Fictive Motion and Intersubjectivity in Phenomenology
Li-hong SHI¹,* and She-ru ZHANG²
¹Foreign Language Department, Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing 102600, China
²International Education School, Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing 102600, China
*Corresponding author

Keywords: Fictive motion, Intersubjectivity, Phenomenology.

Abstract. This paper tries to approach fictive motion from the perspective of phenomenology. Different from the research of Talmy, Langacker, Lakoff and Turner, Fauconnier, and Matlock on fictive motion, whose views are popular in this field, the concept of intersubjectivity in phenomenology is introduced, which gives new insights into fictive motion. Intersubjectivity can give more plausible explanations to fictive motion and is regarded as a cognitive motivation of fictive motion sentences.

Introduction
In recent years, the linguistic phenomenon that the use of sentences with motion verbs denotes states with, at least from surface, no motions has attracted much attention of researchers in cognitive semantics. Eg:
(1) That mountain range goes all the way from Canada to Mexico.
(2) The road runs through the dessert.
(3) Light shone from the sun into the cave.
(4) He was uplifted by her smile.
In the 4 examples, motion verbs are utilized to denote the motionless objects without life such as mountain ranges, the road, and the light. Light may travel from the perspective of physics, but its motion still is beyond the human vision. This recurrent linguistic phenomenon seems universal in most languages. It was termed as fictive motion [1] and subjective motion [2,3,4] or abstract motion [5] and Non-Actual Motion [6]. This paper will follow Talmy and adopt the term fictive motion since his categorization of fictive motion is widely accepted and has been regarded as the foundation of fictive motion research. According to Talmy, fictive motion is the cognitive bias towards dynamism [1]. But Langacker instead attributes the motion aspect of fictive motion expressions to the subjective motion on the part of the conceptualizer. So, different linguists pose different cognitive mechanisms for fictive motion. This paper will review the widely accepted theories in fictive motion first and then introduces a new concept of intersubjectivity in phenomenology to explain fictive motion expressions.

Fictive Motion
As the one of the founders of cognitive semantics, Talmy was among the first researchers who have systematically explored into fictive motion. Talmy first mentioned fictive motion in his paper “Figure and ground in complex sentences” published in 1978. He thinks sentences of spatial relationships and motion events are spatial-temporal homologies [7]. He expounded the system of spatial concepts in detail in “How language structure space” published in 1983. In 1996, Talmy divided the linguistic representations into 2 types in terms of the their differences from visual representations. If the linguistic representations in the literal sense highly conform with the visual images in observers’ eyes, then they are classified as factual representations. If the conformity is low, they are called fictive representations, like the utilization of motion verbs to depict the motionless state of an object. Talmy further classified the fictive motion into 6 categories:
emanation, pattern paths, frame-relative motion, advent paths, access paths and co-extension paths. The emanation can further be divided into 5 sub-categories: orientation paths, radiation paths, shadow paths, sensory paths and communication paths.

Talmy’s View
According to Talmy, human beings have quite a number of cognitive systems like the sensory system, memory, and language etc. All the cognitive systems are not independent from other each. Instead, they are correlated and can be regarded as a continuum. All the cognitive systems can work together under the guidance the brain and they are overlapping with each other, which he terms as “ception”[1]. Every cognitive system has its particular features which distinguish it from others, while each has the commonalities with others. Language is just one of the cognitive systems and when the linguistic representation is not consistent with its visual perception, the discrepancy may lead to the linguistic phenomenon: fictive motion. The discrepancy between the two cognitive systems on the same entity does not mean the two systems are contradictory with each other. Rather the discrepancy is due to their different perspectives toward the object. As a result, the motion verbs are employed to depict the motionless entity, while the stationary verbs can also be utilized to describe the motion event. But there are more instances in the former, while much less in the latter, which can only exhibit human’s preference for motion event rather than stationary event.

Langacker’s View
Langacker mainly approaches the subjective motion from the perspective of cognitive grammar. According to Langacker, constructing meaning is a process of conceptualization. Language is an important tool in depicting the factual reality and those relationships in the real world. But on many occasions, those depictions are not direct, or they are indirect, just as the conversational implicature and metaphor. More importantly, human often depict the actuality by referring to the virtuality. Fictive motion is actually the speaker’s mental scanning of the motionless entity [8]. Compared with Talmy, Langacker further extends the subjective motion from space to conceptualization.

Lakoff’s View
Lakoff’s exploration into fictive motion is mainly based on conceptual metaphor. In his viewpoint, fictive motion realizes mapping across domains and it is the linguistic representation of the metaphor FORM IS MOTION, whose source domain is motion and whose target domain is shape and form. So, fictive motion is in essence a conceptual mapping to comprehend the shape and form with motion. Sometimes, the metaphor underlay is so conventional that it has fossilized in human concepts to be clearly noticed [9].

Fauconnier’s View
Fauconnier explains fictive motion based on the conceptual blending theory. According to this theory, there are 4 mental spaces in human’s basic concepts: 2 input spaces, 1 generic space, and 1 blending space, which make up a conceptual network. To understand metaphors or difficult concepts, the listener has to map one input space to the other and together with generic space they are blended in blending space. Through composition, completion and elaboration, a new emergent structure is produced in the blending space, which is crucial to the comprehension of linguistic phenomena.

Matlock’s View
By carrying out different experiments, Matlock claims that fictive motion is actually the mental simulation of the motion in one’s brain. Her experimental results show that subjects dealing with sentences with fictive motion will use more time than those who do not, which can indirectly illustrate her point that people simulate the motion in their brains and the simulation takes time [10,11].
The Intersubjectivity in Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a 20-century philosophical school founded by Edmund Husserl [12]. It is primarily concerned with the systematic reflection and study of structure of the phenomena in the acts of consciousness. Phenomenological ideas are employed by some cognitive linguists to explore the linguistic phenomenon of fictive motion. According to Jordan Zlatev & Johan Blomberg [6,13,14], the fictive motion expressions can be more appropriately and reasonably explained with the phenomenal ideas, especially with the concept of intersubjectivity.

Intersubjectivity is a short-hand description for a variety of human interactions. It refers to the agreement people hold on a given set of meanings or the definition of the situation. It has been understood as the common sense or the shared divergence of meanings constructed by people in their interactions with each other and can be used as everyday resource to interpret the meanings of elements of social and cultural life. In phenomenology, intersubjectivity means intercorporeal, denoting the experience of one’s own body as another. Husserl’s embodied intersubjectivity is based on THE DUAL NATURE OF BODY: on the one hand as a internally perceived subjectivity and agency, on the other as externally perceived biological entity. This duality of body is emphasized by Husserl in his utility of two German terms to refer to body: Leib (profiling the lived aspect) and Körper (profiling the observed aspect). The lived body and the living body may coincide, as Merleau-Ponty [15] has described his double sensation:

When I touch my right hand with my left, my right hand, as an object, has the strange property of being able to feel too... [T]he two hands are never simultaneously in the relationship of touched and touching to each other. When I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but of an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the roles of ‘touching’ and being ‘touched’. [15]

The lived body is what one can experience as a living being in this world and the experience he may gain derive from his own acting in this whole world. At the same time, one can change one’s point of view, i.e. perceive oneself from the others’ point, from outside. The body that has been touched becomes an object to touch. The experience of one’s own body as one’s own subjectivity then is applied to others, which, through apperception, has constituted as another subjectivity. Clearly, this transcendental condition is a precondition for one to apprehend others as fundamentally oneself. Intersubjectivity is important in that no one in the world can experience everything by oneself. Hence, one has to resort to others’ experience to feel the world to gain more insights into the nature. Intersubjectivity also plays a crucial part in language, with which one’s experience could be transcended to others and which naturally will convey one’s experience by itself. This can be clearly demonstrated by the linguistic phenomenon: fictive motion.

Fictive Motion and Intersubjectivity

Just as it is pointed out, intersubjectivity refers to the shared experience based on the dual nature of body: the “internally” perceived subjectivity as well as the “externally” perceived biological entity [13]. How a human person feels as an individual towards an object could be transferred to others and at the same time be mediated by what other people think of the same object. Thus, an individual could also perceive an entity from the perspective of others which may give rise to the following fictive motion sentences:

(5) The enemy can see us from where they are positioned [1]
(6) She can see you from her window.
(7) I must look tall to her.

In (5), the view of the speaker has changed from his own to his enemy looking at himself. (6) and (7) are just like (5), with the angle changed. Of course, no one could jump out of his own body to view himself from outside. It is human’s imagination and sedimented experience that help to achieve that. One’s sedimented experience can be gained by physically experiencing it or by reading from books or learning from others. Take (5) as an example, the speaker may know that they could
been seen by the enemy based on his own experience that he had been to that position before, or he could learn from others that what could be seen from that position. As a result, he could claim as (5) does which seems to contradict the reality. When such sentences are used more frequently and by more people, they become so entrenched in language that one may not even notice the change of point of view in communication. For (7), it is not only the sedimented experience that works, one’s cognitive ability of inference also helps. It is not possible for one to stand in another person’s shoes to look at oneself. But one could see the difference in height and could infer what the speaker looks to her in her position. Therefore, intersubjectivity is one of the cognitive motivations of fictive motion expressions.

Conclusion

Husserl’s phenomenology provides a new perspective to the cognitive motivations of fictive motion expressions. As an important concept in phenomenology, intersubjectivity refers to the shared experience perceived by others. Its transcendental nature lends itself a cognitive motivation to fictive motion sentences. It provides a complementary explanation to fictive motion expressions in language.

Acknowledgement

This research was financially supported by the General Project of Beijing Municipal Education Commission (No. SQSM201710015004) and the 2016 Scientific Research Project of Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication (No. 20190116002/034).

References

