

## IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING POLYSEMY OF PHILOSOPHICAL TERMS

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**Abstract:** Polysemy is an important linguistic phenomenon that influences the interpretation of philosophical concepts and specialized discourse. Philosophical terms such as being, reason, freedom, and truth may express different but related meanings depending on their theoretical, historical, and contextual environments. Studying these meanings helps clarify philosophical arguments, distinguish semantic variation from conceptual disagreement, and improve the translation of philosophical texts. It also contributes to the development of philosophical dictionaries and terminological databases. This article examines the significance of investigating polysemy in philosophical terminology and highlights its implications for semantics, philosophy, and translation studies. It argues that a systematic analysis of polysemous philosophical terms is essential for understanding the relationship between language and philosophical knowledge.

**Keywords:** polysemy, philosophical terminology, lexical semantics, conceptual analysis, translation

Philosophical language is characterized by the use of abstract terms that express complex ideas about reality, knowledge, morality, and human existence. However, the meanings of these terms are not always stable across different contexts and philosophical traditions. Polysemy, defined as the association of one linguistic form with multiple related senses, presents an important challenge for understanding philosophical discourse. Unlike homonymy, which involves unrelated meanings, polysemy concerns meanings that maintain a semantic relationship, although the distinction between these phenomena is not always straightforward (Falkum & Vicente, 2015). Therefore, studying polysemy helps researchers understand how

philosophical terms function in different contexts and how their meanings develop.

One of the main reasons for investigating philosophical polysemy is its contribution to conceptual clarity. For example, the term *reason* can refer to the human capacity for rational thought, an explanation for an event, or a justification for a belief. Although these meanings are related, they are not interchangeable in every philosophical context. Failure to distinguish them may lead to misunderstandings when interpreting philosophical arguments or comparing different theories. Research on polysemy demonstrates that identifying the relevant senses of an expression is essential for explaining how meaning operates in language (Carston, 2021).

Philosophical terms develop historically as thinkers reinterpret established concepts and introduce new theoretical perspectives. Terms such as *being*, *truth*, and *freedom* may acquire different interpretations across philosophical traditions, making historical context essential to semantic analysis. Akhmadullina (2024) examines the polysemous nature of *being* in philosophy and linguistics, highlighting its connections with existence, essence, identity, and translation. This research illustrates the value of investigating a single philosophical term across disciplinary contexts. Furthermore, abstraction, metaphor, historical evolution, and interdisciplinary borrowing contribute to the development of multiple related meanings in philosophical language (Akhmadullina, 2025).

The study of polysemy is also important for understanding philosophical disagreements. Two philosophers may use the same term while interpreting it differently, potentially creating confusion about the nature of their disagreement. For example, *freedom* may refer to the absence of external constraints, individual autonomy, or the capacity to act responsibly. Identifying the relevant meanings helps researchers determine whether a disagreement arises from different interpretations of a term or from opposing positions concerning the same concept. Nevertheless, semantic differences should not automatically be treated as the sole explanation for philosophical disagreements, since scholars may disagree even when they share a definition. A careful analysis of polysemy therefore supports

more precise interpretation of philosophical arguments (Vicente & Falkum, 2017).

Another important application of studying polysemy concerns philosophical translation. When a term has several related meanings in the source language, a single equivalent in the target language may not adequately represent every occurrence. For example, the English word *reason* can be translated into Russian as *разум*, *причина*, or *основание*, depending on whether it refers to rational capacity, causation, or justification. The appropriate equivalent must therefore be selected according to the meaning intended in the particular context. Akhmadullina's (2024) cross-disciplinary study of *being* highlights the relevance of examining philosophical terminology through both linguistic and conceptual perspectives. Such analysis can help translators preserve important distinctions and produce more accurate translations of philosophical texts.

Furthermore, investigating polysemy can improve the development of philosophical dictionaries, glossaries, and digital terminological resources. These resources should not merely provide definitions but also explain how the meanings of a term differ across contexts and philosophical frameworks. For instance, a dictionary entry for *freedom* could distinguish its use in political philosophy from its use in discussions of moral responsibility and metaphysical determinism. Such distinctions would help students, researchers, and translators interpret philosophical texts more accurately. A systematic description of terminological meaning is particularly valuable when specialized vocabulary is used across disciplines and theoretical traditions (L'Homme, 2020).

Despite its importance, the study of philosophical polysemy presents several methodological challenges. Researchers must distinguish genuine lexical senses from contextual interpretations and conceptual differences that do not necessarily correspond to separate meanings of a word. For example, two philosophers may use the term *truth* with the same general meaning while disagreeing about the nature of truth itself. Conversely, apparently similar statements may rely on different interpretations of a central term. Therefore, identifying polysemy requires contextual and conceptual analysis rather than simply counting dictionary

definitions or interpreting every difference in usage as a separate sense (Falkum & Vicente, 2015).

In conclusion, studying polysemy in philosophical terminology is essential for understanding how language represents and communicates complex philosophical ideas. It contributes to conceptual clarity, the interpretation of philosophical arguments, historical research, translation, and the development of terminological resources. Akhmadullina's (2024, 2025) research provides a relevant foundation for examining both the semantic complexity of individual philosophical terms and the principal sources of polysemy in philosophical discourse. Further research could extend this work through systematic comparisons of terms such as *reason*, *being*, *truth*, and *freedom*. Combining semantic, historical, and corpus-based approaches would contribute to a more precise understanding of the relationship between language and philosophical knowledge.

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