The Study of Word Meaning Construction from a Conceptual Integration Theory Perspective

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Abstract. In our daily life, it’s very usual to ask what’s meaning of things around us, from which, we can know the significance of meaning, but how to know the meaning of things? Maybe it seems like a very simple question, but to answer it in a proper way will be very difficult. The answer has to change as the specific circumstance, such as time, place, and person. Meaning construction has been focused for a long time by linguistic, philosopher and psychologist. Since German philosopher G.W. Leibniz (1646-1716) offered the concept of possible world, a throng of learned people have explored meaning construction. In recently, as the rapid development of Cognitive Linguistics, scholar study meaning construction steps into a whole new stage, especially after Fauconnier (1985) offered the mental space.

As we all know, there are many ways to get meanings, such as hearing, communication and reading, but how to connect meaning with object itself? Blending space gives us a new way to connect meaning and object itself; at the same it offers us a space, in which we can construct meaning of object. As we have learned, every object has its own name, while these name need to connect with meaning, but how? In this moment, blending space offers a bridge again, and in a properly speaking way, blending space demonstrates a container, in which, the object is named and given a meaning.

Conceptual Integration theory focuses on the meaning construction subject, namely when people are thinking, working, communication, there is advanced and complicated mental process is working (Fauconnier, 1985/1994, 1997). Conceptual Integration theory is not language itself, while it is under the language dynamic object, and it is a conceptual packet, which is built for getting a better partial understanding when people was talking and communicating (Fauconnier & Turner, 1996:113).

Based on the collected materials, this paper shows the development history of Conceptual Integration theory. This paper demonstrates how to study meaning construction by taking advantage of Conceptual Integration theory.

Introduction

In our daily life, in order to get more information and knowledge, we need to read. However, how to read? We have to know many words. Thus we need to talk about word meaning, but how to construct is worth to researching. A word is no meaning itself, but we give it a meaning. The same question, how? In this moment, blending space offers a bridge, and in a properly speaking way, blending space demonstrates a container, in which, the word is named and given a meaning. Lexical seems simple, but it always is to be a big question to bother linguistics and psychologist in meaning construction. Taking advantage of blending...
space, we will construct the words with meaning. There is advanced and complicated mental process. There is a long history to study lexical meaning in the Western literary, philosophical and linguistic circles. Those study mainly focus on the formation, property, and meaning itself of lexical meaning, in which we can find a lot of materials, is studying. However, it apparently is found that is not enough to explore the lexical. We study it shouldn’t limit to the outer things; we also need to research the inner. First and foremost, how to construct the lexical meaning? It is the source of the lexical meaning. If you don’t know the source, you will be unable to reach the depth of the lexical meaning. Of course, the construction lexical meaning is not just to know how to build word, and then we study its way and rules, but also we study what kind of place we construct, and this place gives us how much conveniences. We called this place is blending space. The blending space gives us a new channel to research the lexical meaning.

Although the word meaning is conventional, there are new cues to back to the root how to construct word meaning. The blending space is a container to construct lexical meaning. This container sometimes will refer to phrase, sentence, and paragraph, and even it will refer to place, person, and reason. What’s more, the container will refer to situation. Of course, it is not enough to demonstrate the significance of the blending space. We need to divide several parts about the blending space to study the construction lexical meaning. Those parts include input1, input2, Generic Space, Blend. However, how to use the Blending Space Theory to analyze the construction lexical meaning is need us to consider. This dissertation will try a new channel to research the construction lexical meaning.

**Conceptual Integration Theory**

The Conceptual Integration Theory is initiated in Fauconnier’s *Mapping in Thought and Language* (Gilles Fauconnier 1997), which is the successor and developing of the Mental Space Theory, is major part of studying cognitive linguistic, and study a kind of universal process-conceptual projection. In the view of semantics, conceptual integration means that language users take advantage of some seemingly abnormal and abuse things or feelings tool spaces give rise to the shocking of readers, and then let reader to adjust their conceptual categories. In the view of reorganization, the essence is to build partial connection in two input mental, and then reflect both of them into a new blended mental space, and the blended space become dynamically the emergent structure. In 1996, Fauconnier cooperates with Turner to publish *Blending as Central Process of Grammar*, and completely and clearly classify the blending space into four parts, including two input space, one generic space, and blended space. All of those spaces take counterpart connection through cross-space mappings. In conceptual blending, generic space includes arbitrary structure from the two input spaces, and then become generic structure. Blending space includes the located structure of two spaces selective projection and emergent, besides including generic structure of generic space. However, how to create the emergent structure? The emergent structure is created by three ways what connect with each other. The first is composition, which is that connect the two input spaces reflection and then rebuild into new relation that is not exist before in real life. The second is completion, which is with the help of background frame knowledge, recognition and cultural pattern, and building construction is from input space reflecting into blending space. The building construction can be viewed a bigger and more complete part, and in blending space there are pattern of contriving construction, and forming a bigger emergent structure.
The third is expansion or elaboration, which is that blending space can expand, namely running the blend, and can be called that it can on the basis of itself emergence logic process recognition in blending space. Emergence structure does not exist in original input space, which reflects the creativity of conceptual blending. In the process of conceptual blending, any space can adjust at any time, not only input space effects blending space, on the contrary blending space also reflect and adjust input space. Fauconnier makes a conclusion, including five main characters, namely pass space reflection, partial reflection from input space, generic space, things blending, generic structure, which is a dynamic and creative recognition activity.

During our communication, if we want to express our feeling clearly, we will have to build a space, in which we will have a situation. As we have learned, we all know Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar.* Julius Caesar is an actor, but in real space Julius Caesar also is a real history person. When we want to talk about the specific person, we need give a space, in which we can limit the topic and elective person. Thus we can use Julius Caesar talk about the drama role, and also can use Julius Caesar talk about history person. When the speaker wants to build the mental space, the easiest way is to use space builder, as follow: in that moment, I was crying. Of course, in that moment is the space builder. There are many other slight space builders, such as prepositional phrase: in Len’s picture, in John’s mind, in 1929, at the factory, from her point of view and so on; adverb: now, really, probably, possibly, theoretically and so on; conjunction words: if...then..., either...or... and so on.

The Conceptual Integration Theory (Fauconnier, 1997) is the development and expansion of the Mental Theory. However, what is the Conceptual Integration Theory? The Conceptual Integration Theory is a series of recolonize activity what combine information from the different mental space. We can express it in a easy way. We can combine the two input space, and then reflect to the third space, namely a blended space what can be expressed in a dynamic way. As the author referred, the Mental Space Theory is the successor and development of the Possible World Theory.

Sweetser and Fauconnier have totally opposite view about the relation between the Mental Space Theory and the Possible World Theory., and they think the both theory have totally different concepts, while the reason is that mental space’s inner has limited specific information, and structure scheme in mental space can adjust as the topic communication. However, Lakoff (1996) and Saeed (1997:319) think that the mental space is viewed a possible world in world Semantics as the equal object in recognition semantics. With the development of time, the mental space and the possible space is not a totally different concept, on the contrary they have many links, and the mental space is the successor and development of possible world. The first, both of them offer a useful tool for understanding word meaning. The second, both of them follow the same or similar rule. Conceptual Integration Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998) points that if you want to get a reasonable space, Conceptual Integration Theory will have to a series of optional principles. Those principles include many parts. The first is integration—space have to include a space what is got in a integrated way. The second is topology—the ingredient in input space need have a good relation with the ingredient what reflect on generic space. In other words, the ingredient relation in generic space is the same as the ingredient relation in input space. The third is web—if we want to view the generic space as a unit to progress, we have to maintain a proper web relation between generic space and input space; In other words, we should keep the close relation between generic space and input space. The fourth is unpacking—if we want to understand the generic space, we must have a ability to make a unpacking progress and rebuild the
relation of the input space, pass-space reflection, all of spaces. The last one is good reason. If one part comes up in generic space, it will have a good reason to express why it comes up, at the same time the generic space have to make a connection with other spaces, and can perform relevant functions. From above, we will find that the Mental Space is the successor and development of the Possible World Theory, and the representation is that the Possible World Theory has the aid of situation that is far from language to express word meaning, while the Mental Space Theory stresses that the function of the cognitive structure of person in word meaning construction. Maybe just because of those disparities, both of them own the perfect complements, so we combine them will demonstrate the process of word meaning construction.

**Word Meaning Construction in a Conceptual Integration Theory**

The definition of lexical meaning is a generalized meaning about language word, and lexical meaning is property after which word comes up, namely what comes up when we communicate with each other, it will get real value of lexical meaning after generalizing. (Wangning)

From the long time, we have known that language is the center of association, and it is the base and core of linguistics study. However, what is the meaning; different person has different view and expression. Actually, those different understandings and concepts of meaning leads to that person have different understanding of lexical meaning nature. The traditional grammar thinks that meaning is the direct reflection to words, and meaning is the composition of words. Structuralism thinks that meaning is expressed by language symbol, and person creates meaning after knowing symbol. What’s more, Structuralism thinks that every word has its own relation, namely words’ relation-syntactical and sentence’s relation-paradigmatic. The lexical meaning is thought that it is passive and static concept, thus traditional semantics focused on absorbing and understanding of language content, namely language input problem. However, functional linguistics thinks that language input or meaning expression is just one facet of language association; actually, speaker (language output or expression) and the possibility of meaning expression is the main point of lexical meaning study (Yangyuchen). Modern linguistics has more studied about lexical meaning. Today we will know that lexical meaning is not fixed, and lexical and real world is not one-to—one conceptual relation. Meaning is buries behind the word, but it is a process that is person’s understanding and knowing. Above that, we found that lexical meaning is a unfixed dynamic problem. As the development of history, the process of society, and invention and innovation of hi-tech, there are many new things comes up, and then person give them new name with new word, so the word meaning is expand. The development of words meaning is not arbitrary, but it bases on cognitive methods of metaphor and monotony. Monotony has become one way of thinking; it is a special mental mapping, which is to learn the striking part of a person, object or even to understand the whole. It is an important method for human beings to learn objective world, which roots in people’s experience. Monotony is the internal salience in a same conceptual domain, and it is also mutual exchange among the whole and part, part and part in a whole. Therefore, when one part expresses the whole the meaning of the word enlarge. If the whole expresses part, the word meaning narrows. (Duanshiqi)

Word meaning has a feature that it can change as situation changes (Labov, 1996). Of course, in dictionary there are many words of science and technology just have one meaning, but those words are not often used in real situation, while the reason is that dictionary not
realizes that slight words are changing with the language situation difference. Word meaning is formed when we analyze the difference between word meaning with others meaning. We know word meaning is not from word itself meaning, but also from the word itself impossible meaning. When we say those values equal to concept, this sentence is understood that those concepts have wholly distinctive, and those concepts meaning is not agreed in the right facet, but is denied by other words meaning from the same part (Ferdinand de Saussure). However, word is the specific expression of language symbol. From above, word meaning is divided into conceptual meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning.

The word meaning also affects the blending space. When you talk about a word name, you will imagine that the word meaning will show us what a colorful world. In the ancient time, we named lake, river, sea as water, so when we said water, we cannot clear that what the real meaning from others. As the time goes by, there are revolted many different rich words for us to communicate with others easier.

Conclusion

In daily life, it’s very often for us to be asked the meaning of objects that we can build the communication through asking, thinking and responding, in order to developing language and social relationship. In the same time, we can know that exploring meaning is important and necessary by means of object meaning’s extension, from which we know that studying words meaning is necessary for learners and lovers in English. Conceptual Integration Theory helps students to understand and learn English easily, so it’s necessary to study Conceptual Integration Theory.

References


