When you search a large dictionary for a particular word sense, e.g. the polysemous word *sage* with its senses 'one (such as a profound philosopher) distinguished for wisdom', 'a mature or venerable man of sound judgment' (Merriam Webster)*,* you may wonder what the criteria of distinguishing some senses and not the others are. If you possibly look into some other dictionary, you are likely to find a different arrangement of meanings. Why does one dictionary distinguish two meanings while the others merge them into one sense?

Some modern linguists offer a rather surprising solution to that problem. Instead of a careful sense enumeration, they attempt to avoid the problem --- denying the existence of polysemy at all. A dictionary made by a modern semanticist would not resemble the old fashioned one. Definitions would sound odd and abstract and the dictionary itself would be filled with strange information about word combinations and sentence parts and syntactic functions.

The proposed project aims at discovering what the underlying structure of the mental sense representation is. The primary goal of this research is to capture the polysemy patterns (like *chicken* 'bird' and 'meat') and types (regular or irregular) and say which one leads to new senses and which does not. The aim is then to give clearer explanation of polysemy sense boundaries and the possible universality of polysemy mechanisms in language.

The planned research will make use of multilingual electronic dictionaries, called wordnets, in which every single sense has its own description through references to other senses (from *nets of words*). We gather such dictionaries for different languages and compare the networks in order to find out what is different and what is in common. To capture the polysemy in action we plan to investigate polysemy traces in usage, analysing sense distribution within a richly semantically annotated corpus of one of Sherlock Holmes short stories and its translations. This is the first project to analyse such large lexical nets in such detail with the goal of discovering the mechanisms of polysemy.

Lexical polysemy lies in the center of modern theories of meaning, since it is not possible to talk about word senses without considering their ambiguity, the boundaries between senses and the effect of context on shifts in meaning. We wish to undertake the proposed research, since it is still one of the unresolved issues in semantic theory.