Derivation and semantic autonomy:
A corpus study of Polish głowa ‘head’ and its diminutive główka
Beata Wójtowicz and Iwona Kraska-Szlenk
University of Warsaw

As typical of major body part terms, the Polish lexeme głowa ‘head’ is highly polysemous and exhibits a number of conventionalized senses extended by means of metaphor or metonymy (cf. Bacz 2009, Derkacz-Padiasek 2010). The word may also occur with the suffix (e)k which, according to Polish grammars, indicates smallness or/and positive emotions (e. g. Grzegorczykowa and Puzymina 1984: 367n., Nagórko 2006: 220, 223), cf. główka dziecka ‘(small) head of the child’. However, the derivative główka also occurs in some figurative contexts, where the diminutive interpretation is not possible, e. g. duża główka salaty ‘big head of lettuce’. Generally, figurative extensions of the lexeme główka partly overlap with that of głowa, in some cases are complementary, while together create a semantic network largely similar to those of ‘head’ lexemes in other languages (e. g. Aksan 2011, Kraska-Szlenk 2014, Maalej 2014, Niemeier 2008, Siahaan 2011). We will examine usage patterns of Polish głowa and główka on the basis of data excerpted from the National Corpus of Polish (www.nkjp.pl). We will construct semantic networks of these lexemes and analyze concordance listings and collocates using computer technology (Biber et al. 1998). The lexical pair głowa/główka also finds parallels in other body part terms in Polish, cf. oko ‘eye’ versus oczko ‘eye-dim. (body part)’, but also ‘gem’ (in the ring), ‘eye’ (on a plant), etc. This suggests that the ek-suffixation, in addition to deriving diminutives, provides a strategy to reduce polysemy of body part terms and to increase autonomy of some of the metaphorical senses by means of more overt morphological marking. Even though the ek-suffix in principle derives an open class of diminutives, in this particular case it functions like other affixes modifying the base-word meaning, cf. głowica ‘missile head’, nagłówek ‘headline’. Our findings are particularly interesting when the Polish data are contrasted with other languages in which a single word ‘head’ covers a range of meanings corresponding to głowa and various members of its lexical nest, cf. Swahili kichwa ‘head’ (body part), ‘head’ (of a vegetable), ‘headline’, etc. (Kraska-Szlenk 2014), as well as with languages in which other cues (e. g. compounding, obligatory modifiers) are used for meaning disambiguation and enhance autonomy of particular senses of a polysemous word. By drawing such parallels our study contributes to theoretical research on polysemy and the relation between the meaning and the form.

Selected references