Prepositions from the Perspective of Cognitive Study

Tiange Huang
Hengshui middle school, Hengshui, China

ABSTRACT: Prepositions as function words, plays very important role in English. Prepositions are deemed as very difficult items both in English learning and teaching, because the senses of them are quite complex and abundant and the usage and collocation of them are quite flexible and complex. According to the English corpus statistics, there is a preposition in every eight word in any English text. In American English Brown Corpus, 12.21% of the word is a preposition; in its corresponding LOB corpus of British English, there are 12.34% of the word is preposition. Thus, the preposition plays an indispensable role in the English vocabulary. At the same time, prepositions research plays an important role in cognitive linguistics.

1 GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Preposition, as a basic vocabulary, is used by humans to express the concept of space. In the English language, preposition plays a very important role. The earliest concept of English preposition is derived from Latin. Preposition, paralleled as one of the two mainstreams of English vocabulary, is the most active part of speech in English. The early research of preposition mostly focused on grammar. Due to the complex usage of preposition, it has been the difficulty of learning English. And it is also becoming a focus of study from grammarians and language researchers. But the early research is limited to the position and function of preposition in the sentence. Traditional approach to teaching preposition is to list the individual meanings of a preposition and then to be explained with the examples. However, this traditional method tends to cause the students to memorize mechanically the collocation of prepositions and other words, so it is difficult for them to flexibly employ the prepositions. The newly-born cognitive linguistics, on the basis of human cognition, provides explanation to linguistic phenomenon. It has its originality in terms of the analysis of preposition. With the rising of cognitive linguistics, people have a new understanding to the status of preposition in language. This paper employs the method of cognitive linguistics to study prepositional semantics. Cognitive linguists think that intentional schema and metaphor can effectively interpret the connection between the various meanings of preposition, but most of their studies focus on the theoretical level and ignore the application in teaching. So in this paper, the author attempts to prove the effectiveness of intentional schema and metaphor in teaching through experimental test.

2 STUDYING “OVER” FROM COGNITIVE VIEWPOINT

Choice of space preposition OVER as research subject, this thesis is to study the meanings of OVER from the perspective of cognitive. It will use intentional schema to explain the spatial meaning of OVER, employ metaphor to further interpret its spatial meaning in an extended sense, and then interpret the connection between the various meanings of OVER. And it tries to explore a suitable method for teaching Chinese students prepositions. Although language scholars at home and abroad have carried out a large number of researches on prepositions and obtained many achievements, but the research on application is not enough. Therefore, first, this essay applies cognitive metaphor theory to analyze a variety of meanings of OVER, and then adopts the cognitive semantic approach to teach prepositions. The research will be applied in teaching experiment on English prepositions of Chinese students, and the effectiveness of this teaching method can be tested through the data and information from the experiment. Through the major meanings of the image schema of the preposition OVER can categorize its spatial senses as follows:

2.1 The sense of above-across

For examples:
- The plane flew over the town
- The bird flew over the house
- Tom climbed over the hill
2.2 The sense of covering
   For examples:
   - She turned over the book
   - He turned over the board

2.3 The sense of reflexive schema
   For examples:
   - Roll the log over
   - Turn the cloth over

2.4 The sense of the excess schema
   For examples:
   - They stayed in Beijing for over a year
   - Over 10 people were killed in the accident.

2.5 The sense of the repetition schema
   For examples:
   - Do the things over

2.6 The sense of the Metaphorical senses
   For examples:
   - He has a strange influence over me
   - Jane still hasn't got over his graduate. Layout of text

3 STUDYING “UP-DOWN” FROM COGNITIVE VIEWPOINT

The original sense of preposition is mainly concerned with spatial orientation. And the spatial sense of the preposition has a strong ability to extend itself by metaphor. Thus, only the spatial metaphor is studied. Spatial metaphor refers to the metaphor with mapping is from spatial orientation as source domain to non-space domain (usually the abstract domain) as target domain (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980:14). They also point out that spatial orientation, coming from the interaction between human beings and nature, is the most basic concept that we live by, such as up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow and central-peripheral (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980:14).

3.1 Happy is up; sad is down
   I’m in high sprit.
   - You’re feeling up.
   - I’m feeling down.
   - I fell into a depression.

3.2 Conscious is up; unconscious is down
   He sank into a coma.
   - He’s under hypnosis.

3.3 Hearth and life are up; sickness and death are down
   He’s at the peak of health.
   - Tom’s in top shape.
   - Lily came down with the flu.
   - He rose from the dead.

3.4 More is up; less is down
   It takes me over an hour to drive there.
   - This machine costs the company over $1,000.

3.5 High status is up; low status is down
   I don’t want anyone over me, ordering me what to do.
   - No one under the rank of captain may enter the room.
   Spatial metaphor plays a vital role in conceptualization of human beings because most of the fundamental concepts are organized in terms of spatial metaphor. A lot of abstract concepts such as emotion, physical state, quantity, social status and so on are structured on the basis of spatial concepts. Take the up-down spatialization metaphors for example; many abstract concepts are formed.

4 CONCLUSION

For the study of prepositions, they argue that semantic extension of spatial prepositions is arbitrary. Prepositional polysemy is reduced to homonymy. To a certain degree, they even don’t pay more attention to the semantic extension of prepositions. However, cognitive linguistics attributes the complicated sense system of human language to the close relationship between human experience and conceptual system (Lakoff, 1987) and thus offers a completely different approach to prepositional semantics. The prototype theory is of great use in the explanation of semantic extension by them. The prototype theory proposes that the membership in a category is determined by the resemblance of an entity to the prototype that is the most central instance of any given category. The polysemy approach has been taken to study the sense of prepositions in cognitive linguistics. Since the 1970s, they have taken up the challenge of the alleged arbitrariness of prepositional usage. They argue all the senses of prepositions are motivated. In fact, the demonstration that prepositional usage is highly structured has possibly been one of the main accomplishments of the cognitive linguistics.

REFERENCES


