

Cognitive Nature of Polysemy in Malayalam

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Abstract

The present paper 'Cognitive Nature of Polysemy in Malayalam' examines the nature of polysemy in Malayalam from a cognitive linguistics point of view. This paper argues that the sense of polysemy is constructed on the basis of Frame. Frame is a mental structure which evokes, naturally when we use the language. The cognitive elements such as conceptual metaphors, metonymy and deep frame are explored to examine the conceptual structure of polysemy in Malayalam.

Keywords: Malayalam, Frame, Deep Frame, Cognition, Embodied, Polysemy, Homonymy, Ontology, Epistemology, Conceptual Metaphor, Metonymy

Introduction

Cognitive linguistics is a modern linguistic approach employed to understand the linkage between language and cognitive abilities of human beings. It hypothesizes that language is always related to the cognitive capacities of human kind. Significant feature of Cognitive linguistics is that it introduces discourses to analyze semantics substantially. This paper attempts to study Polysemy from a frame semantics point of view. Charles J. Fillmore (1977) introduced frame semantics as a broader theory to understand semantics in a coherent way. Cognitive semantics tries to define how an individual embodies his/her world on the basis of common experience. Human being embodies the circumstances through conceptualization. Conceptualization is the process of integrating knowledge by senses.

Frame

Frame is a mental structure which evokes naturally when we use language¹. It defines and determines the meaning through the knowledge based on conceptualization. The basic or fundamental idea of frame is that one cannot comprehend the meaning of word without approach to all essential knowledge that related to the sense of the word. For instance, one who did not see an ocean would never get complete sense of it. It is the experience of ocean that makes the meaning, though ocean can be described with similar words and things. The ocean as a frame is formed through understanding of epistemic signs such as waves, infinite presence of water and constant winds. Frame is a cognitive structure that helps to know the reality of world. It is the frame that provides the knowledge to understand and determine things (Girish:2016). An individual makes more unconscious participations with the environment rather than conscious participation. Thus, framing is unconscious. Each concept exist relies wide epistemic contexts. Thus, cognitive understanding never stands as a monolithic entity in an individual, rather each are perceived by relating with every appropriate and suitable perceptions. Frame is generally divided into two. i.e. minor conceived by Ronald W. Langacker and broad or social frame conceived by

¹ George Lakoff. 2004:15

George Lakoff. This paper attempts define nature of language meaning in the realm of words, using Fillmore's methodology of Frame semantics. For example, (1) *Beat*. This verb is located in the frame of Beating. Elements like Medium (hand, stick, etc.), cause of beating, and one who is beaten (victim), his pain, struggles and protest are included in the image schema of the frame Beating. The value of the verb *beat* is related to the cause of beating. The realm of meaning changes as image schema change. For example, the verb *beat* takes place using the medium of hand. But if image schema changes, the meaning also changes. Thus, *beat* becomes *punch*. Individuals perceive through image schema. The change in this image schema transforms the frame. Thus, it transforms the meaning.

Polysemy: Frame and Cognition

Polysemy is a single morpheme that designates different meanings. A morpheme maps out more than one meaning and things. If a morpheme has multiple and distinguished meaning, it can be called as polysemy, i.e. a word which possess two or more than two meanings is called polysemy. Polysemy can provide similar yet diverse structures of meaning to words. In other words, if any meaning identifies different structures and yet related, that can be called as polysemy. For example, in Malayalam words,

1. *Ullə* - refers to many semantic senses such as inside, truth, mystery, mind and so on.

- a. *avarvi:ttinulliluntə* (They are 'inside' the home) (inside-direct meaning)
- b. *avalkkəkāryatinteulləariyām* (She knows the 'inside' the incident) (truth-metaphorical)
- c. *avasānam CBIulləkaṇṇeti* (At last CBI found the 'inside' crime: secret-metaphorical)
- d. *avanavaluteulləmanaSsilakki* (He understood her 'inside': mind-metaphorical)

2. *Karuttə* (Strength) - powerful, Braveness, Capability and Fertility.

- a. *avankaruattnaṇu* (He is a strong man: powerful)
- b. *avantemanaSsinəKaruttuntə* (He has a strong mind: braveness)
- c. *Karuttanayasthanarti* (Strong candidate: capable)
- d. *Karuttullamaṇṇə* (Fertile soil: mightiness)

Along with the above-mentioned example, polysemy exists in another way also.

3. *Tala* (head).

- a. *kuṇṇintetala* (head of the baby)
- b. *muṇṇintetala* (border of dhoti)
- c. *waḷ tala* (edge of sword)
- d. *talavan* (head of something)

4. *kara* (shore)

- a. *muṇṇintekara* (boarder of dhoti)
- b. *kinattinkara*(edge of well) ,
- c. *karapradēcam* (coastal areas)
- d. *karakayaruka* (escape from trouble)

Centering these examples, polysemy can be considered, on the other hand, as multiple meanings emanated from a homogenous basic structure. Generally, polysemy is understood in this way. This paper tries to understand the cognitive nature of polysemy in a more discursive and precise ways.

This can be described while taking an example of morpheme which has more than one meaning.

(2-a)- *karuttā*

1. *avankaruttānaṅṅu*- He is a strong man: he has good health, so he has strength and physical fitness (powerful)

2. *avantemanaSsināKaruttā* - He has a strong mind: mental health is the strength. For an individual healthy mind is important for healthy body.

3. *Karuttā[[lamanṅā* - Fertile soil: fertility is the health of soil. Reproduction of soil depends on its health. Crops are cultivated successfully in fertile soils.

4. *Karuttānaṅṅasthanarti* - Strong candidate: capable person. Only healthy mind and psyche person can deal problems. Negative and introvert people are never called as strong persons.

From the above examples, we notice that polysemous words comprised of nucleus sense. i.e. health becomes the nucleus of sense for these diverse yet connected meanings. Thus powerful, braveness, capable and fertility are polysemy of the word *Karuttā* (strength). In cognitive linguistics nucleus of sense is named Deep frame. This paper argues that there is a nucleus of semantics sense which encompasses the different sense of polysemy known as deep frame.

Deep Frame

The core of polysemy is the multi frame which evoke from a basic domain. The frame that encompasses different frames is known as deep frame. Deep frame is a theoretical approach in cognitive linguistics to analyze polysemy. Numerous frames that originate from a single structure are the basis of polysemy. Deep frame is the basic frame that combines distinct and diverse frames. The difference in diverse frames of a deep frame is related to the epistemological image schema. Each Polysemy of a morpheme is already encompassed in the deep frame. In another word semantic approach to polysemy's centered on deep frame is called deep frame semantics. Polysemy never comes out of the deep frame circle. If anything happened in controversy, it would consider as distinct word.

For example, the Malayalam word *karam*, *karuttā*, *uttaram* were traditionally considered as polysemy. According to deep frame theory, here only the word *karuttā* is considered as polysemy. i.e. *Karam* – *nikuti* (tax), *kai* (hand) these are different meanings of a word. The meaning of *Karam* as tax is understood based on the commercial context. i.e. commerce becomes the frame for the word *karam* (tax). *Karam* as Hand is meant only by relying on the presence of body. Body turns out to be the frame for the word *Karam* (hand). *Uttaram-tf oḍyattinu[[lamarupati* (answer to a question), *Uttaram- melkkuratāṅṅunnani: aṭṭataṭikkaṣṅam* (long wood that holds roof of house, ridge- piece). These are same morpheme but distinct words since these are external/ outside of deep frames. According to the above-mentioned theory, the deep frame which should

relate these two frames is absent here. In another words these words are not characterized by deep frame. And these words must be counted as distinct words though both possess same morphemes. Thus, these are homonymy²not polysemy and also in dictionaries the word (karam, uttaram) must be shown as two-entry word.

Karam (entry word1)-*nikuti* (tax)
Karam (entry word2) – *kai* (hand)

Uttaram (entryword1) –*foḍyattinulla maṛupati* (answer to the question)
Uttaram (entry word2) (ridge): *melkkura tāññunnnani: aṭṭataṭikkaṣṇam* (long wood that holds roof of house)

In the case of the word *karuttā*, which possesses health as its deep frame, its polysemy are pointed out. Morphemes related to this particular characteristic turn to be the polysemy of the word *karuttā*. In other words, morphemes which have one or two different meanings and yet connected in the deep structure of meaning can be called as the polysemy of that particular word. Polysemy produces multiple meanings based on deep frame. In the case of homonymy (*karam, Uttaram*) there is no deep frame

In discourses polysemy can be seen in direct and metaphor³ as well. For example, look at word *Koyittā*. Its polysemy includes meanings like harvest, profit and prosperity. Harvest is the direct meaning of the word *Koyittā* and the rest are metaphors. Generally, harvesting crops like wheat and rice is called *Koyittā*. Harvest season is the most prosperous and joyful period for farmers and labourers. *Koyittulsavam* (harvest festival) is a common term in Kerala. The metaphor ‘prosperity’ has to be identified with these epistemological contexts.

Good profit is the metaphor of the word *Koyittā*. This secondary meaning indicates a situation when one earns good profit in the exchange of goods and services in a short span of time. (“*nallakoyitāṇu ayalkkə* - this man has good harvesting”: means, this man has good profit)

It is the excess profit earned through the increased exchange is important here rather than the low-priced goods and service. Bustling business during festivals/celebration can be identified metaphorically. There is a cognitive mapping between two domains such as source and target. The source reflects the harvest of rice crop and target represents the financial prosperity through the

² Homonymy is another area that must be understood parallel to the cognitive nature of polysemy. Usually, polysemy and Homonymy are considered as similar concepts in dictionaries and so on. But they exist as different categories in language. Homonymy is characterized as a phenomenon when a word has multiple meanings but does not have similarity in the deep structure of meaning, i.e. the meaning of homonymy is outside part of Deep frame. Though they are same morphemes, these words have to be considered as distinct words. Word which possess deep frame is called polysemy and words which does not deep frame can be called homonymy.

³Conceptual Metaphor, Cognitive linguistics rejects the so-called substitution theory of Metaphor. ‘Metaphor involves a relationship between a **source domain**, the source of the literal meaning of the metaphorical expression and a **target domain** of the experience, the domain of the experience actually being described by the metaphor. For example, to waste time involves comparing **Time** (target domain) to **money** (source domain) in the metaphor represented by the Lakoffian formula **Time is money**. Time is construed as a valuable asset that is possessed by human beings and can be used in the same way that money is’. (William Croft & D. Allan Cruse 2004:55)

instant exchange of goods and service. Harvesting rice crop is like harvesting the wealth. The human perception of rice as wealth is metaphorical in these meanings. The metaphORIZATION of *Koyittā* can be understood by analyzing its ontological and epistemological.

Ontological

<u>Source Domain</u>	<u>Target Domain</u>
Rice	money
Cultivation	trade
Stack of hay	product
Pile	more income
Less liquidity	more liquidity

Epistemological

<u>Source Domain</u>	<u>Target Domain</u>
Pile of grains	sack of money
Harvest (<i>koyittā</i>)	sell
Increased harvest	Increased sale
Raw materials	Value added product

Good profit and prosperity are used as metaphor in these discourses, i.e. Income through exchange is the first one and second one is the excess production. Metaphors like these are well accepted from one generation to another and be used as conventionalized metaphor. Later it may be extended to the other culture too.

Koyittā provides different concepts of meanings by mapping diverse epistemological frames. The meaning of *Koyittā*, direct meaning or non-metaphorical meaning is associated with agriculture frame which has a specific epistemological context that of harvesting grains. Grains like rice, wheat and sesames evoke this agricultural frame. These are also the words that map out the role of agricultural and economic exchanges in the lives of human kind. polysemy like these words represent different epistemological frames.

By analyzing the framing and metaphor of the word *Koyittā* it can be identified that those are the extension or continuity of human experiences. Experience creates different frames and different frames lead to different meaning. The nature of polysemy in *Koyittā* must be understood through this connection. Grains including rice as food products gain export value along with its local markets, and also these are the products that engaged in the everyday life of people. Though the physical labor like harvesting with sickle, collecting crops, making stacks and trampling were experienced, this had a psychological dimension that of prosperity and financial security. The Yellowish Ripe rice crop is yielded and gathered, the feeling of taking handful of ripe rice and the view of piling with bundle of rice and symbols like these constructs the metaphors of prosperity and wealth in the minds of farmers. With all these images, the word *Koyittā* forms a dynamic experience in a farmer. The pile of grains in granary reminds the money in sacks. Thus, the word *Koyittā* emanates a network of connected domain.

Polysemy of the word *Koyittā* are not accidental but embodied. It is important to note the mental structure of the meanings like harvest and crops in fields, when prosperity becomes the metaphor of the word *Koyittā*. This formation helps in associating *Koyittā* with the meaning prosperity. Harvesting crops leads to prosperity. And harvesting is instrumental in deciding, with its quantity and quality, the financial gains and loss. Harvest need not to be profitable always. The perception of a state of excess crops creates the frame here for the word *Koyittā*.

Good profit is the polysemy of the word *Koyittā*. Here the frame of commerce leads to the meaning. Commerce is the exchange of value. Thus the excess profit gained through the exchange of goods and service is the *Koyittā* (good profit). Crops are transformed to goods to be exchanged. And farmers make good profit out its exchange. Connected and combined chain of images like these evoke the commercial frame which provides a new meaning 'good profit' to the word *Koyittā*. New meaning indicates metaphor here.

Cultivation, harvest and its products (crops) and its exchanges in an agricultural economy steers the prosperity among human lives. Thus, frames like these offers diverse meaning to words (polysemy). Here the commercial frame of the word *Koyittā* becomes the common specific deep meaning for the word. That means, due to the polysemy like prosperity, profits and harvest to the word *Koyittā*, the commerce becomes the deep frame for these meanings.

Another example (8) of polysemy is *kayini:ṭṭam*. The numerous meanings of the word *kayini:ṭṭam* expand to the coins offered as presents in ceremonial occasions, the initial sale of a day and bribe. Although it indicates the length of hand (*kai-hand, ni:ṭṭam*- length), the word is absent in its true meaning in the public discourses. Thus, the entire three meanings are available only through metonymy.⁴ This is the specific feature of the word. It has also to be noted that how language speaker perceives the meaning of these language forms.

With languages, Physical movement is a medium for effective communication. Keeping hand in stiff is seen as a sign/symbol of miser. *Kayyayakkāka* (extending hand to help others) is conveyed as meaning, when one helps people more. Physical movement of body takes place here. Thus, stiff hand represents miser and extending hand construes charity. *kayini:ṭṭam* is an instance of expressing physical/body logic through the medium of language

If analyzed or examined how the speech community perceives the similarity of meaning between *kayini:aṭṭam* and present, it can be identified that those are the embodied knowledge of body achieved by human beings. The nature of the body is conceptualized here. Along with the sensual experience, language is what expressed through the experience of inter action of bodily power. Hands stretches as the sociality of charity is realized through hand. Charity is given by the stretching the hand. This is a material condition which body experience. This personal and physical experience lead to language. This is what conceptualized in the meaning of '*kayini:aṭṭm*'. The reflection of force in the physical experience of *kayini:tti'aṭikkāka* (beat with

⁴Metonymy has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to stand for another. But metonymy is not merely a referential device. It also serves the function of providing understanding. For example, In the case of metonymy. The part for the whole there are many parts that can stand for the whole. When we say that we need some good heads on the project, we are using "good head" to refer to intelligent people. (George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, 2003:37)

hands) forms another series of images in brain. Though both, alms giving with stretched hands (*kayini:tti dānamcheyyāka*) and beating with stretched hands (*kaini:tti adikkāka*), involves force, they are different. Here the knowledge evoked by conceptualizations through experience and internal force structure has different locations. And language is the expression of these intricate patterns of images.

Another meaning of *kayini:ttam* - first sale of a day.

Traders give importance to the first sale of a day in their business. They believe that the *kayini:ttam* will lead to healthy business of that day. They wish that *kayini:ttam* should have to be through liquid money and satisfied. The reason behind this concept is their hope that *kayini:ttam* will sheer to increased income. Here the framing depends on these series of images like the opening of shops, doing business, the right and exact financial exchanges and satisfied sales. These images constitute commerce as the frame. Thus *kayini:ttam* leads to the meaning of first sale of a day.

Another meaning of *kayini:ttam* is *coitns* offered as a present in ceremonial occasions. It is associated with culture. These are offered by elders of family to the rest of members of house in festival days like birthday and Vishu⁵ and in special days like New Year. By this offering, symbolically they wish for blessing in life. These are offered to children and elders alike. Financial prosperity and financial awareness are carried through this ritual. The very human nature to secure best quality of life is the basis for these concepts. The elder member of the family offer valuables like gold and money to those who are under his/her authority to get a blessed life. The frame emanates from this family-oriented morality.

Bribe (*kayikku:li*) is another meaning of *kayini:ttam*. *Kayikku:li* (bribe) comprises entirely distinct frame from former examples. *Kayikku:li* (bribe) is a 'present' for gaining or achieving something, legally or illegally from the authority. In other way bribe is an illicit reward. The frame is determined by the discourses between authority and common folk. The frame is composed relating the nature of the exchange between ruling class and their subject. The *kayini:ttam* between them decides the meaning. Briefly, each meaning of *kayini:ttam* is manifested from different epistemological frames. Thus different frames creates different *kayini:ttam*. Here economic value becomes the common featured deep frame for *kayini:ttam*. Thus, Coins offered in ceremonies, first sale of the day and bribe are polysemy of the word *kayini:ttam* as these meaning evolve around the deep frame of finance.

Conclusion

Modern linguistics believes that semantics has no existence without language, but cognitive linguistics considers semantics as conceptual and universal; they also propose meaning emerges from the embodied experiences through the interaction between body and physical atmosphere. This paper offers some conclusion to endorse the fundamental views of cognitive linguistics. These are enlisted below.

⁵ (The New Year festival celebrated in the Indian state of Kerala. The festival follows the solar cycle of the lunisolar as the first day of month called *Medam*. It therefore always falls in the middle of April in the Gregorian calendar on or about 14 April every year (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishu>))

1. Frame which forms the world view of individual is instrumental in semantics. It is frame that determines and defines the meaning.
2. Individual knowledge and social experience are significant in framing meaning.
3. Polysemy exists in discourse depending on deep frames.

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