

Polysemy of –ey in Korean spatial construction

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All languages have some ways to talk about the spatial relationship between two entities: a trajector (TR) and a landmark (LM). Over the decades, analyses of spatial markers have primarily focused on the geometric configuration between TR and LM. Recently a number of studies have argued for the importance of including a functional element in the basic representation of spatial markers. In particular, the principled polysemy model (Tyler & Evans 2003) has demonstrated the importance of the functional element in describing the polysemy networks of English, German, and Russian. Following the criteria set forth by this model, this study focuses on identifying the primary sense and the extended senses along with the functional element of the Korean postpositional spatial marker –ey, which displays a high degree of polysemy.

Based on an analysis using corpus data, this paper provides an analysis that the proto-scene for –ey, roughly translated as English *at/to/on*, designates a spatial relation in which the TR is proximally located within the sphere of influence of a highlighted LM. The humanly meaningful consequences of two entities being in such a particular physical/spatial configuration is hypothesized to impose the functional element of proximity. This paper offers an interesting discussion since there has been no consensus in the literature on –ey's central meaning and no previous analyses have considered the potential role of a functional element. Support for the functional element of the analysis also comes from the fact that –ey contrasts with another spatial marker –eyse, which designates a very similar spatial relations but does not have a proximal sense. This is an important finding since the subtle semantic differences exhibited by both –ey and –eyse have been difficult to clearly distinguish heretofore in the literature.

This paper also provides a polysemous semantic network of –ey with motivated extended meanings. In previous studies many meanings of –ey have been treated as homophones which have no systematic relations. However this paper argues that multiple meanings of –ey is developed not accidentally or arbitrarily, but rather through regular cognitive processes, including cognitive associations formed by experiential correlations which reflect human physical-spatial experience with a particular spatial scene and humans' abilities to develop natural categories that take part in motivated organized semantic networks. From this perspective, this paper explains the experiential motivation deriving other extended senses such as the goal sense or the inclusion sense of –ey from the primary sense.

Key words: polysemy, semantic network, spatial marker, Korean

References

Tyler, Andrea and Evans, Vyvyan. (2003). *The semantics of English prepositions: Spatial scenes, embodied meaning, and cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.