

The Spatial Metaphor of English Preposition based on Image Schema

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Abstract

In English, the most vivid word to express the space relation may be the prepositions. Metaphor especially spatial metaphor, the indispensable method to define the world, is the key to research the polysemy of preposition. So, the spatial metaphor of prepositions plays a critical role in people's life and it is used frequently. The author now presents the spatial metaphor of preposition based on the image schema.

Keywords

Metaphor; Spatial Metaphor; Image Schema; Preposition.

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, the research of metaphor is seen as a kind of rhetorical devices and figure of speech. Cognitive linguists like Lakoff and Johnson held that metaphor is a cognitive method for us to learn about the unfamiliar world. Spatial metaphor is classified as one of metaphorical concept that humans perceive a non-spatial concept on the basis of spatial concept. Spatial metaphor is vital in people's daily life especially the usage of prepositions in language expression. The author would like to discuss the preposition under the spatial metaphor with the help of image schema which equals important in human beings' life.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Metaphor

Some western scholars got the idea of metaphor from Aristotle argued that the status of metaphor in poetics and rhetoric. In Chinese, there are a rich history of studying metaphor for many years actually. They also considered metaphor is conceived as the rhetorical device and to some extent a kind of linguistic phenomenon that are abundance in literature. So, most of Chinese scholars just claimed that metaphor is the same as simile. But as time goes on, there are three Chinese words “比” “兴” “譬喻” (Cheng,2004:33) obeying the common principle that the nature of metaphor possesses which was given by Lakoff and Johnson.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) categorized the metaphor into the cognitive linguistics domain in their book *Metaphors We Live By* and deemed that metaphor is no longer a rhetoric device or simple linguistic phenomenon but allows to understand as conceptual metaphor that mapping is from a familiar, simple, and concrete domain to another unfamiliar, complex and abstract domain. The nature of metaphor they put forward is that people need to catch on the new thing or experience by making use of the existed thing or experience which they comprehended.

Metaphor is divided into three kinds by Lakoff and Johnson that consists of structural metaphor, ontological metaphor and spatial metaphor according to different source domain. Among these three types, spatial metaphor is more popular in people's life.

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2.2. Image Schema

To get an idea of how spatial expressions in everyday language can give us insight into the metaphorical nature of the concepts that structure our everyday activities, the author would make use of the image schema to illustrate. Because image schema exists in the various activities which the body of individuals take interactions and contacts anytime and anywhere.

On the other hand, image schema is specified as one of the central conceptual pillars of cognitive linguistics aspect. The role of the image schema is important understanding the working of spatial metaphor. To some extent, spatial metaphor is a kind of image schema.

And image schema indeed had made great contributions to explaining the polysemous phenomenon of English prepositions. The image-schematic structure of the spatial domain can map onto the non-spatial domains in that spatial metaphor is to extent a kind of image schema. There are three main categories of image schema that are the Container schema, the Source-Path-Goal schema and the Part-Whole schema. The container schema, not only referring to concrete objects but also abstract concept in our life, is made up of interior, boundary and exterior. The source-path-goal schema is composed of a source, a path, a direction and a destination. The part-whole schema includes a whole, parts and configuration (Sun, 2018:15). Three elements of image schema are landmark (LM), trajectory (TR) and PATH. Among them, TR is seen as the main part, whose spatial orientation needs to be determined while LM is static. PATH is zero when the distance between LM and TR is static.

Image schema provides people with structures for affluent mental images as well as the ways which they comprehend the physical world with the help of internal structure of image schema.

2.3. Spatial Metaphor

Based on the ideas of Lakoff and Johnson (1980:14), the spatial metaphor is seen as a kind of metaphor which presents a sense of mapping a spatial structure onto a non-spatial concept. The best cognitive domain is spatial domain in that human beings interact with each other in the space. When we project the special concept onto the non-spatial concept, spatial concept comes into being. Because space metaphor embodies the law of human cognition, which is of great significance to the formation of human concept. Spatial metaphor is the cognitive tool to guide people conceptualize the world. It has great universality for many languages. Just as the nature is not unique to certain group or community. The reason for this phenomenon is that space is the source of life. The linguists Halliday and Lakoff occupy the mainstream status of cognitive linguistics. The individuals make full use of the spatial metaphor, the extension of space concept in the material, to understand unexplained abstract conception in their daily life. Spatial metaphor is also called as Orientationl Metaphor, which maps source domain of spacial concept onto non-spatial target domain like human physical and cultural perspectives. There is a internal system in each metaphor. That is to say, if one metaphor happened, a series of similar metaphor will be generated. For example, "up" means from lower to a higher point so that it is used to express positive meaning in metaphor. Happy is up or we can say health and life are up. In the same way, "down" is from a higher to a lower point that means negative aspect. So sad is down.

The reason why the usage of preposition is complex is that most of preposition indicates spatial orientation and they are the reflection of the spatial orientation in language level. That is to say,

prepositions are most easily in metaphorical semantics. So, exploring the spatial metaphor of preposition is of importance for people learn about the research of English.

2.4. The Prototypical Spatial Meaning of Preposition

In nature, preposition indicates the space concept for people. Preposition can be mainly categorized as four aspects that are place, position, orientation and path by orienational relation.

The prepositions of place like “at”, “on”, “in” refer to some place where things exist or occur. The prepositions of position mean the place where things exist or occur is related to another place, such as “over”, “under” “below” and so on. Orientationl prepositions indicate the points for all direction especially the points at which an object begins to move or ends. For instance, “towards”, “up”, “from” etc. As for the prepositions of path, they describe the trajectory in which objects move or occupy. Prepositions like “across”, “through”, “for” and others all belong to this category. The author here just talks about them shallowly and will illustrate their extension senses by spatial metaphor.

2.5. The Spatial Metaphor of Preposition

The metaphor meaning of preposition exerts on recognition of space relation and description of non-spatial aspects. Cognitive linguists put forward metaphor and image schema theory for preposition which emphasizes the critical role of humans’ life. Polysemy form is the results of preposition based on promote spatial meaning extend outward in a metaphorical way and this is why prepositions are endowed with various usage in English.

2.5.1. Spatial Metaphor of Preposition Mapped to Time Domain

From the sequence of cognitive process, humans perceive the concept of space prior to the time. Therefore, people figure out the idea of time is based on the metaphor of spatial concept. Time was metaphorically conceptualized as a bounded space where things or periods occur. And those things or periods are seen as the points or parts in the bounded space. Given that the spatial meaning of prepositions, there are various usages to express time concept. For instances, in the evening, in ten minutes, the day before yesterday, beyond midnight, at the age of 20 etc. It is necessary to explain the time domain by the way of image schema. The move of TR presents the flowing of time and LM is on behalf of a period of time. TR move from the beginning to the end of LM.

Take the preposition THROUGH, for example. Preposition THROUGH can describe the special relation which refers to move in one side and out of the other side of a space. People obtain the new ideas of time by mapping the spatial concept onto the time concept. Similarly, THROUGH is endowed with extended semantic meanings.

The little cat slept right through the night. (2) She stayed there from March through June. In sentence (1), “the cat slept” is regarded as TR, and “the night” is LM. And the PATH equals the period of cat’s sleeping. So, the whole sentence means that the baby was sleeping from the beginning of night to the end of the night. In sentence (2), “she stayed there” is the TR as well as “June” is the LM. PATH is from March to June. So, it means that she spent there for four months.

The time domain of prepositions is derived from its spatial concept in metaphorical way.

2.5.2. Spatial Metaphor of Preposition Mapped to State Domain

Human beings observe the physical world where they take daily activities by spatial concept. Based on people’s daily experience, some similarities between the space concept and the state concept are generated. In other words, the space concept can evolve into the state concept.

Consider preposition INTO as an example. The spatial concept of INTO is seen as a concrete changing process from one place or thing to another place or thing so that it can be mapped

onto the abstract state domain which means one state change to another state. In terms of image schema, the state can be considered as the part in the container which is made of emotion and situation.

There are some examples. (3) Red came back into vogue. (4) Many companies went into bankruptcy owing to financial crisis. (5) He translates English into Chinese. In sentence (3), (4) and (5), the TR are “red”, “many companies”, “English” and then the LM are “vogue”, “bankruptcy”, “Chinese” respectively. The TR is in the LM, forming the metaphorical meaning of state. So, these three sentences express the state that red became fashion again and companies became lost and the language of English became Chinese. INTO extend the sense of state by spatial metaphor. Some other phrases like burst into tears, burst into laughter, fall into sleep and so on are all the production by this way.

Therefore, spatial metaphor gives prepositions meaning of state in that most of prepositions belongs to space semantic.

2.5.3. Spatial Metaphor of Preposition Mapped to Reason Domain

Space is the source place in which people experience the world and the cognitive thoughts create. Humans are used to connect one thing with another thing especially when something happened. And so there is a reason behind something that happens. If reckon the whole process that things happened as PATH, the reason why things happens will be regarded as an object in the path.

BEHIND mainly indicates that certain object is in the place towards another object's back. Sentence (6) I wonder what's behind this change of plan (Sun,2021:242). “I wonder what's” becomes the TR that was covered by “this change of plan”, the LM BEHIND here is metaphorized in reason domain that points out something doesn't declare and people cannot learn about it on surface. Hence, example (6) can be explained as I wonder know the reason why the plan was changed. Sentence (7) What is the motive behind this crime? The word “motive” is the TR and “this crime” is LM accordingly. Above these two sentences, TR always moves forward LM.

For English preposition, most of them can obtain the extension meaning for reason by metaphor. Humans always prefer to conclude the reasons of one thing by mapping their understandable concepts onto other things. The author here just cites the preposition BEHIND to illustrate it, some other prepositions can be extended for reason domain as well.

2.5.4. Spatial Metaphor of Preposition Mapped to Purpose Domain

Purpose domain is extended from spatial concept in the metaphor way so that people can understand well about the physical world. We could regard the whole process that we should do for one purpose as the LM, and the result of accomplish is considered as TR.

For instance, the average usage of preposition AT is to describe TR contact with LM on a certain little surface which means point. Besides, the PATH of TR is zero. When TR got to its destination, the action of “get to” has reached its goal. Namely, the goal of the action is seen as the whole process's goal. This is an example of what it means for purpose domain that (8) He has been working at his job the whole day (Xu,2018:129). In this sentence, all he has done during his working are deemed to be LM, and “job” is his target. So, the meaning of the sentence can be stated that he works all day in order to finish his job.

Hence, prepositions possess the extension meaning for purpose to some extent, which is importance of linguistics.

2.5.5. Spatial Metaphor of Preposition Mapped to Attitude Domain

Some scholars believes that the body of human is the prototype for spatial metaphor. People keep mapping their own experience and culture onto language expression to rich meanings in language. If persons show their attitudes or give opinion to others, they to some extent will choose metaphorical way to explain.

In its prototypical space sense, preposition OVER gives an explanation that means a certain object is in higher level than another object below. The two objects have some distance between each other and are in vertical.

In spatial metaphor, OVER got its extending meaning equals the world “prefer” (Liang, 2019:191), which means give more positive attitudes than others and so people can express their attitudes using “over”. Give a simple sentence (9) I like Chinese over English. “Chinese”, the TR, is mapped onto “English”, the LM. According to OVER’s metaphorical meaning, this sentence can be said that I prefer Chinese to English.

The author just uses a simple example to show the charisma of spatial metaphor. In fact, a large number of prepositions can also express attitude.

2.5.6. Spatial Metaphor of Preposition Mapped to Object Domain

Object domain is conceived as a significant concept for people connect the abstract world with their experience with the help of spatial metaphor as well. In terms of this metaphorical way that maps unfamiliar perception onto the concrete and familiar objects, prepositions play a key role to realize the process.

Take preposition FROM as an example to make clear. While FROM original senses express some place or direction that one object leaves for or express one the source of an object. By metaphor, the meaning of FROM is changed to be that someone who give or deliver things to others or to be the raw material for making something, which changes during processing. (10) I had a phone call from Linda. (11) Wine is made from grapes (Peng, 2011:629). Likewise, “a phone call” and “grape” are TR. “Mary” and “gapes” are LM. The dynamic spatial meaning of FROM was mapped onto object domain. So, the key point of these sentences are objects signified as LM.

Similarly, the static spatial meaning of FROM can be also given a metaphorical sense which refers to depart or distinguish two objects. That is because the static meaning points to the distance between two places. In object domain, the distance can be concrete as well as abstract. (12) Wild fruit kept us from dying of starvation (Peng, 2011:630). (13) Chinese is different from English. TR are “us” and “Chinese” while LM are “dying of starvation” and “English”. Sentence (12) indicates that we are get out of the dangerous place to the safe space. Sentence (13) shows that Chinese and English are two independent objects.

All in all, preposition sometimes have two types of semantic including dynamic and static aspects like the example FROM. So, if human beings want to learn more about the usage of preposition, they should master them for various aspects.

3. Conclusion

On the basis of these examples, preposition’s metaphorical extension is extended. The author presents the spatial metaphor of preposition with six prepositions in details. Above all, prepositions can be given a lot of extending meaning by mapping their space concept onto non-space concept in metaphorical way. The author here shows six different semantic domain, which are time, state, reason, purpose, attitude as well as object.

To sum up, metaphor as the mode of thinking and cognition gives a novel area to research the rules of language acquisition. The spatial metaphorical usages of preposition are developed in various aspects in English language. From the spatial metaphorical aspect, human beings are able to make use of the extending meaning to express their concepts and intention about all new things.

However, those domains the author talked about are just the tip of iceberg. Prepositions expand the simple prototypical space conception into polysemy network through the way of spatial metaphor so that they possess rich meaning in English. Make it clear well that how the rules of preposition in operate under the spatial metaphorical is not an easy thing.

As English major students or teachers, we should look for more effective ways to master the metaphorical usage of preposition. Because it can't be too hard to learn it for us.

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