

The Semantic Meaning of Verb+ Particle Construction Based on Emergent Metaphor Theory

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Abstract: The origin of Verb+ Particle can be traced back to the Old English period. During the development of Old English to Middle English, the Particle slowly replaced the role of verbal prefixes, and by the late Middle English, it completely replaced verbal prefixes and became a category used quite frequently in everyday English communication. The Verb+ Particle is one of the English phrasal verbs, and because of its multiple meanings, Chinese English learners easily confuse the meaning and make mistakes when acquiring and applying it, thus its becoming a major obstacle for English learners. The thesis tries to use emergent metaphor theory and construction grammar theory in cognitive pragmatics to analyze the semantic meaning of the four common particles down from the form and meaning of Verb +particle constructions, and then to use the meaning features to relate the specific meaning items of Verb + particle. participants, thus strengthening the ability to understand and use Verb +particle in specific contexts, and exploring a new path for English learners to understand the semantic meaning of Verb+ particle.

Keywords: Emergent Metaphor Theory, Verb+ Particle Construction, Semantic Meaning, Verb+ Down.

1. Introduction

Verb+ particle is one of the three categories of English phrasal verbs. The other two formations of English phrasal verbs are namely phrasal verbs consisting of a verb and an adverb and phrasal verbs consisting of a verb plus a preposition or plus a preposition and an adverb. It is the fact that the other two formations of phrasal verbs are so formally identical to Verb+ particle further makes Verb+ particle one of the most difficult and challenging tasks for Chinese learners. In the traditional acquisition process, Chinese learners mechanically and singularly use the cognitive tool of memory to acquire form-meaning pairs, resulting in a fragmented and confusing acquisition of phrasal verbs so that they lack the ability to discriminate semantics in specific application contexts.

2. Verb + Particle Construction

2.1. Construction

Goldberg (2014) defined a construct as "any linguistic format that has some aspect of form or function that cannot be predicted from its components or from other already existing constructs should be considered a construct. Moreover, even if some linguistic formats can be fully predicted, as long as they occur with high frequency, these formats will still be stored as constructs by language users." Construction is a term from a linguistic framework that focuses on the idea that language is built through the combination of smaller meaningful units called constructions. It is an approach to understanding language that emphasizes the role of grammar in constructing meaning and the usage-based nature of language acquisition and use. According to Cognitive Construction grammar, constructions are form-meaning pairings that represent conventionalized patterns of language use. These constructions can range from simple word combinations to more complex syntactic structures. Constructions are not just abstract representations; they carry specific meanings and can be used flexibly in different contexts. This theory argues that language is not solely based

on fixed rules and abstract representations but is instead shaped by the patterns and regularities that emerge from language use. Language users rely on their knowledge of existing constructions to understand and produce new expressions, and these constructions are constantly modified and extended through language experience. Cognitive Construction grammar emphasizes the cognitive processes involved in language production and comprehension. It suggests that language is grounded in cognitive mechanisms, including categorization, analogy, and generalization. By focusing on the cognitive processes and the way constructions are learned, used, and modified, this theory aims to provide a more comprehensive account of how language functions. Construction Grammar has been influential in various linguistic subfields, including syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and language acquisition. It offers a valuable framework for investigating the relationship between form and meaning in language and provides insights into the cognitive processes underlying language production and comprehension. Liu(2017:282) pointed out that "Construct grammar considers a construct as a morphosyntactic pair independent of the verb and refers to a structure formed by two or more symbolic units. Construct grammar defines the phenomenon of suppression as the interaction between two linguistic units, lexical and constructive, including both construct suppression and lexical suppression. Constructive units do not exist in a chaotic manner without meaning, but in a hierarchical structure with certain connections. When there is a semantic conflict between the constructive meaning and the lexical meaning, the underlying syntactic environment will produce a suppression factor, which will have a compulsory influence on the lexical meaning, and the lexical meaning will have to follow and obey the constructive meaning and change, which is the constructive suppression.

2.2. Verb + Particle Construction

The verb + particle first appeared in Old English, then slowly took over the role of verbal prefixes and became a category used quite frequently in everyday English communication in late Middle English. The verb + particle is

a type of phrasal verb that is more often considered to be an idiomatic, high-frequency linguistic phenomenon. It refers to the usual linguistic expressions of verb + particle combinations whose meaning cannot often be inferred from the meaning of their components and the grammatical relations between them, such as turn down, put off, put out, go out, etc. One of the features of verb + particle lies in that one Verb can have collocations with a variety of particles, for example, the verb break can have a collocation with up, down, off, in and other particles. Some of These particles can change the meaning of the verb, so that the phrase is changed to a new meaning. some of them do not change the meaning of the verb, yet the phrase is still hard to predicted by the verb and the particle. The above phenomena attribute the obscure meaning of verb + particle.

3. Emergent Metaphor Theory

Liu (2017:279) pointed out "Cognitive linguistics assumes that there is a "world-perception-concept-language" relationship between the world and language. Humans interact with the external environment to form perfect perception, kinesthesia, and imagery, which constitute the basic levels of experience and cognition. These basic levels include basic categories, imagery and cognitive models. Imagery is based on people's understanding of basic relationships and is a cognitive structure that is formed in the brain through many iterations of interaction with the external world. In short, we use imagery to observe and organize our experiences and the relationships between all things. The human mind is shaped by the biological nature of human beings, their bodily experiences and the environment in which they live, and they first understand the concept of space and then project it onto other aspects of experience, linking different conceptual systems through mapping." In the 1980s, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) on a philosophical and cognitive level, exposed the nature of metaphor as the application of an event or experience to another event or experience. It means using the experience of one cognitive domain to understand the experience of another cognitive domain. When a feature of the source domain is mapped onto the target domain, the target domain is linked to the source domain by some or partial similarity to the source domain, resulting in a partial or holistic understanding of the target domain. Lakoff and Johnson used metaphor as a theoretical framework to explore the nature of language and metaphor, and demonstrated the close correlation between language and metaphorical cognitive structures with numerous examples of English metaphors. They found that the use of metaphors can effectively explain the semantic items of many English expressions after extensive research, and called these metaphors conceptual metaphors, such as the expression like "TIME IS MONEY", "I AM FEELING DOWN. In addition, they also proposed conceptual metaphors and emergent metaphors. Emergent metaphor refers to a metaphorical expression that understands or describes an abstract concept by conceptualizing it. It emphasizes how humans shape and organize abstract concepts based on perception, movement, and spatial experience when expressing and understanding language. The emergent metaphor emphasizes the role of perceptual and motor experience in language and thought processes to help us understand abstract concepts. For example, when we understand the abstract concept of time, we often use spatial and sensory experiences to express it, and

we see time as a moving object with ourselves in the "forward" direction of time. Through our life experience, we feel the movement of position before and after, and through this change of displacement, the abstract concept of time has a perceptible spatial understanding, so we come up with words that express time such as "the day before", "the day after", "the past", "the future" etc., which realizes the mapping of abstract concepts to concrete sensory concepts to understand and express abstract concepts.

The emergent metaphor is a specific aspect of conceptual metaphor theory. While conceptual metaphor provides a broad theoretical framework that explores relationships and analogies between concepts and describes the process of understanding relationships between different concepts through mapping and analogy, emergent metaphor focuses more on the role of perceptual, motor, and spatial experience in the understanding of abstract concepts.

4. Literature Review of Verb + Particle

Long ago, scholars thought that the various meanings are arbitrary. That is to say, the meanings of them are freely matched and there is no way to explain the polysemy nature of verb + particle. Fortunately, this viewpoint was questioned. And as the cognitive linguistics developed in linguistics research, more and more scholars took close look at the analysis of the connection between the forms and the meaning of the verb + particle. Meng and Liu (2014:43) pointed out that "cognitive linguistics believes that each sense item of phrasal verbs is a semantic network of different sense items formed from their prototypical spatial meanings through conceptual metaphors, and the seemingly disparate and disordered multiple sense items can be incorporated into a semantic category with intrinsic relevance." According to the cognitive linguistic theory, Zhang (2018) proposed the cognitive parsing of phrasal verbs by using diagrammatic method and rationale analysis, first theoretical introduction, combined with textual examples to explain, and finally categorized phrasal verbs into four categories: diagrammatic, metaphorical, metonymic and metaphonymical. Fan and Liu (2021:497) pointed out that "we believe that the syntactic schema of an idiom is actually an abstract representation of the constructs in the idiom, the result of abstract generalization of the combined features of the idiomatic expressions, and a template for generating new expressions, and the role of the schema is to category the idiomatic expressions (i.e., to judge whether a certain expression is acceptable or not) and to help people to create based on the theories of prototypical categories and valence grammar, He (2023) cognitively analyzed the spatial metaphorical expansion of English fictional words from the perspectives of conceptual metaphor and imagery schema to reveal the rationale for the expansion of meaning in the co-temporal dimension.

From some of the above research results, it can be seen that the study of phrasal verbs or verb+ particle through the new perspective of cognitive linguistics such as imagery schema and conceptual metaphor can explain these linguistic phenomenon well. With the development of construction grammar, it has gradually become a more open perspective to describe and explain the semantic justification of multiple meanings of verb phrases or verb+ particle from the perspective of the combination of construction grammar and cognitive linguistics.

5. Analysis of the Semantic Meaning of Verb + Down Construction Based on Emergent Metaphor

The verb-particle construction, also known as a phrasal verb, is a combination of a verb and one or more particles (usually prepositions or adverbs) that together create a distinct meaning. These constructions can be challenging for language learners because the meaning of the phrasal verb is often idiomatic and cannot be understood by looking at the individual words. The semantic meaning of verb + particle construction is determined not only by the verb but also the particle, in most case, the particle actually change the meaning of the verb. Therefore, the particle plays a decisively role in the semantic meaning of verb + particle.

5.1. Verb + Down Construction

There are many phrases of verb + down such as write down ,put down ,settle down ,break down ,cut down ,calm down ,slow down ,lay down ,track down ,take down, get down etc., take the phrasal of get down for example, there are multiple meanings. The common types of Verb + down constructions are summarized based on the basic meaning of the constructions and the target domain of emergent metaphor.

The first type of down is the spatial domain, which occurs most frequently, such as the verb phrases sit down, step down, get down, sink down, cut down, knock down, blow down; the semantic feature of these constructions is the use of the concept of space, which is a basic semantic meaning.

The second type of verb is the metric domain, where the meaning indicates a decrease in intensity, quantity or volume, such as slow down, wear down, wash down, turn down.

The third category is the emotional domain, where constructions occur quite frequently, such as lay down, get down, settle down, cool down, calm down, quiet down.

The fourth category is the state domain, which is also very common, such as fasten down, clamp down, nail down, pin down, hammer down, write down, copy down, jot down, put down, note down, take down, set down.

The fifth category is the behavior domain, "down" has the meaning of "suppress, stop, quell", such as put down, hold down, referring to the use of a series of means (power, force or spontaneous force) to suppress and stop someone and something, or to put down, hold down, means to use a series of means (power, force or spontaneous force) to suppress and stop someone and something, or to put something down. In addition, there are a series of verb phrase pages that express this meaning, such as close down, shut down, drop down, break down, run down, and turn down.

The semantics of Verb+ particle is a combination of constructional and contextual questions, so verb+ particle of get down, , has a different semantics in different contexts, with different domains of surfacing metaphors and mapping.

For example 1:

"He climbed up the ladder and then got down carelessly."

"The dog got down from the table."

"Get down" can mean to move from a higher position to a lower position.

For example2:

"The dog got down on its belly when it saw the angry owner."

"During the gunfire, everyone got down on the floor for safety."

"Get down" can also refer to assuming a lower position,

often associated with submission or hiding.

For example3:

"The crowd was getting down to the beat of the music."

"Let's hit the dance floor and get down tonight!"

In informal contexts, "get down" can mean to engage in lively and energetic dancing or partying.

For example 4:

"After studying for hours, I finally got down the concept."

In certain contexts, "get down" can mean to grasp or comprehend something.

5.2. Analysis of Break Down Construction Based on Emergent Metaphor

In the verb + particle construction, an action or behavior is usually represented, and the particle provides information about the location, direction, relationship, and status of the action as it occurs. For example, the sentence goes like "The biometric system has broken down". In this sentence, "break" is a verb that means "to separate into parts with suddenness or violence." "down" is a small word whose basic meaning is to move downward, and it can be simply understood the semantic meaning of the sentence as the biometric system is separated or broken below. However, the Chinese receiver thinks that this sentence is not fluent, because this semantic understanding does not match the Chinese lexical expression. In this case, by mapping these concrete sensory and spatial experiences onto abstract concepts, the semantics embodied in down is then extremely explanatory. Using the emergent metaphor theory and the mapping relationship between the source and target domains, the following semantic path can be derived: the source domain is the concrete sensory and spatial experience, the target domain is the abstract concept of non-sensory and non-spatial experience, and the basic semantic meaning of the verb break is to separate, to separate, and in this sentence the Break verb is valued as a biometric system. Niu (2019:89) "The first basic imagery of "down" is a spatial concept in which the projectile expresses its semantic characteristics by moving downward along the boundary marker". In human's basic life experience, downward movement is a displacement caused by pressure, and when the human body is under pressure, it will produce unpleasant feelings, so based on the basic imagery of down, the downward spatial movement is projected to the state or emotional domain (target domain) through the cognitive tool of emergent metaphor. "Down" embodies the downward movement of a state or emotion, and can be used to indicate a bad state or negative emotion. Therefore, the semantics of break down in the sentence can be interpreted as the operation of the biometric system in a bad state under the action of breaking down. Similarly, we can use emergent metaphor theory to explain the semantics of other verb+ particle construction. By mapping concrete sensory and spatial experiences onto abstract concepts, we are able to gain a deeper understanding of the way, location, or relationship of an action and enrich the expressive power of language through metaphorical mapping.

6. Conclusion

The cognitive tool of surfacing metaphor in cognitive linguistics highlights the invisible information of verb+ particle constructions, helps to find the semantic linkage of verb+ particle constructions, provides a new path for the interpretation of their semantics, and the process of

acquisition better establishes the form-sense matching connection to make the acquisition result strong.

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