

Syntactic Iconicity of Language

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Abstract: This paper explores syntactic iconicity of language from the angle of cognitive linguistics. The study covers introduction, cognitive basis of iconicity, syntactic iconicity, principle of syntactic iconicity and conclusion. It mainly discusses distance iconicity, sequence iconicity and quantity iconicity of syntactic iconicity. The study of syntactic iconicity is a profound theoretical study of language, which reveals the cognitive motivation of language structure and has a profound impact on language teaching. Therefore, it is of great significance to study the syntactic iconicity of language.

1. Introduction

Iconicity is a hot topic in cognitive linguistics in recent years. Cognitive linguistics holds that human language cannot be separated from specific physical experience and interaction between subject and object. Experiential perception and cognitive structure are mapped into language expression, restricting the structure and meaning of language. Therefore, language research should start from the perspective of human experience and cognition, so as to be more effective and reliable. Accordingly, cognitive linguistics holds that there is phenomenological similarity between linguistic form and signified (including the real world, empirical structure, conceptual system and expressed meaning). There is a corresponding iconicity relation between grammatical structure and people's cognition of the objective world. The way of organizing grammatical structure maps or analogies the way of organizing conceptual structure through cognitive means of metaphor. [1] This paper attempts to explore the syntactic iconicity of English language from the perspective of syntactic iconicity in cognitive linguistics.

2. Cognitive Basis of Iconicity

Since 1980s, cognitive linguists have established a set of non-objective reality philosophy system of empirical realism. It holds that the conceptual system of human comes from their own interactive experience with the objective world, and also from the innate cognitive ability of human beings, which is the ability to map the body and interactive experience attached to experience into abstract conceptual structure. The rules of reality and grammar are connected through the medium of human cognition. According to this view, the way of organizing conceptual structure is mapped to the way of organizing linguistic structure through abstract metaphor, that is, "grammatical rules are the projection of laws of real objects in language". [2] Thus grammatical structure is not completely arbitrary, but justified and demonstrable. This correspondence between form and meaning in different complexity is the principle of language iconicity. The chaotic reality is abstracted into the

conceptual structure of human beings through the intermediary of cognition, and then projected into language through coding, so that the objective reality has the material shell of language.

Owing to the mediation of cognition between language and reality, different language communities adopt different cognitive viewpoints on the same objective existence and experience different cognitive processes when processing information. Therefore, the same objective reality has different materiality in different languages. For example, when expressing spatio-temporal relations, English and Chinese adopt different cognitive strategies, resulting in different language forms. Chinese adopts the "moving self" strategy, in which the subject moves to the object, and the subject always approaches the larger object before it approaches the target object. However, English applies the "Moving Object" strategy, which is the opposite of the subject strategy, and adopts the spatio-temporal cognition strategy from the part to the whole.

3. Syntactic Iconicity

Iconicity refers to the phenomenon that linguistic signs mirror their signified meanings (including objective world, experiential structure, cognitive mode, etc.) in sound, form and structure. Iconicity mainly deals with the motivation relationship between language form and signified, that is, there is an inevitable connection between language form and content, which can be demonstrated and justified. [3] Iconicity is proposed in response to Saussure's arbitrariness of language. The research of linguistic iconicity in cognitive linguistics mainly focuses on language structure. It holds that language structure to a large extent has an "iconicity" motivation, syntax structure and even syntax rules are non-arbitrary and motivated, and have a natural relationship with human experience. [4] Sperber and Wilson, famous cognitive linguists, point out that under the right conditions, any natural or artificial phenomenon in the world can be used to symbolically represent other phenomena similar to it in some way. Speech can also be symbolically represented in another way, which is based not on a phenomenon but on a propositional form and the reality of some actual imaginary world. According to Aitchison, syntactic iconicity is reflected in: First, when languages first form singular and plural forms, they are processed according to certain natural tendencies, and these natural tendencies are the reflection of the real world; Secondly, from a statistical point of view, it is highly likely that language will remain a feature of the real world, so this feature must influence the development of language. [5]

4. Principle of Syntactic Iconicity

There are many principles of syntactic iconicity, including distance iconicity, sequence iconicity and quantity iconicity. Within the framework of cognitive linguistics, the three main principles of iconicity have gained a new interpretation. Distance iconicity is defined as the distance between linguistic elements reflecting the distance between the elements of the concept expressed; Sequence iconicity is regarded as the sequence of syntactic elements that reflects the actual state or sequence of events they express. Quantity iconicity is expressed as the number of linguistic units that resemble the number and complexity of the concepts they represent, and so on.

4.1 Distance Iconicity

Distance iconicity is also known as proximity iconicity. Cognitively similar concepts are also close in time and space in the form of language. The distance between linguistic elements corresponds to the distance between its concepts. The multiple adjectives that modify the central word are arranged in this order according to this principle. The closer the adjectives are to the central word, the closer the relationship between them is. For example:

(1) the beautiful big old blue wooden house

Since wooden is essential to the house, it is closest to the central word. Because beautiful is subjective, it comes first in the noun phrase. Old for a house is neither essential, because a house cannot be old to begin with, nor is it purely subjective because it is associated with a time standard and is therefore closer to the central word than beautiful and farther from it than wooden. Blue is an external and obvious feature that people can see from the appearance, so it is more essential than old and placed after old. But the color is not completely organic because you can paint the house in other colors. Wooden is the one that stays the same from the time when the house is built to the time when the whole house is demolished. So wooden is put before beautiful. Beautiful is a purely subjective attribute and varies considerably from person to person. Big has a physical basis and therefore comes after Beautiful. However, big is more subjective than old, because the standard of big is more subjective than that of old, so it is natural to put it before old.

4.2 Sequence Iconicity

Sequence iconicity refers to the time order in which events occur and the time order of concepts correspond to the linear order of language description, for example:

(2) Billy hit Tom and Tom hit Billy.

It means Billy hit Tom first, and then Tom hit Billy.

(3) Billy and Tom hit each other.

It means Billy and Tom fought each other more closely.

(4) She promises to come.

It means promise is before come.

(5) They married and had a child.

It means marriage comes before children.

(6) They had a child and married.

It means having children is before getting married.

4.3 Quantity Iconicity

Quantity iconicity refers to the longer and more complex language expression of more important and more difficult to predict information, which is consistent with the labeling theory. Its cognitive basis is that a larger number of symbols will attract more people's attention. Mental processing is more complex, and language conveys more information. Such as:

(7) Larry caused the car to stop.

(8) Larry stopped the car.

If there is more (7) than (8), the amount of information transmitted is more. (7) is the complex marker expression, so the content is richer than the non-marker expression (8). If (8) stops using conventional brakes, (7) may stop using emergency brakes.

As the maxim goes, "Being polite is saying a bit more". Such as:

(9) No smoking.

(10) Don't smoke, will you?

(11) Would you mind not smoking here, please?

(12) Customers are requested to refrain from smoking if they can.

In the examples above, adding form actually means conveying the speaker's respect for the listener and the increasing level of respect.

In addition to the iconicity principles mentioned above, some other syntactic iconicity, such as topic iconicity, marker iconicity, sentence pattern iconicity, similarity iconicity, symmetric iconicity and asymmetric iconicity, have been summarized by scholars at home and abroad.

5. Conclusion

The iconicity of language can explain the commonness of language because human cognition is the same to a large extent, which is also manifested in the same language structure. Iconicity can also explain the individuality of language. After all, human experience is different and the order of language elements corresponding to the order of experience is also different. Syntactic iconicity is the most secret of linguistic iconicity, reflecting the relationship between linguistic structure and thinking structure. The study of syntactic iconicity is a profound theoretical study of language, which reveals the cognitive motivation of language structure and has a profound impact on language teaching. Therefore, it is of great significance to study the syntactic iconicity of language.

References

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