

Abstract

Homonyms present considerable difficulties not only for the theoretician of language but also for any lexicographer who aims to adequately represent the state of lexical relations within a language. Mapping the principal causes of fuzziness in understanding homonymy, the present thesis first seeks to systematize the usage of the concept by discussing the two poles that characterize each homonymic pair: the notion of sameness on the one hand and the notion of difference on the other. The theoretical part of the thesis concludes with a brief disputation over the usual practice of subsuming homonymy under the heading of ambiguity.

The research project uses ambiguity as a springboard for a detailed three-tier analysis of the homonyms *bank* and *palm*. Since the point of convergence of almost any treatment of homonymy is the disambiguating role attributed to context, the principal points that are analysed are all to do with context albeit on various levels of abstraction. The first tier looks at the structure of the noun phrases that contain the analysed homonyms. The second tier expands the understanding of context in order to embrace the whole clause with a view to discovering systemic variation in the type of clause element the examined homonyms tend to occur in. Finally, the third tier analyses the type, means and lexical realization of modification of the homonyms in question.

The study draws on the material taken from the British National Corpus. A random sample of two hundred tokens for each homonym was analysed and the results of this analysis led to formulation of general conclusions.