

Dynamic Metonymy: perspectives from lexical semantics and Blending theory

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This paper explores and discusses the theoretical notion of metonymy, aiming to enrich our understanding of the metonymic phenomena in Japanese and Chinese Mandarin. Two perspectives will be mainly provided in this study, i.e., from lexical semantics and from the blending theory. In lexical semantics, metonymy is often used as one of the mechanisms that give rise to semantic extensions. In a case study of Japanese word トイレ ‘toilet’, it is found that the interaction between the modified elements (or “construction”) and the target word is crucial for the metonymic readings caused by “toilet”, leading to its semantic extensions as the action (e.g., Example 1), the event (e.g., Example 2), and its related events (e.g., Example 3). However, the core meaning of トイレ should be the location sense, and it is the dynamic metonymic mechanism that provides the basis for those polysemous readings. From the perspective of blending theory, it is well recognized that in word formation, two words can blend into a new word, such as brunch (breakfast + lunch), which can be taken as a type of metonymy (cf. Koch 2012). This paper provides a case study to discuss another type of blending, involving a non-present element which instead causes a blended reading (e.g., Example 4). In example 4, those are two names of Taiwanese political figures who happen to have very virtuous Chinese characters in their names. When the netizens in Taiwan try to make fun of them, they manipulate their names. By omitting the character in their names to refer to them, netizens create an ironic effect. Hence, *Yao Wen Zhi* 姚文智 becomes *Yao Wen* 姚文 (losing *Zhi* 智)(4a), and the missing part causes an implicit reading of *being unwise*. In this way, we can see that the blending process is triggered by the non-present element, which becomes a marked reading instead. In sum, this study provides two case studies to discuss the dynamic aspect of metonymy, which is often overlooked in the previous literature. Our data is retrieved from the BCCWJ corpus and the online forum (PTT Bulletin System). More analysis will be provided and discussed at the conference.

Examples:

- (1) 歩行が不自由なので、夜間のトイレは危険だから便器でと指導していた。
'Because of not being able to walk, the toilet at night is dangerous, so I instructed him/her to use the chamber pot.' (“action” reading)
- (2) 犬のトイレのしつけはどうすればいいのですか？ (Yahoo!知恵袋)
'Any suggestions for potty-training a dog?' (“event” reading)
- (3) トイレと言えば、ペットのトイレも私がやってるんですね〜。(Yahoo!ブログ)
'As for the toilet, it is me that clean our pet’s pot (toilet).’ (“a related event” reading)
- (4) a. Person’s name: 姚文智 (*Yao, Wen Zhi*; ‘Yao, letter-wisdom’) --> 姚文 (*Yao Wen*) (implying ‘losing wisdom; dementia’)
b. Person’s name: 賴清德 (*Lai, Qing De*; ‘Lai, clean-virtue’) --> 賴清 (*Lai Qing*) (implying ‘lacking virtue; villainous’)

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