

A Review of Embodied Linguistics Research

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Keywords: Embodied linguistics, embodied perspective, research review, theoretical construction

Abstract: Embodied linguistics was proposed based on the study and reflection of cognitive linguistics and its philosophical foundations. This theory holds that human thought, language, and concepts arise from interactive experiences and cognitive processing. Wang Yin (2014) explicitly introduced the concept of "embodied linguistics." Prior to this, embodied linguistics was in its nascent stage. From 2014 to 2019, following Wang Yin's (2014) contribution, there was a concentrated application of embodied linguistics. The second theoretical construction and application research of embodied linguistics, compared to the first, yielded richer results with more diverse research directions. We are currently in the second stage, at the initial stage of development of embodied linguistics, gradually departing from the influence of Western philosophy and linguistics to establish a localized linguistic theory.

1. Introduction

Embodied linguistics was proposed based on the study and reflection of cognitive linguistics and its philosophical foundations. This theory posits that human thought, language, and concepts stem from interactive experiences and cognitive processing. This viewpoint was later encapsulated as the "embodied (unitary) perspective," wherein "embodied" highlights the interaction between the body and the objective world, while "cognitive" emphasizes cognitive processing in the mind. Based on this important idea, the core principle of embodied linguistics, namely "reality—cognition—language," emerged. Specifically, human mental activities and language systems derive from the "reality" (interactive experience) and "cognition" (cognitive processing) of the real world. It can be said that this core principle of embodied linguistics is a further reflection on the principles of Frame Semantics Theory, placing more emphasis on the embodiment, similarity, and practicality of language[1]. According to the "embodied perspective" and "core principles" of embodied linguistics, the fundamental viewpoints of embodied linguistics can be summarized as follows: first, the formation of language originates from the interaction between the mind and the objective world, stemming from the synergy between "embodied" and "cognitive"; second, language possesses embodiment, similarity, and practicality; third, "reality" is presented in language through cognitive processing, meaning language does not directly present reality, but rather the reality presented in language is filtered through individual cognition.

2. Development Overview

Wang Yin (2014) explicitly introduced the concept of "embodied linguistics[2]." Prior to this, only Yan Ming (2011) and Wang Yin (2013) had used the term "embodied," with Yan Ming (2011) focusing on the "embodied resemblance perspective" within the scope of language philosophy, and Wang Yin (2013) elaborating on the issue of "embodiment." Both were seminal works, indicating that before Wang Yin (2014), embodied linguistics was in its nascent stage and had not formed a systematic theoretical framework. Wang Yin's (2014) research explicitly introduced the concept of "embodied linguistics" and laid the initial framework for embodied linguistics, marking the official birth of embodied linguistics in China. Subsequently, from 2014 to 2019, there was a concentrated application of embodied linguistics. During this period, there was less theoretical research, and the focus of application research was on model construction based on embodied linguistics theory. After the first concentrated application, embodied linguistics embarked on its second phase of theoretical construction and application research. Compared to the first phase, the second phase yielded richer results with more researchers and more diverse research directions.

2.1 Research on Theoretical Foundations

The earliest use of the term "embodiment" in China was by Yan Ming (2011). His work focused on the "embodied resemblance perspective" from the perspective of language philosophy. He regarded the embodied resemblance perspective as a cognitive view based on experiential philosophy, which he summarized into three main reasons for its role in language: firstly, it bridges the rationality and sensibility of philosophy, critically transcending the extreme deficiencies of traditional empiricism and idealism; secondly, it deepens the dialectical relationship between language symbol arbitrariness and resemblance, considering the embodied resemblance perspective as a dialectical interpretation of the relationship between linguistic resemblance and arbitrariness; thirdly, it highlights the trends of constructivism and humanism in emerging linguistics[3]. Yan Ming (2011) laid an important philosophical foundation for the discussion of the "embodied resemblance perspective." Until Wang Yin (2014) explicitly introduced the concept of "embodied linguistics," there were not many related studies.

Following Wang Yin's path after 2014, several scholars attempted to establish a solid philosophical foundation for embodied linguistics. Peng Zhibin (2019) argued that although embodied linguistics developed based on cognitive linguistics, it was still influenced by postmodern philosophical trends, including characteristics such as "anti-traditionalism, differentiation, fuzziness, anti-philosophy, anti-foundationalism, decentralization, methodological pluralism, multi-perspectiveism, post-humanism, and irrationalism [4]." Compared to Yan Ming (2011), this article delves deeper into philosophical interpretations. It can be seen that Yan Ming's discussion of the "embodied resemblance perspective" sparked the thinking of some scholars, as Peng Zhibin (2019) keenly observed the postmodern philosophical characteristics inherent in embodied linguistics.

Undoubtedly, during the five years after Wang Yin (2014) proposed embodied linguistics, it gradually found its own foothold and development direction. However, Peng Zhibin (2019) keenly noticed two problems in the theoretical background of cognitive linguistics: first, the neglect of "experience" leading to discrepancies between theory and reality; second, the narrow vision due to the philosophical background of experiential philosophy[5]. To form linguistics research with indigenous characteristics, these two problems must be addressed. We believe that Peng Zhibin (2019) pointed out two aspects of the same problem, fundamentally stemming from the unclear definition of "experience" in domestic research, leading to efforts to avoid this concept in research while being confined to the awkward situation of experiential philosophy. To address this issue,

research must integrate philosophical foundations with concrete language facts.

After the first concentrated application of embodied linguistics, there emerged articles on theoretical construction from various perspectives domestically [6]. Zhang Zhiyi (2021) attempted to explore the Chinese cognitive philosophical dimension of embodied linguistics based on its ontology and methodology. Hu Zhuanglin (2021) examined, evaluated, and expounded Wang Yin's views in "Embodied Linguistics" from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics. Cui Zhongliang (2021) explored the essential relationship between perceptual modes of the body and language from the theoretical perspective of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. By discussing the relationship between language and synesthesia through two dimensions: the external characteristics of language (bodily experience) and internal structure (cognitive processing), he elaborated on the synesthetic characteristics displayed in language expression, comprehension, meaning, abstract concepts, imagery schemas, and metaphorical mappings [7]. Xu Feng (2022) argued that the essence of Whitehead's process philosophy aligns with the core principles of embodied linguistics, demonstrating that process philosophy is also the philosophical foundation of embodied linguistics. Qian Guanlian (2022) believes that embodied linguistics integrates dialectical materialism and humanism of Marxism, and draws on the latest research results in philosophy of language, Chinese post-structuralism, postmodern philosophy (including the second enlightenment), etc., opening up a new direction for linguistic research in China and even worldwide, deserving increased attention from the academic community. Meanwhile, since the first International Conference on Embodied Linguistics held in 2019[8], four sessions of the International Conference on Embodied Linguistics have been conducted.

2.2 Wang Yin's Theoretical Construction Path

Wang Yin's (2013) research still falls within the scope of cognitive linguistics, but his emphasis on "embodiment" shows initial signs of surpassing cognitive linguistics [9]. In Wang Yin's (2014) study, he explicitly introduced the concept of "embodied linguistics" and summarized its core principles as "reality—cognition—language," suggesting that both the mind and language originate from the "body (interactive experience)" and "cognition (cognitive processing)" of reality. He elaborated on ten aspects in his article, laying the initial framework for embodied linguistics and marking the official birth of embodied linguistics in China.

Subsequently, embodied linguistics entered its first period of theoretical construction. During this period, Wang Yin (2013, 2015) discussed the basic principles of cognitive linguistics and the relationship between research methods and postmodern philosophy from nine aspects: decentering, experiential humanism, prototype category theory, subject-object constructionism, diversified understanding, semantic ambiguity, linguistic diversity, metaphor cognition, and new creation structure theory. Wang Yin (2018) demonstrated how the "non-centralism," "pluralism," and "particularity" advocated by postmodern philosophy are reflected in constructional grammar. This stage of construction mainly focused on comprehensive introductions to embodied linguistics (Wang Yin, 2014, 2019), the forefront of embodied linguistics (Wang Yin, 2015), new interpretations of embodiment in embodied linguistics (Wang Yin, 2019), and the continuation and development of Western language philosophy in embodied linguistics (Wang Yin, 2019).

After the first application of embodied linguistics, Wang Yin's theoretical construction underwent a significant shift, intentionally delving into specific language issues from the standpoint of language philosophy to broaden the applicability of embodied linguistics. Wang Yin (2020) once again discussed the embodiment of Chinese idioms based on the basic principles of embodied linguistics [10]. Wang Yin (2021) attempted to revise "cognitive translation studies" as "embodied translation studies" to further bridge translation studies with Marxism, linguistics, language

philosophy, postmodern philosophy (including experiential philosophy), and cognitive science. Wang Yin (2021b) re-discussed the main features and usage of interjections in English and Chinese based on embodied linguistics, distinguishing between interjections and onomatopoeia. Wang Yin (2021c) conducted a study on structural symmetry based on embodied linguistics[11].

2.3 Applied Research of Embodied Linguistics

After the first period of theoretical construction following Wang Yin's (2014) proposal of embodied linguistics, until Tie Yi and Qin Xiugui (2019) appeared, specific applications of embodied linguistics emerged. In 2019, a large number of applied research studies on embodied linguistics appeared in China for the first time, marking the beginning of the second phase of theoretical construction of embodied linguistics in 2020.

Tie Yi and Qin Xiugui (2019) studied noun-predicate sentences from the perspective of embodied linguistics and established a new theoretical analysis model—the FRG model, which stands for the Frame and Reference point-based Situation Implantation Model. Based on this model, they examined the conceptual relationship between the subject noun NP1 and predicate noun NP2 in noun-predicate sentences and conducted cognitive motivation analysis. They found that NP1 and NP2 in the ((NP1) NP2) construction exhibit three different types of conceptual connection relationships [12]. Liu Yunfei (2019) proposed a Conceptual Layering Model from the perspective of embodied linguistics, further analyzing the mechanism of complementation in causative constructions and cognitive causes[13]. Zhao Yongfeng (2019) studied the intersubjectivity of language subjects based on social embodiment and the cognitive mechanism behind it, focusing on the transformation of the first-person pronoun in Chinese[14]. Liao Guangrong (2019) studied the semantic supercomposition and typicality of Chinese semantic structures from the perspective of embodied linguistics[15]. Wei Zaijiang (2019) researched the metaphor mechanism of Chinese idioms from the perspective of embodied linguistics[16].

The first specific applications of embodied linguistics mainly focused on the theoretical construction of models based on embodied linguistics and the use of these models to solve specific problems. However, the models established did not receive widespread use, possibly due to their overly targeted nature and lack of universality. This suggests the need for models with stronger explanatory power.

The second phase of theoretical construction accompanied the second phase of application. Compared to the first phase of application, the second phase exhibited a rich variety of research directions, thanks to the second phase of theoretical construction of embodied linguistics, which made embodied linguistics more comprehensive in its practical applications. Liu Yumei and Wang Jingyuan (2021) studied the concept of "boundary" in spatial relations from the perspective of embodied linguistics, finding that when determining spatial relations, boundaries have a flexible embodied way in spatial dimensions, integrity, shape, and form, giving rise to the polysemy of "in." The degree and strength of its enclosure of the object are key factors determining whether the spatial relation of inclusion is established and whether the usage of "in" is correct[17]. Yang Changqin (2021) studied the cognition of exaggerated idioms in Chinese from the perspective of embodied linguistics[18]. Wang Sijing (2021) integrated the concepts of three kingdom figures' idioms based on embodied linguistics[19]. Zhang Zhiyi and Zhang Shuxian (2021) studied Chinese local out-of-self-reference based on embodiment and type[20].

3. Research Development Trends

Since the emergence of embodied linguistics in 2014, we can observe a trend of development, which is that embodied linguistics is gradually breaking away from the influence of Western

philosophy and Western linguistics, and gradually establishing a localized linguistic theory. The establishment of embodied linguistics has a relatively rich philosophical foundation, and the application of experiential linguistics has an extremely broad scope. From the existing research results, it can be seen that embodied linguistics has the ability to reanalyze linguistic phenomena, and various language phenomena can give rise to multiple research models, showing great potential for development.

In recent years, research has focused on the following areas: first, repairing the initial theoretical framework to integrate embodied linguistic theory with traditional Chinese philosophy, promoting the localization of embodied linguistics. Second, confirming the position of embodied linguistics in the history of linguistics and seeking its theoretical value. Third, extensively applying embodied linguistics to language practice, combining embodied linguistic theory with multiple research aspects to find richer examples to support embodied linguistics.

Future research on embodied linguistics still needs to focus on the following areas: first, promoting the study of traditional Chinese philosophy, advancing research in Chinese language philosophy and linguistic theory to promote the localization process of embodied linguistics and provide a more solid foundation for the construction of embodied linguistic theory. Second, repairing existing research models. Embodied linguistics can generate many research models, but existing models are too targeted and lack broader adaptability. Efforts should be made to integrate existing research models and establish more adaptable research models. Third, summarizing the experience of applied research, bridging applied research with theoretical construction to provide more insights for theoretical research through applied research. Fourth, promoting research on specific language facts rather than being limited to theoretical discussions and numerical models. In international Chinese teaching, there are many teaching situations available to test the rationality of theories. Future research can continuously improve the theoretical framework and analysis models of embodied linguistics in practice.

4. Conclusion

Since the concept of perceptive linguistics was put forward clearly, perceptive linguistics is going through a preliminary stage of development, gradually breaking away from the influence of Western philosophy and Western linguistics, and gradually establishing a localized and systematic linguistic theory. Wang Yin, as the originator of the concept and the pioneer of the field, has made great contributions to the construction of the theory of cognitive linguistics, and played an important role in two periods of theoretical construction and two periods of concentrated application.

Cognitive linguistics draws nourishment from the theoretical system and philosophical foundation of cognitive linguistics, and has a strong application nature, which is the advantage of cognitive linguistics. In recent years, the research of recognition linguistics has focused on theoretical repair and model building, trying to consolidate the theoretical position of recognition linguistics. Throughout the past ten years, we can find that understanding linguistics is gradually forming a more perfect linguistic theory by putting theory first and getting rid of philosophy. Future research still needs to take both theory and application into consideration, promote the research of Chinese linguistic philosophy and linguistic theory, repair existing research models, sum up the experience of applied research, and extensively seek breakthroughs from linguistic facts. And applied to language teaching.

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