

FAMILIAR FORMS, ADDITIONAL MEANINGS: LEARNING POLYSEMOUS VOCABULARY IN ADULT SECOND-LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Recognizing an English word does not establish knowledge of all the meanings that the word conventionally expresses. This distinction is especially important for adult learners who encounter familiar forms in occupational, academic, and everyday settings where a previously learned interpretation no longer fits. In a test involving 87 advanced Turkish learners, 81 English nouns, and 162 tested meanings, core uses were better known than extended uses, and metonymical extensions were better known than metaphorical extensions. A Chinese–English production study involving 90 learners further showed that the familiarity of the first-language translation affected performance. Experiments with adult native-language readers found that new meanings connected to a word's established meaning were easier to learn than unrelated assignments, while reading research demonstrated benefits when a fixed number of encounters was distributed across different texts. These results identify distinct influences on adult vocabulary learning, but they do not measure the same learning outcome. This article explains how meaning relations, translation correspondence, exposure, and feedback affect the acquisition of additional meanings of familiar second-language words. The English nouns *branch* and *seal* are examined through specific classroom sentences, usage boundaries, and assessment tasks. The central distinction is between interpreting a meaning during one encounter, being able to use it in unfamiliar contexts, and becoming faster at selecting a meaning already known. These distinctions support precise teaching decisions and more informative investigations of lexical development.

KEYWORDS: adult second-language acquisition; polysemy; English vocabulary; lexical knowledge; contextual reading; meaning differentiation

1. INTRODUCTION

Recognizing a word can give learners a misleading sense that lexical learning is already complete. A student who understands *branch* in the sentence “The storm broke a branch from the tree” may not interpret the same noun in “The charity opened a branch in the northern district.” Another student may understand both uses but not the disciplinary expression “a branch of environmental science.” The written form remains constant while its relation to the surrounding words and the situation changes. Learning an additional use involves considerably more than encountering the familiar spelling again: the learner must identify a conventional interpretation, determine the contexts in which that interpretation is appropriate, and distinguish it reliably from other meanings that remain available.

This difficulty cannot be represented adequately by vocabulary size alone, because recognition of a lexical form does not specify the range or precision of meanings available to the learner. Schmitt [1] distinguishes the number of words known from the quality of knowledge associated with each word. Depth encompasses grammatical behavior, collocations, associations, derivation, and different meanings. Within this broader set of lexical abilities, knowledge of polysemous vocabulary has particular educational value because the same word recurs across reading, discussion, and subject-specific communication. A learner may recognize a large number of forms while interpreting only a restricted selection of their uses.

This distinction is especially important in adult English-language education, where familiar forms repeatedly reappear in occupational, academic, institutional, and everyday settings. Professional training provides a practical illustration of this multilingual setting: a JPCL/SSPC report described delivery of the Protective Coating Inspector course in Chinese, demonstrating that specialized technical instruction may be mediated through another language

even when much of the professional terminology originates in English. This practitioner example is contextual rather than evidence about lexical acquisition. A word first learned through an everyday description can reappear with a specialized or institutional meaning. The tree-related use of *branch* provides little direct information about where a charity's district office is located unless the learner also recognizes its organizational use. Similarly, knowing *seal* as a device that closes a container does not guarantee recognition of the marine animal. A familiar form can support the interpretation of additional meanings, but existing knowledge may also promote an inappropriate reading when the surrounding sentence provides insufficient guidance.

Intentional vocabulary instruction and incidental encounters during meaningful communication both contribute to lexical development, as documented by Webb et al. [2, 3]. Those findings do not imply that contact with a familiar written form is interchangeable with contact with a previously unknown use. Ten occurrences of *branch* referring to trees cannot themselves demonstrate ten opportunities to learn the word's organizational meaning. The interpretation expressed on each occasion matters as much as the count of word occurrences.

The Ontogenesis Model developed by Bordag et al. [4] describes second-language lexical knowledge as a developing system of relationships among linguistic forms, meanings, and cross-language equivalents. That perspective helps explain why a familiar English form can remain open to additional learning without the earlier meanings disappearing. The relevant change is not a second acquisition of the spelling. It is the formation or refinement of a use that the learner can recognize in language and employ appropriately.

The discussion therefore concentrates on three connected questions: which new meanings learners can relate to meanings they already know; when a first-language expression helps or obstructs an additional English use; and which encounters allow a learner to retain and use the additional meaning beyond the teaching sentence. The answers are drawn from identifiable research findings and illustrated with English nouns whose conventional meanings differ in the relationship they present to a learner. The classroom sentences are instructional illustrations, not observations or test responses collected from participants.

2. EVIDENCE FROM ADULT WORD LEARNING AND ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Research on additional word meanings requires careful separation of the tasks that participants actually completed and the kinds of lexical knowledge those tasks can legitimately demonstrate. Some investigations assess naturally occurring English meanings that learners might already have met. Other investigations assign unfamiliar meanings to familiar words so that their relationship can be manipulated. Reading studies frequently teach entirely new written forms, whereas ambiguity studies measure the speed or probability of selecting an established interpretation. These approaches answer related questions but cannot be treated as equivalent demonstrations of how an adult learner acquires a new conventional English use.

The most direct evidence for the present argument comes from studies of polysemous English words in EFL populations. Öztürk [5] tested 87 advanced Turkish learners enrolled in English language teaching. The instrument covered 81 nouns and 162 meanings: a core use and an extended use for every noun, with 42 metonymical and 39 metaphorical extensions. Learners recognized core meanings more successfully than their paired extensions; metonymical extensions were also better known than metaphorical extensions. The comparison is particularly informative because the extended uses were not all of one kind. The 42 metonymical extensions involved relationships such as a container and its contents or a place and its associated people; the 39 metaphorical extensions involved various similarities between referents or activities. The findings indicate that extension type is associated with what the learners knew in the test. They do not establish that every individual passes through the same order of acquisition, nor do they determine how frequently each participant had previously encountered the tested expressions.

Qu [6] examined 90 Chinese EFL learners divided into two proficiency groups of 45. Participants translated 88 Chinese sentences into English. The investigation distinguished core from peripheral meanings and dominant from less dominant Chinese equivalents. Among the higher-proficiency group, the reported mean for the dominant-equivalent/core-meaning condition was 17.49, compared with 5.38 for the non-dominant-equivalent/peripheral-meaning condition; the corresponding means in the lower-proficiency group were 17.47 and 4.69. The contrasts show how strongly the supplied Chinese expression and the required English use can influence production. For the lower-proficiency group, the mean of 17.47 in the dominant-equivalent/core-use condition was close to that of the higher-proficiency group, whereas the 4.69 mean in the non-dominant-equivalent/peripheral-use condition was lower than the corresponding 5.38 mean. These values illustrate the importance of the particular translation task: the Chinese

prompt, the meaning required, and familiarity of the equivalent were not interchangeable features. The scores should not be converted into percentages of vocabulary acquired, and the comparisons do not by themselves establish a developmental sequence.

Experiments using familiar first-language words establish a related but methodologically different point. Rodd et al. [7] had adults learn invented meanings associated with known words. Meanings that were related to the established interpretation were recalled more successfully than unrelated meanings. The advantage was evident after brief training and persisted in an experiment extending over seven days. This result establishes the relevance of perceived connections under controlled learning conditions, although the participants were not acquiring conventional second-language meanings. Hulme et al. [8] further demonstrated learning and delayed retention of unfamiliar assigned meanings encountered in stories, while Hulme and Rodd [9] found that immediate testing could improve later retention after story reading.

A complementary reading experiment by Frances et al. [10] included 88 participants reading Spanish or English texts. The same unfamiliar form occurred eight times, distributed across one, two, four, or eight texts. Distributing encounters across more texts improved several measures of word learning without reducing text comprehension; mean comprehension accuracy was 88%. Because those items were unfamiliar written forms with designated meanings, the experiment establishes an effect of textual distribution rather than an effect of alternating several conventional meanings of a word already known.

2.1. WHAT THE REPORTED CONTRASTS ESTABLISH

The studies make different kinds of evidence available. A comparison of 162 noun uses administered to Turkish learners identifies meaning knowledge at a particular point in their education. The Chinese translation responses show how an expressed meaning and an available first-language cue jointly affect English production. The seven-day learning experiment tests the value of connecting an invented meaning to prior knowledge. The reading experiment tests the distribution of encounters while their total number is unchanged. These findings should not be treated as four independent estimates of a single underlying effect. They demonstrate that the meaning being learned, the prompt used to elicit it, and the learner's experience are each important for interpreting results.

The distinction is crucial when applied to ordinary adult learning. Suppose a student recognizes *branch* in a botanical sentence but cannot explain it in a bank notice. Such an answer resembles the incomplete range observed in noun polysemy tests, but it is not a score drawn from the Turkish study. If the student recognizes the bank use after being offered an equivalent in another language, that improvement may reflect the cue's usefulness, as the Chinese production study makes plausible. If the student later understands the bank use without translation in an unfamiliar announcement, the second performance provides evidence about independent English interpretation. Each claim requires a response from the student in the actual teaching setting.

This separation also protects the interpretation of instructional research from claims that extend beyond the task actually administered. Successful recall after an explicit relation explanation supports memory for a word-to-meaning association. It does not establish spontaneous use in conversation. Likewise, improved recognition when a word appears across different texts does not automatically imply that two meanings of the same word have been distinguished. A description of adult lexical development should specify which outcome participants completed, rather than allowing success in one task to stand for every form of knowing a word.

3. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KNOWING A FORM AND KNOWING ITS MEANINGS

3.1. RELATED USES, UNRELATED MEANINGS, AND ORDINARY REFERENCE

Polysemy concerns distinct but conventionally related uses of a word, whereas homonymy concerns meanings whose relationship is not ordinarily apparent to contemporary speakers. The distinction is useful for teaching, but it does not imply that every dictionary division is represented as a separate unit in each learner's memory. Haber and Poesio [11] discuss evidence that word-meaning boundaries depend partly on linguistic judgment, task demands, and how finely uses are distinguished. Teachers therefore need enough precision to identify a learning target without treating the dictionary's arrangement as a direct description of an individual learner's knowledge.

The noun *branch* makes the problem concrete. The tree use and the local-office use share a broad part-whole relationship, but they are not interchangeable. A branch growing from a trunk is a physical part of a plant; a branch of a charity is an organizational unit associated with a larger institution. The disciplinary use in *a branch of science*

concerns the division of knowledge rather than either a physical extension or a staffed location. A learner who knows only the botanical interpretation must learn what kind of entity can be called a *branch* in the other expressions.

The animal and closure meanings of *seal* provide a contrasting relationship. A learner who recognizes the closure use has learned the written form, but the familiar interpretation provides no straightforward everyday analogy that identifies a marine mammal. In the sentence “A seal rested on the rocks by the sea,” surrounding details may support the animal interpretation. Without the relevant meaning, however, the learner may still need an explicit explanation. The teaching challenge is a new conventional word-to-meaning association, not the discovery of a natural relationship between every pair of meanings sharing a spelling.

An additional lexical meaning must also be distinguished carefully from a newly learned fact about an object or situation. The sentence “The northern branch is closed on Sundays” may teach a student something about opening hours without changing their understanding of the organizational noun. Similarly, interpreting an unusual metaphor once does not establish that it has become a stable, conventional part of the learner’s English. Acquisition is best recognized when the learner can interpret or use the relevant meaning with different referents and wording.

3.2. RECOGNIZING AN EXTENSION WITHOUT OVERGENERALIZING IT

For the organizational meaning of *branch*, “a local part of a larger institution” is a useful explanation but not a complete rule for English nouns. The same student must distinguish a *branch* from a department, a desk, a team, or a temporary service point. A public library may have several branches, whereas a library counter inside one building is usually described differently. What the word identifies depends on the institution’s organization, the referent, and accepted usage. Learning the related meaning therefore includes acquiring restrictions on when the extension sounds natural.

The disciplinary sense places a different restriction on the apparent connection. A *branch of linguistics* refers to a recognized area of academic study, not to an office of linguists located in a district. The expression *a branch of science* draws on division within a body of knowledge. A learner who explains only “part of a larger whole” may have understood the shared relationship without yet being able to distinguish these two English uses. Appropriate understanding requires the student to identify the kind of larger entity and the kind of subdivision involved.

These distinctions have practical consequences for feedback. If a learner describes a university faculty as a *branch* of a building, feedback should not simply mark the response wrong and repeat the botanical definition. A useful explanation identifies the intended relationship and supplies the expression normally used for that referent. When the relation is helpful, it can be retained; when it licenses an unsuitable substitution, English usage must take precedence over the analogy.

3.3. NEW KNOWLEDGE, MORE PRECISE KNOWLEDGE, AND FASTER ACCESS

Several qualitatively different changes can produce an improved answer to a vocabulary question. A learner might acquire the organizational meaning of *branch* for the first time, learn to distinguish a branch from a head office more accurately, or access an organizational meaning faster after recently encountering it. The outcomes are different even when a short multiple-choice test records each of them as a correct response.

Research on ambiguity supports this distinction. Rodd et al. [12] demonstrated long-lasting changes in preference for particular established meanings after exposure, and Rodd et al. [13] related word interpretation to recent encounters and longer-term language experience. Gaskell et al. [14] found that sleep stabilized a change in meaning preference following contextual exposure. These effects concern how an already available meaning is selected and retained; none, by itself, proves that the person learned a previously unknown dictionary use.

For teaching and assessment, *meaning range* refers to the conventional interpretations a person can support in appropriate contexts; *precision* refers to the limits they place on each use; and *access* refers to the reliability and speed of retrieving an available interpretation. A student who chooses *branch* correctly only after a lengthy explanation may show emerging meaning knowledge, even if their reading is not yet fluent. Another student may respond rapidly simply because the relevant meaning was well established beforehand. The distinction prevents differences in reading speed from being mistaken for differences in the number of meanings learned.

Previous knowledge must be checked empirically rather than assumed from recognition of the written form. Recognition of the spelling *branch* cannot establish familiarity with the organizational use. A useful preliminary check gives the learner at least two sentences expressing the intended use and asks for a paraphrase or an appropriate expression in a different sentence. Inconsistent responses indicate uncertain knowledge rather than definitive absence. Later success with unfamiliar wording provides firmer evidence of acquisition than repeating a phrase already seen in

class.

4. MEANING CONNECTIONS AND THE ROLE OF OTHER LANGUAGES

4.1. WHEN ESTABLISHED MEANINGS SUPPORT LEARNING

Learners do not necessarily experience the same degree or type of semantic relatedness that a linguist or dictionary analysis identifies. An explanation connecting a tree branch with an institutional branch may be intuitive to one student and unhelpful to another. Rodd et al. [7] show why the connection deserves attention: adults recalled invented meanings better when the relationship to a familiar meaning was clear. The finding favors meaningful links during learning, but it does not establish that every etymological history, metaphor, or diagram improves second-language acquisition.

A useful pedagogical explanation must identify both what remains conceptually similar and what changes across the conventional uses. In *branch of a tree*, the referent extends from a larger physical structure. In *branch of a charity*, the referent belongs to a larger institution and serves a local function. In *branch of biology*, the referent is a subdivision of a discipline. The connection is neither a definition that permits unrestricted substitution nor a claim about how students mentally store the word. It is an aid to interpreting specific expressions, checked against English usage.

Boers [15] discusses teaching approaches that make meaningful relationships among vocabulary items accessible to learners. Such instruction is most defensible when paired with examples and opportunities to apply the distinction. Learners must still discover that English ordinarily calls a kitchen a *room*, not a *branch* of a house. A plausible part-whole analogy does not automatically establish which extension English speakers use.

4.2. TRANSLATION CORRESPONDENCE IS MEANING-SPECIFIC

An English word does not necessarily have a single first-language equivalent that covers all of its conventional uses. Srinivasan and Rabagliati [16] document both common cross-linguistic patterns and differences in which related meanings are expressed by one word. An EFL student might know a translation for the botanical *branch* but require a different expression for the organizational use. A teacher who supplies only the first translation may reinforce the wrong interpretation when learners encounter a bank or charity branch.

The Turkish evidence illustrates the problem. In the study by Öztürk [5], the relationship between English meanings and Turkish equivalents differed for metonymical and metaphorical extensions. The learner's knowledge of a core English word therefore cannot be treated as a reliable prediction of every extension. The Chinese evidence is similarly precise. Qu [6] found that choosing a dominant versus a less dominant Chinese expression changed the likelihood of producing the intended English polysemous word. This is a finding about production in response to a Chinese sentence, not an independent demonstration of which meanings each learner understands while reading English.

A productive classroom comparison can begin with the three sentences about a tree, a charity, and a scientific discipline. Learners explain each English use, offer an appropriate equivalent in any language they know well, and identify which equivalents can and cannot be carried across sentences. The answer need not be the same for all bilingual speakers. What matters is whether a translation correctly expresses the target use and whether the student can distinguish it from the word's other meanings.

Cross-linguistic support should neither be prohibited automatically nor accepted uncritically without checking the particular meaning expressed. A precise equivalent can help identify a new use immediately; a translation that collapses distinct meanings can conceal the boundary the learner needs to acquire. Recent university-level work on translation pedagogy likewise treats vocabulary factors and intercultural communication as explicit components of instructional design [33]. The instructional decision therefore concerns the actual expression provided, the cultural-linguistic relationship it activates, and the use it supports, rather than the simple presence or absence of translation.

4.3. PROFICIENCY DOES NOT SUPPLY A PERSONAL WORD HISTORY

General language proficiency influences contextual learning, but it cannot establish which particular meanings an adult learner has previously encountered, understood, or used. Elgort et al. [17] found that proficiency affected behavioral and electrophysiological indicators of meaning learning during reading. This finding does not imply that advanced learners have uniform knowledge of common polysemous words. A learner reading technical material daily might know a disciplinary meaning while remaining unfamiliar with an everyday idiom involving the same form.

The amount and type of experience with each word are therefore central. In a mixed adult classroom, a familiar

English form may have entered one learner's vocabulary through employment, another's through fiction, and another's through subject textbooks. Instruction is more accurate when it begins with each target meaning and the uses learners already recognize. A course level is an imperfect substitute for this information.

5. READING EXPERIENCE, FEEDBACK, AND RETENTION

5.1. COUNT ENCOUNTERS WITH THE INTENDED MEANING

Frequency contributes to vocabulary learning, but the unit being counted determines the interpretation that can legitimately be given to the evidence. Uchihara et al. [18] found an overall positive association between repetition and incidental vocabulary learning across the studies examined. Repeated appearances of a printed form cannot, however, be assumed to present the same learning target. The English noun *branch* could occur repeatedly in a nature textbook without ever appearing as an organizational unit. Such exposure would not directly explain whether a student learns the expression *the local branch of a charity*.

The crucial instructional distinction is between recurrence of the orthographic or spoken word form and recurrence of the intended meaning in an interpretable context. Within an organizational use, examples about a bank, public library, and charity can provide different settings while keeping the relevant meaning relatively stable. A sentence about a tree introduces a different use; it may help learners discriminate established and newly acquired meanings, but it does not provide another encounter with the organizational interpretation. Both kinds of experience have educational value, provided the purposes are not confused.

Frequency in published language collections is also fundamentally different from frequency in a particular learner's reading, study, workplace communication, and conversation. A specialized use may be uncommon in general English yet essential to a student preparing for a particular occupation. Instructional selection should reflect the communicative situations students face. There is little value in requiring exhaustive memorization of every listed dictionary meaning when a smaller set of uses would improve their actual understanding and participation.

5.2. DISTRIBUTE ONE MEANING ACROSS DIFFERENT TEXTS

The experiment reported by Frances et al. [10] isolates an important property of reading experience. Each unfamiliar item appeared eight times; the difference was whether those encounters occurred in one, two, four, or eight texts. Readers benefited when occurrences were spread across more textual settings, and comprehension was not adversely affected. Because the study compared unfamiliar forms with designated meanings, it does not establish that frequent alternation of unrelated meanings of one known English word has the same effect.

For a familiar word, varying the surrounding material can accomplish two different tasks. Sentences about a bank branch, a charity branch, and a library branch show the organizational interpretation with different institutions. Alternating one of those sentences with a sentence about a broken tree branch requires the learner to select between conventional uses. The first arrangement offers experience using one meaning in multiple contexts; the second directly exercises meaning differentiation. The benefit of either arrangement should be assessed against the ability being taught.

Timing can matter alongside contextual variation, particularly during the earliest encounters with an unfamiliar meaning. Mak et al. [19] examined how initial contextual stability and subsequent variation affected early incidental learning of unfamiliar words. Their observations caution against introducing so much variation at the outset that the learner cannot identify a reliable interpretation. In a lesson on the organizational *branch*, a clearly understood first encounter can establish that meaning; additional examples can then show how it functions across institutions. Introducing the tree meaning again may become useful when the learner needs to distinguish competing interpretations, rather than before the new use is understood.

5.3. COMBINE COMPREHENSION, EXPLANATION, AND RETRIEVAL

An unfamiliar use must first become sufficiently intelligible for the learner to establish an appropriate form–meaning relationship. Context may provide an answer, but it can also encourage an incorrect reading based on the word's better-known use. Elgort et al. [20] compared the placement of definitions in contextual word learning with first- and second-language readers. Their findings support opportunities to attempt interpretation and then check it against accurate meaning information. They do not justify making every learner guess without support. In a sentence about a charity branch, the teacher can ask what the word means there, clarify “a local unit of the charity,” and invite the

learner to check why the botanical definition cannot work.

A short, meaning-specific gloss can serve a similar instructional purpose. Yanagisawa et al. [21] found advantages for glossed reading over reading without glosses across the studies included in their analysis, while also identifying differences associated with gloss type and test conditions. The gloss “*branch*: here, a local office of an organization” directs attention to the use in the sentence without implying that this is the word’s only meaning. The phrase *here* helps prevent one definition from erasing other conventional uses.

Retrieval practice should require access to the intended meaning, rather than accepting any correct response that happens to be associated with the familiar form. Asking “What does *branch* mean?” can produce “part of a tree” even after a lesson intended to teach its organizational meaning. A more informative prompt asks learners to explain *branch* in a new charity notice or write a sentence directing someone to a branch in a district. van den Broek et al. [22] found that the value of retrieval opportunities during reading depended on whether learners had received sufficient meaning support. Productive effort should therefore follow intelligible input rather than replace it.

The amount of practice must also be interpreted in relation to the time spent and the quality of the retrieval activity. Nakata [23] showed that additional within-session retrieval could affect subsequent vocabulary performance, with important qualifications when study time was considered. Kim and Webb [24] found advantages for distributed practice over concentrated practice in second-language learning. These findings support revisiting meanings after the initial encounter, but do not establish a single interval or a fixed number of repetitions that will work for every word and learner. A later opportunity to interpret the target use within ordinary reading can be more informative than repeating the same definition several times in succession.

5.4. UNDERSTANDING DURING READING IS NOT IDENTICAL TO LASTING KNOWLEDGE

Reading behavior can reveal processing and engagement with unfamiliar vocabulary without, by itself, fully identifying the lexical knowledge that has been acquired. Pellicer-Sánchez [25] recorded eye movements while studying incidental word learning during reading; Godfroid et al. [26] likewise examined exposure and processing in natural reading. Elgort et al. [27] investigated how contextual word learning was reflected in second-language eye movements. Together, these studies establish the relevance of processing during encounters, but they do not warrant treating one long fixation as successful acquisition of a new meaning.

A student may pause because a sentence is difficult, because an established interpretation is misleading, or because an unfamiliar expression is being worked out successfully. Conversely, rapid reading may accompany fluent understanding or superficial recognition. Elgort and Warren [28] distinguish aspects of vocabulary knowledge that are readily reported from those expressed less directly in processing. Evidence of lasting meaning knowledge therefore needs to include interpretation or use after the encounter, preferably with wording and referents different from those already presented.

6. ENGLISH TEACHING APPLICATION: BRANCH AND SEAL

6.1. THREE CONVENTIONAL USES OF BRANCH

The noun *branch* offers three useful English meanings for classroom comparison. In the Cambridge Learner’s Dictionary, tree, business, and academic-subject uses are distinguished.¹ These uses can be taught without claiming that the dictionary establishes the exact organization of an individual’s vocabulary. Each expression has its own referents and common language environment.

The tree meaning is usually supported by words such as *tree*, *leaves*, *gardener*, and *trunk*. Organizational uses appear in expressions such as *local branch*, *branch office*, and *a branch of the bank*. The disciplinary use appears in combinations such as *a branch of science*. These neighboring words are useful signals, though none acts as an infallible definition. Interpretation depends on the whole expression and its communicative setting.

Table 1 contains complete sentences that make the distinctions visible. The examples move between concrete botanical reference, institutional organization, and divisions of academic knowledge. The table also includes a usage boundary and a purposeful communication task. The activities can be selected according to the meanings students already demonstrate; they are not a record of instructional outcomes.

¹Cambridge Learner’s Dictionary, *branch*: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/learner-english/branch>. The sentences in this article are newly written teaching illustrations rather than dictionary quotations.

TABLE 1. MEANING DISTINCTIONS IN COMPLETE SENTENCES WITH THE NOUN *BRANCH*

Meaning or task	Sentence or instruction	Specific learning focus
Part of a tree	“The gardener removed a damaged <i>branch</i> from the tree.”	Identify the physical meaning the learner may already understand.
Local organizational unit	“The charity has a main office in the capital and a <i>branch</i> in every district.”	Interpret an institutional unit operating as part of a larger organization.
Another organizational setting	“The library’s northern <i>branch</i> opens on Sundays.”	Recognize the same organizational meaning with a different institution.
Academic division	“Marine ecology is a <i>branch</i> of environmental science concerned with life in the sea.”	Distinguish a subdivision of knowledge from a staffed office or a tree part.
Boundary of ordinary usage	“The kitchen is a room in the house.”	Explain why replacing <i>room</i> with <i>branch</i> would not be ordinary English, despite the part–whole relation.
Independent communication	“A resident needs assistance while the charity’s central office is closed. Explain where the resident should go.”	Use the organizational meaning accurately in a new communicative situation.

Note. The sentences and tasks are instructional examples, not quotations or observations from a classroom experiment.

6.2. MAKE SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE EQUALLY VISIBLE

One useful question after the three *branch* sentences is to ask what larger entity each referent belongs to and what type of relationship the word expresses. The tree branch belongs to a plant, the district branch to an institution, and the scientific branch to a subject area. The part–whole connection can help learners bring the uses together, but it does not remove differences in their conventional application. A branch of a bank can serve customers; a branch of science cannot open for customers; a tree branch can have leaves but does not issue service notices.

The sentence about the kitchen supplies a necessary constraint. It would be possible to invent a metaphor calling the kitchen a branch of the house, but that is not how ordinary English classifies rooms. Meaning connections assist comprehension without authorizing unrestricted use. This is especially important for production, when a student may understand a broad analogy yet choose an expression that listeners would not normally expect.

Specific contexts can be introduced through professionally edited short texts, authentic institutional notices, or carefully checked concordance lines. Boulton and Cobb [29] found benefits associated with learners’ use of authentic language collections and concordances, although their analysis does not establish the effectiveness of these *branch* tasks. Related university-level research has also emphasized interactive, student-centered English instruction supported by structured language resources and communicative activity [34]; this provides a broader pedagogical context rather than direct evidence for the specific polysemy exercises proposed here. If teachers use real examples, they should select complete instances of the intended noun use, retain enough surrounding language to establish the referent, and exclude names or unrelated verb uses. A small number of well-chosen sentences is preferable to a long list in which learners cannot distinguish the meanings.

Mitsugi [30] compared instruction based on a shared explanatory image with translation-list teaching for the prepositions *at*, *in*, and *on* among Japanese university learners. The immediate learning advantage associated with the image-based instruction supports the educational interest of meaning connections. Preposition meanings are not interchangeable with noun polysemy, and the classroom comparison does not establish that a single image will explain all senses of *branch*. For this noun, the teacher’s explanation remains closely tied to actual English expressions.

6.3. RETURN TO THE ORGANIZATIONAL USE IN A DIFFERENT TASK

After the first lesson, a short service notice can require interpretation of *branch* without repeating the original charity sentence or its wording. A second task can ask students to write a message to a resident identifying where a service is available. These tasks make different demands. Correctly explaining the notice shows comprehension of the organizational meaning; using *branch* accurately in a new message adds evidence of production. Writing *local office* instead may meet the communicative objective even though it does not demonstrate retrieval of the target form.

The established botanical meaning should also reappear later. A student who applies the newly taught organizational meaning to every occurrence of *branch* is responding to recency rather than selecting the interpretation required by the sentence. The goal is an English repertoire that preserves established uses while supporting additional ones. Immediate and delayed opportunities to retrieve different meanings are consistent with the memory findings of [9] and the wider vocabulary-learning principles discussed by [31], without implying a universally effective lesson timetable.

6.4. A COMPLETE READING-TO-USE EXERCISE

One classroom exercise can begin with the short notice “The charity’s central office will be closed for repairs. Residents may continue to receive assistance at the eastern branch.” Before any explanation, students identify the institution, the relevant location, and the action residents can take. The teacher can then ask what *branch* contributes to the second sentence. An appropriate paraphrase is “the charity’s local office in the eastern area.” A student who interprets *branch* as part of a tree can see why that reading would not identify a place to obtain assistance.

A second notice can change the institution and wording: “Please return borrowed books to any branch of the city library before Friday.” The task is to identify where the books may be returned, not to recite a definition. If the student correctly identifies a local library location, the response shows that the organizational meaning extends beyond the charity example. A third sentence, “The storm damaged several branches near the footpath,” checks that the learner still selects the botanical meaning when the surrounding language calls for it.

Production can follow comprehension. Students compose two sentences: one telling a resident how to find a local service, and another explaining an area of academic study they are interested in. If they use *branch* for each target appropriately, the sentences demonstrate two distinct conventional uses. If the student writes *office* instead of *branch*, the message may be communicatively successful but does not reveal whether the target word can be produced independently. Recording that difference allows a teacher to acknowledge successful communication without overstating lexical learning.

A later reading task should employ materials that have not already appeared in the exercise. The teacher can ask for a short meaning explanation with no dictionary, followed by the same task with a gloss when necessary. This sequence distinguishes independent understanding from interpretation achieved with support. The examples are complete teaching materials that can be used as written; their educational effect has not been measured in a participant study for this article.

6.5. SEAL REQUIRES A DIFFERENT EXPLANATION

The noun *seal* prevents the teaching method from deteriorating into a forced analogy in which every shared form is assumed to have semantically connected meanings. English uses the noun both for a marine animal and for a closure or official mark, as indicated by the Cambridge Dictionary.² Consider the sentence “A seal rested on the rocks beside the cold sea.” The sea and the animal’s activity make the intended reading accessible. A student who previously learned only the closure-related use may nevertheless need a picture, a clear explanation, or an accurate translation to identify the animal.

No botanical-to-institutional connection resembling the *branch* example is required. The two familiar-spelling meanings of *seal* can be learned as distinct conventional uses. Later sentences can contrast “The seal swam beside the boat” with “The package arrived with an unbroken seal.” The student must select the correct interpretation from context rather than simply give the most recently taught definition.

Comparison of *branch* and *seal* reveals a practical limit of teaching through meaning relationships. When a connection is clear, it can help explain a new English use. When the connection is not available or would be strained, contextual evidence and a direct explanation provide better support. Neither kind of explanation eliminates the need to check the learner’s later understanding with unfamiliar sentences.

7. ASSESSING WHETHER THE ADDITIONAL MEANING HAS BEEN LEARNED

A vocabulary test can produce apparently favorable scores while leaving the nature, independence, and durability of the underlying learning unclear. Recognizing *branch* in a sentence already discussed in class does not establish independent interpretation. Repeating a definition may reveal memory for the teacher’s explanation. Using the word in a new, appropriate sentence is a more demanding outcome; consistently distinguishing botanical and organizational contexts establishes something further about the range of meanings available.

Assessment should first determine, as far as the available task permits, whether the intended meaning was already known before instruction. A useful check presents the word in two previously unseen contexts and asks learners to paraphrase it or explain the referent. The teacher should record which prompts, translations, or explanations were necessary. Weak or inconsistent performance is not equivalent to confirmed absence; it calls for a cautious description of initial knowledge.

²Cambridge Dictionary, *seal*: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/seal>. The example sentence is written for this analysis.

After instruction, the meaning can be tested in different wording and with different referents. For *branch*, a charity notice can be followed by a library notice or an unfamiliar bank announcement. For *seal*, an animal sentence about a rocky shore can be followed by a sentence about swimming or feeding. The resulting responses help distinguish understanding of a conventional meaning from recall of one illustrative sentence.

Table 2 specifies what different tasks can establish. It is a practical record of observations and does not assign numerical cutoffs unsupported by a validation study. Repeated evidence after a documented delay is more persuasive than a single immediate correct answer, but the period should match the educational claim and the course setting.

TABLE 2. DISTINCT OBSERVATIONS REQUIRED TO ASSESS ADDITIONAL MEANING KNOWLEDGE

Ability	Task	Response evidence	What the response establishes
Contextual comprehension	Interpret <i>branch</i> in an unfamiliar notice about a district library.	A paraphrase identifies a local unit within the library system.	Understanding without requiring production of the target word.
Appropriate production	Write a notice directing a resident to the library's district office.	<i>Branch</i> is used naturally for the organizational unit.	Productive use in a communicative message.
Retention and transfer	Interpret the organizational meaning later in a new institution's announcement.	The meaning remains correct beyond the original teaching sentences.	Continued availability of an additional meaning.
Distinguishing meanings	Interpret one sentence about a tree and another about a charity.	The learner assigns each use to the appropriate referent.	Established and additional meanings are kept distinct.
Efficient access	Complete timed interpretation after untimed knowledge has been checked.	Accuracy remains high while responses become more efficient.	Improved selection of an available meaning; not necessarily first acquisition.

Note. The descriptions organize separate tasks and response types. They are not a standardized, validated test, and no total score or universal passing point is assigned.

A student who explains *branch* correctly in a new sentence but does not use the word in writing has demonstrated comprehension, not necessarily production. Another student may repeat the phrase *local branch* while misunderstanding who or what the phrase refers to. These cases should not receive identical descriptions merely because each produces the target word somewhere in an answer.

The learning distinction also matters for interpretation of response times. Rodd [32] describes word-meaning access as responsive to experience and to competition among possible readings. Faster choice of the organizational meaning following several organizational sentences could be a change in preference rather than newly acquired knowledge. Untimed meaning checks, unfamiliar wording, and continued interpretation of previously established meanings are needed to determine what kind of learning has taken place.

7.1. RECORD CORRECTNESS AND THE ASSISTANCE REQUIRED

A two-column marking record can be substantially more informative than a single overall vocabulary score because it separates correctness from the assistance required to achieve it. In the first column, the teacher notes whether the student's explanation fits the intended meaning. In the second, the teacher records whether that explanation was given independently, after an English gloss, after a translation, or after direct teaching. "A district office belonging to the charity" given unaided has a different evidential value from the same paraphrase copied immediately after it was supplied. Both can be useful learning responses, but they should not be reported as identical accomplishments.

Production deserves similar care. A sentence such as "The charity opened a new branch near the market" uses the word with an appropriate organizational referent. "The kitchen is a branch of the house" relies too heavily on the general part-whole connection. A sentence with no target word may still complete the communication task successfully. Recording all three responses accurately is better than assuming that only one dimension of language ability is being measured.

When a delayed task is used, the teacher should retain the date and the new context rather than infer lasting knowledge from one correct response. A student who succeeds in two later unfamiliar announcements has stronger evidence of retention than a student who repeats only the originally taught sentence. The teacher should nevertheless distinguish observed performance from a claim of automatic, unrestricted fluency. Such care is especially important when accuracy and response speed change at different rates.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR INVESTIGATING ADULT MEANING LEARNING

8.1. IDENTIFY THE MEANING KNOWN BEFORE AN ENCOUNTER

A study of additional meanings needs to establish considerably more than recognition of the printed form or familiarity with one dominant interpretation. Participants can be asked to interpret familiar uses and the particular additional use before reading or instruction. Where knowledge of the new use is uncertain, responses should be described as partial or inconsistent instead of being counted automatically as complete unfamiliarity. Testing itself may draw attention to the target and influence later learning, so investigators should make the initial check brief and record what information participants receive.

Learners who do not know either the established use or the additional use face a different learning task from those who know one and are acquiring the other. Those groups should not be combined without considering that difference. Previous reading, occupation, educational specialization, and languages used regularly can help explain why two students at the same course level know different meanings of one form.

The materials also change what a study can establish. A naturally occurring English word makes the findings relevant to ordinary language learning, but it carries uncontrolled differences in familiarity, commonness, and the relation between uses. Invented meanings assigned to familiar forms allow controlled comparisons, as in [7], but they do not reproduce all the characteristics of conventional EFL vocabulary. These approaches complement one another when the interpretation remains tied to what participants actually learned.

8.2. TEST MEANING RELATIONS WITH COMPARABLE ENCOUNTERS

The first critical comparison is between additional meanings that learners themselves regard as related to an established use and meanings they experience as unrelated. Participants should encounter equally interpretable sentences, receive comparable explanations, and be tested with new sentences rather than only the teaching material. If the advantage of related meanings remains after amount of reading, comprehension, and feedback are comparable, that result would strengthen the claim that existing meanings provide a learning benefit beyond mere exposure.

The comparison also needs to test the learner's perception of the connection. A connection supplied by the researcher may not be available to every participant. Adult native-language findings establish a reason to examine this issue, but the size and reliability of the benefit for naturally occurring English uses must be established with L2 participants. Treating relatedness as a rated learner response, not only a dictionary judgment, makes the comparison more informative.

8.3. SEPARATE TRANSLATION PROMPTS FROM ENGLISH COMPREHENSION

A second comparison concerns learners whose other language uses a familiar equivalent across both English meanings and learners for whom the two meanings require different equivalents. In production, the exact translation prompt can favor one English response, as the results of [6] demonstrate. Tests should therefore include an English sentence-interpretation task as well as any translation task. This would distinguish successful comprehension of the additional English use from successful retrieval triggered by a particularly familiar expression in the learner's other language.

Language background should be described through demonstrated word mappings wherever possible. Citizenship, first-language labels, or dictionary listings alone do not establish that a specific student knows or routinely uses an equivalent. The influence of an additional language may also differ between acquiring the meaning and producing it quickly during communication.

8.4. DISTINGUISH VARIETY OF TEXTS FROM VARIETY OF MEANINGS

A third comparison should hold the number of encounters with the additional meaning constant while systematically changing the texts in which that meaning appears. A separate comparison alternates established and additional meanings and asks whether learners become better at distinguishing them. Those arrangements should not be combined under a single count of total word appearances. Reading many instances of the wrong use may improve form recognition without strengthening the use under investigation.

Evidence of success needs to extend beyond immediate recall. Interpretation in unfamiliar contexts, suitable production, retention after a delay, and correct selection of the established meaning should be recorded separately. Where observations are repeated across learners and words, the analysis should account for both sources of variation. Meaning familiarity, sentence difficulty, translation cues, and the amount of explanation are potential alternative

causes of any observed difference.

9. CONCLUSION

Adult second-language vocabulary develops within already familiar word forms as well as through the acquisition of entirely new lexical forms. Studies of English noun polysemy show that learners' knowledge is uneven across core, metonymical, and metaphorical uses. Experiments with assigned meanings show an advantage for new interpretations that can be connected to established ones, and reading studies demonstrate that the number and distribution of meaningful encounters affect vocabulary learning. Cross-linguistic evidence adds a further consideration: an equivalent that supports one English use may fail to express another.

The instructional consequences become particularly clear when the contrasting meaning structures of *branch* and *seal* are examined. The tree, institutional, and disciplinary uses of *branch* can be compared through a part-whole relationship while preserving restrictions on ordinary English use. The animal and closure meanings of *seal* require clear differentiation without forcing an unsuitable analogy. In both cases, the teacher's task is to make the intended meaning intelligible, provide opportunities to encounter it in unfamiliar expressions, and distinguish correct understanding from simple recognition of the word.

Evidence of learning is strongest when the learner can interpret or use the additional meaning beyond the original teaching sentence while retaining accurate and context-sensitive access to previously established meanings. This result should be distinguished from recalling a particular explanation or becoming faster at choosing a meaning that was already known. Attending to these differences brings the study of adult word-meaning development closer to the language decisions learners actually make while reading, speaking, and writing.

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