Polysemy Analysis of the Preposition "Through" and Its Teaching Enlightenment Based on Image Schema Theory

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Abstract: *Prepositions are frequently used in English, so it is particularly important to use image schema theory to explore the semantics of prepositions and help students to learn polysemous prepositions. The preposition "through" expresses the spatial concept in English which plays a key role in providing the basis and foundation for people to recognize abstract concepts. This paper aims to use image schema to explore the spatial prototype image schema of the preposition "through", and the semantic extension based on spatial metaphor, then give classification examples, and propose teaching enlightenment.*

Keywords: *Image Schema; Prototype; Cognitive approach; Preposition through*

1. Introduction

Language is an organic system which is constantly developing and changing. Polysemy is the basic feature of natural language. Lyons [1] points out that there is almost certainly not any natural language in which one word has only one meaning. Prepositions, as a kind of polysemy, gradually extend from single meaning to multiple meanings in the long-term development, forming the phenomenon of polysemy of prepositions. Therefore, there are certain difficulties and obstacles for learners to master polysemous prepositions.

According to the view of cognitive linguistics, the different meanings of prepositions are related to each other, which shows the economy principle in language. Then, through the transformation of image schema, different meanings are related, and different spatial semantics are derived. Non-spatial semantics are based on metaphors of spatial perception.

This paper makes a polysemy analysis of "through" from the perspective of image schema theory, further excavates the extended meaning of "through", categorizes its extended metaphorical meaning, and then draws some teaching enlightenment from polysemy analysis of English prepositions.

2. Image Schema Theory

According to the consensus in the field of cognitive linguistics, in the interactive experience with the external world, people will form relatively fixed image structure in the brain, namely image schema, based on which various cognitive models are formed. So, people can categorize and conceptualize the knowledge of the world, thus forming the meaning of language. Therefore, image schema is the most important and basic part in the cognitive process.

Lakoff [2] believes that there are seven main image schemata: space, hierarchy, container, power, wholeness/diversity, recognition and existence. Image schema is usually composed of three elements: landmark, trajector and path.

Landmark, abbreviated as LM, is the reference; trajector, abbreviated as TR, is an entity; path, abbreviated as P, is the direction in which the trajector moves with the landmark as the reference point. For example, the basic spatial meaning of "up" is determined as "vertical upward movement or position", and its image schema is shown in Figure 1.
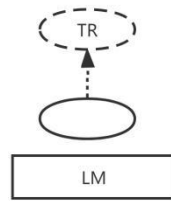
Figure 1: Image schema of UP

To sum up, image schema is an abstract frame structure formed by people's perceptual experience. The original image schema is spatial image schema, which is the basis for people to understand other concepts. Image schema is mainly based on spatial relations and then extends to other cognitive domains through metaphor.

3. Literature review

There are three stages in the study of prepositions based on image schema theory. In the first stage, foreign scholars mainly used image schema as a tool to study the meaning of the preposition "over", such as Brugman[3] and Lakoff[4]. The second stage focuses on literature review and schema innovation. In the third stage, scholars, such as Silva Brato[5] and Al-Muoseb Anwar[6], turned their research objects to other languages other than English and conducted bilingual comparative studies, which verified the operability of applying image schema theory to other languages.

4. Semantic Analysis of preposition "Through" under image schema Theory

4.1 Prototype meaning of the preposition "Through"

Because of its core position in semantic category, the prototype semantics of Through is regarded as the starting point of cognitive semantic analysis. According to Lee [7], The typical category of through is a situation in which a physical substance enters a container, follows a path within the container, and then exits. The space category described by Lee includes three concepts: enter, follow and exist. Its image schema is shown in Figure 2:
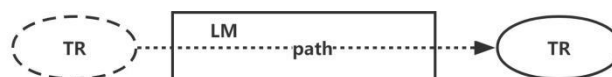

Figure 2: Prototype semantic image schema

In the figure, LM represents a solid space, PATH represents the path (through LM), and TR represents the body from which the action originated. Such as:

(1) The deer ran through the forest.

(2) The truck went through the tunnel.

The trajectors in these examples are "the deer" and "the truck", and the landmarks are "the forest" and "the tunnel". The trajector basically follows a straight path, and passes through the starting and ending boundaries of the landmark.

We can study prototype meaning of the preposition "through" basing on image schema. At the same time, we can use image schema to expand the meaning of preposition "through" from prototypical semantic to spatial metaphor, to obtain more meanings.

4.2 Extended semantics of the preposition "through" under image schema theory

Image schema not only constructs our spatial domain, but also constructs many concepts existing in our abstract domain. "through" can indicate the direction of movement in physical space and can also cover abstract cognitive domains through metaphorical projection to locate various mental activities.

The prototype image schema of "through" can completely cross out of the spatial domain and enter a more abstract domain through metaphorical projection. Both trajector and landmark can be assumed by abstract concepts.

4.2.1 Mapping from spatial domain to temporal cognition domain

Through metaphor, people map the spatial conception of "through" to the temporal conception, so as to obtain a new understanding of time, and at the same time, the semantics of "through" are expanded. Such as:

(1) The little girl cried through the morning.

(2) They talked with each other through New Year's Eve into the early hours of New Year's Day.

Based on the temporal structure mapped from spatial model, the semantics of "through" are developed to mean "from the beginning to the end of the time".

In the first sentence, TR is "the little girl was crying", LM is "the morning". The girl cried from the beginning of the morning to the end of the morning. The state of crying metaphorically ran through the night, as if through some entity. The beginning is the beginning of the morning, and the end is the end of the morning.

In the second sentence, TR is "they were talking". LM Is "New Year's Eve". "They are talking" continues New Year's Eve and into New Year's Day.

4.2.2 Mapping from the spatial domain to the mode domain

The spatial concept of "through" can also be mapped to the mode domain. It means to proceed according to something, which means to complete the action in the specified way, thus generating metaphorical meaning of "means" and other meanings. Such as:

(1) Timmy got his job through a newspaper advertisement.

(2) He succeed through hard work.

In the first sentence, the TR is "Timmy", LM is "a newspaper advertisement", Timmy got his work mainly by LM (a newspaper advertisement). In this case, a way can be seen as a path that must be experienced to reach a destination or to complete a specific task or carry out a specific activity.

In the second sentence, the end point is success, the origin is not success, and the path is hard work. There is no success without "hard work", and "hard work" is the means to achieve success.

4.2.3 Mapping from the spatial domain to cause domain

The spatial orientation relationship can also be mapped to the cause domain, where "through" can be extended as "due to". Such as:

(1) I lost my the job through the fault of mine.

(2) We missed the plane through being held up on the motorway.

In the first sentence, TR is "I", LM is "the fault of mine"; In the beginning, "I" didn't lost my job, but then "I" lost my job because of the fault of mine.

In the second sentence, the TR is "we", LM is "being held up on the motorway"; "We" wouldn't miss the plane at first, and because "being held up on the motorway", "we" missed the plane at last.

4.2.4 Mapping from the spatial domain to event domain

"Through" after the verb can also be said "accomplish something". The basis for mapping from the spatial domain to the event domain is "Actions are self-induced movement". The change of events can be understood as the change of spatial position: the beginning of a path is mapped to the beginning of an event, and the end of a path is mapped to the end of an event. Such as:

(1) The handbook guides students through the whole procedure of registering.

(2) Amy read through the novel.

In these cases, the progress of events is seen as a continuous process; The matter ends when the trajector moves from one end of the landmark to the other. In example (1), TR is "students" and LM is "registering". The start of the state is "the students did not register", and the end of the state is "the students have registered". The path is the procedure of registering. In example (2), TR is "Amy", LM is

"reading the novel". The start of the state is "Amy did not read the novel", the end of the state is "Amy finished reading the novel". The path is the procedure of reading the novel.

To sum up, "through" has its prototype meaning, and its atypical meaning is extended through metaphor, an effective cognitive tool, based on its prototype meaning, namely spatial meaning. Atypical meaning is different from prototype meaning, but they are interrelated.

5. Teaching Enlightenment

Four cognitive domains developed by the prototypical image schema of the preposition "through" express its different meanings respectively, and each of the different meanings has different usage. By revealing the semantic expansion of polysemous prepositions through image schema, we can express the meaning of words more vividly, dig out the inseparable relationship between words, and make learners grasp the multiple meanings of prepositions more easily and accurately.

In the teaching process, teachers can first introduce a preposition prototype image schema, and then analyze the trajectors, the landmarks and the path in image schema. Through metaphorical projection, we can get the projective domain related to the prototype domain. We can find out the spatial metaphorical extension of these semantics, that is, polysemy term, which forms the complete semantics of prepositions.

Teachers reveal the process of semantic expansion of polysemous prepositions through image schema, which can help students to deepen their understanding of prepositions. Therefore, in the teaching of prepositions, teachers should encourage students to memorize words through various internal connections established by metaphors and inspire students to use associative memory method to promote long-term memory.

At last, teachers should learn enough theoretical knowledge, arm themselves with theories, and improve their teaching practice with theories. What's more, teachers should set up the correct preposition teaching idea and recognize the importance of the preposition teaching, instead of using translation method to teach students.

6. Conclusion

From the perspective of metaphor research in cognitive linguistics, this paper uses Langacker's image schema to analyze the spatial and metaphorical meaning of "through". The prototypical meaning of spatial words like "through" is to denote spatial concepts. On the basis of this prototypical meaning, the metaphorical meaning expands outward from spatial meaning to non-spatial abstract meaning as a result of human's cognitive function.

This pattern of register expansion suggests that we should pay attention to cultivating students' metaphorical thinking ability in vocabulary teaching. Students learn the semantics of their prototype domain first, and then gradually expand into other domains which is more in line with students' cognitive rules. Through this teaching method, students' memorization pressure can be reduced, which is more conducive to students' vocabulary learning.

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