

Metaphor, Metonymy and the Extension of the Meanings of Polysemous Words

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Abstract

As an important and pervasive semantic phenomenon across languages, polysemy has attracted much attention of linguists. In the structuralist approach, the research of the relationship of different senses of a polysemous word is confined to the internal structure of language without considering its underlying cognitive mechanism. Thus it fails to reveal the essence of the phenomenon, and cannot give a satisfactory explanation. Cognitive linguistics provides a more convincing and systematic analysis of polysemy. This paper studied meaning extension by means of cognitive linguistic theories and presented the patterns of lexical meaning evolution. It is found that in the process of category enlargement, new members are derived or split from already existing members mainly through metonymy and metaphor, which are two powerful cognitive tools for extension of word meanings. Cognition is a driving force of polysemy, which is the result of the collaboration of metaphor and metonymy. That is, the derivative meanings of a polysemous word are extended from the source meaning through metonymy and metaphor within a category.

Key words: Polysemy; Cognitive mechanism; Metaphor; Metonymy

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1. INTRODUCTION

Polysemy is an important and pervasive semantic phenomenon across languages. How do terms get their symbolic representations? How do they extend their meanings? Research in this respect could help English learners to acquire the senses of words accurately. It is not only beneficial to translation between English and Chinese, but also good for foreign language learners in their reading comprehension.

Because of this, polysemy has long been among the central topics in the study of word meaning. The traditional approach, namely the classical view or structuralism, emphasizes the relationship between different senses of a polysemous word. However, their research is confined to the internal structure of language without taking into account its underlying cognitive mechanism. Therefore, they often fail to reveal the essence of the phenomenon and cannot give a satisfactory explanation.

Cognitive linguistics provides researchers with a new approach to language research. In this paper, theories in cognitive linguistics, especially those on metaphor and metonymy, were applied to explore the cognitive mechanisms binding and governing lexical meaning extension, and to show how these mechanisms work in the process.

2. A COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE OF POLYSEMY

2.1 Traditional Research on Cognitive Linguistics

It is fairly known that research on polysemy began with the work of the French semanticist Michel Breal in the late 19th century (Nerlich, 2011). And about fifty years ago, the linguist and semanticist Ullmann said: "polysemy, the fact that some words have a network of multiple but related meanings, is the pivot of semantic analysis"

(Ungerer, 2003). Several decades later, polysemy has become central to modern cognitive semantics. From the traditional point of view, there exist five means of the evolution of word meaning.

The first one is the expansion of meaning. Along with the development of society and the further deepening of human's cognition to the world, the scope of human's cognition extends. The new things anti-deepened cognition, which endows the word with new connotative meanings. In other words, the scope of the referent extends. The Chinese word *jiang* (匠), in ancient times, only refers to carpenter instead of other skilled workers such as artist or craftsman. But along with the application of the word, the public accepted its specific meaning and extended it. Finally, people get used to the word and have a liking for it. Thus, the word meaning enriched. It refers to the people who have high skills to make something. This is the expansion of meaning. It is not only the carpenter but also the person who have skills to make something. Just like the word *jiang* (江), it used to refer to a specific river in China, which is called Changjiang. Now it doesn't mean any specific river but the general reference of a river.

The second one is the reduction of word meaning, which refers to the reduction of the extent of meaning in the evolution of word meaning. Usually the former meaning refers to one thing, which we can call "A". Then according to the reduction of word meaning, some words, which obtain new meaning and only present the partial part of the former "A" reduce its extent of reference. Some senses of the word even disappear in the use of language in daily communication.

The third one is the shift of word meaning. The meaning of word makes shift from "A" to "B". "A" refers to the former meaning. "B" refers to the new meaning.

The fourth one is the reduction of lexemes. Considering the reduction of lexemes, it is usually concerned with the phenomena of polysemy.

The fifth one is the increase of lexemes. In contrast to the fourth one, it refers to the extension of senses of polysemy.

However, in the traditional approach to the research, the relationship of different senses of a polysemous word is confined to the internal structure of language without taking account of its underlying cognitive mechanism, thus failing to reveal the essence of it and to give a satisfactory explanation of the linguistic phenomenon of polysemy.

2.2 Cognitive Perspective of Polysemy

It has become clear that the study of polysemy is of fundamental importance for any semantic study of language and cognition. Cognitive semantics is the mainstay of cognitive linguistics.

Cognitive linguists have carried out a lot of research on polysemy in the cognitive semantics approach. Alm-

Arvius (1993) described different truth conditions of see senses and discussed the concepts of polysemy and lexicalized senses in some details. Taylor (2001) studied polysemy based on the theory of prototype and concluded that if different uses of a lexical item require reference to two different domains, or two different sets of domains, it is a strong indication that the lexical item is polysemous. In China, some linguists have also studied polysemy from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. Tian Bing (2003) carried out a detailed study of sense demarcation and definition of common polysemous words and explored the relationships between cognitive semantic frames of polysemous words and the environments of dictionary users. Lin ZhengJun (2005) studied polysemy from diachronic and cognitive perspectives and made a conclusion that polysemy is the result of the cooperation and interaction between diachrony and cognition. All of these do have made a great contribution to the study of polysemy.

This paper researched polysemy and explained the formation of meanings of polysemous words through two cognitive devices: Metaphor and Metonymy. The next section first built up the theoretical framework for the present study from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.

3. A COGNITIVE STUDY ON LEXICAL MEANING OF POLYSEMY

3.1 Metaphor and Metaphorical Extension

3.1.1 Definition

Metaphor is a ubiquitous feature of natural language. It has been studied and theorized for over two millennia. Most traditional theories have treated metaphor chiefly as a linguistic expression used for rhetorical or artistic purposes. Cognitive linguistics holds a different view from the traditional ones. As Lakoff and Johnson observe, a metaphor can be viewed as an experientially based mapping from one domain to another domain. The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff, 1980). It is very common for a word that designates an element of the source domain as the corresponding element in the target domain. Based on the study of a cross-linguistic metaphor MIND AS BODY, Sweetser (2002) once claimed that metaphor derived lexical change in a motivated way and provided a key to understanding the creation of polysemy and the phenomenon of semantic shift.

Metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words. On the contrary, human thought processes are largely metaphorical. That is, human conceptual system is metaphorically defined and structured. Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system. Thus, metaphor can be interpreted as metaphorical concept. The concepts structure what people perceive, how they

get around in the world, and how they relate to other people. The conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining people's everyday realities. If people are right in suggesting that conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way they think, what they experience, and what they do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. Primarily on the basis of linguistic evidence, it is found that most of the ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. For example, when taking part in an argument, people set up positions, attack, defend and retreat, and then they end up winning or losing. These metaphorical expressions are made possible in virtue of what Lakoff and Johnson called a "conceptual metaphor", namely ARGUMENT IS WAR. The domain of intellectual argument is understood in terms of war. Elements from the domain of war-things like attack, defense, retreat, etc, are projected onto the abstract domain of intellectual argument. The basic "logical" of the source domain is applied to a different area of experience, the target domain.

3.1.2 The Principle of Mapping

The metaphorical mapping that relates the two domains defines the relationship between the senses of the word. Metaphor consists in the projection of structure from one domain to another of a different kind. A basic type of this metaphorical projection is to metaphorically elaborate and extend a basic schema from the physical domain to the nonphysical ones. So structurally speaking, metaphor projects the framework of source domain to the target domain. The mapping is directional, which means there is asymmetry in the process of mapping. They do not set up a symmetrical comparison between two concepts, establishing points of similarity. Instead, they provoke the listeners to transfer features from the source to the target. The mapping does not work in the other way around. Another point is that the mapping is partial. In any metaphorical projection only part of the structure of the source-domain is typically projected onto the target domain. If it were total, one concept would actually be the other, not be merely understood in terms of it.

Metaphor consists in the projection of structure from one domain onto another domain of a different kind. The definite internal structure of image schema provides the basis for a large number of metaphorical mappings from concrete domains to more abstract domains. The mapping from the source domain to the target domain follows what Lakoff (1980) mentions the invariance principle for metaphorical mapping preserves the image-schema structure of the source domain in the way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain. That is, people's knowledge of a particular source domain should predict their understanding of a dissimilar target domain that is partially structured by that source domain. There is some preservation of image-schematic structure as the constructs associated with one domain are metaphorically mapped into another.

3.1.3 Polysemy Through Metaphorical Extension

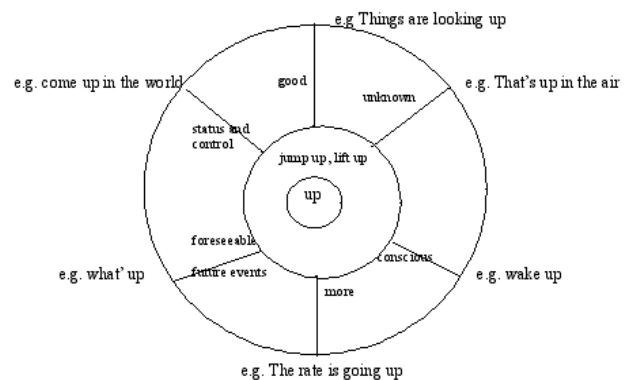
Metaphorical extension becomes possible in virtue of conceptual metaphors that map the image schema onto other areas of experience. That is, word meaning can be expanded by means of linguistic metaphorization rooted in the mapping from one conceptual domain to another. The mapping of different conceptual domains creates different contexts in which the phenomena of polysemy happen. For example, "up" originally in orientation domain means, "to a higher position" as in "jump up" and "lift the head up". But when it is mapped to emotional domain, "up" appears in the new context as in "I am feeling up" and "cheer up". Here, "up" is as another meaning "happy". The mapping of two conceptual domains or the process of metaphorization underlies the existing conceptual metaphor "happy is up", which maps the up-down schema from the orientation domain onto emotional domain.

According to the statistics, 70% of the lexical meanings originate from metaphor in language (Zhao, 2001). The most basic experience of human being lies in them, and then is extended to the outside world. Next, take orientation metaphor and human body metaphor as illustrations.

Take "up" as the first example.

The core of "up" means "to a higher position", such as "jump up". From which comes the next of layer of metaphorical usage. Based on the psychological similarities and our conventional knowledge, the extended meanings of "up" are understood in terms of other conceptual domains.

Now, let's see the following diagram. In this diagram, there are so many "up" in different contexts or domains:

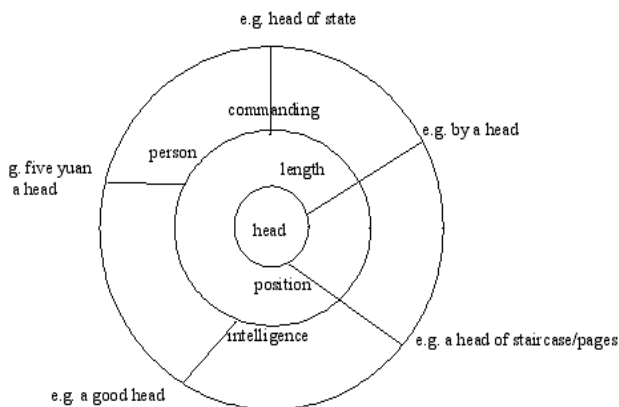


Metaphorical Extension of "up"

In the context of "wake up", it is a linguistic metaphorical realization of the conceptual metaphor: COUSCIOUS IS UP, because of the conventional experience that human and most mammals sleep lying down and stand up when they awaken, such as in "stay up", and "sit up"; it is the mapping from the source domain (orientation domain) to the target domain (amount domain). Here, the conventional experience is that if more of a substance or of objects is added to a container or pile, the level goes up, so "up" here means "more". According

to it, its meaning can accordingly be inferred in “speak up”, “turn up”, “lay up”, and “run up” etc. In “What’s coming up” the conventional knowledge is that normally people’s eyes look in the direction in which we typically move. As an object approaches the person or the person approaches the object, the object appears larger. Since the ground is perceived as being fixed, the top of the object appears to be moving upward in the person’s field of vision. So “foreseeable future events are up”. In “come up in the world”, “on your way up”, and “up the ladder”, the conventional knowledge is that the things that principally characterize what is good for a person-are all “up” such as happiness, health, and life status. In “bring up”, “crop up”, “pop up” and “that’s up in the air”, “up” means unknown. The experience is very much like that of “understanding is grasping” as in “I couldn’t grasp his words”. With physical objects, if people can grasp something and hold it in the hands, they can look it over carefully and get a reasonably good understanding of it. It’s easier to grasp something and look at it carefully if it is on the ground in a fixed location than if it is floating through the air like a leaf or a piece of paper.

In this diagram, the meanings of “up”, radiate from the center along several lines. The more lines it radiates, the more extended meanings it has. Though the different meanings come from the same core or from the same mental domain, the basic conventional knowledge is different. It is not that there are many different ups, rather, the feature of verticality enters people’s experience in many different ways and so gives rise to much different meaning transference between various mental domains.



Metaphorical extension of “head”

Next, let’s see a human body metaphor “head”. The core of “head” means “the top of body”. It can be projected onto other physical things such as animals, staircase, bed, page, match etc, on the basis of their physical similarity, that is, the similarity of position. It can also be projected onto abstract domains. At the top of the body and with a brain in it, head performs the function of commanding the action of other parts of the body. Thus, the extended meanings of it in the phrase can be obtained: “head of government”, “head of state” or “head

of department” etc. On the basis of functional similarity so here, it means “leader”.

When “head” is transferred into the domain of intelligence, the meaning of “talents” can be understood in the phrase “a good head”, and “put heads together”. By means of metonymy (which would be discussed next), it allows people to use the part to stand for the whole; thus, “head” can also be mapped into the domain of measurement according to the similarity of its length, so deeper understanding in “Tom is taller than I by a head” can be achieved.

Metaphor, as is seen, consists in the mapping of the logic of one domain (usually a more concrete domain) onto another (usually more abstract) domain. By which, the meanings of a polysemous word get related. There is always a core meaning with all the other meanings coming from it by means of metaphor. Polysemy is highly motivated by metaphor. In the following the paper discussed another no-less important process whereby different meanings got associated with each other by metonymy.

3.2 Metonymy and Metonymic Extension

Like metaphor, metonymy is also a basic imaginative cognitive mechanism, and both of them are the means by which it is possible “to ground our conceptual system experientially and to reason in a constrained but creative fashion” (Johnson, 1987). Both mechanisms are, with the underlying basis of image schema, complex mental mappings of knowledge of one domain of experience (the source domain) to structure knowledge of a different domain of experience (the target domain). In metaphor, people project part of one conceptual domain onto another separate domain, while in metonymy, the projection takes place within the same domain.

3.2.1 Definition

Metonymy is one of the basic characteristics of cognition. It is extremely common for people to take one well understood or easy-to-perceive aspect of something and use it to stand either for the thing as a whole or for some other aspect or part of it. The best-known cases are those like the following:

-The ham sandwich is waiting for his check.

The expression “the ham sandwich” is being used to refer to an actual person, who ordered the ham sandwich. This is a case of what metonymy, that is, one entity is used to refer to another that is related to it.

Here are some further examples

-He likes to read Shakespeare. (=the writing of Shakespeare)

-He’s in dance. (=the dancing profession)

-The Times hasn’t arrived at the press conference yet. (=the reporter from the Times)

Here a special case of metonymy needs to be included—what traditional rhetoricians have called synecdoche, where the part stands for the whole, as in the following.

THE PART FOR THE WHOLE

-We need a couple of strong bodies for our team.
(=strong people)

-There are a lot of good heads in the university.
(=intelligent people)

-We need some new blood in the organization. (=new people)

In these cases, as in the other cases of metonymy, one entity is being used to refer to another, therefore, metonymy has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows people to use one entity to stand for another. But metonymy is not merely a referential device. It also serves as the function of providing understanding. For example, in the case of the metonymy THE PART FOR THE WHOLE there are many parts that can stand for the whole. Which part people pick out determines which aspect of the whole people are focusing on. When people say that they need some “good heads”, they are using “good heads” to refer to “intelligent people”. The point is not just to use a part (head) to stand for a whole (person) but rather to pick out a particular characteristic of the person, namely, intelligence, which is associated with the head. The same is true of other kinds of metonymy. When people say “The Times hasn’t arrived at the press conference yet”, they are using “The Times” not merely to refer to some reporters or other but also to suggest the importance of the institution the reporter represents. Thus, metonymy can also be interpreted as metonymic concept.

Metonymic concepts are also systematic, as can be seen in the following representative examples that exist in our language. (Lakoff, 1980)

We don’t hire longhairs. (THE PART FOR THE WHOLE)

He bought a Ford. (PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT)

The buses are on strike. (OBJECT USED FOR USER)

I don’t approve of the government’s actions.
(INSTITUTION FOR PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE)

Wall Street is in a panic. (THE PLACE FOR THE INSTITUTION)

The sentences given above are not at random. They are instances of certain general metonymic concepts in terms of which people organize their thoughts and actions. Metonymic concepts allow people to conceptualize one thing by means of its relation to something else.

3.2.2 Active Zone Phenomenon in Metonymy

Langacker (1987) admits “entities are often multifaceted, only certain facets being able to interact with a particular domain or play a direct role in a particular relationship”. Those facets of an entity capable of interacting directly with a given domain or relation are referred to as the “active zone” of the entity with respect to the domain or relation in question. Active zone phenomenon is a kind of typical phenomenon that happens in metonymy. When people “wash a car”, they have in mind the car’s exterior; when people “vacuum-clean the car”, they highlight its interior; while to “service a car” focuses mainly on

its moving parts. People would not claim that “car” is polysemous, merely that, in Langacker’s terminology, those certain facets of the car become the “active zone”. Yet, the process of activation clearly contains the seeds of polysemy. Consider the example “door”:

(1) The room has two doors.

(2) Open the door.

(3) She walked through the door.

(4) We took the door off its hinges and then walked through it.

As illustrated in the above sentences, the word “door” has different meanings in the four sentences. In sentence (1), the door is conceptualized as unitary structure; alternatively, people can focus on the movable part of the door as in sentence (2), or people can focus on the aperture of door when the moving part of door is opened as in sentence (3). While, the three meanings above are all included in sentence (4)

The different senses of “door” illustrated above are related through metonymy, on the broader understanding of the term “active zone” proposed above. A speaker of English has a good deal of common-sense knowledge about doors. He or she knows, for example, about their usual shape, size, and manner of construction, and about their function and usual location. This kind of knowledge is held together in what might be called “door frames”. Different uses of “door” activate different components of the respective frames.

3.2.3 Polysemy Through Metonymic Extension

There are countless instances in the polysemy through metonymic extension by the perspective of a component of an integrated conceptual structure. A couple of examples are listed as follows.

“Hand” is used very often in a metonymic mold to refer to a whole person. As represented by the conceptual metonymy THE HAND STANDS FOR THE PERSON. Many of this kind focus on ability, competence, expertise, experience of a person in general or in a particular trade, profession, or skill, as in “skilled hand”, “good hand”, and “right hand”, whereas “left hand” is associated with some derogatory senses such as “unskillful”, “awkward”, or “unsuccessful”. As mentioned “above the hand” is associated with power and control, which always involves in skills, means, tactics, etc. so people get the relevant metonymy and metaphor as THE HAND STANDS FOR CONTROL and CONTROL IS HOLDING IN THE HAND.

Therefore, one can say:

His life was in my hand

I suffered at his hands.

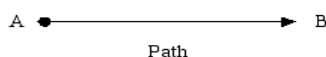
The meeting is getting out of hand.

Hands are external body parts with which physical work is done. When people start to do something physically, they use their hands. Hands then come to be associated with the idea of “starting something” in general, including mental work that entails the use of

one's brains rather than his hands. The metonymy THE HAND STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY seems to be operative here, as the idiom "have a hand in something". There are still other idiomatic phrases involving in the body part "fingers" that have similar or related meanings. For instance, "have/get a finger in something", "get one's fingers into something", "keep fingers on something", "keep fingers on one's own affairs", "have/stick one's finger in the/every pie".(Yu, 2003) While, if people want to wait and see, they would "hold their hand". If they do not want to do anything, they will "sit on their hands" or "put their hands in their pockets". If people can do something very easily, they are said to "do it with one hand behind their back". If they are authorized to act as they see fit, they are "given a free hand". On the other hand, if they are said to "have their hands tied behind their back", it means that they cannot act as they want.

The polysemy of spatial prepositions is of special interest because of the rather abstract image schema that is involved. Consider, first of all, the path schema. There is a natural metonymic relationship between the path followed by a moving entity and any one of the infinite number of points located on the path.

See the path schema:



The relationship is, in essence, an instance of the whole-part relationship. It frequently happens that a linguistic form, which designates a path, can also designate a place.

- 1) a. the road passes under the railway line. (Path)
- b. The dog is under the table. (Place)

A particularly salient point on a path is the also end-point. Again, a linguistic form designating a path frequently designates a place construed as the end-point of a path

- 2) a. He walked across hill. (Path)
- b. He lives across the street. (End of path)

Thus it can be frequently seen the different sense relations between lexical units of polysemous words are not arbitrary but regular. The different extended meanings are motivated by lexical rules, namely image schema, metaphor and metonymy.

3.3 Collaboration of Metaphor and Metonymy and Extension Patterns of Polysemy

There are mainly two patterns whereby the meanings are extended from the prototype produced by the extension principles, namely radial structure and concatenate structure.

3.3.1 Radial Structure

Radial structure, which was introduced by Lakoff (1987), has been a most common one for the understanding of polysemy within the field. Lakoff used the term "radial category" for the characteristic pattern produced by metaphorical extension or metonymic extension

of meanings from a central origin. In this model, the meanings of a term are reduced to one central sense, while its other senses are believed to have evolved from the central sense, or as metaphorical or metonymic extension senses of it. For Lakoff, the radial structures of conceptual categories are organized with a central member and a network links to other members. He believes that the radial structure of categories involves the following:

- A conventional choice of center.
 - Extension principles. These characterize the class of possible "links"
 - between more central and less central subcategories. They include
 - metaphorical models, metonymic models, image schema relations etc
 - Special conventional extensions. Though each extension is an
 - instance of the extension principles, the extensions are not predicable
 - from the center plus the principles. Each extension is a matter of
 - convention and must be learned (Lakoff,1987)
- The following ripple diagram can illustrate the process.

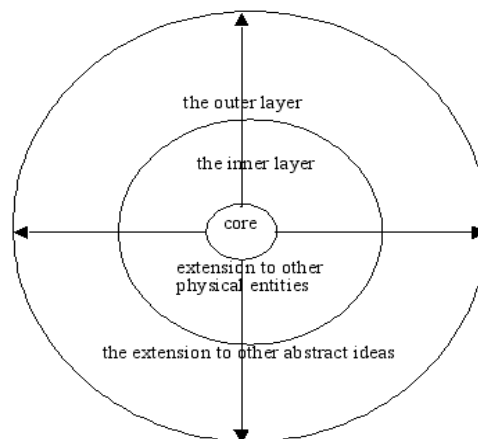


Diagram of radial structure

The ripple diagram is composed of three circles. The innermost circle stands for core meaning or a conventional choice of center. The inner layer includes the concrete meanings extended from the core. The outer layer includes the corresponding abstract meanings. The spokes indicate different meaning extension routes and the arrows here used to indicate unidirectional.

Take the word "power" for example; it has thirteen senses listed in COD:

- 1.ability to do or act ... ; particular faculty of body or mind ...;
- 2.vigor, energy;
- 3.active property...;
- 4.government, influence, authority...; personal ascendancy; political or social ascendancy...;
- 5.authorization, delegated authority...;
- 6.influential person , body, or thing....;

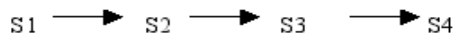
- 7.deity...;
- 8.(colloq) large number or amount...;
- 9.(Math) third, tenth, etc. power of a number , product obtaining from three, ten, etc. factor equal to that number...;
- 10. instrument for applying energy to mechanical purposes...;
- 11.mechanical or electrical energy as opp. To hand-labour...;
- 12.capacity for exerting mechanical force, esp. hoarse-power;
- 13. Magnifying capacity of lenses;

These various secondary meanings may be arranged in a diagram. (Greenough/Kittredge)

The simplest meaning “the ability to do or act” stands at the center, and all the secondary meanings proceed out of it in every direction like rays. Each of the secondary meaning might easily have developed from the central meaning without regard to any of the others. Consequently, any one of them might go out of use without affecting the others in the slightest degree.

3.3.2 Concatenate Structure

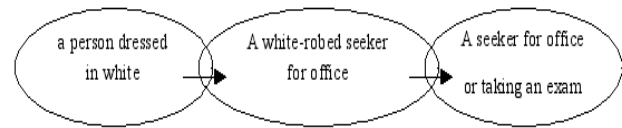
Another extension pattern is concatenate structure. Concatenation is a semantic process in which the meaning of a word moves gradually away from its first sense by successive extensions, like the links of a chain, until there is no connection between the sense that is finally developed and the primary meaning. The process also labels it as the following chain diagram which can represent “meaning chain”.



The arrows are used to indicate the sources from which the extended meanings come. In this conception, it is allowed that a prototypical category does not have a single prototypical member, but it is rather required to have a set of members, all of which are similar to all other members. This is referred to as the model of family resemblance. For example, a prototypical category “A” based on family resemblance has a set of a, b, c, d, of which a is similar to b, b is similar to a and c, c is similar to b and d, but a is not at all similar to d and there is no single member of A that is similar to all other members. In such a scenario, one will be likely to tempt to judge the word WA that corresponds to the category “A” to be polysemous, but one will have difficulty deciding exactly what distinct meanings to attribute to it. Concatenate pattern is usually produced by metonymic process.

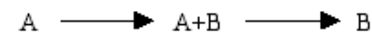
The development of the meaning of “candidate” serves as a good example too. The English word “candidate” comes from the Latin word “candidatus”, which means “pertaining to a person dressed in a white-robe”. From this meaning there arises the modified sense “a white-robed seeker for office”, because the Romans wore white robes when standing for office. The next step is to reject the first

meaning altogether, so that the word comes to mean “a seeker for office; or a person taking an examination”. The extensions are all of metonymic extensions. The following diagram can show the senses development.



Semantic Extension of “candidate”

This diagram can also be exhibited in another way: Given A refers to a person dressed in white, B refers to a seeker for office, then the following schema comes into being:



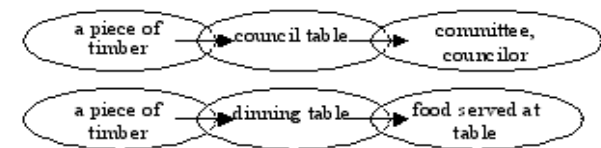
As seen from the schema , although it seems hard to tell the relationship between A and B, there is a certain relationship between them: in ancient Rome, the seeker for office always wore a white robe. Here A is the core meaning from which B is extended.

Sweetser (2002) called this phenomenon as semantic change. After a monosemy A is used frequently and consistently in context B for a long time enough for conventionalization, it will acquire meaning B, but it will take a long time for meaning A to become meaning B. During this long time, there must be a stage when meanings A and B coexist, often for several hundreds of years. That is polysemy. Polysemy is the record of semantic change at a point of time.

The primary meaning of the word “candidate” has become obsolete. However, sometimes the primary sense survives and remains in use along with the senses derived from it. The word “board” is the best example to illustrate. It has the following meanings listed in the dictionary

- S2: flat surface with patterns etc
- S3: council-table; councilors; committee
- S4: food served at table

The process of meaning development can be shown as follows. See



Semantic Extension of “table”

The extensions are all of metonymy.

3.4 The Factors That Affect the Extension

Generally, there are various means or aspects to illustrate the affected factors of its evolution. In this paper, three aspects were discussed.

3.4.1 The Subjective Factors

It is known that our subjective thinking, feeling and opinions have substantial influence on the meaning of a word. Generally, word meaning has the abstract

characteristic. It can present some kinds of animal, such as a bird, which can refer to plenty of birds. It can contain some general features of this kind of thing. For example, the word “house” means various forms, features, materials and living places, etc. However sometimes it needs to be generalized, sometimes specific. The mode of our human mind thought adjusts and influences the change of word meaning. The realization of human being to the objective and subjective world is the vital force to the change of word meaning, the same to the change of polysemous word meaning.

The rule of the realization of human’s thought follows the principle of the general to the specific, the surface to the core, and the complicated to the simple.

Actually, the realization of the world abides by the tendency of the change of the senses of polysemy. While people have the further realization of the world, the meaning or sense of the polysemous word changes at the same time. Some senses extended or elected. Take the word “net” for example. Let’s see some definitions of it in Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary (Fourth edition).

Net

- (a) (U) loose open material made of string thread, wire, etc knotted or woven together
- (b) Piece of this used for a particular purpose, eg catching fish, holding hair in place, etc
- (C) trap or snare
- (C) Network (esp of communications)

From these definitions of net, it is not hard to discover that all of the definitions have close connection with the functions of the net in our daily lives. In a simple word, all of them can’t live without the thought of human mind. It is our thinking to classify and consider it to be used like this way. So the senses of the word “net” extended and developed.

In some situation, people even have strong feelings, such as strive for the novel, beauty, etc. They can coin many new words and meanings in order to express special meaning or attract attention.

3.4.2 The Objective Factors

Both the meaning of word and the development of the meaning of word reflect the realization and thinking of the subjective and objective world as the above-mentioned. These objective factors contain the large extent field, the historical geological field, the cultural field, the development of the society, and the innovation of new things, etc. It is so complicated that people can’t ignore the influence.

From the diachronical aspect, it is easy to sense out the influence of these objective factors. The evolution and development of word meaning can’t live without these factors. The world people live in makes countless changes and new things appear every time. So the meaning of word also develops according to the tendency. For

example, the last definition of the above-mentioned word “net” just confirms this principle. It is known that without the creation of computer and network, the extended sense of “net” would not exist. The original meaning of the word “minister” in English refers to the low class status in certain times. Then it becomes the title of the people at the head of a government department or a main branch of one. It is the accomplishment of the development of society. In Chinese ancient times, the development of the meaning of “臣”(chen) also follows the similar pattern from the low to the high status.

3.4.3 The Linguistic Factors

The use of word or word meaning can’t live without context. As the above -mentioned, in lexical system, there is morpheme—morpheme unit—sense—sense unit—lexical item—lexical item unit. Actually for language is a system, above morpheme, there exist word, phrase, clause, sentence and context. Concerning the affected factors in the development of lexical meaning, the context factor and the interactive semantic factor are vital. Generally, the relationship among senses in polysemy is to be treated as polymerization. As the attributes of lexical system, it is not single instead that it is interactive and connective with other attributes. All of them have more or less interaction in the development of lexical system.

4. CONCLUSION

Structuralist approaches isolate language from human experience, ignoring human’s subjective function. Therefore they could not explain the nature of polysemy. Cognitive linguistics provides a more convincing and systematic analysis of polysemy. This paper researched meaning extension by means of cognitive linguistic theories and presented the patterns of lexical meaning evolution. It is found that in the process of category enlargement, new members are derived or split from already existing members mainly through metonymy and metaphor. Metonymy and metaphor are two powerful cognitive tools for extension of word meanings. Cognition is a driving force of polysemy, which is the product of the collaboration of metaphor and metonymy. That is, the derivative meanings of a polysemous word are extended from the source meaning through metonymy and metaphor within a category.

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