Polysemy: the construal of sense boundaries

5.1 Introduction:
Polysemy is understood in a broad sense as variation in the construal of a word on different occasions of use.
(it will be treated here as a matter of isolating different parts of the total meaning potential of a word in different circumstances. The process of isolating a portion of meaning potential will be viewed as the creation of a sense boundary delimiting an autonomous unit of sense.)

5.2 Full sense boundaries:
Full sense boundaries are limited in the sort of sense units that include those that are the stock-in-trade of traditional dictionaries.

I. Homonymy and polysemy
Homonymous senses: given separate main headings and they are treated as separate words that have the same spelling or sound.
Polysemic senses: are treated as ‘different meanings of the same word’.

II. Entrenchment
As far as the present discussion is concerned, there is no difference between entrenched readings and nonce readings in respect of boundary properties or the nature of delimited units.

III. Boundary effects
Autonomy is meant the ability of a unit to behave independently of other units that might be construed in the same context.

1. Antagonism: attentional autonomy
The feature that distinguishes full sense units from other types of unit is antagonism. (two units are mutually exclusive as foci of attention, if one is at the focus of attention, the other is excluded.) see the example

2. Relational autonomy
the possession by two readings of distinct sets of sense relations. (sense relations are themselves basically context-sensitive construals: the more stable the relations are, and the more supported by conventional constraints, the stronger the evidence they provide for the autonomy of readings, and for the presence of a boundary.)
3. **Compositional autonomy**  
In a compositional process: the modification of a noun by an adjective- one of the participating elements will engage with, or take as its scope, only a portion of the meaning of the other. That portion will be said to display compositional autonomy, and it will be assumed that a boundary has been drawn between it and the rest of the meaning.  

*A steep bank*  
(stEEP in effect ignores the meaning ‘financial institution’)  
*A high-street bank*  
(the meaning ‘edge of river’ is cut off)

IV. **The nature of full sense units**  
What makes antagonistic: few components in common, belong to different domains, and to be of different ontological types.  
Antagonistic readings resist unification => on this view, full senses are readings that strongly resist any kind of unification.

Three relevant modes of unification:  
(1) the assimilation of two items as parts of the same whole  
(2) the inclusion of two classes as subclasses of a superordinate class  
(3) Englobement: the encompassing of two disparate items as components of a global Gestalt.

5.3 **Sub-sense units with near-sense properties**  
There also exist sense units that resemble full senses in many ways, but do not display antagonism, or do so only in restricted contexts.

**Facets:** distinguishable components of a global whole, but they are not capable of being subsumed under a hyperonym.

I. **introduction**  
Although facets display a significant degree of autonomy, they are rarely given separate definitions in dictionaries. (see example)

II. **Autonomy in facets**  
(a) Relational autonomy  
(b) Compositional autonomy: predicate can apply to facets independently.  
(c) Autonomous ‘cores’  
(d) Some miscellaneous aspects of autonomy: a textless tome and a tomeless text can
both be designated by *book*.

(e) Attentional autonomy in facets: change attention to different facets.

### III. Unifying facets

(a) prototypical co-occurrence
(b) Joint compositional properties
(c) Joint lexical relations
(d) Global reference
(e) Joint extensions
(f) Joint nameability

### IV. Why are facets not full senses?

we are free to construe the facets either as autonomous or as unified in response to other constraints. In the case of facets, we have significant constraints favoring a unified construal and constraints favoring the construal of a boundary. When this state of affairs obtains, whether a boundary is construed or not in particular circumstances will depend on other factors.

**The novel problem**

*A red book* is normal, but *a red novel* is a little bit odd. It seems that construing a [TOME] facet for novel is difficult.

At very least, we can say that the [TOME] reading of *novel*, in spite of the fact that it informs a good deal of our everyday interaction with novels, for one reason or another, is much more difficult to construe than that of *book*.

**Near neighbors of facets**

Many word meanings represent an association between ontologically distinct components, and it is in the domain of such associations that facets appear. However, the degree of integration of the components varies, and it appears that the construal of facets is favored by an intermediate degree of integration. Where there is a lower degree of integration, the components behave more like full senses, and where integration is higher, the facets lose their autonomy.

**Microsenses:**

distinct sense units of a word that occur in different contexts and whose default construals stand in a relation of mutual incompatibility at the same hierarchical level. E.g., *knife* and *card*. (see example)
Default specificity: when we encounter them, our first assumption is that one of the specific construals is intended, and we look for evidence as to which one.

**Why microsenses are not contextual modulations**
There are two strands: (1) involves evidence that the specific readings have too much autonomy, (2) involves evidence that the hyperonymic reading does not have default status.

Evidence for the autonomy of the specific construals comes from a number of sources: (1) they can show relational autonomy, in that each has its own independent set of sense relations, (2) they exhibit truth-conditional autonomy.

**Why microsenses are not full senses or facets**
It’s because they are unifiable under a hyperonym, and are therefore not, by the usual criteria, antagonistic. The reason microsenses are not facets is because facets are of different ontological types and cannot be subsumed under a hyperonym.

**Microsenses and facets compared**
Microsenses are in some ways a kind of converse of facets in that, whereas for facets, the difference of ontological type would lead us to expect them to by autonomous, but the default construal is in fact a unified one, in the case of microsenses, their close similarity would be expected to produce unified readings but, in fact, it is the specific readings that are in some sense the default case.

**A ‘latency’ approach**
This phenomenon exhibits a number of resemblances and parallels with the phenomenon of microsenses.

There are a number of possible objections to the latency analysis for microsenses:
(1) although in some cases an appropriate specifying expression can be found corresponding to a microsense, e.g., postcard, Xmas card and so on.
(2) The ‘openness’ of latency.

**Ways-of-seeing**
Ways-of-seeing do not correspond to distinct concepts, and they are not referentially distinct: they represent different ways of looking at the same thing.

The *part-whole WOS*: views an entity as a whole with parts (e.g. a horse, as viewed
by a vet).

The **kind WOS**: views an entity as a kind among other kinds (e.g. a horse as viewed by a zoologist).

The **functional WOS**: views an entity in terms of its interactions with other entities (e.g. a horse as viewed by a jockey).

The **life-history WOS**: views an entity in terms of its life-history, especially its coming into being (e.g. a book as viewed by an author or publisher).

**Semantic components and low-autonomy active zones**

The lowest (positive) degree of autonomy is shown by certain active zones and semantic components: these are units whose sole manifestation of autonomy is compositional; they do not constitute pre-meanings in the full sense.

**Contextual modulation**

Different contextual modulations certainly represent different construals and are not in any sense less important communicatively than different microsenses or facets.

**Autonomy: summary**

The construal of autonomy in a sense unit is the result of complex interactions among a variety of constraints, and cannot, in general terms, be regarded as having an inherent association with specific lexical items.

At the same time, autonomy itself is a variable, rather than an all-or-nothing property. No adequate account of variable word meaning can afford to ignore the property of autonomy.