

**For: One schematic meaning vs. 36 dictionary senses and subsenses**

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The preposition *for* is attributed a total of nine different senses and 27 sub-senses by the Oxford English Dictionary. *For* is a highly polysemous word. With an analysis of over 5,000 attested examples from a variety of sources, especially the Corpus of Contemporary American English, this paper will demonstrate how by examining a wide range of uses of the same form that an underlying unity can be discerned.

The approach undertaken is based on the hypothesis that it is possible, even for a word that appears to be highly polysemous, to determine one meaning that will explain all observed usage. Fundamental to the proper treatment of polysemy, is taking into account that a word's meaning exists in two different states, (1) as a potential allowing for a range of possible senses and (2) in actual use, which is one sense expressed out of all of the possibilities. In this way, a word is both permanent, having a potential that is unobservable, and variable, as observed in actual use. As pointed out by Hirtle (2007a: 22), "we must always keep in mind language's two modes of existence, the potential and the actual, ability and speech (or text)."

It will be proposed that a schematic potential meaning, or image schema, explains the entire network of related senses of *for*, and that it is not possible to derive all the uses of a word from one particular, or prototypical use, as this constitutes deriving effects from other effects and not from the causes on which they depend for their existence. The goal of this paper will be to characterize *for*'s schematic meaning by using both a diagram and a description of how this diagram is to be interpreted. It will be demonstrated that the highly polysemous *for* can be reduced to one schematic meaning which has the semantic potential to produce very different effects according to the way it is exploited in actual usage (for the general model of how such a meaning is actualized, cf. Duffley 2006: 5-7).

This constitutes further evidence in support of the postulate of the existence of schematicity in human language (cf. Langacker 1987, 2008). In cognitive linguistics, image schemas, are seen as basic, "preconceptual" structures that give rise to more elaborate and more abstract conceptions through combination and metaphorical projection (cf. Langacker 2008: 32). The relation between a schema and its instantiations is schematicity, a process of extracting the commonality inherent in multiple experiences (cf. Langacker 2008: 17).

**Keywords:** polysemy, schematicity, image schemas, prepositions, semiological function

**References**

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