

Study on the English Creative Noun-Noun Compounds: Based on Metaphorical Thinking

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Creative N+N compounds, also known as metaphor or metonymy N+N compounds, are a productive approach to form new words. This category of words is large in number and semantically complex. Research has demonstrated that the creativity of creative N+N compounds stems from the abstract and figurative thinking of people's cognitive mechanisms. Abstract thinking facilitates the construction of abstract concepts of nouns, while figurative thinking draws connections within and between noun concepts through association and imagination. Metaphor is a source of creative words and meanings, and Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory is a favorable illustration of this innovative process. Additionally, it contributes to the development of cognitive thinking skills and creative abilities. The study of creative N+N compounds helps English learners expand their vocabulary, enhance their lexical sensitivity, and promote metaphorical thinking. From a cognitive linguistic perspective, this study focuses on the cognitive mechanisms of creative N+N compounds and reveals their advantageous implications for English vocabulary teaching.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, creative N+N compounds, vocabulary teaching

Introduction

Metaphor is a complex concept in linguistics that was first articulated in B.C. Since then, as linguistics and psychology have evolved over the course of more than two millennia, the notion has undergone several stages of evolution. The actual study of metaphor started with the Greek scholar Aristotle, whose explanation of its nature was later dubbed "Comparison Theory". A Roman rhetorician named Quintilianus proposed a different theory of metaphor in the first century B.C. called "Substitution Theory", which held that metaphor is actually the rhetorical phenomenon of replacing one word for another. However, it was not until 1936 that Richards proposed "Interaction Theory", which allowed for a completely new investigation of metaphor from the perspective of cognition. The conceptual metaphor hypothesis put out by Lakoff and Johnson in their book *The Metaphors We Live by* elevates the field of metaphor studies to a previously unheard-of level and offers a strong theoretical framework for the literacy of creative word meanings. The conceptual frameworks that guide our thoughts and behaviors are essentially metaphorical. The foundation of language is its vocabulary, and the philosophy of conceptual metaphor fosters not just vocabulary comprehension and word meaning literacy, but also the development of metaphorical thinking and creative expression through vocabulary.

From the standpoint of cognitive linguistics, this study focuses on the cognitive mechanism of creative N+N compounds and illustrates its beneficial implications for teaching English vocabulary.

Literature Review

The necessity for word formation leads to the creation of new words and phrases. The most effective way to increase vocabulary is through word formation, which shows us the principles of word production.

From a morphological perspective, there are numerous ways that words are formed in English. Four forms of word formation—prefixation, suffixation, compounding, and conversion—were enumerated by Quirk (1985, p. 50). This category was divided into affixation, constructions, conversions, integrals, palindromes, and contractions by Lu (1999, pp. 12-55). Lu's list is expanded by Wang (2001, p. 124), who lists four additional categories: acronyms, word making, onomastics, and loanwords. Compounding is the most effective method for producing new words in contemporary English, according to Jackson (1988, p. 30).

N+N Compounds

A strategy for differentiating compound words based on the connections between their lexical parts was put forth by Bloomfield (1933, p. 233). There are two categories for compound words: syntactic and non-syntactic. Compounds that lack the juxtaposition of their lexical elements, as in a syntactic structure, are known as non-syntactic compounds. While, phrases and their lexical components in syntactic compounds share the same syntactic relationships. Consequently, linguistic study has focused on syntactic compounds, which N+N compounds fall under. The most crucial point is that N+N compounds are a very unpredictable kind of compound word with an endless number of potential semantic meanings. N+N compounds are therefore distinguished by their inventiveness and unpredictable nature.

Creative N+N Compounds

The term "creative N+N compounds" was coined by Benczes (2006, pp. 4-7). The constituents of such compound words are in the form of metaphors or metonymy, with a large number of words and complex semantics. Research has shown that the creativity of creative compound words comes from the abstract and figurative thinking in people's cognitive mechanism, which helps English learners expand their vocabulary, enhance their lexical sensitivity, and promote metaphorical thinking.

Exploring Compound Words From a Cognitive Linguistic Perspective

With the emergence of cognitive theories, many scholars have tried to examine the problem from this perspective in order to find out its internal explanatory mechanism. Z. G. Liu and R. Q. Liu (2004) investigated the semantic relations of N+N compounds as a basis for comprehension. There are five kinds of semantic relations between N1 and N2: connective, relational, attribute mapping, conflation, and integration. Hu and Wu (2006) used Schema Theory to explain N+N compounds in English and Chinese. Based on Ryder's categorization of schemas, they pointed out that entity schemas, event schemas, and representation schemas can be utilized to explain the pragmatic functions of compound nouns.

N+N compounds have been extensively examined at home and abroad over the years, which offers hints for understanding creative N+N compounds. The understanding and application of these words are aided by scholarly research, but there is still room for improvement because of the limitations of current studies and the fact that recent cognitive analyses offer new sources of inventive compound words but do not concentrate on identifying useful explanatory mechanisms for them. This study will thus focus on the cognitive mechanism of creative N+N compounds from a cognitive linguistic perspective and show how it can be favourably used to teach vocabulary in English learning.

Theoretical Framework for Innovative Compound Words

Metaphor

The concept of cognitive metaphor is more comprehensively described by Lakoff and Johnson in the book *Metaphors We Live by*. Metaphorical thinking is the cognitive ability to recognize one thing in terms of another, and it focuses on the interconnectedness of things, which abstract and figurative thinking can stimulate and create. Thus, the conceptual systems on which we think and act on a daily basis are also metaphorical in their essential foundations.

Cognitive Mechanisms of Conceptual Metaphors

The cognitive mechanism of conceptual metaphor involves two conceptual domains: the clearly structured origin domain and the vaguely structured target domain. People grasp the target domain by understanding the origin domain's schematic structure, which they project onto the target domain. "Imagery schema" is another way to convey the ability to connect objects that metaphors embody. It is an abstract framework that comes before the creation of concepts and language, connecting physical objects to abstract notions. It refers to the recurrent typical stylized diagrams that people experience interactively with the objective outside world.

Classification of Innovative Compound Words Based on Metaphor

Classification of Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson classify metaphors into three categories: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor, and ontological metaphor.

Structural metaphors allow us to use highly constructive and simply descriptive concepts to construct other concepts. Time is money. The conceptual metaphor is "You are wasting my time. I don't have the time to give you". The statement "I don't have the time to give you" in the money domain is systematically mirrored in the time domain, and the concepts of spending, saving, and other related concepts may be applied systematically to metaphors pertaining to the expression of "time" using the concept of money.

Oriental metaphor refers to the use of the concept of spatial orientation to understand another conceptual system. For example, in the sentence "I am feeling up", "up" is a metaphorical expression of a happy mood using the orientation concept of "up".

Ontological metaphors mainly refer to entity and substance metaphors, which refer to treating experience as an entity or substance and understanding the former through the latter. For instance, inflation can be quantified in the statement, "If there are much more inflation, we will never survive".

Classification of Creative N+N Compounds

There are two main types of creative N+N compounds: endocentric constructions and exocentric constructions. Both conceptual metaphor/metonymy and conceptual blending characterize their cognitive mechanisms: First, conceptual metaphor/metonymy processes the meaning of the compound word first, followed by conceptual blending, and second, conceptual blending combines the compound word first, followed by conceptual metaphor/metonymy processing the meaning of the entire word.

Endocentric Creative N+N Compounds

Since these are endocentric compound words, the creative compound words where modifier N1 is employed metaphorically or metonymically highlight a quality of the qualifier N2 through their metaphorical or metonymic

interpretation of the first constituent. Then, the process of integration of N1 used metaphorically or metonymically with another constituent N2 produces semantic features of the creative compound words.

For example, “orphan patient” means “a hospital patient without a family doctor”. It can be interpreted as a patient who has no one to turn to, that their family does not love or care for them. An “orphan patient” is a patient, and the concept of an orphan serves as a metaphor for the concept of a patient. The conceptual metaphor’s source and target domains are, respectively, the concepts of orphan and patient.

Exocentric Creative N+N Compounds

Innovative compound nouns of the exocentric type lack a central term and have meanings that are more elusive to understand initially. N2, an innovative compound word component, is employed as a metonymy. According to the conceptual integration theory, the two input spaces correspond to the conceptual metaphor’s target domain, and the components of these two domains are interconnected.

For example, the term “video pill” describes a camera that resembles a vitamin pill that broadcasts images from the stomach and intestines of a person when swallowed. The source domain of this compound word is a metaphorical usage of the concept of “pill”. The target domain is the concept “video”, which is envisioned as a device that records specific shows. The image of the pill then gives us access to the concept of video.

In summary, there are mainly two types of interpretive procedures: Conceptual metaphor, also known as metonymy, focuses mostly on the constituent parts of a compound word before integrating them, or vice versa.

Implications of Creative Compound Words for English Vocabulary Teaching

For teachers, teaching vocabulary is a crucial component of instruction. The interpretation of creative N+N compounds from a cognitive linguistic standpoint is the main topic of this study. Given that compound words make up a sizable fraction of the English language, as a result, studying this type of vocabulary will help with vocabulary learning and instruction.

Expanding Vocabulary

The foundation for learning a language is vocabulary. Increased vocabulary can lead to more flexible language use. Through this study, we can summarize two methods of expanding vocabulary: compound method and conversion method.

Compound method. The compound method is the most effective way to increase vocabulary since it helps us learn the principles of word construction and become familiar with the syntactic and grammatical rules of words. A formal combination of two or more free morphemes is called a compound word. When a compound term is non-creative, its meaning is often the sum of its parts. For example, “swimming pool”, “chess board”, and so forth. Whereas, the central morpheme of creative compound words can be used to deduce their meaning. Compound words improve vocabulary acquisition effectiveness and help students decompose words into their constituent morphemes and connect the components in short segments (Yu & Tian, 2022).

Conversion method. Another typical way that words are formed is through vocabulary conversion. A word can be converted, or changed from one meaning to another in a discourse, by using metonymy and metaphor to create the new meaning. For example, the term “cougar lift” describes how plastic surgery can enhance a person’s appearance. The definition of the verb “lift” is to transfer anything up from a lower location. It is transformed into a noun in this compound phrase, meaning “plastic surgery” to eliminate wrinkles and other facial age indicators. Thus, “plastic surgery” is another concept that is figuratively described by the simple verb “lift”.

Lexical shift thereby broadens vocabulary through discourse change and deepens word semantics through metonymy and metaphor.

Improving Lexical Sensitivity

Improving lexical sensitivity is crucial to lexical research. Lexical sensitivity can be enhanced by researching semantic motivation. The mental connections that conceptual meaning suggests as well as the relationship between literal meaning and cultural variances are the focus of semantic motivation. According to cognitive linguists, language is motivated since it is a product of our worldview, and it can be motivated cognitively. As for teaching vocabulary in a second language, several academics point out that the best approach to success is cognitive motivation analysis (Wu, 2021).

Discussion and Conclusion

Cognitive theories include metonymy, conceptual metaphor, and conceptual integration theory. They examine language issues from human cognition, which are the foundation of meaning interpretation. In addition to being useful for studying creative N+N compounds, the integration of these theories offers some direction for teaching English vocabulary. Teaching vocabulary is a crucial component of teaching languages and enhancing students' ability to communicate. This study questions the rote memorization-based approach to vocabulary learning in the classic sense. With the aid of Cognitive Theory, the study of creative N+N compounds creates a model to solve vocabulary learning issues.

First of all, two nouns can be integrated and used as metaphors or metonyms in creative N+N compounds. Theoretically, creative N+N compounds can be analyzed using conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, and conceptual integration; the combination of these theories offers a powerful explanatory framework for the subject of the investigation.

What's more important is that learning the internal mechanisms that creative N+N compounds use to explain themselves can help students comprehend, remember, and use them more effectively. Creative N+N compounds can be revealed and creative thinking stimulated by cognitive explanatory procedures.

This study focuses on the cognitive interpretation of creative N+N compounds; however, due to data collection limitations, some exceptions might not be explained by this interpretation process. Additionally, other compound word structures were not extensively investigated and only a tiny portion of the themes of creative N+N compounds were covered in this study. More research is required to explore whether this explanatory mechanism can be utilized to analyze other creative compound words or even all creative N+N compounds.

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