# The making of lexical meaning

# 8 THE MAKING OF LEXICAL MEANING

The preceding study addresses the puzzle of whether and how the positive pole of the vertical dimension, verbalized in English as *up* and in Mandarin as *shàng*, exhibits different patterns of semantic extension when compared cross-linguistically. My discussion up to this point has revealed that the different repertoires of conceptual archetypes with which each of the target words is associated lead them down different paths of meaning extension and thus result in different semantic networks.

However, a comparison between *up* and *shàng* would not be complete without also addressing their commonalities in full. Accordingly, this question remains: If archetypal conception is the key to the differences between *up* and *shàng*, can it also provide an explanation for all the similar meanings of [V] – [UP] and [V] – [SHANG]? I deal with this issue in 8.1, returning to the role of conceptual archetypes in cross-linguistic research of lexical semantics.

I have discussed the notions of attenuation, subjectification, schematization and archetypal conception, which are all important cognitive mechanisms that help model the semantic networks of *up* and *shàng*. In 8.2, I will answer this ultimate question: Are the above cognitive principles which motivate the semantic networks of *up* and *shàng* specific to each language? Put another way, what is the relationship between these principles and basic human cognitive abilities? Do they reflect an autonomous or a non-autonomous view of language?

Having answered the above inquiries, I will close with the limitations of the present study and suggest issues for future research in 8.3.

## 8.1 Lexical semantics in cross-linguistic comparison

In this section, I will explore whether the notion of conceptual archetype may help scrutinize and compare the semantics of [V] – [UP] and [V] – [SHANG].[95]

As I showed in previous chapters, *up* 'completive' and *shàng* 'completive' are different in terms of their archetypal meanings. On one hand, *up* 'completive' elaborates the archetypal concept of vertical elevation construed in the least objective manner, since the onstage conceptual content of upward motion has completely faded away, leaving behind no onstage conceptual content as the object of conception. The aspectual meaning thus resides exclusively in the mental simulation (performed by the subject of conception) of an entity following an upward path and arriving at a goal. On the other hand, *shàng* 'completive' instantiates an archetypal combination of vertical elevation and rest on a surface, with vertical elevation being completely stripped away and with part of surface reduced, which leaves behind only a trace of contact. Here, vertical elevation is similarly construed least objectively, since it has fully attenuated, while rest on a surface is still midway to full attenuation. Therefore, if we compare that to *up* 'completive', the onstage conceptual content of *shàng* 'completive' has not yet attenuated to an extreme, with the aspectual meaning residing not entirely in, but only partially in, the mental scanning by the subject of conception. Following the above argument, the conceptual divergence between *up* 'completive' and *shàng* 'completive' is twofold. First, although they form cross-linguistic counterparts under certain circumstances, their conceptual substrates differ. In addition to that, the two semantic categories also differ in terms of their degree of attenuation, with the construal of *up* 'completive' involving no identifiable onstage conceptual content, and that of *shàng* still involving the onstage conceptual content of contact.

A comparison between the completive senses of *up* and *shàng* have hence revealed a paradoxical truth: although *up* and *shàng* share a concrete sense of 'vertically higher', which instantiates the same conceptual archetype, the 'completive' senses associated with the positive pole of the vertical dimension in the two languages result from distinct conceptual substrates. The two sets of highly attenuated archetypal concepts, as a consequence, come to express similar aspectual meanings via attenuation, or subjectification if construed from another perspective, given the pivotal role of the mental simulation by the subject of conception.

Now that I have fully addressed the semantic similarity between *up* and *shàng*, I am now in a position to discuss the implications of the present study for cross-linguistic research of lexical semantics. The present study accentuates the importance of the following elements in cross-linguistic research on lexical se-

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[95]    My analyses in Chapters 4 to 6 only allow us to compare the core senses of *up* and *shàng*, since the metaphorical senses of *shàng* remain yet to be investigated.

mantics: conceptual archetype; semantic attenuation; and subjectification.

The notion of conceptual archetype is the most important of these three since, as I have shown, a semantic analysis based on conceptual archetype can explain why analogous words in two or more languages may come to develop different semantic networks, in spite of their partial semantic and functional overlap. Seemingly similar senses of such cross-linguistic counterparts can also find an explanation in archetypal conception, and it may turn out that similar senses across languages are in essence conceptually distinct.

Attenuation is the second important component in cross-linguistic semantic analysis. This is because distinct sets of conceptual substrates may, by means of attenuation, turn into subjectified senses that reside largely, or in some cases only, in the mental simulation performed by the subject of conception. Such subjectified archetypal meanings across languages may come to overlap to a certain extent.[96] Hence, one would not be able to account very well for such semantic similarity between abstract meanings of cross-linguistic counterparts unless the twin factors of attenuation and subjectification are taken into consideration.[97]

## 8.2 Residence of meaning in basic human cognitive abilities

In addition to the implications for cross-linguistic research on lexical semantics, the present study also bears implications for Cognitive Linguistics in general. The present study reflects the relation between lexical meaning and the following human cognitive factors: mental simulation; archetypal conception; schematization; and most importantly, the close relation between perception and conception.

Firstly, I showed that subjective processing, i.e. mental simulation by the subject of conception, exists in all the senses of *up* and *shàng*, ranging from the prototypical sense, involving the most onstage conceptual content, to the most attenuated sense, which invokes the least onstage conceptual content. Along the way, the gradual bleaching of the onstage conceptual content gives the inherent subjective processing an increasingly prominent role in conceptualization; hence, attenuation of the onstage conceptual content is essentially no different

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96    I doubt the existence of perfect cross-linguistic correspondences and suspect that semantic categories are highly language-specific. Interested readers are referred to Croft's (2001) argument of the radically conventional nature of syntactic categories and its application in comparative stylistics in Verhagen (2012). Readers are also referred to various cross-linguistic studies based on parallel texts (such as Lu 2020, and the references therein).

97    I suspect that such a claim may not only hold for a cross-linguistic comparison but also for a comparison between analogous constructions within one single language. Lindner (1983), for instance, observes that *up* is sometimes interchangeable with *out* and sometimes with *down*. I claim that such interchangeability may also be accounted for by my proposal and constitutes a potentially interesting topic for future pursuit.

from a relatively more prominent role of the mental simulation by the subject of conception. Note that such mental simulation is especially important to abstract meanings, which involves rather scarce onstage conceptual content, and as a result would not be accounted for unless we take into account the subjective mental simulation inherent in all the senses. Therefore, subjective mental simulation is of paramount importance to the study of meaning, both because of its inherent role in all the senses and because it helps us make sense of abstract meanings.

The notion of conceptual archetype also deserves more attention in the study of meaning. As has been mentioned, the prototypical meaning in a semantic network is the archetypal concept most objectively construed, since this concrete meaning prompts the most onstage conceptual content and naturally fills the typical role of the object of conception in a viewing arrangement. In contrast, an attenuated conceptual archetype prompts less onstage conceptual content, which renders its status as an object of conception less typical. A conceptual archetype, if attenuated to the extreme, retains only a trace that is barely readily identifiable and resides only in the mental simulation of the subject of conception in processing the archetypal concept. Therefore, the present study supports Langacker's (1991, 1999, 2006, 2008) proposal that archetypal conception, the ability to identify recurrent patterns in fundamental experiences, be given due attention in the study of language.

The present study also accentuates the importance of schematization in language. As I showed, the highly abstract remnant of subjective processing is schematic, in the sense that it is imminent in and is elaborated by all instantiations. The process of attenuation leaves behind various instantiations; this means that the schematic conceptual archetype is realized with different levels of schematicity, or specificity if put the other way round. Therefore, attenuation can be understood not only as a process of subjectification but also as a process that lays bare the core schema. Such a mechanism of schematization, as Langacker (2008) states, appears not only in the domain of SPACE but also in other abstract conceptual domains, and is thus a domain-independent cognitive ability.

In addition to the above three cognitive abilities, the present study also attests a close relation between perception and conception, as has been argued extensively in Cognitive Linguistics, for the following two reasons. Firstly, as I have claimed, the mechanism of "self-projection" (Ikegami 2008) is involved in the extension from the prototypical meaning to 'approaching' for *up* and to 'forward' for *shàng*. For the construal of such extended senses, the conceptualizer projects himself onto the stage as a part of the conceptual scene, from which the object of conception is conceived. Moreover, as we have seen previously, the gradual attenuation of the onstage conceptual content results in an increasingly more prominent role of the conceptualizer in a construal. As the participation of the

conceptualizer in a construal is greater, he behaves less as a typical subject of conception and more as an object of conception. I argue that this parallel relation between perception and conception in the above stage model (Langacker 1985, 1987, 1999, 2008) is embodied, in the sense that human anatomy confines us to being physically present at one place. The impossibility of being omnipresent limits our visual experience and understanding.

In sum, as is shown in the above discussion, the meaning of a symbol and the extensions at its semantic pole is contingent on the collaboration of the above cognitive factors: mental simulation; archetypal conception; schematization; and the parallel relation between perception and conception. The above connections between semantics and cognitive factors support the cognitive view of language as non-autonomous, intertwined with basic human cognitive abilities. In particular, conceptual archetypes play a pivotal role in lexical semantics, as a result of schema formation from recurring sensory-motor experiences. We can also see that there is a tight connection between perpetual experiences and conception, following Langacker's stage model. The above arguments of how lexical semantics interact with sensory-motor experiences are solid evidence against language being independent from other cognitive abilities in the human mind.

## 8.3 Limitations and further studies

The present study has, of course, some limitations. First of all, as I mentioned in my discussion on *shàng*, the positive pole of the vertical dimension in Mandarin occurs in a variety of constructional schemas, in addition to the [V] – [SHANG] schema. In my corpus, *shàng* also occurs in [SHANG] – [NP], as in *shàng-chē* 'SHANG-car', *shàng-cì* 'SHANG-time', *shàng-děng* 'SHANG-class', and so on, and it also occurs in the schema of [NP] – [SHANG], as in *chē-shàng* 'car-SHANG,' *shèhuì-shàng* 'society-SHANG', *shíjì-shàng* 'fact-SHANG', and so on. Only with a detailed exploration of *shàng* in all possible constructional schemas would we arrive at a comprehensive picture of how the positive pole of the vertical dimension is verbalized in Mandarin. Therefore, exploring the semantics of *shàng* in the above constructional schemas would be worth pursuing in further research.

Another limitation regarding the semantics of *shàng* is how the positive pole of the vertical dimension is instantiated in various abstract conceptual domains, such as quality, quantity, etc. For instance, Chinfa Lien (p.c.) pointed out that the metaphor of powerful is up in the social domain seems to abound in lexical expressions that involve *shàng* in Mandarin, whereas it is not so common for the English *up*. Therefore, a comparison and contrast between the respective repertoires of related abstract conceptual domains of *up* and *shàng* would also be worth further pursuit.

The third limitation of the present study is seen in the various ways of verbalizing the vertical dimension in English. In English, the positive pole of the vertical dimension can be instantiated as *on*, *above*, *over*, or *up*, with each of these portraying a distinct tr-lm relation. However, the present study only analyzes *up*, due to its productivity in VPCs. Therefore, it would also be worthwhile to explore how near-equivalents of the spatial particles *on*, *above*, or *over* could be found in Mandarin.

A fourth possible topic for future study is an investigation into analogous constructions that involve spatial terms within a single language. As was mentioned by Lindner (1983), the particle *up* is interchangeable with *out* and *down* under some circumstances. An account based on attenuation and conceptual archetypes might be able to solve the mystery of why *up*, *out*, and *down*, which instantiate at least three different archetypal concepts, may all come to express a completive reading. A similar phenomenon can also be observed in Mandarin, where *shàng* seems to share an inceptive reading with the resultative *kāi* (Wang and Su 2015) and *qǐlái* (Chang 1994; Huang and Chang 1996; Li 1999; Lu 2017a: 245–246). Looking further into why different spatial terms in one language can converge to express similar abstract meanings would shed further light on the role played by conceptual archetypes, attenuation and subjectification in the study of lexical semantics. I believe that the verb, as the autonomous predication relative to the suffixes, will be the key to the puzzle, and that a study on analogous constructions would have pedagogical value for second language learners.[98]

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98    Interested readers are referred to Lu (2015b) for an instance of how such cognitive semantic analysis of *shàng* may be applied to the second language teaching of Chinese.