Developing Metaphoric Concepts with Constructions: A Corpus Based Analysis

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In the course of concept development motivated by metaphors, how the "right" schemata are consistently extracted, elaborated, and applied to further mappings is an important issue. Fauconnier (1997) and Fauconnier and Turner (2002) discuss the diachronic development of metaphors within the conceptual blending theory and specify six stages of conceptual development: (a) analogy and schema induction; (b) categorization and new conceptual structure; (c) naming and projected structure; (d) blending and conceptual integration; (e) motivated polysemy; (f) divergence and extinction. The "career of metaphor" hypothesis (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005) proposes to describe the evolutionary path of metaphoric development as "a shift in mode of mapping from comparison to categorization as metaphors are conventionalized."

Based on the notions that "metaphoric language depends not only on the choice of words, but also on particular grammatical constructions" (Sullivan, 2013) and that grammatical constructions are systematically involved in the expression of metaphor (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, pp. 128-129), this paper accounts for the development of metaphoric concepts by incorporating constructions into the theory of conceptual integration, proposing that language speakers extract and elaborate conceptual schemata in the course of metaphor conventionalization by inheriting from three types of constructions: analogical constructions, framing constructions and downgrading constructions. The analogical constructions are used to fuse two mental spaces together and prompt conceptual integration; the framing constructions from source domain and target domain provide syntactic frames for composition and completion in conceptual integration; the downgrading constructions are used to establish relationship among the elements inside the blend and the relationship between the blend and other mental spaces.

The proposal is illustrated in the paper with case studies of two Chinese metaphors, wherein corpus evidence is collected from a large diachronic corpus, showing that the three types of constructions are adopted in time order to develop the schemata involved in the course of conventionalization of the two metaphors.

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