,000 years. It is claimed that metonymy operates on names of things, substituting the name of one thing for another and associating two things with a single word (Dousti & Gowhari, 2025). Littlemore et al. (2018) specifically focused on metonymy and selected 10 Japanese learners to examine their understanding of metonymy. They faced comprehension problems due to the misuse of contextual clues. This suggests that these are really confusing when an individual does not have access to all the essential knowledge about words that contain such linguistic devices. Anastasiya et al. (2018) examined the semantic relatedness and semantic similarity of literal and non-literal (metonymic and metaphorical) senses of three word classes: noun, verb, and adjective. He used two methods: a psycholinguistic experiment and a distributional analysis of corpus data. The results suggested that the mental representation of a polysemous word depends on its word class. In nouns and verbs, literal and metonymic senses are stored together, while metaphorical senses are stored separately; in adjectives, metonymic senses significantly overlap with both literal and metaphorical senses. So, this study suggests that polysemous meanings are stored in our mind depending upon the category of the words. For verbs and nouns, the literal meaning is kept together, and the metaphorical meaning is stored separately. For adjectives, metonymic meaning overlaps significantly with literal and metaphorical meanings.

There are comparative studies of polysemy, meronymy, and metonymy in other languages, but none have been found that directly compares English and Sindhi. So, this study will attempt to fill that gap by comparing and contrasting English and Sindhi polysemy, meronymy, and metonymy.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is frame semantics. It was developed by Charles J. Fillmore. It is a cognitive structure, or mental model, of a situation, event, or object, organised by

a set of related concepts (frame semantics and frame net, 2020). The main idea of frame semantics is that an individual cannot understand the meaning of a word until they have access to all the essential knowledge about that word. For instance, one would not be able to understand the word “bank” without knowing what it refers to, whether it is a bank (financial institution) or a bank (shore of a river). So, a word activates a frame of semantic knowledge relating to that particular concept to which it is referred.

To analyse and understand polysemy, metonymy, and meronymy in English and Sindhi, this theoretical framework would be very helpful, as frame semantics is developed to understand the larger cultural and situational frames. This framework also helps in understanding cross-linguistic comparison by highlighting how cultural knowledge helps shape lexical meaning.

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative analysis. The primary data was collected from a diverse corpus of English and Sindhi texts, including literature, academic texts and spoken language. The collected data was analysed by using corpus linguistic tools to identify instances of metonymy, meronymy and polysemy. To identify and analyse the similarities and differences between the two respected languages, a comparative analysis of collected examples from both languages was conducted. It was observed that the selected words are cryptic in nature when used without shared context.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involved classifying and documenting metonymic, meronymic, and polysemous expressions in both English and Sindhi. The examples classified from the corpus are provided to illustrate the findings and facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the similarities and differences between the languages.

Metonymy

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which a word or a phrase is used to represent or refer to something closely associated with it, instead of using the actual name of the thing itself. It involves substituting one term for another based on a conceptual or contextual relationship.

In metonymy, substitution occurs through association, contiguity, similarity, or cause-and-effect. It relies on the audience or reader's understanding and recognition of this relationship to make sense of the intended meaning.

Conceptual transfer is the process of transferring meaning from one concept to another through metonymy. This transfer allows for indirect and creative expressions that can evoke specific images, emotions, or ideas in the minds of the listeners or readers.

Examples of Metonymy in English

Here are some examples of metonymy in English:

1. "The pen is mightier than the sword." (Here, "the pen" refers to writing or literature, while "the sword" represents warfare or violence.)
2. "The White House issued a statement." (In this case, "the White House" refers to the government or the President's administration.)
3. "Let me give you a hand." (Here, "a hand" is used to represent help or assistance.)
4. "The crown announced new tax policies." (In this example, "the crown" symbolizes the monarchy or the ruling power.)

5. "The suits on Wall Street made the decision." (In this case, "suits" is used to refer to businessmen or executives.)

Examples of Metonymy in Sindhi

Here are some examples of metonymy in Sindhi:

1. “ميان، تون انسان مٽيءَ واپس ورتو ”

(Translation; oh man, you are about to return back to mud).

Here the highlighted word (mitti) means “mud” which represents ‘grave’. This sentence refers to religious interpretation of word, as in Holy Quran Allah says, “we created human beings from mud.”

2. “اي ڪاش! تون ڄاڻين هان آزاد هوا ڇا ٿيندي آهي ”

(Translation; Alas! If you could know what is free air flow).

Here the highlighted words (azad hawa) means “free air flow” which represents ‘freedom of speech’. This sentence refers to cultural and poetic interpretation of metonymy in Sindhi that how do we interpret specific words and phrases within our culture.

3. “انڌيري رات کان پوءِ روشن صبح ضرور ٿيندو آهي ”

(Translation; after a dark night, there comes a bright morning).

Here the highlighted words (Andheri raat) means “dark night” which refers to ‘hardness of life’ and (roshan subh) means “bright morning” which refers to ‘arrival of good days’. This sentence also refers to cultural interpretation of metonymy in Sindhi.

4. “زندگيءَ جي جنگ اڪيلي سر وڙهو ”

(Translation; fight the battle of life alone).

Here the highlighted words (zindagi ji jung) means “battle of life” which refers to ‘ups and downs of life’ and (wirho) means “fight” which refers to ‘accept the challenges’. This sentence refers to cultural interpretation of metonymy in Sindhi.

5. “خير ناھي ڪٿي حسرتن جي شام ٿئي ”

(Translation; I don’t know when the evening of regrets will be!).

Here the highlighted word (sham) means “evening” which can be interpreted either as ‘death’ or ‘success’. It depends upon how speaker wants his regrets to be over. If he wishes to be successful than the word ‘evening’ refers to success if the speakers wishes to die than the word ‘evening’ refers to death.

Meronymy

Meronymy is a semantic relationship that exists between a whole and its parts. In this relationship, one word represents the whole entity, while another word represents a specific part or component of that entity. The term "meronym" refers to the word representing the part, and "holonym" refers to the word representing the whole.

For example, in the phrase "car - wheel," "car" is the holonym representing the whole entity, while "wheel" is the meronym representing a specific part of the car.

The part-whole relationship is essential for understanding the hierarchical structure and organization of objects, concepts, or ideas. It allows us to describe the components, constituents, or elements that make up a larger whole.

Examples of Meronymy in English

Here are some examples of meronymy in English:

1. "Tree - trunk": The word "tree" represents the whole entity, while "trunk" represents a specific part of the tree.
2. "Book - chapter": The word "book" represents the whole entity, while "chapter" represents a specific part of the book.
3. "House - roof": The word "house" represents the whole entity, while "roof" represents a specific part of the house.
4. "Body - hand": The word "body" represents the whole entity, while "hand" represents a specific part of the body.
5. "Bicycle - tire": The word "bicycle" represents the whole entity, while "tire" represents a specific part of the bicycle.

These examples demonstrate how meronymy describes the relationship between a whole and its parts.

Examples of Meronymy in Sindhi

Here are some examples of meronymy in Sindhi:

1. “پٽي (گلابل)“ means; Rose - petal: The word (gulab) is a whole entity, while (pati) represents the specific part of the flower rose.
2. “پر (پکي)“ means; bird – feather: The word (pakhi) is a whole entity, while (par) represents the specific part of the bird.
3. “ٻٽڻ (ڪمير)“ means; shirt – button: The word (kameez) is a whole entity, while (batan) represents the specific part of the shirt.
4. “ورڪ (ڪتاب)“ means; book – page: The word (kitaab) is a whole entity, while (warak) represents the specific part of the book.
5. “هٿ (جسم)“ means; body – hand: The word (jism) is a whole entity, while (hath) represents the specific part of the body.

These examples illustrate the part-whole relationship in Sindhi language.

Polysemy

Polysemy refers to the phenomenon in which a single word or phrase has multiple related meanings. These meanings may be distinct yet connected, or they may share a common thread. Polysemy is a common feature of language and contributes to the richness and versatility of vocabulary.

Examples of Polysemy in English

English has numerous examples of polysemy. Here are a few:

1. "Bank":
 - Meaning 1: A financial institution where people deposit and withdraw money.
 - Meaning 2: The side of a river or lake.
2. "Bat":
 - Meaning 1: A flying mammal.
 - Meaning 2: A wooden or metal club used in sports like baseball.
3. "Book":
 - Meaning 1: A written or printed work consisting of pages.
 - Meaning 2: To reserve or arrange a place or service.
4. "Run":
 - Meaning 1: To move swiftly on foot.

- Meaning 2: To operate or function.

Examples of Polysemy in Sindhi

Sindhi, a language spoken in South Asia, also exhibits polysemy. Here are a few examples:

1. “وار” (waar):
 - Meaning 1: To attack
 - Meaning 2: Hair (the part of human body)
2. “اچا” (acha):
 - Meaning 1: White (color)
 - Meaning 2: Ok (expression)
3. “بيھڻ تي پيرن” (pairan ta beehan):
 - Meaning 1: To stand on feet
 - Meaning 2: To be financially stable
4. “سڳو” (sagho):
 - Meaning 1: Thread
 - Meaning 2: Full-sibling
5. “درجو” (darjo):
 - Meaning 1: Class
 - Meaning 2: Rank

Discussion and Findings

The discussion section presents a comparative analysis of the examples, highlighting the similarities and differences between English and Sindhi in the use of metonymy, meronymy, and polysemy.

Comparative Analysis of Metonymy in English and Sindhi

Metonymy is a literary device found in many languages, including English and Sindhi. While the concept and application of metonymy are similar in both languages, the specific examples and cultural associations may differ.

In English, metonymy often draws on historical, political, or cultural references specific to English-speaking contexts. Examples like "The White House" or "Wall Street" may not have direct equivalents in Sindhi. Similarly, English metonymy may involve references to sports, literature, or popular culture that are less prevalent in Sindhi metonymic expressions.

On the other hand, Sindhi metonymy may draw on cultural, religious, or traditional references unique to Sindhi-speaking contexts. Examples such as "قرآن" (Quran) or other references to emotions and relationships may be more common in Sindhi metonymy.

Overall, the comparative analysis of metonymy in English and Sindhi reveals that, while the fundamental concept remains the same, the specific examples and associations may vary across linguistic, cultural, and contextual factors.

Comparative Analysis of Meronymy in English and Sindhi

When comparing meronymy in English and Sindhi, we can observe some similarities and differences.

Similarities

- The concept of meronymy exists in both English and Sindhi.

- Both languages use meronyms to describe part-whole relationships.
- The basic structure of meronymy, with a holonym representing the whole and a meronym representing a part, remains consistent in both languages.

Differences

- English and Sindhi have different vocabulary and linguistic structures. Therefore, the specific meronym pairs will vary between the two languages.
- The script and pronunciation differ in English (Latin script) and Sindhi (Perso- Arabic script), which affects the visual and auditory representation of meronyms.
- Cultural and contextual factors may influence the choice of meronyms in each language, as they reflect the specific objects, concepts, or ideas prevalent in the respective cultures.

Overall, while the fundamental concept of meronymy exists in both English and Sindhi, the specific examples and usage may differ due to the variations in vocabulary, linguistic structures, and cultural contexts between the two languages.

Comparative Analysis of Polysemy in English and Sindhi

English and Sindhi exhibit polysemy in their respective vocabularies. However, the specific words and their meanings vary across cultural contexts and linguistic influences. English has a larger lexicon and a wide range of borrowed words from various languages, which contributes to greater polysemy. Sindhi, on the other hand, has a rich poetic tradition and relies heavily on metaphorical usage, leading to polysemy in words related to emotions and aesthetics.

The comparative analysis of polysemy in English and Sindhi would require a comprehensive study of their respective vocabularies, semantic networks, and cultural backgrounds. It would involve examining the frequency and patterns of polysemous words, as well as analysing the cultural and linguistic factors that contribute to the development of multiple meanings. Such an analysis would provide insights into the unique characteristics of polysemy in each language and facilitate a deeper understanding of their linguistic structures.

Conclusion

This research provides a comparative analysis of metonymy, meronymy, and polysemy in English and Sindhi. It was observed that both languages are culturally and linguistically rich, with a wide range of vocabulary borrowed from neighbouring languages and from languages in contact with them through trade or other interactions. The findings of this study illustrate the significant role of these semantic relationships in both languages and shed light on the cultural and linguistic influences on their usage and interpretation. Furthermore, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language reflects and shapes cultural and cognitive processes, highlighting its intricate nature as a dynamic system. This study also contributes to the understanding of the Sindhi language in the global linguistic context. Further research can explore additional languages and investigate the impact of cultural factors on the manifestation of these linguistic phenomena.

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