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Investigating the understanding of Homonymy and Polysemy of English language

تحري فهم تعدد المعاني والتشابه الشكلي في اللغة الإنجليزية

(Sudan University of Science and Technology)

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirement for M. A
degree in English language (Applied Linguistics)**

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الإستهلال الآية

قال تعالى:

(قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ الْبَحْرُ مِدَاداً لَّكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّي لَنَفِدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَنْفَدَ
كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّي وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِمِثْلِهِ مَدَداً)

الاية 109 سورة الكهف

Dedication

To the souls of my parents,

To my husband,

To my dear friends,

I dedicate this work

Acknowledgements

Thankfulness and gratitude to Allah for the achievement of this work would like to the college of language at Sudan University of Science and Technology for granting me the permission to the conduct this study.

My sincere gratitude is extended to my supervisor Dr, Abdrhaman for his continuous guidance and valuable suggestions without which it would have been difficult for this study to be completed.

I gratefully acknowledge my particular thank and deep indebtedness to all those who helped me and provided me with valuable knowledge.

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the understanding of homonymy and polysemy of English language. It shows the importance of relations of polysemy and polysemy for both teachers of English and students. The researcher uses quantitative method. The researcher adopts descriptive analytical method. The sample of the study is limited to the third year students of English college of languages at Sudan University of Science and Technology. The sample has chosen randomly. The number of students is 30. The researcher has come out with results as follows students of English cannot differentiate between polysemy and homonymy in language.

المستخلص (Arabic Version)Abstract

تهدف الدراسة لتعالج مشكلة تحري فهم عدد من المعاني في التشابه الشكلي في اللغة الإنجليزية. توضح هذه الدراسة لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية أهمية تعلم تعدد المعاني والتشابه الشكلي في اللغة. إنحصرت عينة الدراسة في طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية بالمستوي الثالث في كلية اللغات بجامعة السودان للعلوم والتكنولوجيا بمحلية الخرطوم. هي عينة عشوائية لثلاثين طالباً تم إختيارهم عشوائياً. خرجت الدراسة بالنتائج الآتية:-
طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية لا يستطيعون أن يفرقو بين المعاني والتشابه الشكلي في اللغة.

Table of contents

Title	Page No.
Quranic verse الإستهلال	I
Dedication	II
Acknowledgment	III
Abstract	IV
Abstract المستخلص (Arabic Version)	V
Table of contents	VI - VIII
list of tables	IX
list of figures	X
Chapter one: introduction	
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Statement of the problem	1
1.3 Objective of the study	2
1.4 Questions of the study	2
1.5 Hypotheses	2
1.6 Significance of the study	3
1.7 Methodology of the study	3
1.8 Limits of the study	3
1.9 Structure of the study	3
Chapter two: Literature Review	
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 Semantics	5
2.3 Sense relation	6
2.4 Lexical relation	7
2.5 Synonyms	7
2.6 Antonyms	8
2.7 Hyponymy	8
2.8 Homophones	8

2.9 Definition of homonymy	9
2.10 Types of homonymy	10
2.10.1 Complete (full, absolute):	10
2.10.2 Partial homonymy	10
2.10.3 Lexical homonymy	11
2.10.4 Grammatical homonymy	11
2.11 Polysemy	11
Chapter Three: Methodology	
3.1 Introduction	13
3.2 Methodology of the Research	13
3.3 The study sampling	13
3.4 Method of data collection	14
3.5 The instrument and tools	14
3.5.1 The test	14
3.6.1 Polysemy and homonymy definition	14
3.7 Sorting words in particular type	14
3.8 Giving different meaning of asking word	15
3.9 Study sample	15
3.10 Procedures	15
3.11 Reliability and validity	15
3.12 Summary	16
Chapter four: Data Analysis and Discussion	
4.1 Introduction	17
4.2 Question one	17
4.3 Data analysis	17
4.2 Question three	21
4.5 Result Discussion	23
4.6 The discussion of the research's hypotheses	23
4.7 Summary	24
Chapter Five: Conclusion, Findings and Recommendations	
5.1 Introduction	25
5.2 Conclusion	25
5.3 Recommendations	25
Suggestion for further studies	
References	
Appendixes	

List of tables

Title	Page No
Table (1)	17
Table (2)	19
Table (3)	21

list of figures

Title	Page No
Figure (1)	18
Figure (2)	20
Figure (3)	20
Figure (4)	23

Chapter One

Introduction

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background

A single word form can be associated with several different meanings well-known fact about language. Take the word run. It's meaning in the verb phrase run half marathon is clearly different from the one it has in run some water, or for that matters. In run a gasoline, run for president, and so on.

This phenomenon is described as polysemy, and it proliferates in natural language, words like bears and bare are homonymous (also called homophones) homonyms are words that have different meanings, but are pronounced the same and may not be spelled the same. Hymes (196.p.157).

This research will be carried out in the field of polysemy and homonymy. The study raises teacher's attention for the importance of those phenomenon, it will develop and promote students knowledge in what related to them.

1.2 Statement of the problem:

The research focuses on investigating students of English understanding and use of homonymy and polysemy.

Students of English have difficulty in understanding polysemy and homonymy.

1.3 Objectives of the study:

The aim of the current study is to investigate the understanding and use of polysemy and homonymy. It attempts to achieve the following objectives:-

1. Discovering students' ability in using polysemy and homonymy.
2. Emphasizing the important of the two terms.
3. Making sure that students are able to differentiate between the two terms.

1.4 Questions of the study:

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How far do students of English understand polysemy and homonymy?
2. To what extent do polysemy and homonymy are problematic to the students?
3. What are the possible solutions for differentiation between the two words relation.

1.5 Hypotheses of the study:

The researcher assumes the following:

1. Students of English Language do not understand polysemy and Homonymy appropriately.
2. Polysemy and homonymy represent a difficult problem in the understanding of the words.

3. Understanding the context of the sentences is a correct way to differentiate between two words relation.

1.6 Significance of the study:

English language teachers and learners can use the finding of this study as a guide. The research shows the importance of polysomy and homonymy in English language use for teachers and students. It enriches vocabularies of students of polysomy and homonymy. It also, supports English syllabus designers with proper vocabularies on both relations.

1.7 Methodology of the study:

The researcher adopts quantitative analytical method. The researcher designs a test as a tool for data collection. The researcher will select sample randomly and purposefully.

1.8 Limits of the study:

The study will be carried out within the following limits. Place is restricted to Sudan university of Science and Technology. The study is timed to the academic year. 2015-2016 and topic is limited to investigate the understanding and use of polysemy and homonymy of English Language.

1.9 Structure of the study:

The research is divided into five chapters:

Chapter one presents brief background information, statement of the problem, objectives, questions, hypotheses, significance, limitation, and methodology and structure of the study. Chapter two reviews the relevant literature along with some studies conducted and results obtained. Chapter

three presents methodology of the research. It describes the subject responding to test, and procedures to obtain the data from the test. The chapter also explains how these tools are handled and processed to qualify the validity and reliability of the research. Chapter four analyses and discuss the data obtained by research tools. Chapter five sums up the finding the researcher has reached; and it forwards some recommendations and suggestions for further researches in the field.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews and discusses some definitions of Homonymy and Polysemy – in addition, the chapter focuses on some studies which investigate on the same area of the research.

2.2 Semantics:

Semantic is the study of the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. In semantic analysis, there is always an attempt to focus on what the words conversationally mean, rather than on what the speaker might want the words to mean on a particular occasion. This technical approach is concerned with objective or general meaning and avoid trying to account for subjective or local meaning. Linguistic semantics deals with the conversational meaning conveyed ob the use of words, phrases and sentences of a language. Yule(2006 p. 700)

Semantic is the technical term to refer to the study of meaning. Unfortunately “meaning” covers a variety of aspects of language and there is no very generally agreement either about what meaning is or about the way in which it should be describedPalmer,(1977: 7)

Semantic is the study of meaning expressed by elements of any language, characterizable as a symbolic system. The goal of linguistic semantics to describe the meaning of linguistic elements and to study the principles which

allow the assignment of meaning to combinations of these elements. A complete an adequate semantic theory.

1. Characterizes the systematic meaning relation between words and sentences of a language.
2. Provides an account of the relations between linguistic expressions and the things that they can be used to talk about. Filip;(2008:9)

Semantic is the linguistic study of meaning is centered to the process of communication. Interestingly, there is usually the controversy about the nature of meaning. Meaning is at the centre of the study of semantic. For both the philosopher and the linguist .However,there differences in opinion based on approaches and methods. Semantic theories explain the nature of meaning by utilizing a finite set of aules to explain a variety of semantic phenomena. Any theory of semantic should provide statements that explain meaning relationship – such as ambiguity, anomaly, contradiction, tautology, paraphrase, entailment, synonymy, hyponymy. This means that such a theory should be able to explain the inherent meaning characteristics of words and sentences.Ogbulogo,(2012)

2.3 Sense relations:

Meaning is more than denotation and connotation. What a word means depends in part on its associations with other words, the relational aspect. Lexemes do not merely ‘have’ meaning; they contribute meaning to the utterances in which they occur, and what meanings they contribute depends on what other lexeme has because they are associated with in these utterances. The meaning that a lexeme has because of these relationships is

sense of that lexeme. Part of this relationship is seen in the way words do, or do not, go together meaningfully. It makes sense to say, John walked and it makes it makes sense to say John elapsed. It doesn't make sense to say John elapsed or an hour walked. Part of the meaning of elapse is that it goes with hour. Second, minute, day but not with John, and part of the meaning of hour, second and so forth is that these words can co-occur with elapse.kreidler(1998:46)

2.4 Lexical relations:

Not only words be treated as “containers of meaning or as full filling” roles in events, they can also have relationship with each other. In every day talk, we often explain the meaning of words conceal, for example, we might simple say “it's the same as hide or give the meaning of shallow as the opposite of deep” or the meaning of daffodil as “a kind of flower” in doing so, we are characterizing the meaning of each word, not in terms of its component feature, but in terms of its relationship to other words. This approach is used in the semantic description of language and treated as the analysis of lexical relations. Yule.(2006:104)

2.5 Synonyms:

Two or more words with very closely related meaning are called synonyms. They can often, though not always, be substituted for each other in sentences. Examples of synonyms are the pairs: almost/ nearly, big/ large, board/wide, buy/purchases, cab/taxi, car/ automobile, couch/sofa, freedom/liberty.

2.6 Antonyms:

Two forms with opposite meaning are called antonyms. Some common example are the pairs : alive /dead, big / small, fast/ slow, happy/ sad, cold/ hot, long/ short, male/ female, married/ single, old/ new, rich/ poor, and true false.

Antonyms are usually divided two main type gradable antonym such as the pair big, small. (Opposite along the scale) and non gradable (direct opposite)gradable antonym can be use in comparative constructions like I m bigger than you and a pond is smaller than a house.

Non gradable antonyms also called “complementary pairs” comparative construction are not normally used.

2.7 Hyponymy:-

When the meaning of one farm is included in the meaning of another, the relationship is described as hyponymy.

Examples: -are the pairs:animal/dog, dog/poodle, vegetable /carrot,flower/ rose,tree/banyan. The concept of inclusions “ involved in this relationship is the idea that if an object is arose, then it is necessarily a flower, so the meaning of flower is included in the meaning of rose or rose is the hyponymy of flower.

2.8 Homophones:

When two or more different (written) forms have the same pronunciation, they are described as homophones. Common examples are

bore/ bear, meat/meet, flower/ flour, paile/ pale, right/ write, sew/ so, and to/too/two .yule(2006:4,5,6)

2.9 Definitions of Homonymy:

Originally, the word “ homonymy” comes from the conjunction of the Greek prefix homo, meaning “same” and suffix-onymos, meaning “name” thus, it refers to two or more distinct concepts sharing the “same name” or signifier. Wikipedia (2010:1)

Lyons(1982:72; Oxford Wordpower 2000:366; Richards and Schmidt 2002:241; and Yule 2006:107) define (Homonyms) as a term used in semantic for lexical items that are identical in spelling and pronunciation but have different meanings: examples of homonyms are lie as in you have to lie down and lie in don't lie tell the truth. The above definition does not involve anything about homophones and homographs; in addition, it creates a problem with polysemy.

Hartmann and stork (1976: 105) Atichison(1993:52) and formkin et al (2003:71) agree that homonyms are different words with the same pronunciation that may or may not be identical in spelling. Thus they give them a definition that is partially similar to that of homophones. On the other hands, Walkins et al.(2001:269) define it just like other “words but have different spelling” in spite of the fact of not naming them “homophones” in addition to “homonyms” as Formkin et al, (2003:71)

On other hand Wikipedia ,(2010:2) define homonmy as the existence of different lexemes that sound the same (homophones e.g. days daze) or homonyare spelt the same (homograph,e.g lead(guide) lead mental) but have

different meanings. In this way, they divide them into homophones and homographs. This is definition that is adopted in this research.

On a large scope homonymy is defined as a word that is identical in form with another word, either in sound (as a homophone) or in spelling (as in homograph) or both. But differ from it in meaning. For example sale (an act or of spelling something) and sail (to travel on water) bank (the skin of a tree) and bank(the sound of a dog) or pitch (throw/ pitch (tor).

2.10 Types of Homonymy:

2.10.1 Complete (full, absolute):

Those are homonyms that have the same pronunciation and the same spelling i.e. the identity covers spoken and written forms. Classic examples are bank (embankment) and bank (place where money is kept) (Lyons,(1982:72) and Allan,(1986:150).

2.10.2 Partial homonyms:

They are those where the identity covers a single medicem, as in homophony and homograph. Thus, homophones and homograph are considered partial homonyms Crystal (2003: 220). Watkins et al (2007:269) differentiate between homonyms and what call “near homonyms. According to them homonyms are words that are exactly alike in pronunciation but differ in spelling and meaning.e.g. morning and morning, there and their, while near homonyms do not sound exactly alike e.g. except and accept; loose and lose.

2.10.3 Lexical homonyms:

When the homonyms belong to the same part of speech. They called lexical homonyms. The difference is only in their lexical meaning. They can be found under one entry in the dictionary .Singh,(1982: 25) for example trunk (part of an elephant) and trunk(a storage chest).

2.10.4 Grammatical homonyms:

When the difference between homonyms is not confined to the lexical meaning but the grammatical types are also different, they are called grammatical homonyms. They are given separate entries in the dictionary. In these cases, the words have similar canonical form but different paradigms and structural patterns. Verbs occurring as intransitive or lexical units that occur as nouns, verbs, adjectives etc. (e.g. cut (v) cut(n). cut(adj) are examples of such homonyms(Ibid).

2.11 Polysemy:

That asingle word form can be associated with several different meanings is a well-known fact about language. Take the word run. It's meaning in the verb phrase run a half marathon is clearly different from the one it has in run some water, or for that matter. In run on gasoline. Run on empty, run a shop, run late, run away from responsibilities, run in the family, run for president, and so on. This phenomenon is described as polysemy, and it proliferates in natural languages. This is confirmed by the range of different senses (and/ or uses) that any dictionary will have listed under a considerable number of its entries. On top of this comes the range of non-

established senses that lexical items may be used to express on different occasions of use, which are contextually derived on the spot.

Linguists, philosophers of language and psychologists have been long interested in the polysemy phenomenon due to the challenging issues it raises of theories of semantic representation, semantic compositionality, language processing and communication. Falkum, (2011:9)

Polysemy is the phenomenon when a single word has two or more meanings, no matter how meaning is defined in a given approach. Word is to be understood here as a element of the lexicon of a language, i.e. as lexeme, as opposed to word form (which is a realization on one or more lexemes) and word token (which is a concrete material realization of a word form in actual discourse).

This definition of polysemy is shared in most of the literature. However, although the intension of the term polysemy is therefore construed in basically the same way in the various approaches its extension varies extremely. Petho, (1999, 2,3)

Polysemy can be defined as a form (written or spoken) having multiple meanings that are all related by extension. Examples are the word head, used to refer to the object on the top of your body, on top of glass of beer, person at the top of the company or department and many other things. Other example of polysemy are foot (of person, of bed, of mountain) or run (person does, water does, colors do)

If the word has a multiple meaning (i.e. it's polysemous) then there will be a single entry, with a numbered list of the different meanings of that word. Yule, (2006; 7)

Chapter Three

Methodology

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the methodology of the research used along with the tools, instruments, method of data collection and analysis. The chapter also discusses the procedures followed in collecting the data and analysis and reliability and validation are provided as well.

3.2 The Methodology of the Research

The study has adopted the descriptive analytical approach where the researcher collects information from two different sources. The descriptive approach was represented in the theoretical frame work discussed in previous chapters. In the analytical approach, the researcher has followed the qualitative approach in achieving data analysis. The qualitative approach is believed to give accurate results of the students' real performance.

3.3 The Study Sampling

The study has aimed to investigate the problem of students in understanding the use of polysemy and homonymy. The sample of the study are (30) students chosen randomly from Sudan University of Science and Technology.

3.4 Method of data Collection:

The data of the researcher have collected from the answers of the students in the designed test. And these data have been analyzed qualitatively with brief comments assigned to each table result.

3.5 The Instruments and Tools

The study aims to investigate the problem of students in understanding the use of Polysemy and Homonymy, and for the purpose of the study to be fulfilled the researcher has designed a test. The instruments used are believed to give the desired results and accurate findings.

3.5.1 The Test

The aim of behind designing the test is to obtain the data from students' directly potentials. For the test to fulfill its purpose the researcher has divided it into five different parts:

3.6 Polysemy and Homonymy definition:

Students need to guess the correct answer from the given choices.

3.7 Sorting words in particular type:

In this part, words need to be sorted into two parts, polysemy and homonymy. Sorting words into two types shows how students understand the polysemy and homonymy.

3.8 Giving different meanings of a single word:

The students need to give different explanations of a word and this shows how students understand the first part.

3.9 Study sample

The sample of the study is a group of (30) students randomly chosen from University of Sudan who they learn English as a foreign language. The researcher has chosen the students randomly to undergo the test.

3.10 Procedures

The researcher has chosen the thirty (30) students to undergo a test sessions. Place was chosen for the participants to take the test and time was adjusted for the test start.

To do that, the researcher has advised the participants to sit in an empty classroom and pick the right answers.

After taking the test, papers were collected and analysis has been done for the obtained data using qualitative measures.

3.11 Reliability and Validity

The researcher has used some measure to validate the test, and the tools of data collection and analysis to be valid the researcher has consulted experts to review the designed test, and some modifications have been done in accordance.

3.12 Summary:

Through this chapter, the researcher has discussed the methodology and the tools and instruments used in carrying out the study along with procedures followed and the measures of validity and reliability.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Discussion of the Results

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Dissection of the Results

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher analyzes of the obtained data from students' test. The participants are 30 students undergo the test regardless to their gender specification as they have been chosen randomly.

4.2 Question One

In this question, students are asked to choose the most right answer of a given choices. The meaning of "Homonymy" has three possible choices and students need to pick the most correct one. The question consists of two parts.

Table (4-1)

Question No	Students' No.	Frequency of correct answers	Percentage of correct Ans.	Frequency of incorrect answers	Percentage of incorrect Ans.
1	30	23	76.6%	7	23.4%
2	30	17	56.6%	13	43.4%
Total	60	40	66.6%	20	33.4%

The above table shows the statistical results of the first sub question in students' test. The students who have undergone the test were (30).

As it can be seen in the table, (23) of the students have answered the first sub-questions, the percentage was 76.6% while (7) students have failed to guess the correct answer with associated percentage 23.4%.

As it is noticed, students can easily figure out the correct answer. The question somehow hints at the expected answer as students normally know the definition of both “Homonymy” and “Polysemy”.

The result indicates that students have succeeded to find the correct answer and hence have shown ability in dealing with homonymy and polysemy.

Looking at the second sub-question it can be seen that (17) of students have succeeded in guessing the correct answer with percentage of 56.6% while 13 failed to find the most correct answer with percentage of 43.4%. As the case in the first question, most of the students have found the correct answer, and that indicates their knowledge about polysemy.

Figure (4.1)

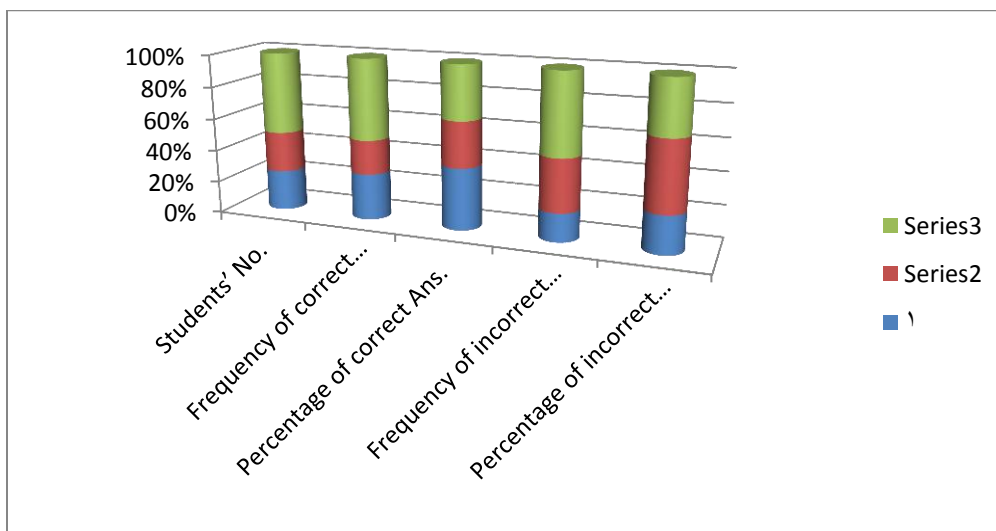


Figure (4-1): Question One

Looking generally at the first question, it is obviously that more than half of the students have passed this section.

4.3 Analysis Question Two

In this question, students are asked to sort the given words according to their types into Homonymy and Polysemy.

Table (4-2)

Question No	Students' No.	Frequency of correct answers	Percentage of correct Ans.	Frequency of incorrect answers	Percentage of incorrect Ans.
1	30	12	40%	18	60%
2	30	13	43.4%	17	56.6%
Total	150	62	41%	88	59%

The table above shows the statistical analysis results of the second question of students' test. The question consists of two sub-questions.

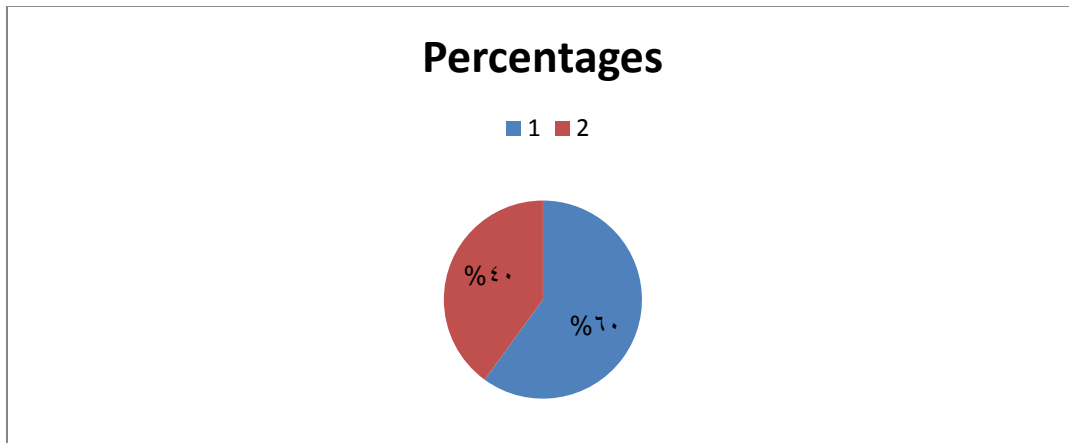
The given words need to be sorted into two types (Homonymy) and (Polysemy).

As it is shown in the table (12) students in the first sub-question have succeeded to find the correct answer with percentage of (40%) while (18) failed to guess the right answer and the percentage was (60%).

In this first sub-question students get the low percentage of correct answer as less than half of them only have guessed the most correct answer.

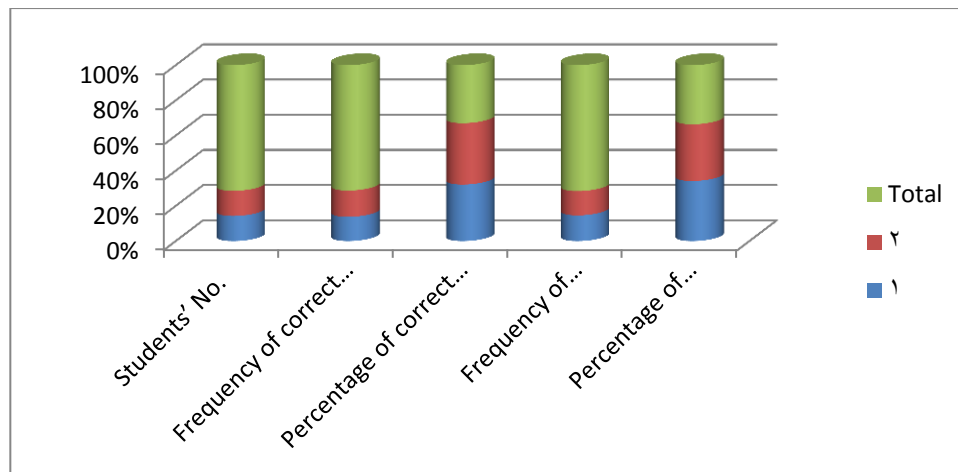
The indication of this result is that most of the students confuse in putting certain words into their appropriate type group, though they know the definition of each group.

Figure (4.2)



The second sub-question reveals that (13) students get the correct answer with percentage (53.3%) while the other 17 get the incorrect answer. Like the first sub-question, less than half of the students have guessed the correct answers

Figure (4.3)



4.4 Question Three

The question asks to students to give different meanings of a single word.

Table (4-3)

Question No	Students' No.	Frequency of correct answers	Percentage of correct Ans.	Frequency of incorrect answers	Percentage of incorrect Ans.
1	30	20	66%	10	34%
2	30	12	40%	18	60%
3	30	10	34%	20	66%
4	30	18	60%	12	40%
5	30	15	50%	15	50%
Total	120	102	68%	48	32%

The table shows the third question's results of the students' test. The question consists of five sub-questions where students are asked to give two meanings of a single word.

In the first sub-question 20 students have succeeded in giving the correct answer with percentage of 66% while 10 failed to find the most correct answer with percentage of 34%. As it is noticed, most of the students have found the correct answer, and that indicates their knowledge about the different meanings of the word (bank).

In the second sub-question 18 students have succeeded in guessing the correct answer with percentage of 60% while 12 failed to find the most correct answer with percentage of 40%. As the case in the first question, most of the students have found the correct answer, and that indicates their knowledge about native culture.

In the third sub-question (10) students have succeeded in guessing the correct answer with percentage of (34%) while 20 of the students have failed to find the most correct answer with percentage of 66%. As the case in the first question, few of the students have found the correct answer, and that indicates their knowledge about the meaning of the word (can) is weak.

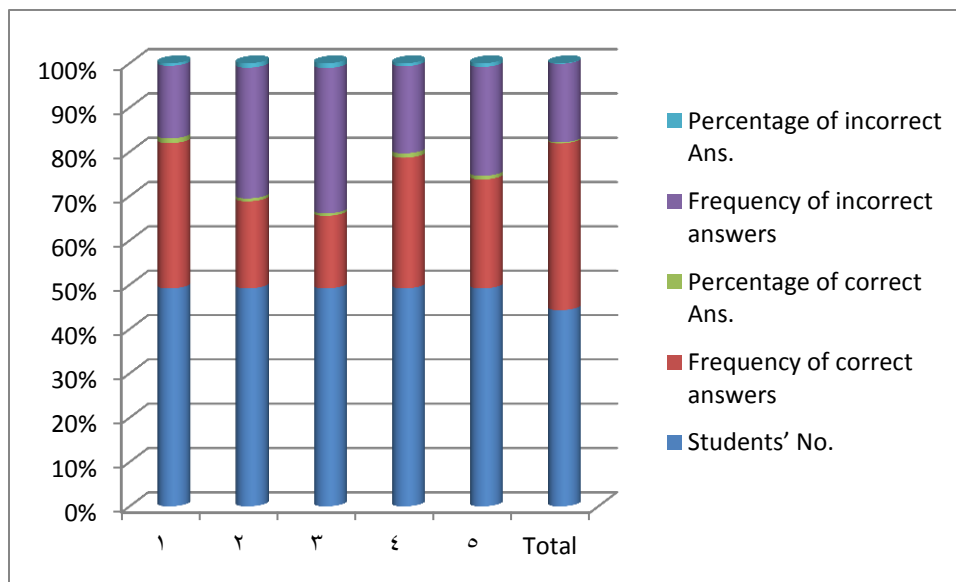
In the fourth sub-question (18) students have succeeded in guessing the correct answer with percentage of (60%) while (12) failed to find the most correct answer with percentage of (40%). As the case in the first question, most of the students have found the correct answer, and that indicates their knowledge about the different meanings of the word (fan) is good.

In the fifth sub-question (15) students have succeeded in guessing the correct answer with percentage of 50% while (15) students also have failed to find the most correct answer with percentage of 50%. As it is noticed, students have divided into two halves, and that indicates their knowledge about the different meaning of the word (school) is ok.

4.5 Result Discussion

Looking at the previous tables, students' answers have differed from correct to incorrect, but the overall result showed that students have serious problem with regard to identifying Homonymy and Polysemy.

Figure (4.4)



4.6 The Discussion of Research's Hypotheses

4.6.1 Students of English don't understand Polysemy and Homonymy appropriately.

Based on the result of the first question in descriptive analysis, the total percentage (66.6%) of the correct answer indicates that most of the students have succeeded in finding the correct answer which in turn proves that students' haven't got problematic issue in knowing the concepts of "Homonymy and Polysemy". This proof refutes the first hypothesis claim. It can be said the problem is in its minimum level.

4.6.2 Polysemy and Homonymy represent a difficult problem in the understanding of the words.

Looking at the second table of the descriptive analysis, it can be noticed that the majority of the students have failed to guess the correct answer which can be seen in the overall incorrect percentage (59%). The result is totally in agreement with the second hypothesis. The hypothesis totally is confirmed.

4.6.3 Understanding the context of the sentences is a correct way to differentiate between two words.

The researcher can noticed that, the descriptive results have proved that students find difficulties in giving meanings of a single word and hence shows their less understanding of the context.

4.7 Summary

The chapter has analyzed the data obtained from students' test. The descriptive results were obtained, and charts were designed to represents the result tables. The overall results reveal that students have serious problem in Homonymy and Polysemy.

Chapter Five
Conclusion, Findings,
Recommendations

Chapter Five

Conclusion, Findings, Recommendations

5.1 introduction

This chapter is useful for the following reasons: it reflects problems of the study, it also suggests proper solutions for them and the section calls for other relevant topics of the study. This section is important: it includes the topic, it shows the end of the study, this chapter provides: conclusion, findings, and recommendations.

5.2 Conclusion:

The researcher achieved the data analysis and came out with its results. He extracted the following findings of the study;

1. students of English have problems in understanding of polysemy and homonymy.
2. understanding of polysemy and homonymy represent a difficult problem in the understanding of the words.
3. students of English cannot understand context of the sentences is a correct way to differentiate between two word relations.

5.3 recommendations:

In the light of the findings of this research it might be appropriate to suggest the following recommendations.

1. student should go back to dictionary of polysemy and homonymy.

2. Teachers should encourage their students to know polysemy and homonymy words.

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Appendices

Test

Question One:

What does the word "Homonymy" mean?

- 1- Two forms with opposite meaning.
- 2- One of a group words that share the same pronunciation but have different meanings.
- 3- A and B

What does the word "polysemy" mean?

- 1- One word has a several meanings.
- 2- Two words with very closely related meanings.
- 3- When the meaning of one form is included in the meaning of another.

Question Two:

Sort out the following words according to their types.

Mole – sign – tear – pupil – foot

Fish – face – date – book – head.

Homonymy	Polysemy

Question Three:

Give two meanings for the following words:-

1- bank

2- ball

3- can

4- fan

5- school
