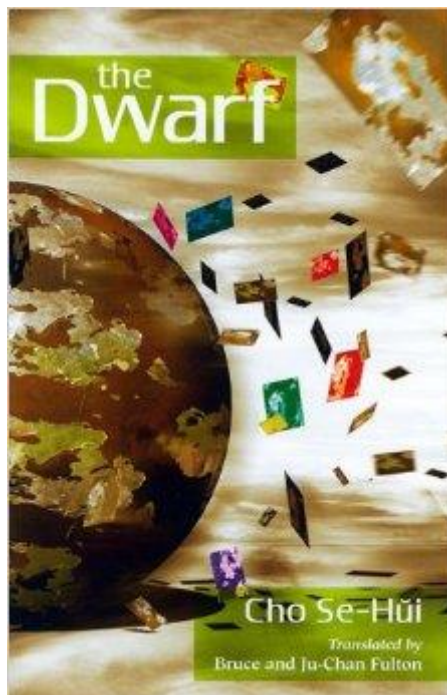# A Cognitive Semantic Account of Translating Polysemy:
A Case of Korean-English Transferability

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Abstract

The present paper is a cognitive semantic account of translating polysemy in the semantic field of perception verbs in English and Korean. It explores why and how our experience and understanding of the five senses constrains and shapes the way in which we create mappings between the physical domain of perception onto more metaphorical and abstract conceptual domains of experience. The different extensions of meaning in these verbs, both synchronically and diachronically, have not taken place as a result of chance, but are grounded in our own conceptualisation of these sense modalities.

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The paper attempts to analyse the translation strategies of Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton of *Cho Se-hui's,* Korean short stories under the heading of "The Dwarf". The paper analyses the mapping that has been made between the words and meanings represented in the translated text "The Dwarf". It also attempts to explore whether any disambiguator has been incorporated into translation process.

Key words: Translating polysemy, cognitive-semantic account of transferability, English, Korean

Introduction

The present paper is a cognitive semantic account of translating polysemy in the semantic field of perception verbs in English and Korean. It explores why and how our experience and understanding of the five senses constrains and shapes the way in which we create mappings between the physical domain of perception onto more metaphorical and abstract conceptual domains of experience. The different extensions of meaning in these verbs, both synchronically and diachronically, have not taken place as a result of chance, but are grounded in our own conceptualisation of these sense modalities.

Grey Area between Concepts of Polysemy and Homonymy

There is an extensive grey area between the concepts of polysemy and homonymy. A word like walk is polysemous (went walking, went for walk the dog, while a word like bank is homonymous between at least bank for money and bank for a river). The coexistence of several meanings in one word is called polysemy. It could be defined morphologically as the phenomenon that a word acquires new usages which, over time, are likely to become more like new meanings. And it could be defined semantically as the phenomenon that a word has several different meanings which are closely related to each other.

Problems in Translation

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The existence of polysemy in a text has obvious hazards in translation. In recent years researchers have made great progress in the field of translation, however, no existing general-purpose translation theory has yet developed a mechanism to deal with polysemous expressions.

Translation involves negotiation of meaning between producers and receivers of texts. Much of the debate on translation has centered on the degree of freedom the translator has in representing the meaning of the source text in the translation. It is sometimes claimed that the domain in which the discourse takes place will always constitute the context necessary to disambiguate lexical polysemy in a given sentence.

The question of assigning such meanings and matching translations to them is addressed in the paper.

The paper attempts to analyse the translation strategies of Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton of *Cho Se-hui's,* Korean short stories under the heading of "The Dwarf". The paper analyses the mapping that has been made between the words and meanings represented in the translated text "The Dwarf". It also attempts to explore whether any disambiguator has been incorporated into translation process.

Whenever a polysemous word occurs in the text to be translated, it's most likely that the meaning can be calculated by the prototype model. The prototypical sense of a word is the most frequent or salient or most concrete one. It is the one from which most others can be derived economically. This perspective gave rise to the notions of (i) *radial categories* –with a central element that combines many high-cue validity attributes and motivates the existence of, and is conventionally related to, less central members.

Vision

Vision is by far the most studied sense of the five perception verbs. The semantic field of sight has been analysed from different points of view of polysemy. Due to fact that the vast number of extended meanings is possible in this sense, I have organised them into 4 groups.

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The first group of extended meanings is that which relates physical vision with the intellect or mental activity. Within this group, the following meanings 'to understand', 'to foresee', 'to visualise', 'to regard', 'to imagine', 'to revise', and 'to meditate' are included. The meaning 'to understand' is illustrated in the sentences (1), (2) and (3) below:

(1) I explained the problem but he could not see it.
(2) I didn't see at the time what he wanted to say.
(3) It's a very hasty way to see things.

Another meaning belonging to this group is 'to foresee' as in (4), (5) and (6).

(4) I can see what will happen if you don't help.
(5) I already foresaw what has happened to Peter.

Another meaning in this group is 'to consider', 'to regard', and 'to judge'

The second group is the one that relates vision to social relationships. This group includes meanings such as 'to meet', 'to pay a visit', 'to receive', 'to get on badly', 'to go out with' and 'to accompany, to escort' (only English)'. The first meaning is 'to meet'.

 (6) I'll see you at seven.

'To visit' is another meaning that can be included in this group.

In the examples below *see* means 'to receive'. This meaning is inferred when the subject of the sentence is a person who usually does not visit other people, but a person who is visited in order to get advice, to have an interview and so on.

(7) The doctor will see you now.

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Another meaning is this group is 'to go out with'. In this case it is necessary to give a time frame for indicating a durative period of time.

(8) They have been seeing each other for a year

A third group of meanings is that which links vision to reliability, and assurance. This includes meanings such as 'to ascertain, to find out' as in (9), 'to make sure' as in (10), and 'to take care' as in (10).

(9) Please see who's knocking.
(10) I'm seeing Kim home.

Table 1: Extended meanings in vision in English and Korean.

English	Korean
to see (understand · realize · learn · hear· pick up · find out · get a line · discover · interpret · check · see to it · ensure · control · ascertain)	참조 {vb} chamjo
	자주 만나다 {vb}
	간주하다 {vb}
	발견하다 {vb}
	알아차리다 {vb}

Table 2 (a): English Korean Equivalents

Meaning	English	Korean
'to understand'	See	이해

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		Ihae
'to imagine',	See	상상 sangsang
'to visualise'	See	시각화 sigaghwa
'to consider'	See	'고려 ' golyeo
'to meet'	See	모임 Moim
'to receive'	See	수신 Susin
'to find out'	See	발견 balgyeon
'to escort'	See	호위 Howi

To elaborate it further, I now cite examples from *"The Dwarf"* to show the polysemous nature of some of the perception verbs which have been used many times in the text. The examples gathered from the text have been presented in the tabular form along with its English translation.

Table1 3: Comparison between Korean text (L1) and English text (L2)

Source Language (Korean) Korean Text Cho Se-hui	Target Language (English) The Dwarf (English Text) Translation by : Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton

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하지만 공장 노동자는 가을과 축적 볼 수 없습니다 *hajiman gongjang nodongja neun ga-eulgwa chugjeog bol su eobs-seubnida*	but the factory workers can't see it fall and accumulate (122 City of Machines)
그러나 그들은 그것을 볼 수 없었다 *geuleona geudeul-eun geugeos-eul bol su eobs-eossda*	But they couldn't see it (178 The klein Bottle)
Squatlegs 빛의 두 개의 열 접근 보았다 *Squatlegs bich-ui du gaeui yeol jeobgeun boassda*	Squatlegs saw two columns of light approaching (page 6 The Möbius Strip)

The table below showcases the type of equivalent used in the English translation of Korean word for verb "see" used as "verb" in the novel.
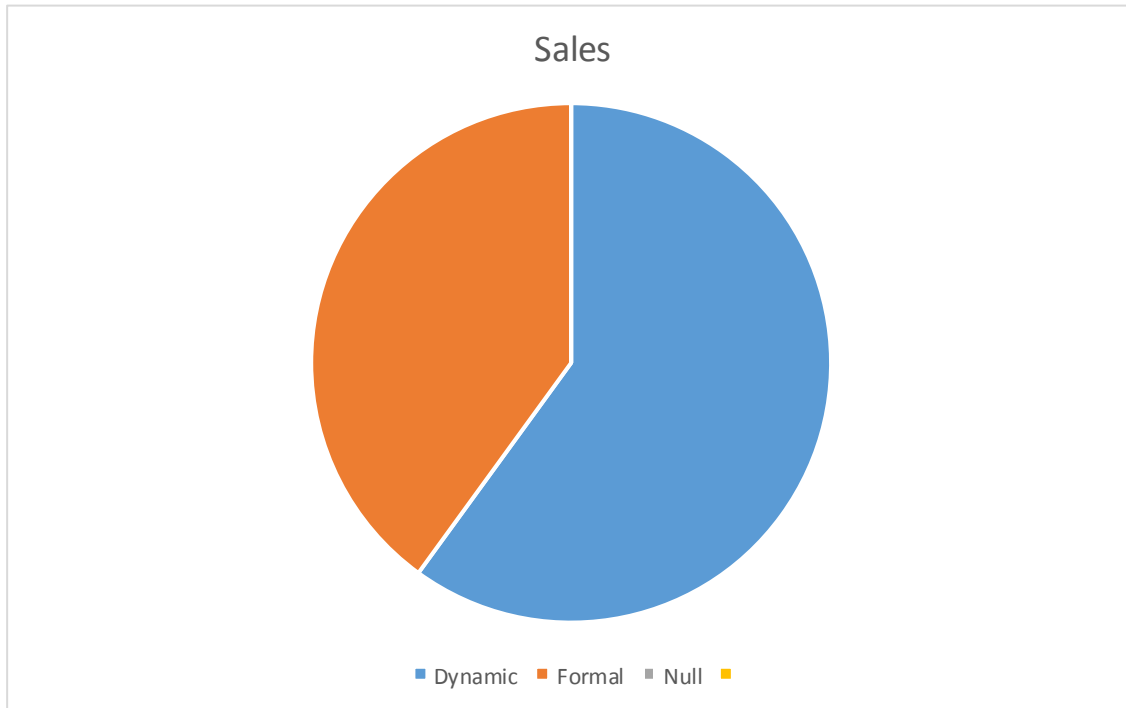
Table 4: Types of Equivalents

Sr.No.	Word from original text	Translated text (The Dwarf)	Equivalence Type
1.	볼	See	Dynamic
2.	볼	See	Dynamic
3.	*보았다*	Saw	Dynamic
4.	수신	See	Formal
5.	발견	See	Formal

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Table 5: Frequency of Equivalents

	Null equivalence	0
	Dynamic equivalence	3
See as verb	Formal equivalence	2
	Total	**5**

As shown below in Figure 1, DYNAMIC equivalence occupies the first position with 60 % occurrence. It is followed by Formal Equivalence occupies second position with 40 % of occurrence. The Null Equivalence has been given the least priority in translation process which occupies only 0 % of occurrence in the text.

Fig.1: Pie chart of the frequency of the type of equivalent used by Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton

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It suggests that POLYSEMY can make language rather slippery. Shifting senses, on the other hand, makes it easier to use. Presently, the term *polysemy* is used both in semantic and lexical analysis with a special connotation where it implies a word with multiple meanings or senses. The word *ambiguity* is defined semantically as the phenomenon that an expression has more than one meaning. Two different types of ambiguity can be distinguished on the basis of what is causing it: lexical ambiguity (more than one word meaning) and structural ambiguity (more than one syntactic structure).

Discussion and Conclusion

On the basis of the discussion above, we may conclude with the remark that a classical issue in lexical semantics concerns the distinction between *semantic generality* and *polysemy*. We have primarily considered English verb "to see" designating *vision* to suggest that *Korean* distinguishes among different verbs as shown in the chart below:

Table 2 (b): English Korean Equivalents

Meaning	English	Korean
'to understand'	see	이해 *ihae*
'to imagine',	see	상상 sangsang
'to visualise'	see	시각화 Sigaghwa
'to consider'	see	'고려 ' golyeo
'to meet'	see	모임 Moim
'to receive'	see	수신 Susin

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'to find out'	see	발견 balgyeon
'to escort'	see	호위 Howi

To conclude, we can say that the present paper argues that the above listed Korean verbs reflect different meanings and concepts. However, in English "to see" is unidirectional. The question is now whether these Korean meanings are lexicalized in English. There are at least three theoretical and methodological possibilities here. For example,

- Semantic generality
- Polysemy and
- Agnosticism.

First, *semantic generality*: it could very well happen that "to see" is semantically general and does not distinguish among the above listed meanings at all. In that case we could say that English does not lexicalize the differences among the meanings in having just one and the same word (or one word couple) covering all the meanings. The second possibility, *polysemy*, would mean that *"to see"* does in fact distinguish all the meanings listed above. In that case we could still say that each of these meanings is lexicalized in English - however, not as the meaning of its "own" particular lexeme, but rather as the meaning of a particular *lexical unit*. A lexical unit is, in turn, defined as the pairing of a single specific meaning and sense with a lexical form (Cruse 1986: 77–78), so that a polysemous word is a lexeme consisting of several lexical units. The present paper visualizes the difference between potential semantic generality vs. polysemy.

As the examples presented in the paper show, languages differ considerably as to how many different lexemes they have for talking about comparable domains and how exactly these words partition the domains. It is therefore reasonable to ask whether there is any systematicity underlying the obvious cross-linguistic variation.

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Finally, word lists, as we have seen, may well be used for some purposes, but are of marginal value when too little is known about the lexical meaning of the phenomena under consideration or when the phenomena involve too many language-specific lexical idiosyncrasies. Another possibility is to leave aside the problem of semantic generality vs. polysemy and to remain neutral about the correct semantic analysis of a particular word. This is the "default" interpretation of the data in the Table no 2(b). Under this view, what matters is the fact that English has only one lexeme (or, rather, a couple of directionality related lexemes) corresponding to the different Korean verbs. There are various tests for distinguishing between semantic generality and polysemy, for example, the distinct meanings within a lexeme having different syntactic properties.

On the basis of this particular study it can be argued that each of English words analysed in the present study distinguishes among several meanings, very much along the lines of the Korean system.

I hope that the present study will be a good point of departure for numerous future projects in lexical typology.

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