

## Applying Cognitive Linguistics to Teaching Polysemous Vocabulary

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to compare the efficiency of two methods for teaching polysemous vocabulary – the *image-schema-based vocabulary instruction method* (ISBM) and the *translation-based vocabulary instruction method* (TBM). While ISBM is inspired by cognitive linguistics, and represents a new trend in teaching polysemous vocabulary, TBM embodies a traditional and well established way of teaching polysemous vocabulary in EFL contexts. The subjects of this study, 40 pre-university Arab students studying in an intensive English program, were placed in two groups and were taught a range of metaphorical meanings of polysemous words, in accordance with the cognitive linguistics ISBM and the mainstream TBM. In order to assess the pedagogical value of both methods, a polysemous word knowledge test (PWKT) was used as a pre and post-test. The results of the immediate post PWKT suggest that the ISBM is more effective in teaching and learning polysemous vocabulary in this setting than the TBM. In light of these findings, I give a number of recommendations to teachers. As far as the contribution to field of vocabulary acquisition is concerned, this study attempts to shed light on the teaching of polysemous words in an Arab context (a so far an unmapped territory). In that, it tries to show how polysemous words have been treated in the English syllabi directed to UAE learners, to equip English teachers with feasible ways to teach polysemous words more efficiently, and thereby to improve the learners' ability to comprehend the polysemization mechanism more easily.

**Keywords:** cognitive linguistics, polysemous words, image-schema