An Exploration of the Evolution of Chinese Lexical Meaning from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

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Abstract. The prototype theory, experience view and metaphor theory of cognitive linguistics is the basic theory, from the perspective of cognitive linguistics to analyze the Chinese semantic evolution phenomenon is a new research direction of modern lexical semantics. From the perspective of semantics, in all relevant meanings, one of them plays a role like the center or core meanings, and thus become the prototype of other meanings; other meanings are extended on the basis of it, thus forming a radiation category of meaning. Human's experience plays an important role in the process of language use. Metaphor is the basic type of cognitive model, and it is the basic feature of thinking.

Introduction

Modern Lexical Semantics Research tried to use other research results of other disciplines, such as took the use of cognitive linguistics and other disciplines to observe the evolution of semantic meaning, found that there are a lot of metaphors appeared in the evolution. Lakoff (1993) believes that discourse is an organic system that includes traditional metaphorical expressions. He believes that mental understanding involves two cognitive domains: source and target. The conceptual metaphor is used as a cognitive domain experience to understand another cognitive domain experience; a part of the source domain is mapped to the target domain, the latter due to the former and get some understanding, is the mappings across cognitive domains. Metaphor is a process of expanding the meaning of words by similarity, which is a projection from one cognitive domain to another.

The transferred meaning in the evolution is to transfer sememe A to sememe B, the key point to transfer the meaning is the similarity between them. When A and B two things have some similarities, which refers to A can also be used to refer to B. A and B in the language express the same relationship, and actually behind of the same relationship the similar relations of them hidden, metaphor is formed by the similarity of them, new sememe produced through metaphor. Metaphor is a cognitive way to use a specific concept to understand an abstract concept, and it is also a cognitive way to deal with similar relationship to the same relationship. Therefore, it is a new research direction in the study of modern lexical semantics from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.

Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive linguistics is a new discipline formed in 1990s, which is a frontier subject formed by the combination of cognitive science and linguistics. The philosophical basis is the experiential realism epistemology involved subjective and objective theory, empiricism for short. Empiricism emphasizes the importance of human experience. The main research content of cognitive linguistics is to study the cognitive structure and cognitive law of the objective reality in the human brain from the perspective of language. Cognitive linguistics is based on our perception of the world of things and experience, and to conceptualize it to do language studies. "Cognitive theory" from cognitive linguistics believed that human language abilities and other cognitive abilities are in separable, cognition is the foundation of language, language promotes cognitive development, and language
invests the results of human's cognitive achievement. The semantic phenomenon is actually a kind of cognitive problem, semantic largely restrict the grammar, grammar and semantics are inseparable.

On the Theory of Prototype Category

According to the theory of prototype category, the category is not based on the shared characteristics of the category members, but is based on the net of mutuality. Taylor stands for "attribute" instead of "feature". Attribute is the embodiment of things’ character in people's psychology and the result of the interaction between the cognition and the thing. (Wang Yin, 2005) some members of the category shares some of the attributes, some of the members share some of other attributes. However, there is no property is shared by all members, and these attributes are not just belong to the category. These overlapping attributes constitute a complex network.

About the basic category, is a level category has the priority position. A thing has different names in the category hierarchy, and the name of a category hierarchy has a priority, things begin to be divided based on this level. The level is the basic category. On the basis of basic categories, categories can be extended upward like super-ordinate category or downward like subordinate category. For example, "bird" is a basic level category, it has a upper category of "animal", under which there are subordinate category "swallow", "sparrow", "Dove" and so on.

From the perspective of semantics, in all relevant meanings, one of them is the center or core meaning, and thus becomes the prototype of other meanings, the other meanings is extended on the basis of it, thus forming a radiation category of meaning. The first one is the prototype meaning, other meanings are the results of the prototype meaning expending. The meaning is also from the specific meanings gradually developed into abstract.

On the Concept of Experience

At present, the development of cognitive linguistics is to diversify the situation, involving all aspects of language phenomenon. However, the essence of cognitive linguistics is uniform, the subject of cognition “people” is always in the active position, not the passive recipient. Human experience plays an important role in the use of language.

Empiricism emphasizes the importance of experience in human cognition and language, is aimed at "understand the meaning of the body through the cognitive activity of the body structure and experience to understand the meaning of". Here, the "experience" is not referring to some experience of the individual, but refers to the sum total of human experience: including the human body structure, genetic, physical exercise in the objective world, social organizations, etc. Human experience comes from the human social life, in the social life, the human brain is not one to one to reflect the objective world, but have a certain understanding of the structure and laws of things. Experience is the objective reality in the human brain in the cognitive world or cognitive structure, and cognitive linguistics is the impact of research experience on the language.

The main point of empirical realism is: 1. Thinking and the body are inseparable; it is rooted in our perception of the external world, subject to our physical structure and social environment; 2. Thinking relies heavily on metaphor, metonymy and imagery, and is therefore imaginative; 3. Categorization is based on the ideal cognitive model, which mainly includes the basic level category, and germinal class typical (the prototype above) effect. View of the experience of scholars through the experiment method of language users, please describe their idea of when to say a word or sentence, at this point, the speakers will say some of the objective, the experiential meaning, the meaning of this for the research of real plump and channel information provides a new way.
Experiments show that, when asked about the noun of the car, most participants pointed out that cars are not only similar to the shell of the box, there are four wheels, a driver, a few passenger seat, cars to be comfortable and convenient, and provides the convenient, independence and social status. These features are clearly beyond the scope allowed by traditional semantics, but it does form part of the understanding of the car. Shows that in the process of daily communication, people use the language of the meaning of all is not objective, one-way, but contains a human experience and experience, and more importantly, we can get information by using the method of observation and experimentation.

In addition to gaining experiential information through interviews with language users through experimentation, they can also be analyzed by solidification or metaphorical and metonymic words and sentences that appear in the language. These metaphor or metonymy of cognitive form of words or sentences, adding people to understanding and awareness of the things, it is generally believed that metaphor or metonymy is the familiar things to people's experience is transferred to the people are not familiar with a cognitive activity that uses a field of experience to illustrate and understand another field experience of a kind of cognitive activity, usually by the entity category transfer to abstract category. Such as: Time is money. Life is a journey. Death is departure. There are some similarities between time and money. All of them are very valuable. People familiar with the experience of money attached to the abstract concept of time, so that the concept of time with money as valuable as this layer of information content. It is clear that people's experience plays a significant role in the process of the use of this statement, and is manifested in the language through metaphor. Therefore, metaphor is a manifestation of cognitive linguistic experience and a tool for people to understand abstraction.

**On Metaphor Theory**

According to cognitive linguistics point of view, human language as a whole is a symbol system, the metaphorical thought the basic types of conceptual metaphor is a cognitive model, are the basic characteristics of thinking. Cognitive linguist Lakoff mapping theory, put forward the main idea is that the psychological understanding involves two cognitive domains: the source domain and target domain. Conceptual metaphor is a cognitive domain experience to understand the experience of another cognitive domain, a cognitive domain is part of the characteristics of the source domain is mapped to another cognitive domain is on the target domain, in conceptual metaphor theory, the mapping is unidirectional, is a specific perceived experience to understand the abstract concept of imperceptible range, is a kind of abstract reasoning. That means people use finite, non-continuous language units to express the infinite and continuous external world, often refer to the familiar, tangible concrete concepts to cognition, thinking unfamiliar, invisible, abstract concepts. Lakoff and Johnson divide metaphors into three categories: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor. The process of metaphor is actually a process of categorization, which is the mapping of people's experience. The premise of metaphor is the existence of similarity and relevance, and the new semantics is generated on the basis of original semantics. Many new meanings are generated by metaphorical cognition. When new things come into being, people are constrained by the laws of language. They do not infinitely add concepts and create new words, but will know the abstract concepts associated with perceived things, find the connection points between them, and using the knowledge of known things to express new concepts, new meaning.

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