

国际认知语言学经典论丛

Cognitive Linguistics

Classic Papers Series

Series Editor: Dingfang Shu (束定芳)

Motivation and Inference: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach

认知语言学视野中的动机与推理

Klaus-Uwe Panther and
Linda L. Thornburg

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丛书的出版，将极大方便国内教师、学生和研究者直接接触认知语言学领域原版经典论文。这些论文散见于各个时期的各种期刊或图书中，经过作者的精心搜集、整理并选定刊出，相信一定会发挥它们应有的作用，从而为促进我国语言学研究做出新的贡献。

Foreword

Most of the basic ideas and fundamental principles of Cognitive Linguistics appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s in papers by Fillmore, Langacker, Lakoff, Talmy, etc. But graduate students of linguistics in China often complain that access to these “classic papers” was very difficult if not impossible, due to the fact many of them were scattered in different journals or book chapters, and some published in some obscure journals. To provide students of Cognitive Linguistics and other interested readers with a more accessible anthology of materials that not only documented the path of development of early Cognitive Linguistics, but also presented important principles and arguments of cognitive perspectives on language, I thought of editing a series of collections of classic papers by the founders and forerunners of Cognitive Linguistics. The first person I contacted was Ronald Langacker, whose participation and support, I believe, was crucial for the success of the project, as he is widely recognized as one of the most important founders of the Cognitive Linguistics movement. Ron, though occupied with many other commitments, fully supported the idea and promised to contribute to the series. And I went on to contact all the others whose work I thought made important contributions to the emergence, development, propagation and diversification of Cognitive Linguistics, including Miriam R. L. Petruck, one of Charles Fillmore’s students, without whose help, the volume by Fillmore would be practically impossible.

I must add that Ron was the first who completed the collection and offered to write an introduction to each of the papers collected in his volume to provide the readers with some background information about

the papers and explanations about some of the modifications that might have been made later on. This has become an attractive model that other contributors more or less followed in their own volumes.

My special thanks go to Dirk Geeraerts, whom I consulted on how the series should be organized, and who supported the project by contributing a volume of his own.

I should also give my thanks to Sun Jing, Director of the Academic Department of Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, who professionally and meticulously managed the whole project and patiently corresponded with all the authors and coordinated everything throughout the process.

Dingfang Shu
Professor, Shanghai International Studies University
Chief Editor, *Journal of Foreign Languages*
President, China Cognitive Linguistics Association (CCLA)

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We would like to express our appreciation to Professor Dingfang Shu and to Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press for giving us the opportunity to republish some of our research, which, we hope, will be of use in academic teaching and will inspire linguists in China to develop and pursue new research projects within a cognitive linguistic and pragmatic paradigm.

Klaus-Uwe Panther
Linda L. Thornburg
Kendal, United Kingdom
November 2016

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Motivation and inference in the construction of meaning

1. Introduction

The chapters in this book are slightly revised contributions by the present authors from various collective volumes and journal articles covering a period between 1998 and 2014. What all of these studies have in common is a focus on the *motivation* of language structure and use and on speakers' *implicational* and hearers' *inferential* work in the production and comprehension of conceptual and pragmatic meaning. Since the notions of cognition, motivation, and inference play a crucial role in every chapter of this book, we believe that a brief introduction to these key concepts, which is presented in Sections 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3, would be helpful to our readers. The chapters of the book are summarized in Section 2. In Section 3, we provide additional empirical evidence of the workings of motivation and (invited) inference before concluding this introductory chapter in Section 4.

1.1. *Cognition*

We take the notions of motivation and inference to be embedded in the larger framework of cognition. Following Panther and Radden (2011: 2), we regard human cognition as a system of “higher-level mental

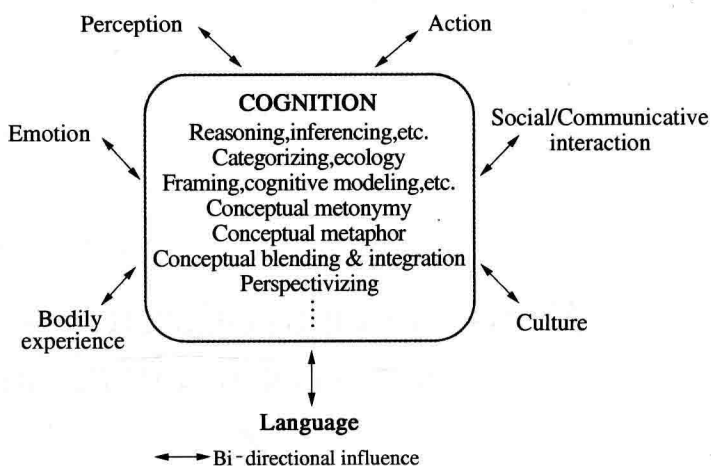


Figure 0.1. *Cognition and its interaction with other human systems* (adapted slightly from Panther and Radden 2011: 2)

processes”. These include faculties such as reasoning, inferencing, and categorizing — in particular, conceptual metonymy and metaphor — which are regarded as figures of thoughts in cognitive linguistics. The components of cognition interact with “peripheral systems” such as bodily experience, emotion, perception, action, communicative interaction, culture, and, last but not least, *language* (see Figure 0.1).

The double-headed arrows in Figure 0.1 signify that the relationship between cognition and the peripheral systems, including language, is bi-directional. Regarding the link between language and cognition, the diagram expresses the assumption that cognition may be shaped by language, a hypothesis that goes back to at least Wilhelm von Humboldt (1979[1830–35]) and was revived in the 20th century by the American linguists Edward Sapir and especially Benjamin Lee Whorf (see e.g. Whorf 1964). However, conversely, language may also be impacted by cognition, and via cognition, by the peripheral systems diagrammed in Figure 0.1. When this is the case, we speak of *linguistic motivation*, which is one of the major themes of this book (see Panther and Radden 2011: 8).

1.2. Inviting and interpreting inferences

A language is commonly viewed as a relatively stable system of lexicogrammatical resources or a *linguistic code*. According to one common view, in an act of linguistic communication a speaker *encodes* a thought acoustically according to the rules of the linguistic code and transmits it to a hearer, who, on the basis of her knowledge of the same code, *decodes* the speaker's message. As pointed out by e.g. Sperber and Wilson (1995: Ch.1), this model of communication is too simplistic in not taking into account that, beyond encoding and decoding meanings according to the instructions of the code, the construction of meanings involves language users' cognitive activities of *inviting inferences* (i.e. implying) and *interpreting inferences*, respectively. Language users are usually not consciously aware that they routinely apply spontaneous and swift reasoning processes in the construction of meaning.^[1]

The relationship between a meaning that is *explicitly coded* by grammatical and lexical devices and its *implicit* content, i.e. what is implied by the speaker and has to be inferred by the hearer, is diagrammed in Figure 0.2.

Among the inferential devices that are employed by language users in the construction of implicit meanings, one figure of thought and language is of especial significance in this book: metonymy. We regard metonymy as

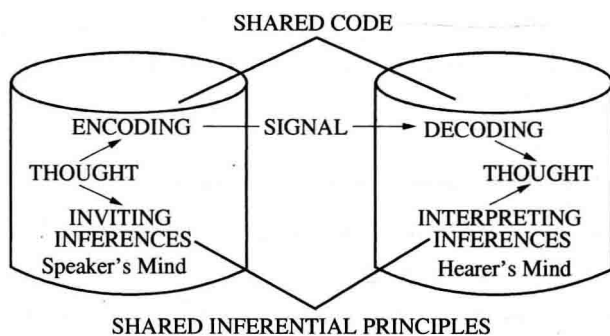


Figure 0.2. *Inviting and interpreting inferences in language use* (adapted slightly from Panther 2016: 110)

a conceptual-pragmatic inferential relation between a source meaning and a target meaning within the same conceptual frame (see in particular the chapters in Part I of this volume for a justification of our view). In line with this conception, in Table 0.1 we succinctly present a view of metonymy as a piece of *abductive* reasoning, where the term ‘abduction’ is inspired by the American philosopher and semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce (see e.g. Paavola 2005: 150 on Peirce’s notion of “abductive instinct” and Buchler 1955: 151).

Table 0.1. Correspondences between language-independent abductive reasoning (Peirce) and an abductively motivated interpretation strategy for metonymies (adapted from Panther and Thornburg Forthcoming)

PEIRCE:	PANTHER & THORNBURG:
abductive reasoning	metonymic reasoning
Surprising fact C	Contextually/situationally, a linguistic unit LU is <i>incongruent</i> with the meaning SENSE ₁
If A, C is a “matter of course”	If SENSE ₁ is shifted to SENSE ₂ , LU becomes <i>congruent</i> with the context/situation in which it occurs
A is true	SENSE ₂ is the intended interpretation

According to Table 0.1, a metonymic reading is typically triggered when a conceptual-pragmatic “incongruence” arises between the literal (source) meaning of a linguistic item and the surrounding linguistic context and/or the extralinguistic situation. Metonymy then serves as a means of conceptual-pragmatic *adjustment* that establishes congruence between the target meaning of the metonymy and the discursive context and/or situation.^[2]

1.3. *The linguistic sign: Convention, motivation, and inference*

The founder of European structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure (1995[1916]) (see Chapter 1, this volume), is usually credited with the insight that the linguistic sign is *arbitrary*, i.e. unmotivated. Saussure’s dictum applies to numerous monomorphemic words in the lexicon of natural languages since these normally do not exhibit any natural

connection between their form and their content.^[3] For the present-day language user, there is no motivated (e.g. iconic) relationship between the forms English *dog* [dɒg], German *Hund* [hʊnt], French *chien* [ʃjɛ̃], Italian *cane* ['ka:ne] and their denotatum 'dog'; in this respect, the relationship between the form and the content of these words is an arbitrary, or as we prefer to put it, *unmotivated* convention.

However, Saussure also emphasized (see Chapter 2, this volume) that morphosyntactically complex linguistic signs, e.g. constructions in the sense of Goldberg (1995, 2006), are typically *relatively motivated*. The chapters in this book are indeed guided by the assumption that significant numbers of linguistic phenomena are partially motivated by a linguistic source and *language-independent factors*, i.e. factors that shape not only language but other sign systems as well, such as pictorial representations or gestures.^[4] One such language-independent factor is the ability of normal language users to invite and to draw inferences regarding intended meanings. We call meanings that are not to be taken literally but are pragmatically derived through inferences *inferentially motivated*.

The following motivational relationships between form and content/function of linguistic signs can be distinguished (see Panther 2008: 6):

- (1) a. A linguistic form is motivated by its content/function: $\text{CONTENT} > \text{FORM}$.
- b. A content/function is motivated by its form: $\text{FORM} > \text{CONTENT}$.
- c. A content/function is motivated by another content/function: $\text{CONTENT}_1 > \text{CONTENT}_2$.
- d. A form is motivated by another form: $\text{FORM}_1 > \text{FORM}_2$.

Examples for the motivational relations in (1) are given in section 3. For a detailed discussion of the nature of motivation and other extra-linguistic motivational factors, the reader is referred to Chapter 2 of this volume (see also Radden and Panther 2004, Panther 2008, and Panther and Radden 2011). Suffice it to say here that e.g. the relation between two contents, as in the case of polysemy, is *inferentially motivated* by figures

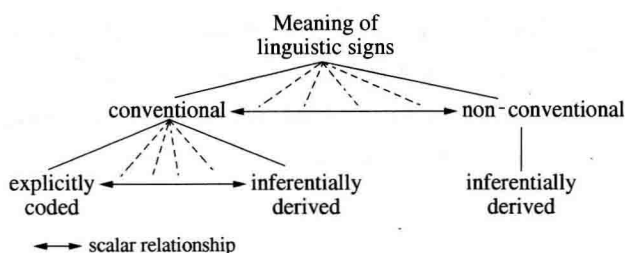


Figure 0.3. *Convention and inference*

of thought such as metaphor, metonymy, or some other inferential schema such as conversational implicature.

Another relevant distinction in this context is that between *conventionally* used vs. *non-conventionally* used linguistic signs, on the one hand, and *explicitly* coded vs. *inferentially* derived meanings, on the other. Importantly, the oppositions 'conventional' vs. 'non-conventional' and 'explicitly coded' vs. 'inferentially derived' are not conceived of as binary, but as poles on a continuum with intermediate values. The relation between convention and inference can be diagrammed as in Figure 0.3.

In Table 0.2 examples are given that illustrate the contrast between conventional vs. non-conventional, explicitly coded vs. inferentially motivated, and transparently vs. non-transparently (i.e. diachronically) motivated senses.

Table 0.2. *Convention and inferential motivation where S = Speaker, H = Hearer, and '<' = 'diachronically derived from'*

TYPE OF SIGN	EXAMPLE	ILLOCUTIONARY MEANING
<i>Conventional:</i> explicit coding	(i) Who do you think will be the next president?	<i>Explicit Question:</i> S wants to know who H thinks will be the next president.
	(ii) Can you lift your arm?	<i>Explicit Question:</i> S asks H whether H is able to lift H's arm.

(continued)

TYPE OF SIGN	EXAMPLE	ILLOCUTIONARY MEANING
<i>Conventional:</i> transparent inferential motivation	(iii) Who do you think you are? (A public intellectual?)	<i>Indirect Expressive:</i> S strongly disapproves of H's pretense to being a "public intellectual".
	(iv) Can you (please) lift your arm?	<i>Indirect Request:</i> S asks H to lift H's arm.
<i>Conventional:</i> non-transparent diachronic motivation	(v) Goodbye < God be with ye	Bidding farewell
	(vi) hiya ['harə] < How are you? + hi	Greeting
<i>Non-conventional:</i> transparent inferential motivation	(vii) The door is open.	<i>Indirect Request:</i> S asks H to close the door.
	(viii) Are you on holiday?	<i>Indirect Statement:</i> S claims that H has a non-local or foreign accent.

Some brief comments on the examples given in Table 0.2 are in order. Sentences (i) and (ii) can be used as *literal* conventional questions of information. In contrast, the interpretation of utterance (iii), which is literally a question, indirectly functions as an expressive speech act, which is inferentially derivable from an underlying cultural or folk model of rational thinking. In the given context, the speaker assumes that the hearer's behavior is an indication of some cognitive dysfunction (note the use of the verb form *think*) — hence its emotion-charged meaning (see Panther and Thornburg 2017a, b). Example (iv) is a classic case of an indirect speech act, i.e. an indirect request, as indicated by the adverb *please*. Despite their indirectness, in English, (iii) and (iv) are conventionally used to perform kinds of expressive and directive illocutionary acts, respectively. Their pragmatic meanings are (transparently) motivated by inference. With regard to speech acts like (iii), it was already observed by Searle (1975) that a question about the hearer's ability is often understood as a question about a preparatory condition for directive speech acts. There is thus a strong motivational