

## **Polysemy in the lexicon within and across languages: theory and methods**

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### **Description**

The main focus of the course will be on polysemy, namely on the phenomenon whereby a linguistic unit exhibits multiple distinct yet related meanings. I will open up by sketching the history of polysemy in the paradigm of cognitive linguistics focusing on lexical semantics. Then I will discuss some of the issues that have sparked debate and critical reflection among researchers. For example, I will try to provide answers for the following questions:

- a) Based on which criteria one is able to identify the prototypical meaning of a word? Is it possible to constrain the arbitrariness in the choice of this primary meaning?
- b) How to decide when two usages of a word are clearly different or similar enough to be considered as a single meaning?

Within the cognitive-linguistics tradition, there have been several solutions offered for these problematic issues, both top-down and bottom-up. The former are theory-driven which start with a predetermined set of criteria and the latter are data-driven, in which corpus data assist the task of establishing the prototype and of distinguishing between meanings. In this course, I will compare the two approaches and discuss their advantages and shortcomings.

The second part of the course will be devoted to the cross-linguistic aspect of polysemy and will focus on the method of semantic maps. The semantic map method has been used intensively during the last 20 years. It has proved attractive to typologists because it provides a convenient graphical display of the interrelationships between meanings across languages, while at the same time differentiating what is universal from what is language-specific. In the context of this course, I will give an overview of the model, explain in a step-by-step fashion the principles of the method, present its advantages and disadvantages and highlight the open questions in this field of research.

The course will be both theory- and practice-based. The participants will be introduced to some analytic techniques for identifying prototypes and for distinguishing between meanings within a language as well as to methods for automatically plotting semantic maps.