

“ENHANCING SEMANTIC FLEXIBILITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CONTEXTUAL HOMONYMS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGE TEACHING”

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Abstract

This study explores the linguo-cognitive features of contextual homonyms and examines effective strategies for teaching them in English and Uzbek language groups. Contextual homonymy, which arises when a single lexical form conveys different meanings depending on discourse, poses significant challenges for language learners. The research highlights key cognitive mechanisms—such as conceptualization, categorization, and inferential reasoning—that assist learners in distinguishing contextual meanings. It also proposes a set of methodological approaches, including comparative analysis, contextual modeling, and task-based learning, designed to enhance students' semantic flexibility and interpretive competence. The findings suggest that incorporating cognitive-linguistic principles into pedagogical practice substantially improves learners' comprehension of homonymous forms and strengthens their overall communicative performance in both English and Uzbek.

Keywords

contextual homonymy; linguo-cognitive approach; semantic interpretation; polysemy; English-Uzbek comparison; contextual inference; language teaching methodology

1. Introduction

In both English and Uzbek, homonymy is considered one of the most complex semantic phenomena. Contextual homonyms require learners not only to recognize identical linguistic forms but also to interpret their meaning through cognitive processing. For bilingual or multilingual learners, the ability to analyze contextual cues is essential for achieving communicative accuracy. Therefore, understanding and teaching linguo-cognitive mechanisms underlying contextual homonym interpretation is of special importance.

Teaching practices in English and Uzbek groups must take into account structural differences between both languages, frequency of homonymous forms, and students' cognitive readiness to process meaning shifts. This article explores theoretical foundations of contextual homonymy and proposes methodological solutions for effective instruction.

Contextual homonyms are words that share the same form but acquire different meanings depending on the discourse situation. Their interpretation is guided by several cognitive mechanisms:

Learners rely on mental models and background knowledge to construct meaning. For example, the English word "*bank*" may evoke different conceptual frames—finance or river—depending on textual cues. Similarly, the Uzbek word "*yoʻz*" can mean "*summer*" or "*write*", requiring cognitive disambiguation. Cognitive linguistics assumes that speakers categorize experiences through mental schemas. Homonymous forms activate competing schemas, and learners must select the appropriate category based on contextual signals such as collocations, grammatical structure, and pragmatic intent. Meaning differentiation heavily depends on inference. Learners must infer unstated information using logical reasoning, discourse knowledge, and cultural background. These cognitive mechanisms suggest that contextual homonymy is not merely a lexical issue, but a deep linguistic-cognitive process. English and Uzbek learners frequently encounter the following challenges:

- **Interference from L1 semantic patterns**, especially when a homonymous form exists in one language but not in the other.
- **Limited exposure to authentic discourse**, preventing learners from observing how meaning is shaped by context.
- **Overgeneralization**, where students apply one dominant meaning to all contexts.
- **Difficulty in identifying contextual cues**, such as syntactic environment or pragmatic intention.

These difficulties demonstrate the need for a cognitively oriented methodology.

Presenting English and Uzbek homonyms side by side strengthens cross-linguistic awareness. Students analyze similarities and differences in semantic patterns, which facilitates cognitive mapping. Learners should be given multiple texts where the same form appears with different meanings. Teachers can guide students to identify contextual markers—collocations, discourse type, topic, and pragmatic signals.

Tasks such as problem-solving, translation analysis, and real-life scenarios help students interpret homonymous words using cognitive strategies. Examples:

- Choosing correct meaning from context
- Reconstructing meaning using missing contextual cues
- Creating short dialogues with homonymous forms

Mind maps, semantic networks, and schema diagrams allow learners to visualize how one form branches into various meanings. This supports long-term memory and conceptual clarity. English learners often struggle with homonyms due to the high number of polysemous words in English, while Uzbek students face challenges related to morphological ambiguity and verb-noun homonymy. Therefore:

• **In English groups**, instruction should emphasize pragmatic context and collocations.

• **In Uzbek groups**, more attention should be paid to grammatical markers, case endings, and verb forms.

A bilingual, comparative approach significantly improves metalinguistic awareness. Teaching contextual homonyms through a linguo-cognitive approach enhances learners' interpretive abilities, encourages flexible thinking, and strengthens communicative competence. Integrating cognitive strategies – such as contextual inference, schema activation, and comparative linguistic analysis – helps students navigate complex semantic structures in both English and Uzbek. The methodology presented in this article can be effectively applied in foreign language classrooms, especially in multilingual educational environments.

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