Analysis of Polysemy in Little Women (2019) Movie

Zuvika Amoret S. A[1], Cipto Wardoyo [2]

[1] English Literature, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia; zuvikamoret@email.com
[2] English Literature, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia; ciptowardoyo@uinsgd.ac.id

Article Info	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Little women, semantics, polysemy, meaning, movie	Polysemy is a linguistic term that describes when a word or phrase has multiple related meanings. Polysemy is part of the field of semantics, which studies the relationship between meanings in language. This research examined the presence of polysemy in the movie adaptation Little Women (2019) that directed by Greta Gerwig. The research method is descriptive qualitative, with analytical techniques applied to the source material, specifically the movie script. The theoretical framework for analyzing polysemy was based on Apresjan's concept, which provides a comprehensive understanding of polysemy. The findings of this analysis include 12 data points, each consisting of two dialogues that present similar words but different meanings. The analysis concluded with the assertion that the Little Women (2019) movie exemplifies a multitude of polysemic uses related to semantics.
Corresponding Author: Zuvika Amoret S.A UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung; zuvikamoret@gmail.com	

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Kreidler (1998:3), "semantics is the systematic study of meaning, while linguistic semantics studies how language organizes and expresses meaning." In order to comprehend the meaning of meaning, it is imperative to understand the concept of semantics itself. Since meaning is part of grammatical forms and has a linguistic description, it is necessary to examine the concept of semantics. Paul H. Portner in his book What is Meaning: Fundamentals of Formal Semantics states, "Meaning is what allows speakers to understand one another. It is the relationship between linguistic forms and the world, as well as the relationship between linguistic forms and mental representations." (Portner, 2005). Classical semantic theories, such as referential theory, see meaning as the relationship between words and real objects in the world. Other approaches, such as language use theory, emphasize the importance of context and the way words are used in social interaction. The semantic sense of meaning, therefore, encompasses not only the representation of external objects but also individual interpretations influenced by experience, knowledge, and the communication situation.

Apresjan (1974: 16) in Johannes Dölling's Journal (2018: 1) stated that Polysemy is the situation in which a single word has numerous separate but related meanings. Polysemy is when one word or phrase has multiple meanings. Polysemy has become an important study in linguistics and literary analysis. Polysemy in linguistics is essential for creating depth and complexity in communication, especially in story forms such as novels and movies. By using polysemy, authors can incorporate different levels of meaning that invite various interpretations. The study of polysemy, especially in the case of literary adaptations, provides an opportunity to study how linguistics is maintained, altered or recreated in various media (Haber & Poesio, 2023).

The 2019 film adaptation of Little Women, directed by Greta Gerwig is an interesting case study of polysemy in film narrative. The movie, which is based on Louisa May Alcott's famous work, incorporates themes about gender, family, purpose, and social expectations. Little Women interprets the lives and desires of the March sisters using a polysemic approach through richly meaningful dialog and meticulous visual storytelling. This adaptation not only retells the story, but Louisa reinterprets the text for modern fans by adding a new perspective to the issues at hand (Wilkinson, 2019).

Polysemy appears in the dialog and visual and thematic elements of Little Women. For example, the title word "woman" contains multiple meanings. It can be interpreted as a representation of sister March's personal identity, a collective symbol of women's struggle in a patriarchal society, or a reflection on the common experiences of women. These layers of meaning show how the movie uses polysemy to appeal to different audiences.

In addition, the film uses a non-linear storytelling approach, which enhances the polysemic nature of the narrative (Saberi, 2024). Gerwig creates a dialog between the characters' youthful dreams and their adult reality by combining past and present events. This story structure not only enhances emotions, but also makes it possible to revise important events, which results in new interpretations that show deeper meanings.

The Intertextual references found in Little Women add to its linguistic and polysemy. Gerwig blurs the distinction between true story and fiction by incorporating elements from Alcott's life from other literary works. This interaction between texts adds meaning, encouraging the audience to engage with the movie from both a narrative and meta-narrative standpoint. For example, Jo March's struggles as a writer mirror Alcott's personal experience, providing two perspectives to understand the character (Wilkinson, 2019).

The depiction of relationships between characters is an additional polysemic element in the film (Khabibullaevna, 2022). The dynamics between the March sisters, their parents, and other characters have various phases, allowing for multiple interpretations based on each perspective. For example, Jo and Laurie's relationship can be considered romantic, platonic, or even a representation of broader social standards. This ambition makes the story more interesting, allowing the audience to project the way they see the characters' interactions.

In addition, the movie conveys polysemic meanings by using symbolism and visual motifs (Retnomurti, 2021). Items such as Amy's art supplies, Beth's piano, and Jo's writing desk serve as an extension of the characters' aspirations and identities. They have multiple meanings, and each demonstrates the personal development and social constraints that each sister faces (Wilkinson, 2019). The significance of the topic is amplified by the recurring appearance of these symbols, prompting the audience to consider their deeper meanings. Little Women investigates polysemy through an analysis of gender roles and expectations, in addition to its narrative and symbolic elements. The struggle between the characters with social norms and their personal goals is one example of the tension that still exists in modern discourse.

The movie encourages viewers to reflect on the changing roles of women in society and the challenges they continue to face by presenting these issues through the lens of polysemy. The study of polysemy in Little Women (2019) is more than just an academic study, but also reveals the power of storytelling and language in shaping the narrative. This paper aims to identify words that are the same but have different meanings in Little Women (2019) movie. Thus, the author emphasizes how important it is to understand the cultural content of Little Women movie, the next section will explore how polysemy forms appear in Little Women (2019) movie.

2. METHODS

In this research, a qualitative method was used to generate descriptive data in the form of words using content analysis techniques. The method collects, categorizes, and interprets descriptive data

in order to form conclusions about the phenomenon of what the research subjects experience, such as behavior, perception, motivation, action, and others (Moleong, 2013).

The descriptive qualitative approach was applied by the researchers since the purpose of this study is to explain the subject matter of semantics study, particularly the meaning relation, which has polysemy. This strategy was used to relate the solutions to the problems. The data for this study are performances based on hypothesis by Apresjan. This study's data consists of the context from the Frozen film script. The data was obtained from the online movie script database known as the Variety online magazine. The researcher selected Little Women movie (2019) as the subject of this research. This study focuses on identifying polysemy found in Little Women (2019) movie.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This segment of the text demonstrates the existence of polysemy in Little Women Movie by way of quotations taken from this source. The polysemy is exemplified by the presence of quotations containing the same word, though with different meanings.

Data 1

Jo: "I was ***looking*** for the Weekly Volcano office... I wished to see Mr. Dashwood?"
Jo: "What?! Why are you all ***looking*** at me like that?"

The word *looking* exemplifies the polysemy of the dialogue, as both verbs share the same lexical root. However, the distinction in their semantic interpretation lies in the distinction between *looking* as a verb that implies a search or pursuit, and *looking* as a verb used to denote gazing, staring, or observing.

Data 2

Jo: (*nervous, presenting pages*) A friend of mine desired me to offer a story, by her, she ***wrote*** it - She'd be glad to write more if this suit.
Jo: /My reaction indicates that you are a pompous blowhard. Shakespeare ***wrote*** for the masses.

The word *wrote* exemplifies the polysemy of the dialogue, as both words share the same lexical root. However, the distinction in their meanings is pronounced. The first *wrote* refers to the act of authorship or the creation of a written work, while the second *wrote* is associated with the legacy or purpose behind Shakespeare's written works.

Data 3

Jo: "I only ***sold*** what was my own."
Jo: "No, sir; she has ***sold*** to "Olympic" and "Scandal" and got a prize for a tale in the "Blarney Stone Banner."

The polysemy of the dialogue is exemplified by the use of the same word for both *sold*. The difference in meaning between the two is that *sold* refers to the act of exchanging personal property for money or other compensation, while another *sold* refers to the sale of written works or creative products to publishers. This meaning extends beyond a basic transaction, encompassing the publication and marketing of creative content for financial or professional gain.

Data 4

| John: /Stay. "I asked for leave. I'll take **care** of the children." |
| Laurie: (*shaking his head*) "You will **care** for somebody, and you'll love him tremendously, and live and die for him. I know you will, it's your way, and you will and I'll watch." |

The polysemy of the dialogue is exemplified by the use of the same word for both expressions. The difference in meaning between the two is that *care* refers to the act of providing for the needs and well-being of children, which implies practical and nurturing actions such as feeding, protecting, and supporting them emotionally. Meanwhile, *care* also refers to a deeper emotional connection, referring to affection, care, and love for others. It suggests a profound emotional investment and dedication to the well-being and happiness of others.

Data 5

| Laurie: "They're **cutting** down the competition." |
| Beth: (worried) "She's not **cutting** her trip short, is she?" |

The use of the word *cut* in both contexts exemplifies the polysemy of the dialog, as both use the same word yet differ in meaning. The difference in meaning between the two is that *cutting* is used metaphorically, referring to the act of reducing or eliminating competition, possibly in a competitive or strategic context. In another example, *cutting* refers to the act of shortening or reducing something, or in this case, travel.

Data 6

| Sallie: "He'll be so **pleased** with how you look that he'll forget all about the expense." |
| Amy: "You're going to the theatre with Laurie. Meg, **please**, can I come?" |

The polysemy of the dialogue is exemplified by the use of *please*, which is shared by both words. The difference in meaning between *please* and *pleased* becomes apparent when considering the former as a polite request or expression of satisfaction, while the meaning of *pleased* is more closely associated with an emotional response resulting from a positive impression or event.

Data 7

| Amy: "Selfish people do **like** to talk about themselves." |
| Amy: "It looks **like** it's never done a day of work in its life. And that ring is ridiculous." |

The word *like* is an example of polysemy in dialogue, as it is defined by the same word in both sentences. While the meaning of *like* is similar in both sentences, there is a clear distinction in their implications, *like* is used as a verb meaning to enjoy or prefer doing something. It expresses a habitual action or preference. While in another like is used as a preposition meaning resembling or similar to. It is used to draw a comparison between the object's appearance and something else.

Data 8

| Meg: "Don't stare, don't put your hands behind your **back**, don't say Christopher Columbus, don't say capital, don't shake hands, don't whistle — |
| Amy: "Mother doesn't say anything about Beth. I feel I should go **back** but they all say "stay." |

The polysemy of the dialogue is exemplified by the use of the word *back* in both sentences, with the difference in meaning between the two being that *back* is part of the phrase "behind your back," which means at the back or at a position behind the body. It refers to the area of the body that is opposite the front. The other uses *back* to refer to returning to a previous place or going in the opposite direction. Another *back* implies a return to a specific location or a transition in the opposite direction from a previously visited location. This could be interpreted as a reference to Amy's previous or current location, suggesting a return to a place she has previously departed or is on the verge of leaving.

Data 9

Amy: "You didn't look **hard** enough!"
Meg: "It's so **hard** to go back to work after such good times."

The use of the word hard in this dialogue exemplifies its polysemy, as both meanings are expressed with the same word. The difference in the meanings of *hard* as an adverb and as an adjective is that *hard* is used as an adverb to mean "to make a great effort or with intensity," while in another example, it is used as an adjective to mean "difficult or challenging."

Data 10

Laurie: "You can bear it. In fact, I **think** it agrees with you."
Amy: (injured) "I don't **think** it's fair for some girls to have lots of pretty things and other girls nothing at all."

The word *think* exemplifies the polysemy of the dialogue, as both uses of the word share the same lexical root. Between these two uses of *think,* the difference in meaning is pronounced. One use of *think* functions as a verb, denoting the act of believing or supposing, while the other use of *think* functions as a verb, expressing the formation of an opinion or the holding of a belief about something.

Data 11

Sallie: "Meg March! You look so **pretty**!"
Beth: "I think the melancholy piece I've figured out is **pretty** good."

The polysemy of the dialogue is exemplified by the use of the word *pretty* in both examples, though the difference in meaning between the two is significant. In the first case, *pretty* functions as an adjective, denoting attractiveness or visual appeal. In the second case, *pretty* is used as an adverb, signifying fairness or moderation. The adjective "good" is modified by the word "pretty," thereby indicating that Beth considers the work to be pretty or moderately good, but not outstanding or exceptional.

Data 12

Beth: "Why is her hair **off**?"
Jo: "Meg married, Amy off to Europe, now that you're a graduate, you'll be **off** on a long holiday – I'm not good like Beth so I'm angry and restless."

The use of the word *off* in both contexts exemplifies the polysemy of the dialog, highlighting the differences in connotation between the two meanings. The adjective *off* means irregular or out of place, while the adverb *off* means to go or depart, implying that someone is going somewhere, especially travelling or leaving for a destination or, in this case, a long holiday.

4.   CONCLUSION

Polysemy is the situation in which a single word has numerous separate but related meanings. (Apresjan, 1974: 16). The research of polysemy in Greta Gerwig's Little Women (2019) explores the use of linguistic complexity in the movie to enhance its narrative and thematic depth. The research methodically identifies twelve cases in which the same words are assigned different meanings based on their application within the context of the dialogue. This finding demonstrates the adaptability of polysemy in dialogue, a concept that Apresjan's theoretical framework provides a comprehensive framework for understanding. This linguistic sophistication is further integrated with the thematic exploration of gender, identity, and societal expectations, reflecting the characters' multifaceted experiences. The polysemic resonance of the text is further deepened by the movie's non-linear narrative and intertextual references, which lead to diverse interpretations and a bridging of the original text by Louisa May Alcott with contemporary discourse. The integration of symbolic elements, such as Amy's art supplies or Beth's piano, with broader social and emotional contexts, exemplifies how polysemy in storytelling can not only enhance the narrative but also engage audiences in reevaluating timeless themes. There are 12 data total which contain the polysemy in Little Women (2019) movie. This analysis underscores the pivotal role of polysemy in shaping meaning, offering valuable insights into its application in cinematic adaptations and linguistic studies.

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