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# The Ability of EFL Students to Differentiate between Homonymy and Polysemy

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**Abstract: The majority of content words do not have a single meaning for each; rather they associate to a number of senses. When these senses are semantically incompatible in non-neutral contexts, they are then homonymous; otherwise, they are polysemous where polysemous words have an underspecified meaning that encompasses their different senses. To reliably differentiate between these two lexical relations helps very much in the improvement of the retrieval process. In this orientation, this paper highlights the concepts of homonymy and polysemy, as they constitute one of the central issues in semantics and the psychology of word meaning. This paper also has a survey of the different approaches to homonymy and polysemy. These approaches tackle the two phenomena from different perspectives; however, they all aim to display the way such semantic relations are stored, processed, and resolved. Accordingly, a test is applied to the 4th year students of the Departments of English of three colleges (College of Education, College of education for Women (Tikrit University) and college of Education Samara University) and the results show that the students' ability to differentiate between polysemy and homonymy is weak. The reason behind this weakness is the students' shortage in having a widespread storage of vocabulary in relation to these semantic relations; as well as their concentration on the words that are heavily used (common) neglecting the fact that these words may associate to other meanings. In this respect, the researchers suggest that more attention should be paid to these lexical relations for better retrieval processes, better understanding of the basis according to which the lexicographers design word entries, and for better understanding of the mental processing system in accordance with these relations.**

**قابلية دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية**

**للتمييز بين الكلمات المتشابهة املائيا والكلمات متعددة المعاني**

**الخلاصة**: ينطوي معنى معظم الكلمات على اكثر من اشارة (معنى) فاذا كانت هذه الكلمات مختلفة في سياقات معينة، فانها عندئذ تكون متشابهة صوتيا لبعضها ليس الا. اما اذا كانت معانيها تشمل اشارات مختلفة ضمن السياق الواحد فانها عنئذ تدعى بالبوليسيمي (متعددة المعاني). ان التمييز بين هذين النوعين من المفردات وفهم علاقتهما المعجمية يساعد كثيرا في تحسين عملية الاستذكار والاسترجاع الذهني لها. وفي ضوء ذلك يتناول هذا البحث ظاهرتي التشابه الصوتي وتعدد المعاني لما لهما من اهمية في علم المعاني وفي علم نفس المعاني؛ كما ويناقش ايضا مجموعة المقتربات لهاتين الظاهرتين والتي اخذت على عاتقها دراستهما من عدة جوانب بهدف ايجاد تبرير لكيفية خزن وتناول واسترجاع مثل هذه المفردات.

وفقا لذلك، تم اجراء اختبار على طلبة المرحلة الرابعة في جامعة تكريت (كلية التربية وكلية التربية للبنات) وجامعة سامراء (كلية التربية) واظهرت النتائج بان قابلية الطلبة على التمييز بين هاتين الظاهرتين ضعيف والسبب في ذلك هو قلة المفردات التي يملكونها اشارة الى هاتين الظاهرتين وتركيزهم على المعاني المتداولة للمفردات يهملون بذلك المعاني الاخرى لهذه المفردات فينفس السياق. وعليه فيجب الاهتمام بصورة اكبر بهاتين الظاهرتين لتوفير عمليات خزن واسترجاع افضل ولفهم افضل للطريقة التي يصنف بها المعجميون القواميس.

## Homophony, Homography, and Homonymy

The total sum of words of a specific language is called a lexicon; consequently, the exploration of word meaning is called lexical semantics (Kreidler, 1998: 14). Lexical semantics deals with the systematic study of meaning-related properties of words; how best to specify the meaning of a word; and how to manage the paradigmatic relations of meaning such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy …etc.; and how to investigate the processes of meaning extension including homonymy and polysemy.

Liddell, et al (1882: 480) mention that the term 'homonym' is emerged from the Greek word ὁμώνυμος, means to have the same name, which comprises of the conjunction ὁμός meaning 'common' and ὄνομα meaning 'name'.

If two or more words have the same pronunciation, they are said to be homophones (Yule, 2010: 120). Accordingly, homophony is the semantic relation in which two or more forms are similar in pronunciation only, such as, see and sea; to, two, and too; meet and meat; … etc. These words have obviously different forms of writing but one pronunciation. Homographs, on the other hand, are two or more words that have the same spelling, different pronunciations, and different meanings (Kreidler, 1998: 52). Thus, homography is a lexical relation in which two or more words are alike in their writing forms only, such as, bow (n.) /bəu/ and bow /bau/ (v.) (ibid).

In a similar vein, Curse (2006: 80) states that when unrelated meanings are signaled by similar linguistic forms, such as file /fail/ (n.) and file /fail/ (n.), they are described as being homonyms. This is to say that homonymy is the lexical relation used to describe two forms with similar pronunciations, similar spelling forms, and having different unrelated meanings.

Hurford, et al. (2007: 131) state that homonymy is a word case whose diff erent meanings are dissimilar to each other and not obviously related to each other in any way with respect to a native speaker's intuition. They further believe that "cases of homonymy seem to be matters of mere accident or coincidence", where in the example 'mug' /mʌg/, which might mean a drinking vessel or a gullible person, there is no obvious conceptual connection between the meanings of either word.

Homonyms can be distinguished from other lexical relations by having *different origins*: The word 'match' (n.) might refer to a game between two or more teams or a stick made of wood for lighting fire. Hence, 'match$_1$' and 'match$_2$' are two words of different meanings and different origins that look and sound the same: 'Match$_1$' descends from an Old English word meaning 'a husband or wife', whereas, 'match$_2$' comes from an Old French word meaning "the wick of a candle" (ibid).

Another feature of homonyms is that they show *loss of a connecting sense*, for example 'bow' carries seven senses according to oxford dictionary (2016) as follows:

- A knot tied with two loops and two loose ends, used especially for tying shoelaces and decorative ribbons.
- A weapon for shooting arrows.
- A string used in playing the violin and other stringed instruments.
- A thing that is curved or bent in shape.
- An act of bending the head or the upper part of the body.
- The premiere or launch of a movie or product.
- The front end of a ship.

Though some of these senses seem to be relatively related in shape implication, however, their real senses are not.

The third property that makes homonyms distinct *per se* is that some of them have different word classes, e.g. flat1 (adj. smooth and even) and flat$_2$ (n. an apartment). These words are treated as homonyms, simply because they belong to different word classes though they are in one way or another related in the sense of evenness, being plane and flat.

## 1. Polysemy

The word polysemy originates from the Greek words "πολυ- (poly-*)* 'many', and σήμα, *(*sêma*)* 'sign'", resulting in the linguistic term meaning to 'have many multiple meanings'. (Liddell, et al, 1882: 495). Kreidler (1998: 52) states that a word shows polysemy when it apparently has several related meanings. The noun *foot*, for example, has related meanings when we speak of the lower extremity of the leg below the ankle on which a person stands or walks- foot of a person; the lower or lowest part of something standing or perceived as standing vertically- the base or bottom; a unit of linear measure which is equal to 12 inches (30.48 cm); or it might refer to a group of syllables constituting a metrical unit in poetry. Taking the anatomical referent as the basic one (foot), the other meanings can be seen as derived from the basic one, reflecting either the general shape of the human foot or, more abstractly, the relation of the foot to the rest of the body.

Curse (2006: 133) supports that when a native speaker feels that multiple senses are related in one way or another, it can be judged that these lexemes are belonging to the same word and this word is polysemous. In fact, when a new word is coined, it starts life with one sense. As time passes, this sense may associate to other senses in a way that the original one is lost throughout different processes like:

- Semantic shift which involves meaning change - e.g. *mail* changed its meaning from ‘bag’ to ‘letters’, and it no longer means ‘bag’!
- Semantic extension, which involves the addition of new senses to the original one - e.g. mail, came to mean ‘electronic messages’ as well as ‘letters’.

Since polysemy refers to the case of a word having two or more senses, it is accordingly the consequence of semantic shift and extension.

(http://ridhosamsuar.blogspot.com/2016/05/polysemy.html (internet source))

Curse (2006: 133) suggests that there are other semantic relations that might be listed under polysemy:

1- Multiple senses might be related by hyponymy. Hyponymy shows the relationship between the more general terms, i.e. hypernyms, and the more specific instances of it, i.e. hyponyms. A hyponym as a subordinate has a more specific semantic field than its more general hypernym, which is called a superordinate. It is the case how we view

hypernyms as consisting of hyponyms, for example the polysemous word 'drink' which may mean to imbibe liquid, and to imbibe alcoholic beverage.

2- Other polysemous relations show figurative or metaphorical meanings in relation to the literal meaning of a word, as in 'status' which might refer to the relative social, professional, or other standing of someone or something or it means the position of affairs at a particular time, especially in political or commercial contexts. Or it may be metonymic, as in 'hand' which is symbolically used in reference to the power to direct something, or referring to a factory hand- a person who engages in manual labor, especially in a factory, on a farm, or on board of a ship. In a similar vein, some polysemous relations may involve hyperbole. For example, in the sentence "I have a million things to do", the word million refers literally to a behemoth number; however, in this sentence it refers to an exaggerated description of the many concerns laid on the speaker.

Pustejovsky (2001: 31) mentions seven types of polysemy designed in the form of alternations: count / mass (lamb- animal vs. meat), container / containee (bottle- glass container vs. liquid contained), figure / ground (window- material vs. aperture), product / producer (newspaper- institution vs. material), plant / food (fig), process / result (merger), place / people (New York). Krifka (2001: 3) adds five more types of polysemous variation namely: object / stuff an object is made up (apple- fruit vs. apple salad), stuff / kind (cheese- in general vs. different types), stuff / portions (juice -quantity vs. glasses or bottles), building / institution (university), capital /government (Washington).

Hurford, et al (2007: 139) adopts another way to investigate the various types of polysemy in English. He would rather classify polysemy according to the parts of speech. Polysemous senses might be:

1- nouns, like: 'window' where the two senses are clearly related by the concepts of "an opening from the interior of some solid mass to the outside, and of a place of issue at the end of some long narrow channel".
2- verbs, like: 'run' is a well-known case of polysemy in which the word has more than one related sense. The multiple senses of run are related to each other in a somewhat abstract way: run a race (on foot), run for office, this road runs from east to west, the motor is running, the water is running down the roof, run a computer program, a run in a stocking, etc.
3- prepositions, like: the preposition 'over' in the following related senses:

a- The food is *over* the table.
b- Mary put the painting *over* the sofa.
c- Frank walked *over* the log.
d- Jan put a table cloth *over* the table.
e- The airplane flew *over* the town.
f- They settle *over* the tributary from us.
g- The film is *over* by now.
h- The girl put her hands *over* her face.
i- There were trees planted all *over* the field.
j- The ants walked all *over* the wall.

Other examples of prepositions are like these of the preposition 'up' which can have forty-seven different polysemous related senses (check http://wordinfo.info/unit/3039/s:and).

## 2. Polysemy and Homonymy

In spite of the fact that homonymy and polysemy are categorized as different notions, the boundary between them may not be clear-cut in some cases for there is an extensive doubtful area between them. Wadsworth (2008: 187-188) and Yule (2010: 120) state two criteria to differentiate between these notions: firstly, *the word's historical origin, or etymology*. The word bank meaning 'financial institution' is borrowed from French, whereas bank meaning 'shore of a river' has a Scandinavian origin (ibid: 187). Secondly, *the various antonyms and synonyms of a word* provide a different kind of criterion. The adjective 'plain' has two senses: sense (1) 'easy, clear' and sense (2) 'undecorated; they both can be described as 'devoid of complexity'. Both senses share a synonym in 'simple' and an antonym in 'complex'; this proves that these senses are related, i.e. 'plain' is a polysemous word and a native speaker of the language has clear intuitions that the different senses are related to each other in some way. An ambiguous word whose different senses are far apart from each other and not obviously related to each other in any way with respect to a native speaker's intuition is a homonymous word. The word 'file', for example has two senses: sense (1) 'a tool used for smoothing or shaping a hard material' and sense (2) 'a folder or box for holding loose papers'. Apparently, these two senses don't share the same synonyms and antonyms; and therefore they are not related, and the word 'file' is homonymous (ibid: 188). These two criteria seem to be workable though not always foolproof.

In relation to the factor of *frequency*, homonymous and polysemous words can be sorted into two types: balanced and polarized. Balanced ambiguous words are those whose multi meanings are equally common;

whereas, polarized ambiguous words are the words whose meanings are the prevailing or the predominant ones (Duffy, et al., 1988).

Obviously, homonymy and polysemy are fuzzy concepts, insofar as polysemy might evolve into homonymy. In this consideration, Foraker & Murphy (2012:408) propose two important questions: how those senses are represented in the lexicon and how they are processed during language comprehension. These two questions are answered via different approaches to polysemy and homonymy.

## 3. Approaches to Polysemy & Homonymy

Various approaches have been proposed to deal with homonymy and polysemy from different perspectives, some of which are based on semantic and pragmatic bases though they seem to have a psycholinguistic tinge since they aim ultimately to seek their intrinsic representation, storage, and generation. Most approaches focus on polysemy rather than homonymy for its more problematic nature per se.

### 3.1 The Sense Enumeration Lexicon Approach

This approach was first proposed by Katz (1972). He suggests that the related senses of a polysemous word are represented separately in the mental lexicon; i. e. there is a distinct representation and storage for every single form of a polysemous lexeme. This approach presents an attenuated distinction between homonymy and polysemy. Apparently, it makes no difference between the way homonymous and polysemous forms are processed. Moreover, it recalls for a proliferation of words to cover a great range of uses. Consequently, this approach recommends a great room for storage: many polysemous words have a large number of different related senses (see for example the meanings of 'over' which might extend to a hundred distinct uses according to Brugman's (1988) *The Story of Over: Polysemy, Semantics, and the Structure of the Lexicon*). This approach also fails to differentiate between the intrinsic meaning of a word and other meanings triggered by context, a case which is often referred to as 'polysemy fallacy' (Sandra, 1998: 369).

In fact, polysemy is highly pervasive in all natural languages. Accordingly, in processing any short sentence containing polysemous forms, one needs to access all the possible sense entries in the lexicon. This leads, in turn, to a *costly* processing of merely a simple short sentence and this goes opposite to the need of an economic space of storage and time of processing.

### 3.2 The Generative Approach

This approach is developed by Pustejovesky in (1993) and (1995) (Pustejovesky, 2001: 34). In this approach, he adopts the generative rules in describing homonymy and polysemy. In describing the representation of homonymy in the lexicon he provides the example of 'bank' as follows:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| PHON: *bank* | | PH: *bank* |
| CAT: count noun | | CAT: count noun |
| GENUS: financial institution | , | GENUS: shore |

In representing polysemy, he provides two ways as follows:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| PHON: *window* | | PH: *window* |
| CAT: count noun | | CAT: count noun |
| GENUS: aperture | , | GENUS: physical object |

Or,

| |
|---|
| PHON: *window* |
| CAT: count noun |
| GENUS: aperture, physical object |

The above description of homonymy is quite accurate: it assures that homonymous words are two different lexical items that are stored and represented autonomously in the lexicon and this is what, relatively, all approaches are consensus with. Polysemous words, on the other hand can be represented in two ways the first of which treats polysemy the same as homophony and this is in fact rejected upon by many scholars. The second way is apparently more acceptable: it treats polysemy as one lexical entry with different related meanings. The shortcoming of this approach is that, one representation might represent other words, such as: door or gate, in addition to the one in question.

### 3.3 The One Representation Approach

This approach is sometimes considered the closest alternative to the sense enumeration lexicon approach. According to this approach, the multiple senses of a polysemous word depend or belong all to a single item representation. This is to mean that they are stored in the lexicon as part of one representation. When the listener processes one of these multiple senses, the main representation is triggered and is considered to be the gateway to other related senses. In fact there are two hypotheses under this approach, namely, the core meaning and the underspecification hypotheses.

### 3.3.1 The Core Meaning Hypothesis

The core meaning hypothesis proposes that the semantic representation or the core meaning representation of polysemous terms includes a set of features or a common core that is shared by all senses of a polysemous term, i.e. the storage of a polysemous sense consists of all the features related to that sense. For the word ‘rabbit’, for example, a core representation or a memory structure might consist of [+ANIMATE, +FARM ANIMAL, +EDIBLE, +MEAT] (Klepousniotou et al., 2008: 1535). In this case, when the polysemous word is processed, the features prime each other. This might explain why polysemous words need less effort to be processed than words with fewer senses.

This hypothesis is not devoid of shortcomings. The main criticism is that it has a limited reach. Klepousniotou et al. (ibid) state that this hypothesis "can explain the cases where the senses of a polysemous term are closely related, but not the cases where the senses are ‘distant’ and behave more in line with homonyms". Referring to the above example, a rabbit cannot keep all the features mentioned above in sentences like, "*My rabbit is hopping*" and "The *main dish is rabbit* ". In the first sentence the hopping rabbit is not edible (not having the meat sense) and in the second sentence the rabbit meat is inanimate. This hypothesis is sometimes described as 'thin semantics' because the representing meaning of words impoverished in accordance with their occasional or contextual meanings.

### 3.3.2 The Underspecification Hypothesis

In fact this hypothesis has been proposed to deal with different phenomena in addition to polysemy and homonymy, viz. alleged type-shifting constructions and scope ambiguities. According to this hypothesis, when a polysemous sense is accessed, no specific representation is triggered, rather an underspecified representation, which

is enriched by the emerging context, is activated. This is to suggest that lexical meanings are rich in conceptual information; and this is the reason why this hypothesis is described within the domain of rich semantics as compared with thin semantics (Klepousniotou et al., 2008: 1536).

### 3.4 Literalist Approaches

This type of approaches suggests that when homonymy or polysemy is to be resolved, the first step is to select the literal meaning of that word then choose the senses that are more consistent with the contextual demands. Under this approach, there are other approaches holding the same concept. These approaches deal with homonymy similarly, however polysemy is still problematic:

#### 3.4.1 The Rule-based Approach

This approach is proposed by Jackendoff (1992). He suggests that when we process a polysemous word, we access its literal sense in the beginning, then we posit a conventional rule which leads us to another sense of that word depending on its selectional restrictions. Jackendoff's famous example of 'Ringo' can be explained as follows: "*Tussauds, and someone utters Ringo is the Beatle that I like the most*". According to Jackendoff, "there is a linguistic rule that tells us that 'any NP can stand for an object or for a physical representation of that object'"; therefore, the word *'Ringo'* might refer to the literal meaning Ringo-the-drummer or to the other sense the statue of this famous musician.

#### 3.4.2 The Coercion Approach

The Coercion Approach is proposed by Asher (2011). He states that coercion "is a mechanism that takes as its input a literal meaning, and is forced by a type-mismatch when composing it with the other lexical meanings in the sentence, delivers a different meaning as output". This is to mean that in resolving a polysemous word, two steps are involved, the first is to seek the literal meaning of that word, and then (if it doesn't fit) it seeks an underspecification approach (see **4.2.2** above). This approach is able to justify how to make sense of *The omelet left without paying, although it was very yummy*.

#### 3.4.3 The Lexical Pragmatic Approach

This approach finds itself in the field of lexical semantics which deals with the relation between the lexical meaning of words and the non-restricted context. It resembles the rule-based and coercion approaches in the sense that they all seek the intrinsic literal meaning of a word as a first step in resolving polysemy. However, the difference lies in the view that

"polysemy is the outcome of a pragmatic process whereby intended senses are inferred on the basis of encoded concepts and contextual information" (Sperber and Wilson, 1998:197). This implicates that instead of inventing new words; a speaker or a hearer of a language might find it more appropriate to extend the functions of the real existing words to achieve this aim. Accordingly, polysemy is considered a 'side effect affair' of pragmatic processes. The lexical pragmatic approach treats polysemy as a communicative phenomenon and that the second step after literal lexical search of polysemy is to search for the encyclopedic information of that item which is triggered by the lexical concept plus the other proliferated situational assumptions which are aroused by necessity to meet the hearer's needs.

### 3.5 Sense Networks Approach

In the previous rule-based and coercion approaches, polysemy is tackled and analyzed as a linguistic phenomenon. The lexical pragmatic approach, on the other hand, treats polysemy from communicative perspectives. A third stream is that of the sense network approach which deals with polysemy as a cognitive phenomenon. The pioneers of this approach are Brugman and Lakoff (1988). The approach adopts the proposal that the prototypical sense is related via radial relations with other senses in a form of network structure. These senses, in turn, might be related to each other secondarily, and the whole senses are stored in the long-term semantic memory. In resolving polysemy, the prototypical sense is triggered affected by the more typical senses that are located closer (more frequently used than others or closer in meaning) than less typical senses. This approach is devoid of contextual effects; therefore, Tyler and Evans (2003) developed this approach into another one called 'The Principled Polysemy Approach' which preserves the idea that polysemous senses are symbolized in the form of "sense networks centered around a prototypical sense, but includes a methodology for distinguishing between those senses that are stored in semantic memory and those that are pragmatically constructed in context".

## 4. The Treatment of Homonymy and Polysemy in Dictionaries

Yule (2010: 120) highlights the importance of dictionaries in putting clear-cut boundaries between the fuzzy concepts of homonymy and polysemy. He states, "If we aren’t sure whether different uses of a single word are examples of homonymy or polysemy, we can check in a dictionary".

Lexicographers treat homonymy and polysemy differently. The ways lexemes are arranged in dictionaries seem to be inspired by the psychological views toward words storage in the lexicon. Cruse (2006: 133) states that homonyms have main headings that are separate from each other, i.e. a homonymous word has two entries rather than one being subscripted or superscripted. For example, the homonyms lexeme 'bank' is treated as two separate words for they have two different meanings 'bank1' and 'bank2'. Accordingly, we find the words 'mail', 'mole', 'sole', 'grass', and many other homonyms have two (or may be more) entries for each. In cases of polysemy where a word has multiple meanings, one single entry with a numbered list of the different meanings of that word is used. Kreidler (1998: 54) provides the example of the polysemous word 'needle' under a single main heading and a list of eleven meanings. 'Face', 'foot', 'get', 'head', 'run' are all examples of polysemy and are all treated in the same way.

Sometimes it is possible to have homonymous words when one of them at the same time is polysemous by itself and has a number of related meanings listed within its entry. Yule (2010: 120) interprets this case by the word 'date'. As a homonym, 'bank1= the margin of a river' and 'bank2= a place where money or other valuable material'. However 'bank2' is polysemous in terms of saving valuable material, i.e. the institution sense e.g. 'bank of money, blood, data …etc.'; or it might refer to the people administrating that institution. The treatment of polysemy depends at times on context which is a logical factor that groups certain words together under one entry; however, when one asks "How was your date?'' it could have multi interpretations. Therefore, dictionaries treat polysemous words on the grounds of shared etymology, i.e. the listed words under one entry have the same historical origin. This is a helpful way to judge whether 'table= furniture' and 'table= a list or arrangement of data' are cases of homonymy or polysemy.

## 5. Lexical vs. Structural Ambiguity

Kreidler (1998: 52) states, "a lexeme is a conjunction of form and meaning. The form is fairly easy to determine: in writing it is a sequence of letters, in speech a sequence of phonemes. But meaning is more difficult to determine". This difficulty arises from two main reasons: lexical and structural ambiguity.

Homonymy and polysemy are the major reasons for lexical ambiguity. Homonymous and polysemous lexemes, though are not often ambiguous in their contexts, trigger ambiguity when they occur in neutral contexts because they are semantically compatible; i.e. the less specific the

context, the greater the possibility of ambiguity, and vice versa. The sentence "I have a *file*" is ambiguous; however, this kind of ambiguity is unlikely to be continued in a longer discourse. A following utterance, for example, is likely to carry information about knives, cutting, meat, or about certain information, a folder, a dossier, or the like.

Handling sentences holding polysemy is of no much difference, e.g. (Kreidler, 1998: 54), in the sentence "I can see the foot", the polysemous word 'foot' might refer to the foot flight in the act of flying; the foot of a person or animal; the foot of a hill; the foot of a bed: the foot of a table; the foot of a ladder; the foot of a page; etc. This sentence is ambiguous because all the variations (related forms) of 'foot' are semantically compatible. In a sentence like "My foot hurts me", all these variants (except 'the foot of a person') are semantically incompatible, i.e. the sentence is unambiguous.

The most effective strategy to resolve lexical complexity triggered by homonymy in a neutral context where the two senses are unrelated and incompatible, is to choose the most frequent sense, though both are mentally activated. According to Frazier (1999: 39), "Quick resolution may be necessary because maintaining the ambiguity of these very different possibilities may be costly". In the case of polysemy where the different senses of a word are related and compatible, a different strategy is manipulated by the speaker where the decision to interpret is rather postponed to the end of the context, i.e. an early stage commitment is unpreferable.

Structural ambiguity in a sentence, as a second reason of ambiguity, is basically a question of ‘what goes with what’. According to Hurford (2007: 135), a sentence that is structurally ambiguous is the one whose words relate to each other in different ways, nonetheless its individual words are not ambiguous. For example, the sentences: "The dizzy worker rolled up the carpet"; "The chicken is ready to eat"; "The happy boys and girls"; "I saw a man with a telescope"; and many others of the like, are all structurally ambiguous for having one surface structure with two deep structures for each; i.e. that they can be interpreted differently by the same person. This type of ambiguity if not resolved by the context, a strategy of square brackets can be fair enough to show the two senses. In order to show the relationship between sentences with lexical ambiguity and those with structural ambiguity, Hurford (ibid: 137) proposed "some sentences which contain ambiguous words are ambiguous while others are not, and some sentences which contain no ambiguous words are ambiguous while others are not". This is to say that sentences with lexical ambiguity are not necessarily having structural ambiguity and vice versa.

## 6. Methodology

### 6.1 The Sample Selection procedure:

The population of the present study includes all undergraduate Iraqi EFL learners at the Fourth-year-level in the English Departments, College of Education for Human Sciences, College of Education for Women at University of Tikrit and College of Education at University of Samarra'. All the subjects of the population share the same linguistic background, age, nationality, and years of EFL learning. Table number (1) shows the sample of the colleges:

**Table 1: The sample of the College**

| Seq. | University | College | Total Number of population | Total Number of sample |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Tikrit | College of Education for Human Sciences | 36 | 33 |
| 2 | Tikrit | College of Education for Women | 37 | 31 |
| 3 | Samarra' | College of Education | 55 | 36 |
| Total | | | 128 | 100 |

A hundred students are randomly chosen from the 4th year English department students in the Colleges of Education for Human Sciences, College of Education for Women at University of Tikrit and College of Education at University of Samarra'. The students of the sample are both male and female for the academic year 2015/16. Table (1) illustrates how the sample has been chosen from each college.

### 7.2 The Test

The next subsections offer a detailed description of the test by discussing the test design, test development and monitoring the test.

#### 7.2.1 Test Design

##### 7.2.1.1 Test Aims

The present test is a diagnostic one in that it is directly related to measuring the subjects' proficiency in handling polysemy and homonymy at the undergraduate levels of EFL learning. It aims to test the students' ability to differentiate between polysemy and homonymy linguistically from semantic perspectives via question one; test the students' ability to recognize ambiguous from non ambiguous sentences with reference to lexicon by means of question two; and finally it tests the students' ability to select the most appropriate choice that goes best with the context where all the choices can be used interchangeably with the underlined word out of the context. This aim is achieved through question three.

### 7.2.1.2 Test Content

The questions included in the test aim mainly at pointing out the ability to differentiate between polysemy and homonymy by fourth year students at the English departments of three colleges; having in consideration that they have already studied semantics in George Yule's *The Study of Language* in linguistics material.

A special test is constructed to meet the objectives of the research. The researchers draw up three multiple choice questions to be answered by fourth year English department students at three Colleges of Education. In all of the questions the context plays a great role in deciding the correct choice as most appropriate choice. This highlights the role of context without which the reader would be puzzled to choose what fits. In cases of homonymy, the context would not always be so helpful. However, in cases of polysemy a mere phrase would be enough to settle the semantic query.

The test includes objective questions. Test format consisted of three questions; all the questions measure the recognition level, they consist of multiple choice items. Question 1, 2 and 3 contain five items in each, evenly distributed to testing each one. Total test items are (15).

Test content can be described as follows: the **first** question is concerned with choosing whether the underlined word is polysemous or homonymous. The **second** question includes five items concerned with deciding whether or not a sentence is ambiguous. Question three involved multiple-choice type of 5 items (See table 3). All of the items of the test are distributed between the two terms polysemy or homonymy as it is shown in table (2) (See appendix: 1)

**Table: 2 Distribution of Test Items**

| **Questions** | **Items** | polysemy and |
|---|---|---|

| | | homonymy |
|---|---|---|
| **Q1** | **1** | **P** |
| | **2** | **P** |
| | **3** | **H** |
| | **4** | **P** |
| | **5** | **P** |
| **Q2** | **1** | **H (A)** |
| | **2** | **H (NA)** |
| | **3** | **H (A)** |
| | **4** | **P (NA)** |
| | **5** | **H (A)** |
| **Q3** | **1** | **P (d)** |
| | **2** | **H (c)** |
| | **3** | **P (c)** |
| | **4** | **P (b)** |
| | **5** | **H (b)** |

### 7.2.1.3 Scoring Scheme

The format of the present test is designed as an objective one whose scoring scheme does not depend upon the personal opinion of the scorers themselves. Rather, the subject is required to choose the only correct alternative that the format supplies. Each test paper was scored out of (75) marks, of which (25) marks were allocated to each question. Five marks have been assigned to each correct response and a zero score is given to the incorrect one. All blank items are considered incorrect responses and are, therefore, given a zero score since they predict that the subjects have failed to give the required correct response.

Scoring has been done by the researchers themselves, twice. Additionally, test papers have been scored by a colleague of the researchers to ensure scoring correspondence. A high correlation coefficient of (0.99) has been found between the two scores. This indicates that the testing technique used is an objective one, which rules out subjective scoring. Such consistency in scoring ascertains the fact that "scorer reliability" is secured in the test. The scoring scheme adopted for the present test is summarized in table (3) below:

**Table: 3 Distribution of the Test's Scores**

| Question | Items' No | Score | Total Marks for each question |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | **1,2,3,4,5** | **5for each item** | **25** |
| **2** | **1,2,3,4,5** | **5for each** | **25** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **item** | |
| **3** | **1,2,3,4,5** | **5for each item** | **25** |
| **Total** | | | **75** |

### 7.2.1.4 Test Trail ( Pilot Study)

"Conducting a pilot test is necessary to refine the test reliability and presentation of the items, to judge item discrimination power, item difficulty, and to address validity and reliability" (Cohen et al., 2004: 324). The pilot study assists the analyses of the test items to find out the difficulty level and discriminating power as well as the calculation of the test reliability.

After the assertion of the test validity, the test has been administered to a sample of 100 fourth year college students taken from the Department of English, College of Education and College of Education for Women/ University of Tikrit and College of Education/ University of Samarra. The pilot administration is carried out on 16th, April 2016.

### 7.2.2 Test Development (Item Analysis)

The process of test item analysis means, "checking responses constructed by all students for each item included in the test" (Oliva, 1988: 15). The results of an item analysis provide information about the difficulty of the items and the ability of the items to discriminate between the best and weakest students.

After scoring the test papers of the pilot study, the testees' total scores have been ranked from the highest to the lowest in order to select the 27% of the highest scores to be put in one group (those represent an upper group) and the 27% of the lowest scores to be put in the other group (those represent the lower group). This process is done in order to obtain the difficulty level as well as the discrimination power of the test items.

### 7.2.2.1 Difficulty level (DL)

It refers to the proportion of students who correctly answer an item. The average difficulty of a test is the average of the individual item difficulties (McNamara, 2000: 60). Brown (2004: 58) classifies the too easy items and too difficult items as unworkable to separate high-ability and low-ability test takers and he specifies the range of DL of an item between 0.15 and 0. 85. However, the optimum rate of the DL of all items ranges between 0.222 and 0.574 (see table: 4).

#### 7.2.2.2 Discrimination Power (DP)

Brown (2004: 68) defines DP as "a statistic that indicates the degree to which an item separates the students who performed well from those who did poorly on the test as a whole".

Applying the discrimination power formula, it has been found out that the discrimination power of the test items ranges from 0.333 to 0.777. Thus, all the test items are acceptable (see table 4)**.**

**Table 4: The Difficulty Level and Discrimination Power for the Test Items**

| Items number | Difficulty level | Discrimination Power |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.518 | 0.518 |
| 2 | 0.481 | 0.666 |
| 3 | 0.481 | 0.740 |
| 4 | 0.574 | 0.333 |
| 5 | 0.518 | 0.592 |
| 6 | 0.388 | 0.481 |
| 7 | 0.462 | 0.777 |
| 8 | 0.462 | 0.629 |
| 9 | 0.425 | 0.333 |
| 10 | 0.407 | 0.370 |
| 11 | 0.296 | 0.518 |
| 12 | 0.259 | 0.518 |
| 13 | 0.370 | 0.666 |
| 14 | 0.259 | 0.444 |
| 15 | 0.222 | 0.444 |

In the light of the DL and DP for the items of the test, no item has been left out. As a result, the pilot sample can be the sample of the results of the research.

### 7.2.3 Monitoring the Test

The validity and the reliability types are shown in order to clarify their role in monitoring the stages of test construction.

#### 7.2.3.1 Validity

Richards and Schmidt (2002: 575) define validity as "the degree to which a test measures what is supposed to measure, or can be used successfully for the purposes for which it is intended". The face and construct validity are used in the test. To show face validity of the test, it was submitted to the jury of nine linguistics and methodology specialists.

The researchers handed each member of the jury a copy of the test. See appendix (3).

The researchers asked them to check the questions and show if they were suitable to be the items of the test. They agreed on the ground that such questions were both understandable and carrying the difficulties they aimed to test.

To construct Validity, Weirs (2005:17) illustrates that the construct validity as a matter of the posteriori statistical validation of whether a test had measured a construct in individuals. Test analysis gives indications on posteriori statistical validation in that all the components of measurement tools are provided as being discriminated. (See table 4).

### 7.2.3.2 Reliability

Harmer (2001:322) shows that reliability is "enhanced by making the test instructions absolutely clear, restricting the scope for variety in the answers, and making sure the test conditions remain constant". Moreover; reliability is concerned with stability of scores for the same individuals as Lado (1961: 330) explains. The Alpha-Cronbach formula has been used to state the reliability of the test, and consequently the coefficiency is found out to be 0.837.

### 7.3 Statistical Tools

1. **Formula of DL**: it is used to measure the DL of test items
   (Ebel & Frisbie, 1991:231)

2. **Formula of DP:** it is used to measure the DP of the test items and components

   " $D$ =**Alpha Cronbach Formula:** It is used to calculate the reliability of the tests.
   (Cronbach, 1951: 299).

3. **The percentage (%)** is used to find the percentage of correct and wrong responses for each item in all questions.

4. **T.Test for one independent sample (Lisa et al, 2009).**

## 8. The Results of the Test

The following results are drawn from manipulating the data statistically in order to verify the aims of the study.

**The first aim** is to know the students' ability to differentiate between polysemy and homonymy linguistically.

The results of the post test are analyzed to find out if there are statistically significant differences between the mean score of the sample of the study and the theoretical mean in the first question. T.test for one independent sample is used. The mean score of the sample of the study is (11.650) with a standard deviation of (6.437). The computed T.test value is found to be (1.320) which is lower than the tabulated T.test value (1.980) at (0.05) level of significance and under (98) degree of freedom. These results show that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the sample of the study and the theoretical mean. This means the students' ability to linguistically differentiate between polysemy and homonymy is medial (see table 5).

**Table: 5 The Post Test Results of the first question**

| No. | Mean | S. deviation | Theoretical mean | t.test value | | d.f | Level of sig 0.05 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Computed | Tabulated | | |
| **100** | **11.650** | **6.437** | **12.5** | **1.320** | **1.980** | **98** | **Significant** |

**The second aim** is to find out the students' ability to differentiate semantically between the ambiguous and non-ambiguous sentences. The results of the post test are analyzed to find out if there are statistically significant differences between the mean score of the sample of the study and the theoretical mean in the second question. T.test for one independent sample is used.

The mean score of the sample of the study is (10.250) with a standard deviation of (5.876). The computed T.test value is found to be (3.829) which is higher than the tabulated T.test value which is (1.980) at (0.05) level of significance and under (98) degree of freedom. These results show that there is statistically significant difference between the mean score of the sample of the study and the theoretical mean for the answers of the second question. This means the students' ability to differentiate semantically between the ambiguous and non-ambiguous sentences is weak (see table: 6).

**Table: 6 The Post Test Results of the second question**

| No. | Mean | S. deviation | Theoretical mean | t.test value | | d.f | Level of sig 0.05 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Computed | Tabulated | | |
| 100 | 10.250 | 5.876 | 12.5 | 3.829 | 1.980 | 98 | Significant |

**The third aim** is to find out the students' ability to choose the most appropriate choice in relation to the contextual environment. The results of the post test are analyzed to find out if there are statistically significant differences between the mean score of the sample of the study and the theoretical mean score to in their answers for the third question. T.test for one independent sample is used.

The mean score of the sample of the study is (5.900) with a standard deviation of (5.044). The computed T.test value is found to be (13.048) which is higher than the tabulated T.test value which is (1.980) at (0.05) level of significance and under (98) degree of freedom. These results show that there is statistically significant difference between the mean score of the sample of the study and the theoretical mean for the answers of the second question. This means the students' ability to choose the most appropriate choice in relation to the contextual environment is weak (see table: 7).

**Table: 7 The Post Test Results of the third question**

| N0. | Mean | S. deviation | Theoretical mean | t.test value | | d.f | Level of sig 0.05 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Computed | Tabulated | | |
| 100 | 5.900 | 5.044 | 12.5 | 13.048 | 1.980 | 98 | Significant |

**The fourth aim** is to find out the students' ability to differentiate between homonymy and polysemy and how to conceptualize their

manipulation contextually. The results of the post-test are analyzed to find out if there are statistically significant differences between the mean score of the sample of the study and the theoretical mean score of their answers for the all the questions in the test.

T.test for one independent sample is used. The mean score of the sample of the study is (27.800) with a standard deviation of (10.947). The computed T.test value is found to be (8.860) which is higher than the tabulated T.test value which is (1.980) at (0.05) level of significance and under (98) degree of freedom. These results show that there is statistically significant difference between the mean score of the sample of the study and the theoretical mean for the answers of the all question. That's mean the student's ability the students' ability to differentiate between polysemy and homonymy is weak (see table: 8).

**Table: 8 The Post Test Results of the test**

| **No.** | **Mean** | **S. deviation** | **Theoretical mean** | **t.test value** | | **d.f** | **Level of sig 0.05** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | **Computed** | **Tabulated** | | |
| 100 | 27.800 | 10.947 | 37.5 | 8.860 | 1.980 | 98 | Significant |

Moreover; the researchers use the percentage to find out the percent of correct and wrong responses for each item in all questions (see table: 9)

**Table: 9 The percent of the correct responses for each item in post test Results of all questions**

| Questions | Items | Number of correct responses | The percentage of correct responses |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Q 1** | 1 | 43 | 43 % |
| | 2 | 47 | 47 % |
| | 3 | 49 | 49 % |
| | 4 | 48 | 48 % |
| | 5 | 49 | 49 % |
| **Q 2** | 1 | 45 | 45 % |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 2 | 45 | 45 % |
| | 3 | 42 | 42 % |
| | 4 | 40 | 40 % |
| | 5 | 39 | 39 % |
| **Q 3** | 1 | 23 | 23 % |
| | 2 | 21 | 21 % |
| | 3 | 44 | 44 % |
| | 4 | 20 | 20 % |
| | 5 | 16 | 16 % |

## 9. Discussion of the Results

Generally speaking, the t.test applied to **Q1** shows that there is no great difference between the computed and the tabulated values of the question as a whole and the percentages of the five items of **Q1** are approximately close to each other. However, none is pass due to the fact that the students' ability to differentiate between homonymy and polysemy is weak in addition to other subsidiary reasons. Below is the discussion and the prospective psycholinguistic justification of each item:

**Item (1)** the plural noun chips may refer to (a) the remaining slices of the processes of chopping, cutting, or breaking something; it may also mean (b) a thin slice of crispy food usually eaten as a snack; or, (c) in accordance with modern technology, this word stands for a thin slice of an electronic device specifically used for storing and processing data in binary form in the light of variable programs.

In all three references, 'chips' refers to slices of different materials, i.e., it is a polysemous word. Unfortunately, more than half of the students decide that this word is rather homonymous though the context is fair enough to declare the lexical relationship. The students are in contact with 'chips' of potato or cornp as a snack. However, their mental image of this snack includes not only the shape of slices; rather, all types of such snack that are not necessarily in the form of slices: it might be in the form of rings, short sticks, small triangles, or other shapes. This mental image inhibits the activation of similarity between computer chips and potato or corn chips. Therefore, the students consider 'chips' homonymous rather than polysemous.

Another justification for the students' wrong answers is based on the factor of 'dominance principle' (lexical frequency). The priority of frequent meaning is robust more than any participating factor. Psycholinguistically speaking, the first to be activated is the most frequent sense of a lexical item; subsequently, it is to be accessed firstly albeit the context is a biasing one. Therefore, the precedence is for 'chips' as a snack rather than an electronic device.

**Item (2)** The noun line has many references: It may refer to straight geometrical shape; it may also refer to a length of a rope or a wire serving a particular purpose (such as a clothesline). It may also denote a row of printed or written words of any text; or maybe a row of people in front of a cashier. 'Line' may be included within certain expressions like "line of work" to refer to a certain career, occupation, or specialty; or "line of defense" in a football game or a military force. In a similar domain, the expression "drop me a line" means to keep in contact. 'Line' in this example seems to be homonymous since no semantic relatedness with other meanings of 'line' is noticed.

According to the lexical pragmatic application approach, in which Sperber and Wilson (1998) hypothesize that instead of inventing new words to express certain meanings, one may extend the meaning of another word to satisfy lexicon economy, especially in cases of polysemy. Therefore, at a second sight, this word is found to be polysemous because the meaning of 'line' is extended in the idiom "drop me a line" to corresponds to write a short letter or note; i.e. a line of written words.

The reason of the students' inability to decide the right choice lies behind their deficiency in interpreting most idiomatic expressions containing such lexical relations.

**Item (3)** The noun nail has three different meanings: a small metallic peace used to fix or join wooden pieces or used as a peg; a "horny covering on the upper surface of the tip of the finger and toe in humans and other primates"; or a measurement unit used in medieval ages. It is vivid that the three meanings have no semantic relation and this is why 'nail' is homonymous.

The students' inability to choose the correct answer is the context itself! Students are confused because of the word 'driving'. This word is mostly

used in association with cars or other vehicles. This implication deviates the students' decision to consider 'nail' as polysemous in association with some mechanic tools.

This phenomenon can be justified in accordance with the dominance principle: less frequent meanings may become active in neutral contexts of subordinate-biased contexts. 'Nail' as a tool is less frequent than its use as a covering of finger tips. However, the appearance of the word 'driving' results in the precedence of nail as polysemous.

**Item (4)** The noun lip is associated with more than one meaning: Typically, it refers to the external upper and lower ends of the mouth; or the external edges of a container. According to the lexical pragmatic approach, the associative meaning of a polysemous word is not necessarily stored and then accessed by a student. The associative meaning is inferred from the context which leads polysemy to be considered as a side-effect-affair of pragmatic processes.

The students' failure to decide on the correct choice is their insufficient awareness that this word is polysemous and may be used associatively.

**Item (5)** The verb set may be used associatively to indicate to the following references: to put or to lay something in a certain position; or to change the state of that thing. It may also mean to adjust a watch or a clock to the exact time; to go west for the sun; to change its direction for a wave; or to start some action such as fire.

'Set' is a polysemous word that indicates the meaning of being in a certain case/position or being changed into a new case/position. Just like item (4), the students again fail to conceptualize the relatedness of meaning concerning this verb.

The explicit aim of Q2 is to emphasize the role of context in disambiguating sentences with the lexical items in question. However, implicitly, this question intends to indicate that homonymous words need more contextual information to be clarified; whereas, polysemous words need the students to be more acquainted with their associative meanings rather than their need for contextual cues. The t.test applied to Q2 shows that there is a great difference between the computed and the tabulated values concerning this question as a whole and this is great evidence of

the students' weakness in managing homonymy and polysemy in different contexts. Below is a detailed discussion of the items of Q2 in relation to the students' unsuccessful answers:

**Item (1)** The noun 'mole' is homonymous. Firstly, it refers to a small mammal with small eyes, dark fur, and eats ants. Secondly, it refers to an important spy or an informant that works for the security defenses. Thirdly, it refers to a small blemish or a birthmark on the skin. Fourthly, it refers to a causeway or a breakwater. Fifthly, it refers to a unit of measurement used to measure tiny quantities of atoms. Finally, it may refer to a kind of Mexican sauce that is highly spiced. For the well acquainted reader, the second and fourth meanings are excluded by the virtue of the adjective 'beautiful'.

It is supposed in this neutral ambiguous context that the students encounter interpretive dilemma because a non-biasing context would provide no clues to the ambiguous word interpretation.

However, the students are unable to recognize the multiple meanings of 'mole' because of their limit acquaintance with these meanings. Accordingly, they consider the sentence unambiguous.

**Item (2)** The verb file refers to the action of placing a box or a folder in a particular order for easier future access. It also refers to the arrangement of people in queues; or it may mean to sharpen or to smooth something by a metallic or wooden tool. In the light of the rule-based approach, the literal meaning of a word is first accessed then its selectional restrictions are considered. In view of that, 'file' is a verb rather than a noun. According to the core-meaning hypothesis, if there is no common core shared by the multiple senses of a word, the word is then homonymous.

In spite of the vivid diversity of meanings, the students are unable to choose the correct answer. This is again due to their limit acquaintance with the meaning of 'file' as 'sharpen or smooth' resulting in an illogical relation between the words 'file' and 'nails'. Subsequently, the sentence for 55% of the students is ambiguous though it is not.

**Item (3)** The noun race is a homonymous word of multi references. It refers to a competition between racers of bikes, horses, boats, vehicles. It also refers to a channel or a waterway; or it indicates an ethnic group. The

context here is neutral and ambiguous because there are no clues to the ambiguous word interpretation; and the different senses of the words are semantically compatible with the context.

The students have been exposed to these meanings heavily as being students in English departments beside that these senses are common and frequently used. However, their answers are not felicitous due to the fact that 'race' as a competition is more frequent and it is the first to be activated and accessed in retrieval on line processes. Therefore, the students decide to regard the sentence as unambiguous.

**Item (4)** The adjective plain holds a variety of meanings: not decorated, clear, easy to perceive, ordinary, not attractive, unmitigated. According to the core meaning hypothesis, 'plain' is a polysemous word since its meanings are all associative in the sense that they all indicate the state of being *simple*.

The context is biasing and the sentence is unambiguous; nevertheless, 60% of the students decide that it is ambiguous. The reason behind is that they maybe not well acquainted with the associative meanings of this adjective.

**Item (5)** The noun grass is homonymous. Its references are devoid of semantic relatedness. As a result, the context is a neutral biasing one. 'Grass' refers to a type of short plants (lawn); or to a police informer. Thus, it is ambiguous for there is nothing in the context that declares the intended meaning.

61% of the students' answers are not felicitous. The reason behind is that the students are not familiar with the second reference of the noun 'grass'.

Question **(3)** aims to test the students' ability to distinguish homonymous and polysemous words. It also attempts at checking out the students' knowledge in conceptualizing the different meanings of such lexical items within contexts. The application of t.test to **Q3** shows a great difference between the computed and the tabulated values leading to the fact that the students are unable to manipulate and extend the usages of homonymous and polysemous in different contexts.

The words 'foot', 'shoulder', and 'head' in **items (1)**, **(3)**, and **(4)**, respectively, are all polysemous words. They represent three parts of a

human body and the references each item indicates are associative in the sense that they resemble their referents in shape, position, or function, i.e. they refer to things that apparently have the same relation of these human parts to the body.

The students' failure to select the correct option is due to their limited awareness of the lexical relatedness between the word in question and its extensions.

The words 'bat' and 'run' in items (2) and (5), respectively, are homonymous. Out of context, the four options of each item can be accepted. In context, they are semantically incompatible. Unfortunately, the students failed to select the right choice for their limited acquaintance with other usages of these words.

This survey shows that the students' failure to answer correctly is due to a variety of interrelated reasons: the first and most important is the students' weak ability to recognize and distinguish homonymy and polysemy. The second reason is their limited familiarity with other meanings of homonymous words; in addition to the limited acquaintance and inadequate awareness of the different usages of polysemous words and the extension of their meanings. Another reason is that the familiarity and frequency of one usage of a homonymous or polysemous word may overwhelm the students' choices more than context. Finally, idiomatic expressions may also elude the students from deciding the correct choice.

## 10. Conclusions

Homonymy and polysemy are two interrelated lexical relations to the extent that the boundaries between the two seem to be fuzzy. In neutral contexts, homonymy and polysemy foil comprehension. In biasing contexts, balanced ambiguous lexical items are incompatible with the meaning and result in obviously distinguishable meanings; whereas polarized ambiguous lexical items seem to have the precedence over context resulting in wrong judgments in on line decision tasks.

Accordingly, EFL students face difficulty in differentiating between homonymy and polysemy *per se*. They are also unable to distinguish ambiguous and non-ambiguous sentences containing such lexical relations. This is because of the students' limited acquaintance of other meanings of the same word concerning homonymous words and their

limited acquaintance of other extensions of the same word in cases of polysemy.

To round off, it is important to say that lexical ambiguity which lurks within the semantic relations in question provides a window into the complex processes that the human mind uses to navigate between our conceptual and linguistic systems. The students' awareness in judging sentences containing homonymy and polysemy contributes a lot in comprehension and retrieval processes.

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Appendix (1)

The Test

**NOTE: Circle the correct answer**

**Q1 State whether the following underlined words are best described as polysemy (p) or Homonymy (H).**

1. Computer chips created an important new technology. **( P / H )**
2. Drop a line when you are in Boston. **( P / H )**
3. He is driving a nail. **( P / H )**
4. The lip of the jar is well made. **( P / H )**
5. The criminals set the house on fire. **( P / H )**

**Q2 In each case, decide whether the sentence is ambiguous (A) or Non-ambiguous (NA) taking in consideration the underlined words:**

1. She has got a beautiful mole. **( A / NA )**
2. When I have nothing to do, I file my nails. **( A / NA )**
3. I haven't heard of such a race. **( A / NA )**
4. The advantages were plain to grasp. **( A / NA )**
5. I saw the grass. **( A / NA )**

**Q3 Choose the most appropriate meaning that best describes the underlined words:**

1. The view declares a nice **foot.**
4. The **head** splashes nicely at the office.

**a.** Foot of a person top of your body
**b.** Foot of a poem of a glass of Pepsi
**c.** Foot of bed top of a company
**d.** Foot of mountain

**a.** The thing at the
**b.** The froth on the top
**c.** The person on the
**d.** The main part

2. Ruth came to **bat** in the fifth inning.
   **a.** A tool for hitting the bell
   **b.** A mainly nocturnal mammal
   **c.** Take in turns the role of hitting
   **d.** Hit at with the palm

5. The course **ran** for two days.
   **a.** Traveled
   **b.** Lasted
   **c.** Managed
   **d.** Carried

3. We **shouldered** our backpacks and set of slowly up the mountain.
   **a.** The part of the body between the neck and the end of the arm
   **b.** A paved way along a road
   **c.** Carry on one's shoulder
   **d.** Push something from someone's way

*Good Luck*

## Appendix (2)
## The marks of the students

| No. | Q1 | | | | | Total 25 M | Q2 | | | | | Total 25 M | Q3 | | | | | Total 25M | Total 75 Marks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| **1.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 30 |
| **2.** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 25 |
| **3.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 |
| **4.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **5.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **6.** | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 45 |
| **7.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **8.** | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25 |
| **9.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| **10.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 35 |
| **11.** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 40 |
| **12.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 20 |
| **13.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 |
| **14.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **15.** | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **16.** | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 30 |
| **17.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 40 |
| **18.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 30 |
| **19.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25 |
| **20.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| **21.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 10 |
| **22.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| **23.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 30 |
| **24.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 45 |
| **25.** | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 35 |
| **26.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 20 |
| **27.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 20 |
| **28.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 45 |
| **29.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 20 |
| **30.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 30 |
| **31.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 40 |
| **32.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 25 |
| **33.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 30 |
| **34.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 |
| **35.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 35 |
| **36.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| **37.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 45 |
| **38.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **39.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 40 |
| **40.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 30 |
| **41.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 50 |
| **42.** | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 30 |
| **43.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 25 |
| **44.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 30 |
| **45.** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 |
| **46.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 |
| **47.** | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 20 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **48.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 30 |
| **49.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| **50** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 45 |
| **51.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 |
| **52.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **53.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 |
| **54.** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 40 |
| **55.** | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **56.** | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 30 |
| **57.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 45 |
| **58.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| **59.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 20 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 45 |
| **60.** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 40 |
| **61.** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 35 |
| **62.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 20 | 35 |
| **63.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **64.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 25 |
| **65.** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 20 |
| **66.** | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 35 |
| **67.** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 40 |
| **68.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 40 |
| **69.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| **70.** | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 30 |
| **71.** | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 30 |
| **72.** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **73.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 10 |
| **74.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 25 |
| **75.** | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 30 |
| **76.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 40 |
| **77.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 45 |
| **78.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 40 |
| **79.** | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 45 |
| **80.** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 50 |
| **81.** | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 30 |
| **82.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 35 |
| **83.** | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 40 |
| **84.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 25 |
| **85.** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25 |
| **86.** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 25 |
| **87.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 25 |
| **88.** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 35 |
| **89.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **90.** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 30 |
| **91** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **92** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **93** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 25 |
| **94** | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| **95** | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 15 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 35 |
| **96** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 35 |
| **97** | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 30 |
| **98** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| **99** | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 25 |
| **100** | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 10 | 30 |

## Appendix (3)

## The Jury Members

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