

METONYMY IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. *Metonymy is an important means for people to know the world and enrich the language; and it is a way of thinking used widely in people’s daily life. This paper illustrates firstly the cognitive nature of metonymy in terms of its definition, classification and contiguity notion. Based on this, the author then studies the meaning extension and lexical conversion of vocabulary from the perspective of metonymy, and concludes that understanding the cognitive nature of metonymy can greatly promote the efficiency of vocabulary teaching and help to expand students’ vocabulary amount.*

Keywords: *metonymy, cognitive nature, english vocabulary teaching.*

МЕТОНИМИЯ В АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

Аннотация. *Метонимия является важным средством для людей познавать мир и обогащать язык; и это образ мышления, широко используемый людьми в повседневной жизни. Эта статья иллюстрирует, во-первых, когнитивный характер метонимии с точки зрения ее определения, классификации и смежности.*

Ключевые слова: *метонимия, познавательный характер, преподавание английской лексики.*

INTRODUCTION

The research of metonymy has a history of more than two thousand years, and its study develops from traditional rhetorical research to modern cognitive research. Rhetoricians and linguists have taken it for granted for a long time that metonymy is a figurative language. It is claimed that metonymy operates on names of things; it involves the substitution of name of one thing for that of another and the two things are somehow associated. The cognitive view of metonymy makes different assumptions from the traditional opinions. Metonymy is believed to be a conceptual phenomenon; it is an important means for people to know the world and enrich the language; and it is a way of thinking used widely in people’s daily life. The study of metonymy from the cognitive view is a great help for people to understand the cognitive and conceptual nature of metonymy, and it will shed new light on the English vocabulary teaching.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Classification of metonymy is one of the crucial concerns of research in both traditional rhetoric and cognitive linguistics, as it contributes to understanding the exact nature of metonymy.

Traditional approach to classifying metonymy is to give more or less complex lists of its types, such as PART FOR WHOLE (e.g. Many hands make light work.), WHOLE FOR PART (e.g. Australia beat Canada at cricket.), PLACE FOR INSTITUTION (e.g. The

White House isn't saying anything.), **PRODUCER FOR PRODUCTS** (e.g. I like Shakespeare most.).

It seems there are no systematic criteria for the classification and it lacks generality, so it is hard for people to understand the real nature of metonymy.

Cognitive linguists take a different view at the classification. One particular appealing proposal is offered by Panther and Thornburg (1999, pp.334-336), who have classified metonymies pragmatically into three groups: referential metonymies, predicational metonymies and illocutionary metonymies (or speech act metonymies).

RESULTS

The first one is the often-heard claim that metonymies are typically used for indirect referring, example like **PLACE FOR INSTITUTION** helps to identify the intended referent of the organization.

In predicational metonymies, a statement is used to refer to a different statement.

- (1) a. She was able to finish her dissertation.
- b. She finished her dissertation.

Sentence a and b are not semantically synonymous, and sometimes it is possible to assert a and to deny b without contradiction. Yet on many occasions, speakers can use a to pragmatically convey the same propositional content as that expressed in b. In this sense, the statement a can be used to stand for the statement b, the only difference being that in the first case the speaker predicts the ability to finish the dissertation of the subject she, whereas in the second case the speaker predicts the actuality of finishing it. In pragmatic terms, b is a generalized conversational implicature induced by a. This predicational metonymy exemplifies the **POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY** metonymy, which is very common in English language: A potential event (e.g. the ability, possibility, permission, obligation to undertake an action) is metonymically linked to its actual occurrence.

Panther and Thornburg also put forward the concept of illocutionary metonymies wherein one illocutionary act stands for another illocutionary act.

- (2) a. I don't know where the bath soap is.
- b. Where is the bath soap?

In this case, sentence a has the direct illocutionary force of an assertion about what the speaker does not know, but in many contexts it is used with the indirect illocutionary force of a question, that is, a may metonymically stand for the question or inquiry b.

The significance of Panther and Thornburg's classification lies in the fact that for them metonymy is not restricted to its referring function but is much more pervasive in ordinary language use.

1.1 The contiguity notion of metonymy

The notion of “contiguity” (i.e. nearness or neighborhood) is the key term in the understanding of the definition of metonymy, to which both traditional rhetorician and cognitive linguists agree. However, traditional approaches locate contiguity relationship in the world of reality, whereas cognitive approaches locate them at the conceptual level. Lakoff

(1987) accounts for metonymic contiguity within the framework of idealized cognitive models (ICMs); Croft (1993) deals with contiguity relations in terms of encyclopedic knowledge representation within a domain or domain matrix; Blank (1999) and Panther and Thornburg (1999) describe the network of conceptual contiguity by using the notion of frame and scenario respectively.

While all of these are comparable with respect to claiming a cognitive basis, we will adopt Lakoff's (1987) framework of idealized cognitive models (ICMs) as the cognitive mechanism of metonymy as it very well captures the metonymic processes.

DISCUSSION

The ICMs are the static or dynamic mental representations of typical situations in life and their typical elements. Concepts within ICMs are related by “conceptual contiguity”. “An ICM concept is meant to include not only people's encyclopedic knowledge of a particular domain but also the cultural model they are part of” (Radden & Kovecses, 1999, p.20). The content of an ICM depends on people's everyday experience, their world knowledge: beings, things, processes, and actions that generally or ideally occur together are represented in the mind as ICMs. For example, people have Possession ICM, Production ICM, Control ICM, etc. ICMs and the network of conceptual relationships give rise to associations, which may be used in metonymic transfer. When a specific ICM is opened or accessed, all concepts that by convention belong to this ICM are simultaneously activated. For example,

CONCLUSIONS

The evolution and change of lexical meaning, to a large extent, is considered as the result of exterior factors like historical and social development, however, as for the interior factors, metaphorical and metonymical cognitive models are its basic sources and inner mechanisms.

In terms of meaning extension and lexical conversion, metonymy is of great value to vocabulary teaching. Teachers can illustrate the cognitive nature of metonymy, and guide students to explore the metonymic motivation of a word. This will help students to make clear the internal relationship among different meanings of one word, make reasonable cognitive reasoning, and gradually grasp the language rules. In this way their learning efficiency will be greatly improved and their vocabulary amount will be expanded a lot.

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