

***Meaning In Terms: A Monosemic Approach To The Lexical Semantics
Of English And Japanese Terms Taken From Narrative Contexts***

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Abstract

Monosemy, the univocal relationship between a term and its meaning, appears to be a rare and rather theoretical phenomenon. Contemporary critics have so far focused on the polysemic nature of terms (Austin 1962; Lyons 1977; Cruse 1999; Ravin & Leacock 2000), others have taken the monosemic potential of terms for granted (Wüster 1979; Paltridge & Starfield 2014). Recent communicative approaches have ignored the existence of a potential monosemy (Cabr e 1998; Temmerman 2000). Yet, the possession of one meaning appears to be a potential semantic property of terms from specialized languages in specific contexts. In recent years, linguistics have applied the study of sense possessions to scientific, economic, legal and academic terms. Few have shed light on the monosemic potential of geographical terms. My presentation aims to make up for this deficit and pursues a double objective. First, I shall analyze the sense boundaries of proper names (London, City; 東京, 京都) and of words from the general language (fog; kiri 霧) taking into account morpho-lexical, semiotic and terminological aspects. Then, I try to put these terms into context relying on Natsume Soseki's *The Tower of London* and Virginia Woolf's *The London Scene* as narrative examples. In line with the conference theme, the narrative context of these stories might allow for some insight into the variability or inflexibility of word meaning helping to establish a possible monosemic potential of geographical terms from a synchronic perspective.

Keywords: monosemy, polysemy, sense boundaries, lexical semantics, geographical terms, Natsume Soseki, Virginia Woolf

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I. Introduction

This presentation concerns a synchronic approach to the lexical semantics of terms. In particular, I shall examine a monosemic potential present in specialized vocabulary taken from narrative texts. First, I shall outline the scope of the corpus-based approach. Then, I intend to map meaning in linguistics and in terminology to illustrate how meaning is conceived in these two disciplines. After that, I attempt to outline sense boundaries and will show how a monosemic potential might arise among technical terms. Finally, I situate the semantic-terminological phenomenon in context. In this way, the intended approach combines applied linguistics with literature in an effort to shed light upon interdisciplinary and transversal terminological parameters.

Terminology is the study of terms and the discipline concerned with the development of terms and their interrelationships within a specialized domain. Terms are usually words, lexical units and compositional expressions that in a specific context are given highly technical meanings. The terms used in this presentation are taken from the domain of geography and form a corpus of over 500 words. The corpus concerns novels, biographies, essays and short stories from a period covering around fifty years from the end of the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century and includes works from such authors as E.M. Forster, Conan Doyle, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann and Natsume Soseki. Due to the limited scope of this presentation, I have reduced the number of terms and works. The below table presents an overview of some of the collected terms, which have been arranged according to their textual sources and their corresponding domains.

Table 1: Collected terms with their corresponding domains and narrative sources

Narrative Contexts > Domains and Sub-domains ↴	Virginia Woolf <i>The London Scene</i> <i>'Kew Gardens'</i>	Nastume Soseki <i>The Tower of London</i> <i>Sanshiro</i>
1/ Physical Geography		
1.1. Proper names	London	Tokyo, London
1.2. Place names	The city of London	東京
2/ Human Geography		
2.1. Settlement	city	city
2.2. Mapping spaces	space (vast green vs unique)	space (drifting in)
3/ Meteorology		
3.1. Atmosphere	fog	fog
3.2. Types of fog	fog, mist, haze	霧霞朧

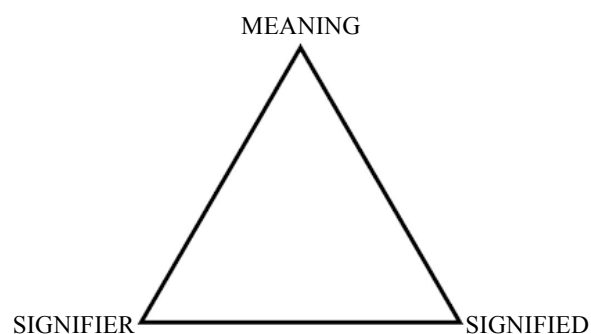
The decision for relying on these narrative texts is manifold. First, both, Virginia Woolf and Natsume Soseki, are emblematic authors in their respective countries. Second, they belong to pivotal periods, which have influenced cultural and literary perceptions: V. Woolf from the modernist period and N. Soseki from the Meiji restoration and modernization. Then, both authors make use of geographical terms in their works, terms, which also reflects the most recent trends taking place in the Earth science around the turn of the last century.

This brings me to the reason why I have chosen to focus on geographical terms. Geography, with its geological, climatological and human dimensions, has always played an important role in Japanese culture and literature for the simple reason that the island nation not only sits on the rim of the Ring of Fire but also displays fascinating geographical variation from Hokkaido in the North all the way to Okinawa in the Southwest. The English geography, on

the other hand, is less varied with highlands and lowlands covering most of the Isles. Yet, geography has been crucial to the United Kingdom during centuries of empire expansion in drawing up maps, helping taking political decisions and enlarging the colonial power. Finally, geographical terms have received surprisingly little attention in contemporary research, let alone their semantic properties. Before turning our attention to these terms, let us have a look at the very notion of meaning first.

II. Mapping Meaning

In linguistics, meaning is construed in a triangular way composed of a signifier and a signified inherent in a sign. A sign in formal linguistics corresponds to this Saussurian entity of signifier and signified. Contemporary linguistics have reconsidered the Saussurian concept to include extralinguistic referents in meaning relationships. The following simplified schema portrays this triangular interrelationship.



Take, for example, the words *London* and *Tokyo*:

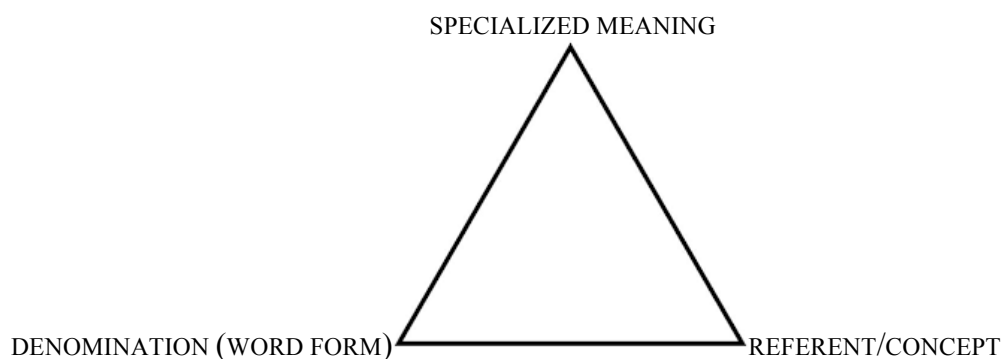
signifier	L o n d o n / 'lʌndən/	東 (<i>to</i> , east) 京 (<i>kyo</i> , capital)
signified	city of London	city of Tokyo

In this example, the word form *London* corresponds to the extralinguistic concept of the metropolitan city of London. Likewise, the *kanji* ideograms standing for *east* and *capital* forms the syllabary Tokyo (東京) since Tokyo, which lies geographically to the East of Kyoto, the formal capital, became the capital of the Japon in 1868. The synthetical relationship between a morphological form and its corresponding referent representing extralinguistic objects from the real world results in meaning patters to emerge.

In terminology, meaning is construed in a slightly different way. One of the founders of the discipline, the Austrian Eugen Wüster, wrote in 1979: “Language essentially consists of words which serve as denominations directly attributed to concepts” (Wüster 1979, 6).¹ The difference lies on the importance given to the extralinguistic object. While meaning in linguistics remains sign-bound, meaning in terminology is conceived through the conceptual characteristics of non-linguistic entities from the human experience. To rely entirely on a linguistic sign in terminology is pointless because it would present limits.

¹ “Die Sprache besteht jedoch überwiegend aus Wörtern, die [...] als Benennungen unmittelbar den Begriffen zugeordnet sind” (Wüster 1979 : 6). My translation.

Terminology is based on the so-called onomasiological approach which starts from a concept in an attempt to ask for the corresponding word form.² Once the concept is clearly outlined, it is attached to a naming process, a denomination. Onomasiology concerns ideally just one concept per term and then moves on to naming it. The example of *fog*, taken from the domain of meteorology, illustrates this. V. Woolf writes: “the month of February, cold and *fog* are in the street” (Woolf *London*, 40). The meteorological phenomenon is likewise present in N. Soseki’s *The Tower of London*: “Like thick liquefied peat washing around my body, the heavy, black-strained *fog* has started to assail my eyes” (Soseki *Fog*, 147). Each author has a specific concept of *fog* in her/his mind ranging from Woolf’s cold winter fog to Soseki’s oppressing smog. In both cases, the noun *fog* is a so-called *denomination* because it stands for the naming of the extralinguistic atmospheric phenomenon. Such a denomination represents the concept upon which the technical term is based. The result is the emergence of a specialized meaning in both cases since the onomasiological approach lies at the origin of a univocal sense pattern between a concept and a denomination. The below schema exemplifies this.



This difference in comparison to the semasiological approach is significant when examining a monosemic potential of terms for the onomasiological perspective controls the conceptual relation of a term. In particular, onomasiology reduces the scope of a term’s meaning in that the one-concept-per-term relationship allows for sense boundaries to appear.

III. Sense boundaries

Sense boundaries limit the scope of a term’s meaning which traditionally fluctuates between polysemy and monosemy. Monosemy, from the Greek roots *mono* “one” and *semainein* “to signify,” stands for a word that has only one meaning. It is the opposite of polysemy which concerns words that have more than one meaning (Michel Bréal, 1897). Languages such as Japanese (*kanji*, *hiragana*, *katakana*) and English use lexical units that are usually polysemic, like the word *river*, which can designate a “large natural stream of water,” a “sense of relentless movement” or even “the finest grade of diamond” (river stone). Alternatively, the Japanese word *kawa* may stand for “a river,” “a stream,” “a row” or “surroundings.” It then becomes pertinent to ask under what circumstances a polysemic word such as *river* may show patterns of sense restriction and unveils characteristics of a potential monosemy.

The purpose of looking at the monosemic potential of terms is significant because such a potential seems to be intrinsically linked to specialized vocabulary since scientific terms must convey singular meaning patterns in order to function. Then, a potential monosemy allows for terms to be easier recognized and classified since a monosemic character tends to avoid

² The opposite approach would be semasiology, usually used in linguistic studies. Here one starts with a word and asks what it means or what concepts it refers to. A semasiological approach determines the possible concepts for a word.

ambiguity. Finally, a potential monosemy unveils qualitative properties in that a uniquely specialized meaning helps creating hierarchical conceptual domains in terminological research. In order to look at how a potential monosemy is likely to emerge, it becomes necessary to consider morphological, referential, conceptual and contextual criteria.

Some word forms are more likely to develop specific meanings because lexical morphemes appear to carry particular meaning properties. In particular, morphological derivation produces sense restrictions since the process of forming a new word from an existing word, by adding a prefix or a suffix, restricts the meaning pattern of the derivational morpheme. For example, the English derivational suffix *-ment* changes the verb *to settle* into a noun to produce *settlement*. The derivational pattern not only modifies the lexical category, but furthermore results in a more restrictive meaning property. While the verb *to settle* may refer to the resolution of an agreement, a decision-making process, the adaptation of a secure style of life, or simply to come to rest in a comfortable position, the substantive *settlement*, considered through the lenses of human geography, stands for a place where people establish a community. The consequence of such a nominalization taking place from the conversion of a verb to a noun is the emergence of a specialized meaning. However, a noun like *settlement* is far from unveiling a monosemic potential for the simple reason that settlements are numerous and in no way unique. In order to pursue a potential monosemy a step further, it becomes worthwhile to look at the second criterion, particularly reference.

Relying on the onomasiological approach, reference is construed by establishing a link between the source of the extralinguistic information and the linguistic form. Objects from our world (concrete, imagined, abstract, metaphoric, etc.) become linguistically represented. Take, for example, the following definition: “the capital and the most populous city of England and the United Kingdom.” Based on this definition, one referent obviously comes to mind, namely *London*. Another example would be: “the capital of Japan situated within the Kanto region and consisting of 47 prefectures” for which the most likely referent would be *Tokyo*. In both cases, a univocal relationship between a referent and a sign can be observed. In terminology, such an univocality is referred to as a potential monoreferentiality. The monoreferential principle signifies a univocal relationship between a referent and its sign. As a result, a term such as *Tokyo* possesses one referent because its sign relates theoretically to just one referent, one referent equals one sign.

The problem, however, is that in most cases, a referent may still be multidimensional despite the term belonging to a specialized domain such as physical geography. The proper name *London*, for instance, may as well refer to the City, the Greater London Authority, the 32 boroughs. It is the same with *Tokyo*, which might well stand for the Greater Tokyo Area, the Prefecture, or even to its former name *Edo*. One specific reference does not exclude the polysemic potential of the word. Monoreferentiality, nonetheless, does fragment sense relations because each particular referent creates a singular fragment of the meaning potential of the word. A term’s meaning then becomes fragmented. The following example from V. Woolf exemplifies this: “As we go on steaming up the river to London, we meet its refuse coming down” (Woolf *London*, 15). London here has a specific referent, namely the London on the Thames river. London does not refer to the Greater London Authority, the boroughs nor Westminster because the author has chosen one fragment out of its meaning potential. In a similar way, N. Soseki creates a fragmented meaning of London in *The Tower of London*: “London is so vast that once one begins socializing it takes up all one’s time” (Soseki *Tower*, 57). The fragment concerns the comparison of London’s sheer vastness to the protagonist’s apprehension of the British capital. Even though both excerpts show fragmented visions of

London based on specific referents, a monosemic potential of the word *London* cannot be certified simply because monoreferentiality does not eliminate the polysemic values inherent to the term. The monoreferential concept is certainly important in creating sense boundaries since the univocal relationship between a sign and its referent results in the fragmentation of meaning patterns. When it comes to further restricting the fragmented meaning patterns of terms, it is necessary to consider a third criterion, namely notion.

While a referent is the object to which a linguistic sign points to, the process of reference reposes on the conceptual notion linked to a term. A notion is a pertinent semantic property attached to a denomination, and hence a term. This process of abstraction allows to go from the real object to a particular notion. In doing so, certain elements of the object are abstracted in favour of some pertinent ones. As a result, the overall conceptual entity is fractured by establishing one pertinent notion per term. Such a fractured notion then affects meaning: it creates a singular sense relation. In other words, the correspondence between a term and its notion becomes singularly univocal.

Let us have a look at the example of the concept *space* to explain the phenomenon of a singular notion. In “Kew Gardens,” V. Woolf writes: “the light moved on and spread its illumination in the vast green spaces beneath the dome of the heart shaped and tongue shaped leaves” (Woolf Kew, 46). The singular notion of space conceived here concerns the three-dimensional illumination effect of the sun’s light shining through the vast green spaces of Kew Gardens. In a similar fashion, a singular notion of space becomes apparent in N. Soseki’s *The Tower of London*, in which the protagonist seems to be literally drifting in space: “When I go outside only about four yards ahead is visible. When one proceeds four yards, another four yards become visible. I walk along wondering whether the world has shrunk to a four yards square” (Soseki Fog, 147). Both authors create a singular notion of space: Woolf’s sunlit transpiercing motional environment of Kew Garden’s spaces, and Soseki’s geometrically precise square feet space within the foggy mass of London.

Yet, these two very singular notions still do not certify a monosemic potential of the term *space* for different kinds of spaces exist nonetheless. In particular, it becomes significant to ask what kind of fog N. Soseki did have in mind when writing about London’s misty mass. Does his particular notion of fog correspond to Japanese concept of *kiri*? To complicate matters, *kiri* appears to refer to a certain kind of fog.

<i>kiri</i>	霧	mist, the fog of autumn and winter
<i>kasumi</i>	霞	mist, combined with the syllaby <i>sumi</i> 澄 (clear, pure), Kanji combination
<i>oboro</i>	朧	haze, cloudy (dreariness, gloominess)

Soseki’s notion of the foggy space may denote a clear see-through fog (*kasumi*), the dreariness and gloominess of London’s peat-thick fog (*oboro*), or even the fog during the winter or autumn months (*kiri*). Also, fog is a season word in Japanese (*kigo* 季語) associated with a particular season. Even within a specialized domain such as atmospherical meteorology, the meaning of the term may vary. Undoubtedly, the presence of one pertinent notion restricts meaning, but a truly monosemic character of the term is not established. A monosemic potential may only be achieved within the narrative context in which a specific term is used. This is the reason why I have first decontextualized the geographical terms in order to recontextualize them again in the last section to evaluate a potential monosemy.

IV. Narrative Contexts

According to Ludwig Wittgenstein, the “meaning of a word is its use in the language” (Wittgenstein 1953, 311). The textual environment provides the necessary anchoring of specialized terms. Indeed, texts anchor terms within the parameters of context. This anchoring takes place on a morphological level through the denomination of lexical units as well as on a syntactical level within the sentence structure. The sentence structure provides formal and semantic fixtures in order to situate the term within its specialized context. The specialized context constitutes the necessary framework for a term to be uniquely employed. The contextualization thus takes into account the morphological, referential and notional criteria. Only then may the potential monosemy unfold since the text restricts the term’s linguistic and terminological parameters to a singular usage.

Let us go back to our example of *space* in “Kew Gardens.” The word *space* does not correspond to the general vast green spaces of the gardens, but to the very unique space of the sunlight created by Woolf with its illumination of the specific area beneath the dome of the heart-shaped and tongue-shaped leaves at a particular point of time. The word *space* N. Soseki employs is likewise specific: the season is early spring, and the fog through which the protagonist walks “passes into the past and continuously disappears” (147). While the immediate foggy area around him is clearer inside the four-yard parameter, fog seems to create a spatial and metaphorical barrier between him and the outside world. Fog here is a combination of *kiri* and *kasumi* in that the denser fog is to the outside, and a lighter misty sphere inside. The translation renders the specialized meaning of fog accurate in that it respects the particular notions of the concept by employing the corresponding Japanese terms.

The terms’ contextualization within the narrative patters creates a so-called biunivocal relationship. Biunivocality – Wüster refers to it as “*Ein-eindeutigkeit*” – concerns the reciprocal relationship between the term on the one hand, and its referent and singular notion on the other. Inspired by mathematics, biunivocality resides in the idea that one element always entrails the same correlative. The consequence is a fairly rigid link between the term’s denomination and its reference and notion. In other words, if a term can be traced to a particular referent and notion, then the particular referent and notion may, likewise, be traced back to the correlative term. The outcome is the emergence of a monosemic potential since the existing polysemic variables have been eliminated within the contextual parameters. As a result, the authors’ apprehensions of the term *space* become unique within the narrative contexts. They are unique because they are invariable, and the term *space* becomes unequivocally clear (*ein-eindeutig*), unambiguous and semantically impermeable.

V. Concluding remarks

The monosemic potential needs to be analysed from a gradient perspective. The higher the restriction in terms of reference, notion and context, the higher the monosemic potential of geographical terms. The gradient perspective permits a certain variability of sense restriction and boundaries present in terms which, under specific circumstances, may provide a possible environment for a monosemic potential to unfold. The purpose of looking at such a gradient perspective lies in a better understanding of the semantic properties of specialized vocabulary for students in foreign and applied languages as well as for researchers. A better apprehension of the semantic properties is necessary to grasp highly scientific concepts, to elaborate norms, to translate terms from one language to another, and to assist the teaching of technical terms from a didactical and pedagogical perspective.

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