

<https://doi.org/10.62837/2026.2.53>

**CABBAROVA ÇİNARƏ MİKAYİL QIZI**

[jabbarovachinara86@gmail.com](mailto:jabbarovachinara86@gmail.com)

*Azərbaycan Texniki Univesitetinin nəzdində Bakı Texniki Kolleci*

## **LEXICAL AMBIGUITY OF TECHNICAL TERMS IN ESP INSTRUCTION**

**Açar sözlər:** eksik semantika, polisemiya, texniki terminlər, ESP tədrisi, kontekst əsasında lüğət tədrisi

**Ключевые слова:** лексическая семантика, полисемия, технические термины, преподавание ESP, контекстуальное обучение лексике

**Keywords:** lexical semantics, polysemy, technical terms, ESP instruction, context-based vocabulary teaching

### **ABSTRACT**

In English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction at technical colleges, vocabulary acquisition plays a crucial role in students' academic and professional success. One of the major linguistic challenges faced by learners is polysemy—the existence of multiple meanings within a single lexical item. Many technical terms used in engineering and vocational contexts originate from general English vocabulary, which often leads to semantic confusion when students rely on familiar everyday meanings instead of context-specific technical interpretations. This article examines the role of polysemy in ESP instruction, focusing on how contextual meaning determines the interpretation of technical terms. Through lexical-semantic analysis of common ESP vocabulary and examples from technical texts and student writing, the study highlights frequent areas of misunderstanding and discusses the pedagogical implications of teaching polysemous terminology. The findings suggest that explicit attention to context and meaning differentiation significantly improves learners' comprehension and accurate use of technical vocabulary.

### **1. Introduction**

English for Specific Purposes has become an essential component of technical and vocational education, as students are expected to access professional literature, write reports, and communicate effectively in their future workplaces. In technical colleges, ESP courses focus not only on grammar and general communication skills but also on the accurate use of specialized terminology. However, despite having sufficient general English proficiency, many students struggle with understanding and using technical vocabulary correctly (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

One of the key linguistic reasons for this difficulty is polysemy. A large number of technical terms used in engineering, mechanics, electronics, and

information technology are polysemous words borrowed from general English. When students encounter such terms, they often interpret them based on their everyday meanings rather than their technical senses. This mismatch between general and specialized meanings may result in misunderstanding technical texts, producing inaccurate written work, and failing to convey precise information.

This article aims to analyze polysemy as a linguistic phenomenon in ESP contexts and to explore how contextual meaning shapes the interpretation of technical terms. By examining commonly used polysemous words in technical ESP materials, the study seeks to identify typical learner difficulties and propose pedagogically effective strategies for ESP instruction at technical colleges.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Polysemy in Linguistics**

Polysemy refers to the ability of a single word to have multiple related meanings. Unlike homonymy, where meanings are unrelated, polysemous meanings are connected through semantic extension or metaphorical development. For example, the word *field* can refer to an area of land, an academic discipline, or a physical force field. In linguistic theory, polysemy is considered a natural feature of language development, allowing speakers to extend existing vocabulary to new concepts.

From a lexical-semantic perspective, polysemy requires speakers to rely heavily on context in order to interpret meaning accurately. In everyday communication, contextual cues are often sufficient for correct interpretation. However, in specialized discourse such as technical English, the context may be unfamiliar to learners, increasing the risk of semantic ambiguity.

### **2.2 Polysemy in ESP and Technical Discourse**

In ESP, polysemy becomes particularly significant because technical disciplines frequently reuse general English words to name specialized concepts (Carter, 2012). Terms such as *load*, *stress*, *current*, and *resistance* are widely used in engineering and physics, yet their technical meanings differ substantially from their everyday senses.

Technical discourse is characterized by precision, objectivity, and clarity. Therefore, misinterpreting a polysemous term can lead not only to linguistic errors but also to conceptual misunderstandings. For ESP learners in technical colleges, this problem is intensified by limited exposure to authentic technical texts and insufficient training in semantic awareness.

## **3. Analysis of Polysemous Technical Terms**

### **3.1 Common Polysemous Terms in Technical ESP**

The following words frequently appear in ESP materials for technical students and often cause semantic confusion:

<b><i>Word</i></b>	<b><i>General Meaning</i></b>	<b><i>Technical Meaning</i></b>
--------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------------

Load	something heavy	the amount of power applied to a system
Stress	emotional pressure	force exerted on a material
Current	modern or present	flow of electric charge
Resistance	refusal or opposition	opposition to electric current
Output	result or production	measurable result of a system or machine

Students often rely on familiar meanings when encountering these words, especially in reading tasks, which leads to inaccurate interpretation of technical descriptions.

### 3.2 Evidence from Student Writing and Classroom Practice

Analysis of student reports and classroom assignments reveals recurring patterns of misuse. For instance, students may write sentences such as “*The stress of the material is very difficult,*” confusing mechanical stress with emotional pressure. Similarly, *current* may be incorrectly associated with time rather than electricity.

These examples demonstrate that lexical knowledge alone is insufficient; students must develop an awareness of how meaning is shaped by disciplinary context. Without explicit instruction, learners tend to transfer general English meanings into technical discourse (Nation, 2001).

### 4. Discussion

The findings indicate that polysemy is a major source of lexical difficulty in ESP instruction at technical colleges. The problem does not stem from a lack of vocabulary but from insufficient semantic differentiation. Students often know the word but fail to recognize that its meaning changes depending on the context.

Contextual meaning plays a decisive role in resolving polysemy. In technical texts, meaning is constructed through co-text (surrounding words), genre conventions, and disciplinary knowledge. However, ESP learners may lack experience in analyzing these contextual signals. As a result, they interpret terms literally or emotionally rather than technically.

This highlights the importance of integrating linguistic awareness into ESP teaching. Vocabulary instruction should go beyond memorization and focus on meaning relations, context analysis, and contrastive interpretation.

### 5. Pedagogical Implications

Based on the analysis, several teaching strategies can be recommended:

1. Explicit Teaching of Polysemy. Teachers should draw attention to words with multiple meanings and contrast general and technical senses.
2. Context-Based Vocabulary Tasks. Students should practice interpreting terms within authentic technical sentences rather than in isolation.
3. Comparison Exercises. Activities comparing general English sentences with technical sentences help learners notice semantic shifts.

4. Use of Visual and Conceptual Support. Diagrams, graphs, and technical illustrations reinforce technical meanings and reduce ambiguity.
5. Incorporating Writing Feedback. Teachers should highlight semantic misuse of polysemous terms in student writing and provide corrective explanations. Such strategies promote deeper lexical competence and improve both comprehension and production in ESP contexts.

### **6. Conclusion**

Polysemy represents a significant linguistic challenge in ESP instruction at technical colleges, particularly in the area of technical vocabulary. Many commonly used technical terms derive from general English and carry multiple meanings that depend heavily on context. Polysemous technical terms often lead to semantic confusion among ESP learners, as students tend to interpret them through familiar general English meanings rather than discipline-specific contexts (Cruse, 2011; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Without explicit guidance, students tend to rely on familiar everyday meanings, which leads to misunderstanding and inaccurate language use.

This article has shown that addressing polysemy through contextual and semantic awareness can greatly enhance ESP learning outcomes. By integrating linguistic insights into vocabulary teaching, ESP instructors can help technical students develop more precise, confident, and professional language skills. Future research may expand this study through empirical data collection or corpus-based analysis of technical student writing.

### **References**

- Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carter, R. (2012). *Vocabulary: Applied linguistic perspectives* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistic semantics: An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cruse, D. A. (2011). *Meaning in language: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### **Xülasə**

## **CABBAROVA ÇİNARƏ ESP TƏDRİSİNDƏ TEXNİKİ TERMINLƏRİN LEKSİK ÇOXMƏNALILIĞI**

Texniki kolleclərdə İngilis dilinin xüsusi ixtisaslar üçün tədrisində (ESP) lüğət ehtiyatının mənimsənilməsi tələbələrin akademik və peşəkar uğurlarında mühüm rol oynayır. Öyrənmələrin qarşılaşdığı əsas dilçilik problemlərindən biri polisemiya, yəni bir leksik vahidin bir neçə mənaya malik olmasıdır. Mühəndislik və peşə sahələrində istifadə olunan bir çox texniki termin ümumi ingilis dili leksikasından qaynaqlandığı üçün tələbələr gündəlik, tanış mənalara əsaslandığında semantik çəşqınlıq yaranır və terminlərin kontekstə uyğun texniki mənaları düzgün şərh edilmir. Bu məqalədə ESP tədrisində polisemiya problemi araşdırılır və kontekstual mənənin texniki terminlərin şərhindəki rolu təhlil olunur. Ümumi ESP lüğət vahidlərinin leksik-semantik analizi, həmçinin texniki mətnlərdən və tələbə yazılarından götürülmüş nümunələr əsasında ən çox rast gəlinən anlaşılmazlıq sahələri müəyyənləşdirilir və polisemik terminlərin tədrisinin pedaqoji nəticələri müzakirə edilir. Tədqiqatın nəticələri göstərir ki, kontekstə və mənaların fərqləndirilməsinə yönəlmiş açıq tədris yanaşması tələbələrin texniki lüğəti daha düzgün başa düşməsinə və dəqiq istifadə etməsinə əhəmiyyətli dərəcədə müsbət təsir göstərir.

### **Аннотация**

## **ДЖАББАРОВА ЧИНАРА ЛЕКСИЧЕСКАЯ НЕОДНОЗНАЧНОСТЬ ТЕХНИЧЕСКИХ ТЕРМИНОВ В ОБУЧЕНИИ ESP**

В преподавании английского языка для специальных целей (ESP) в технических колледжах усвоение лексики играет ключевую роль в академической и профессиональной успешности студентов. Одной из основных лингвистических трудностей, с которыми сталкиваются обучающиеся, является полисемия — наличие нескольких значений у одной лексической единицы. Многие технические термины, используемые в инженерных и профессиональных контекстах, происходят из общезыковой лексики английского языка, что нередко приводит к семантической путанице, когда студенты опираются на привычные повседневные значения вместо контекстуально обусловленных технических интерпретаций. В данной статье рассматривается роль полисемии в преподавании ESP с акцентом на то, как контекстуальное значение определяет интерпретацию технических терминов.

На основе лексико-семантического анализа распространенной ESP-лексики, а также примеров из технических текстов и студенческих письменных работ, выявляются наиболее частые зоны непонимания и обсуждаются педагогические последствия обучения полисемичной терминологии. Результаты исследования показывают, что целенаправленное внимание к контексту и дифференциации значений существенно способствует улучшению понимания и точного использования технической лексики обучающимися.

**Rəyçi: filologiya üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru Leyla Cumayeva**