从语源学到语用学：
语义结构的隐喻和文化内涵

FROM ETYMOLOGY TO PRAGMATICS

Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure

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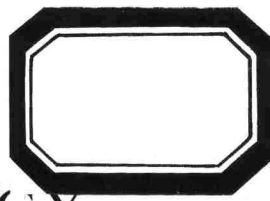*Department of Linguistics*
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出版说明

　　乔姆斯基的转换生成语法强调人类语言的普遍性,试图从语法原则与参数的高度揭开人类语言的普遍结构,更进一步揭示人类认知的奥秘。人类历史上似乎从未有哪一门学科如此富于创造性和挑战性,也很少有一种科学能够如此深刻地对相关学科产生如此广泛而深远的影响。这一理论在不断拓展的语料视野面前,在不断回应新思想方法的挑战过程中,不断地调整自己的思路和方法,跋涉了半个世纪,其所取得的成就不仅使语言学家激动和自豪,也令当代哲学、心理学、信息学、计算机科学、人工智能等众多领域的学者所瞩目。

　　乔姆斯基自称其理论远绍十七世纪法国普遍唯理语法。1898 年,马建忠在他的《马氏文通》后序中这样说:"盖所见为不同者,惟此已形已声之字,皆人为之也。而亘古今,塞宇宙,其种之或黄或白,或紫或黑之钧是人也,天皆赋之以此心之所以能意,此意之所以能达之理。则常探讨画革旁行诸国语言之源流,若希腊、若拉丁之文词而属比之,见其字别种,而句司字,所以声其心而形其意者,皆有一定不易之律;而因以律吾经籍子史诸书,其大纲盖无不同。于是因所同以同夫所不同者,是则此编之所以成也。"马氏是留法的,普遍唯理语法对他的影响同样是深刻的。

　　不过,在中国,普遍主义的思想也就此昙花一现,很快就湮没在强调汉语特点的思路中。半个多世纪之后,转换生成语法逐渐为中国学者所知,可是很多人都认为它不适合汉语语法研究,只有在国外的学者在这方面做了些工作,取得了不少成绩。这种研究尽管还存在许许多多的问题,但至少可以说明,汉语研究同样可以走普遍语法的道路。

　　马氏的模仿是显然的。然而我们今天的研究就能肯定不是模仿了么? 朱德熙先生曾经说:"长期以来印欧语语法观念给汉语研究带来的消极影响……主要表现在用印欧语的眼光来看待汉语,把印欧语所有而汉语所无的东西强加给汉语。""我们现在在这里批评某些传统观念,很可能我们自己也正在不知不觉之中受这些传统观念的摆布。

这当然只能等将来由别人来纠正了，正所谓后之视今，亦犹今之视昔。"其言盖有深意焉。然而问题其实并不在于是否模仿，而在于模仿来的方法、视角是不是可以得出符合汉语事实的结论。反对模仿蕴涵着一个前提：即汉语与印欧语的结构没有相同之处。但是今天的我们对汉语的结构究竟了解了多少呢？

任何语言都有自己的特点，这一点毋庸置疑。但是不了解语言的普遍性，也就谈不上特点，也就无所谓走自己的道路。而且，在某一水平面上成为特点的规律，在更高或更深层的水平上也许就不成其为特点，而仅仅是普遍性的一种特殊表现而已。

当代社会文化领域中多元化是主流，当代语言学理论也趋于多元。在西方，形式语言学不大可能再如以往如此这般地波澜壮阔，而是进入一个相对平静的稳定发展的时期，语言的功能方面的研究已经占据一席之地。在未来的一段时期内，语言学将是一个酝酿期，为下一个重大突破作准备。而在中国，语言学在长期的"借鉴"之后，也在思考如何能够从汉语出发，取得重大突破，反哺世界学林。语言学发展到今天，又重新面临着路怎样走这一根本问题。

不管下一步怎么走，充分了解西方学者的成绩，借鉴他们的思路和方法无疑是必不可少的。特别是对于取得了如此重大成就的当代西方语言学，如果不能有正确的了解，无异于闭门造车，要想出门合辙，不亦难乎？

北大出版社多年来坚持学术为本的出版方针，我们愿意为语言学在新世纪的发展尽一分绵薄之力。为了推动我国语言学事业的发展，在总编张文定先生的主持下，我们将原版引进一批高质量的语言学专著和教材，命之曰"西方语言学丛书"，以飨学林。引进的作品将包括语音学、韵律学、句法学、语义学、语言史、词源学、方言学等各个领域；既包括宏观的理论研究，也包括重要问题的个案研究；既包括形式语言学的方法，也包括认知、功能等视角。但不管是哪一种，都是经过精挑细选，庶几开卷有益。

我们期待着中国语言学的新突破！

In reconstruction we must deal both with forms and with functions. To reconstruct forms alone, without attention to their functional position, is first and foremost to create a hopelessly unrealistic linguistic situation.

Calvert Watkins, *Indo-European origins of the Celtic verb, vol I. The sigmatic aorist*

Most of the older morphemic splits – *that* and *that*, *it* and *it*, etc. – were perpetrated on relatively defenseless grammatical morphemes, in order to accommodate some hypothesis about syntax ... But with the advent of generative semantics, other parts of the lexicon have been exposed to attack.

Dwight Bolinger, *Meaning and form*

In our understanding of language in general, there seems to be a schema for lexicalization the sense of which is that the act of lexicalizing something is the act of presenting it as an established category of human thought. If a lexical item exists, in other words, it must exist as some part of a frame and must correspond to some part of a schema.

Charles Fillmore, Topics in lexical semantics

Preface

This book owes an immense and obvious debt to the Berkeley linguistic community. The largest debt of all is to my thesis committee: Charles Fillmore, George Lakoff, and Paul Kay. As advisors, and since then as colleagues, they have constantly added to my understanding of language, and have also been frequent sources of moral support and constructive criticism. Among my other teachers at Berkeley, James Matisoff first developed my interest in historical semantics, and Yakov Malkiel and Johanna Nichols gave much insightful commentary on earlier versions of this work. I would also like to thank Elizabeth Closs Traugott for her encouragement, criticism, and the inspiration provided by her work.

Numerous colleagues have given me the benefits of their experience and knowledge in commenting on various parts of this book. I have tried to implement much of their advice, and apologize for any instances where the work has suffered from my refusal to heed them. Chapter 2 has profited from the comments of Gary Holland, Dwight Bolinger, Eric Hamp, Tom Walsh, and Calvert Watkins. For comments on chapter 3 I am indebted to Dwight Bolinger, Julian Boyd, Gilles Fauconnier, Suzanne Fleischman, Julie Gerhardt, Mark Johnson, Annette Karmiloff-Smith, Robin Tolmach Lakoff, Iskendir Savasir, John Searle, Dan Slobin, and Leonard Talmy. Robin Lakoff and Don Forman have both been influential in the development of my understanding of conjunction, as represented in chapters 4 and 5; Jeanne Van Oosten's work on topicality was also helpful in chapter 5. And thanks to the Fulbright Foundation, my Polish colleague Barbara Dancygier has engaged me in a very productive dialogue on the subject of conditionals. Naomi Quinn, Dorothy Holland, and colleagues who participated in the Princeton Conference on Folk Models have given me a more complex understanding of cognitive structures. Mark Johnson and Mark Turner have in different ways deeply shaped my views on metaphor. I learned a great deal about semantic change from exchanges of ideas with Bill Croft, Suzanne Kemmer, and

Nancy Wiegand. Vassiliki Nikiforidou, as my student and office-mate, has been a source of many invaluable insights; and Jane Espenson and Michele Emanatian have both contributed thoughtful commentary. Claudia Brugman and George Lakoff have been kind and astute critics of both content and style, through all the chapters and at all stages of revision: I am deeply grateful to them for this, and even more grateful for their own illuminating work. And Orin Gensler has been inextricably involved in many aspects of this work, as friend, linguistic colleague, stylistic consultant, source of Hebrew data, informant for a useful example, and long-suffering on-line editor of an earlier version.

Cambridge University Press's two readers were very helpful to me. I must in particular thank Professor Frank Palmer for his generous and insightful comments, and even more for his own work on the subject of modality. The patience of my editor, Penny Carter, likewise deserves heartfelt thanks.

The Sloan Foundation, through its support to the Cognitive Science community at Berkeley, gave me access to computer facilities for on-line editing and printing.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Kathryn Klar and Brendan O Hehir, my teachers and colleagues in the area of Celtic linguistics. And among my earlier teachers from Harvard, I acknowledge my debt to Calvert Watkins, Jorge Hankamer, Judith Aissen, and particularly to the wisdom and kindness of the late Cedric Whitman. Among my friends, I especially thank the Uggla family for their friendship and support.

Debts to other members of the scholarly community are readily recognized by other scholars, but the debt of an author to familial support is just as deep, if less tangible. To my parents, who constantly fostered my interest in language, to my siblings and to my husband's family, and most of all to my husband, I can truly say that this book could never have been written without them.

Abbreviations

Br.	Breton
Cl.	Classical
Dan.	Danish
Eng.	English
Fr.	French
Ger.	German
Gk	Greek
Goth.	Gothic
IE	Indo-European
Ir.	Irish
It.	Italian
Lat.	Latin
LGer.	Low German
lit.	literally
MIr.	Middle Irish
Mod.	Modern
NE	New English
OE	Old English
OFr.	Old French
OHG	Old High German
perf.	perfect
Rus.	Russian
Skt	Sanskrit
Sp.	Spanish
Wel.	Welsh

Contents

1 *Introduction*

Language is systematically grounded in human cognition, and cognitive linguistics seeks to show exactly how. The conceptual system that emerges from everyday human experience has been shown in recent research to be the basis for natural-language semantics in a wide range of areas.[1] This study will make use of such a cognitive approach to meaning, and show that it can account in a unified fashion for facts in three diverse areas: polysemy; lexical semantic change; and pragmatic ambiguity. All of these areas have in common the fact that they involve one form being used for more than one function. In semantic change, a form historically acquires a new function to replace or augment its old ones; a question which necessarily arises here is what relates the new sense to already extant senses – are there regularities to be observed about the addition of new senses to words, or the loss of older senses? In the case of polysemy (the synchronic linking of multiple related senses to a single form) a parallel question arises: what can we say about the possible groupings of senses to be observed in polysemous words or morphemes – what, for example, differentiates them from the cases of unrelated meanings which share a form (cases which are termed *homonymy* rather than *polysemy*)?[2] In the case of pragmatic ambiguity, a form's basic semantic function is extended pragmatically to cover other referents or meanings: for example, we might say this is the case with a phrase like "How are you?", which arguably retains its original sense as an inquiry about wellbeing, but is also conventionally situationally *interpreted* as a greeting or opener for an encounter. The question in all cases is whether there are regularities to be observed about such mappings of form to multiple functions. I shall be claiming that there are, and that the regularities cannot be appropriately captured within an objectivist semantic theory, wherein meaning is thought of as basically a relationship between word and world – i.e, between a linguistic form and an object or state of affairs referred to or described by that form. However, the observed regularities are natural

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and readily motivated within a cognitively based theory which takes not the objective "real world," but human perception and understanding of the world to be the basis for the structure of human language.

I shall not primarily be discussing or arguing against specific formal-semantic analyses of polysemy or of meaning change. This may seem surprising to some readers, but it is largely the case that semantic work within the formal-semantic tradition has neglected the study of individual morphemes' meanings in favor of examination of the compositional-semantic structure of larger phrasal and sentential units. Earlier generative work concentrated on the extraction of relevant dimensions of a word's meaning (sometimes called "semantic features") with a view to the observation of what structural contrasts are represented by the vocabulary of a given language (see section 1.1). This approach did not focus on a full, rich understanding of lexical meaning *per se*, but on economical representation of the relevant contrasts. More recently, lexical meaning has been studied largely in the context of compositionality: for example, Dowty (1979), expanding on Vendler (1967), analyzes certain dimensions of the meaning of verb roots, and thereby succeeds in giving a motivated account of the different combinatorial possibilities of the verbs in question. There has also been significant interest in the combinatorial semantics of negation, quantifiers, and adverbs; again, the focus has been on the ways in which syntactic structure affects the relationship of these morphemes to compositional sentence-semantics,[3] rather than on the description of full, rich lexical semantics.[4] Part of the reason for this is probably that the researchers in question expected to find the interesting regularities in the area of compositional sentence-semantics or in the contrasts between word meanings, rather than in the structured interrelationships between senses or uses of a single morpheme.

Generative grammar has rigidly separated synchronic semantic structure from historical change: most formal-semantic analyses to date have thus treated meaning change as inherently irrelevant to analysis of the synchronic system (the latter being the relevant object of study). (Although some of the same attitude once prevailed in structuralist phonology, generative phonology has been more conscious of the need to deal with diachrony than has formal semantics: Kiparsky (1968) is a classic example.) Further, even in a synchronic context, there has, to my knowledge, been little or no attempt in generative grammar to give a principled explanation of polysemy structure. This is particularly odd in view of the fact that Katz and Fodor's original (1963) layout of a plan for

feature-semantic analysis of lexical meaning included as a salient example an analysis of the relationship between the different senses of the polysemous word *bachelor* (e.g., "unmarried adult male human, holder of BA degree, junior knight serving another knight…"). Bolinger's (1965) critique of Katz and Fodor makes it clear that their analysis of *bachelor* has little systematic motivation for its choice of features and their hierarchy, and therefore elucidates little except the authors' intuitions about how the senses might be related. Avoiding the difficulties of motivating one polysemy analysis rather than another, objectivist semantic-feature analyses within this framework have unhesitatingly posited separate lexical items to account for variation in a word's syntactic or semantic behavior, tacitly assuming that these (homonymous?) entities were no more closely connected than if their phonological representations had been unrelated.[5] Such analysts presumably trust that it will be possible to describe and explain meaning-changes or polysemy relations in any successful semantic theory; but the theory is nonetheless constructed without reference to diachrony or polysemy. Although few practicing etymologists would agree that these two areas are unconnected with each other, or that they are unimportant to semantic theory (imagine a theory of phonology which made no systematic effort to deal with the relationship between allophones or to account for observed trends of sound change), nonetheless there exists no fully adequate account either of meaning change or of its relation to polysemy. Recent research in both areas suggests that such an account is best sought for in terms of human cognitive structure.

What we would like to have is a motivated account of the relationships between senses of a single morpheme or word, and of the relationships between historically earlier and later senses of a morpheme or word. By "motivated," I mean an account which appeals to something beyond the linguist's intuition that these senses are related, or that these two senses are more closely related than either is to a third sense. For example, it is possible to crosslinguistically examine meaning changes and to observe what senses frequently historically give rise to what later senses. We would then argue that there is reason to posit a close semantic and cognitive link between two senses if one is regularly a historical source for the other. Or we can examine the polysemy structures of languages, and see what groupings of meanings are regularly found. If a language has (as does English) a *systematic* use of the same vocabulary for root and epistemic modality, we may conclude that, within the language's system, these two

classes of senses are closely linked. In section 1.2 I will discuss some of the relatively recent research which has adopted this methodology, and has shown us that it is possible to give serious, well-motivated accounts of the interrelationships of meanings. First I would like to briefly address the question of the cognitive reality of these semantic structural claims.

It should not be a controversial claim that relationships between linguistic form and function reflect human conceptual structure and general principles of cognitive organization. It becomes controversial only in the context of a particular philosophical tradition's understanding of language. Traditional truth-conditional semantic analysis focuses on logical relations such as inference virtually to the exclusion of such linguistic concerns as why the same word might be used to mean very different things. If the meaning of a word or a sentence reduces to a set of conditions which must be met (in the objective real world) for that word to be applicable or for that sentence to be true, then obviously inference (e.g., if these conditions are met, what other conditions do I know must also be met?) is a fruitful area of research, while polysemy is a nearly impenetrable area simply by virtue of the fact that multiple senses of polysemous forms just don't seem to share objective truth-conditions. (For example, there are no necessary *objective* truth-conditions shared between the *see* in *I see the cat on the mat* and *I see what you mean* – the latter can be said equally felicitously by someone wearing a blindfold preventing physical visual perception.) By viewing meaning as the relationship between words and the world, truth-conditional semantics eliminates cognitive organization from the linguistic system. And to a philosopher concerned with abstract truth, the important question is indeed perhaps whether the sort of thing we call "snow" has the color we call "white" in the real world (hence the sentence "Snow is white" will be true rather than false). For the truth of "Snow is white," it may not seem to matter much whether "real world" means an objective world independent of human experience, or an experienced world where *snow* and *white* refer to our experiential classes of objects and colors: in either case, most people are likely to agree on the truth value of the sentence.

But suppose that, instead of *white*, I take Latin *candidus* as my sample word. *Candidus* meant, among other things, "white" and "bright"; but it also meant "open, honest" – as in its English descendent, *candid*. But it seems unlikely that there is any objective correlation in the real world between white things and honest things, or any larger objectively chosen category which includes just these and no others. The "real world," if we

mean one which is outside of human cognitive organization, is not so constructed as to group the white with the honest. Rather, it is our cognitive structuring of the world which can create such an identification. And if language uses a word for our cognitive category, then language cannot be described in terms of pure fit between Word and World: unless, by World, we mean our experiential picture of the world.

The choice of which words express which concepts is arbitrary from a truth-conditional point of view. The so-called "arbitrariness of the sign" is a point on which structural linguistics in the Saussurean tradition converges with logical semantics in the Fregean tradition. If all uses of signs are taken as arbitrary, then multiple uses of the same sign must also be seen as arbitrary, and so the relationships between them might be assumed to be uninteresting. Saussure, who was interested in polysemy and in meaning-change, would not himself have taken this simplistic a view. However, it was probably necessary to firmly establish the arbitrary nature of linguistic convention, in order to liberate linguistics from futile attempts to see onomatopoeia at the root of all linguistic usage. We should now be ready to go back to the examination of iconicity and other motivating factors in the choice of linguistic forms, without any danger of losing our understanding of conventionality.

Saussure (1959 [1915]) was right, of course, that there is an essential arbitrary component in the association of words with what they mean. For example, in *I see the tree*, it is an arbitrary fact that the sequence of sounds which we spell *see* (as opposed to the sound sequence spelled *voir* in French) is used in English to refer to vision. But, *given this arbitrary fact*, it is by no means arbitrary that *see* can also mean "know" or "understand," as in *I see what you're getting at*. There is a very good reason why *see* rather than, say, *kick* or *sit*, or some other sensory verb such as *smell*, is used to express knowledge and understanding. Such motivated relationships between word meanings are as much a part of the study of semantics as inference. But the fact that *see* can also mean "know" has little to do with truth conditions; in any objective truth-conditional understanding of vision and knowledge, seeing is accomplished by visual neural response to physical data, while knowing (whatever it may be) has no particular dependence on the visual modality. One sees objects and events; one knows propositions, and not always because of past visual input.

Why then is *see* (as opposed to *kick* or *feel* or *smell*) used to mean knowledge? We are intuitively certain that the choice is not random, that

see is a well-motivated choice for extension to the sense of knowledge. Our intuition is confirmed by systematic relationships with other lexical items. I will discuss some of these in detail later, but consider the sequence "Do you believe in baptism" "Believe? Hell, I've *seen it!*" If seeing means you *know*, in our understanding of the world, then (since believing is less sure than knowing) it's silly to say we just believe something for which we have direct visual evidence.[6] The answer thus has to do with conceptual organization: it is our understanding that vision and knowledge are related. For this reason, we need a theory of semantics that can take conceptual organization into account.

There are at least two reasons why many theorists have been reluctant to take seriously the idea that language is shaped by cognition. One reason is that linguists have hoped to be able to analyze language relatively independently of the rest of human abilities. I shall return to this issue, but all of the recent research to be discussed in section 1.2, plus examples like *see* and *candidus*, argue that our linguistic system is inextricably interwoven with the rest of our physical and cognitive selves. We can view this with terror at our inability to separate out our data and analyze it as independent of psychology or anthropology. Or we can rejoice in the fact that many aspects of language become much simpler when viewed in the collective light of the human sciences: the study of human culture and cognition is frighteningly broad as a field, but there is no point in pretending the autonomy of language if such a pretense obscures real explanatory possibilities.

The second reason for skepticism is the Sapir–Whorf problem:[7] it may not only be true that our cognitive system shapes our language, but – if such a relationship exists – why not the other direction as well? Perhaps our acquired linguistic categories shape our cognitive system, too. Evidence in this area has tended to be negative. The difference between color-categorization systems in different linguistic communities, for example, was once touted as an example of linguistically based cultural variation, and has now been shown to be a relatively minor and systematic variation, existing against a backdrop of deep similarities. We all *do* see color the same way, whatever words we use for colors, and the possible meanings of color words are limited by our common physical perceptions (Berlin and Kay 1969; Kay and MacDaniel 1978; Kay and Kempton 1984). Analysts of language and culture have become cautious about assuming isomorphism between cognitive and linguistic categories, but particularly about assuming that language shapes culture and cognition (it