The model of principled polysemy

Lecture 3
Principled polysemy

• a particular form is conventionally associated with a number of distinct but related meanings
• not all contextually varying uses of a form constitute distinct senses
• the distinct senses constitute a semantic network in a systematic and motivated way
a spatial particle such as **over** has a number of distinct meanings or senses associated with it

- there has been a tendency among some cognitive linguists, especially those working on lexical polysemy, to exaggerate the number distinct senses associated with a particular form
Methodology for determining distinct senses
Tyler & Evans (2003)

• The reason - to minimize the subjective nature of our analysis
• First, a distinct sense must involve non-spatial meaning or a different configuration between the TR and LM than found in the proto-scene.
• Second, there must be instances of the sense that are context independent.
The helicopter hovered over the ocean.
The bird hovered over the flower.

- *over* designates a spatial relation in which the TR is located higher than the LM

- the same basic TR-LM configuration holds in both and no additional non-spatial meaning is prompted for by one and not the other
Determining the primary sense - problems

• in terms of over, Lakoff (1987) following Brugman ([1981] 1988), argued that the primary sense for over is 'above and across', including a path, as in The plane flew over the city.

• Kreitzer (1997) disagreed, suggesting that the primary sense is something akin to an above sense, as in The bird hovered over the flower.
Tyler and Evans (2003) - methodology to narrow the arbitrariness in the selection of a primary sense

- earliest attested meaning
- pre-dominance in the semantic network
- relations to other spatial particles
One likely candidate for the primary sense is the **HISTORICALLY EARLIEST SENSE**.

- The earliest attested uses have to do with a spatial configuration holding between the TR and the LM.

- Predominance within a semantic network - the unique spatial configuration that is involved in the majority of the distinct senses found in the network.
Certain clusters of particles appear to form compositional sets that divide up various spatial dimensions.

- The particles *above, over, under and below* appear to form a compositional set which divides the vertical dimension into 4 related subspaces.

- *Up and down, before and after, and in front of and behind, and in and out*
A **spatial scene** is an abstract representation of a recurring real-world spatio-physical configuration mediated by human conceptual processing.

- configurational element
- functional element
configurational element

- a **trajector** (TR), (i.e., the element located) and is typically smaller and movable;
- a **landmark** (LM), which is the element with respect to which the TR is located and is typically larger and immovable;
- and a conceptual spatial relation between the TR and the LM.
The infant is in her playpen.

- TR is the infant
- LM is the playpen
- conceptual spatial relation - in
functional element

- reflects the interactive relationship b/n the TR and the LM in a particular spatial configuration (Herskovits, 1986; Vandeloise, 1991, 1994)

- in designates a relation in which the TR is enclosed by the LM - containment

- LM is three-dimensional in nature, and the TR is located within the bounded area of the LM
A proto-scene with more than one functional element

The kids sat on the table

- the table supports the kids
- the table constrains the actions of the kids
- they place pressure on the table
- their bodies cover part of the table and that part is not visible
A proto-scene is an idealized mental representation across the recurring spatial scenes associated with a particular spatial particle.

- It is an abstraction across many similar spatial scenes.
- It combines idealized elements of real-world experience (objects called TRs and LMs) and a conceptual relation (a spatial configuration b/n the objects).
The cat is in the box.
The convict is in his cell.

• TR - the shaded sphere
• LM - diagrammed by the dark lines
• the functional element of the configuration – containment
• the vantage point for construing (i.e. viewing) the spatial scene is 'off-stage'
  (Langacker, 1987, 1991a)
The notion of a **vantage point** suggests how a particular spatial scene is construed.

The tablecloth is **on** the table.
The cloth is **over** the table.
The table is **under** the tablecloth.

- Certain parts of the spatial scene are profiled (see Langacker, 1987, 1992).
Temporality / atemporality

a spatial particle does not profile a relation which evolves through time

• represents a conceptualized relation holding between two entities (a TR and a LM)
• independent of sequential evolving
• profiles atemporal relations
Pragmatic strengthening

• the association of a new meaning component with a particular lexical form through the continued use of the form in particular contexts in which the implicature results

• conventionalized senses at one time did not exist

• they are related to the proto-scene
The picture is over the mantel. There was a thick cloth over the man's face.

- The TR (the picture) is higher than the LM (the mantel)
- the TR, the cloth, is higher than the LM
- semantic element of covering (obscuring)
If an **implicature** is recurring, it can be reanalysed as **distinct** from the scene of which it is a part.

- results in the conventionalization of the implicature as a distinct meaning of the lexical form
- this additional sense is instantiated in the semantic memory
- the additional sense can be employed in new contexts of use unrelated to the context that originally gave rise to it
To sum up

• rigorous criteria for determining the primary sense of a spatial particle
• and for determining when an occurrence of a particle represents an independent sense in the network
• an interpretation created on-line for purposes of local understanding
However,

- even with these constraints, different speakers may have somewhat different intuitions concerning the precise relationship b/n the proto-scene and a particular 'extended' sense.

- Spatial scenes are complex and can be construed in many ways.

- The synchronic network reflects many aspects of its diachronic development.