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Image-schematic scaffolding in textual and visual artefacts

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Abstract

This paper expands the understanding of how image schemas, while essentially spatial in nature, allow more complex concepts involving non-spatial elements to emerge later. We suggest that the explanation requires adding viewpoint characterization to the concept of image schemas. It is their viewpoint affordances which allow image schemas to form the conceptual scaffolding which becomes subsequently enriched through frames, applied metaphorically, and/or blended with textual and/or visual representations, yielding new and complex meanings in a wide array of multimodal artefacts. As a case in point we study examples instantiating the BARRIER schema across a wide range of text types (poetry, prose, political discourse) as well as in visual and material artefacts such as cartoons, graffiti or film, showing how people 'fill in' the skeletal structure of a BARRIER, through frames, metaphors and blends, often resulting in a changed embodied interaction with the BARRIER (characterized by restricted permeability, mobility, vision, or control) or a reconstrual of its materiality, making it (fictively) permeable, transparent, etc. The cross-modality approach we adopt in this research supports the idea that image schemas are not just linguistic (i.e. prompted and maintained through language) but truly conceptual and psychologically real.

Keywords: Barrier; Blending; Frames; Image schemas; Multimodality; Viewpoint

1. Introduction

Image schemas – skeletal conceptual structures arising from perception, bodily movements, manipulation of objects and experience of force, such as UP/DOWN, FORCE, COUNTERFORCE, or IN/OUT – were first proposed by Johnson (1987), and have attracted much attention since. In his 2005 paper Johnson reminds us that image schemas are primarily used as an explanation of the link between embodied experience (especially basic spatial experience), and higher cognition. Thus, as Johnson puts it, they provide the 'bones' on which the meaningful 'flesh' can then be put. At the same time, Johnson seems to call for further work to focus less on what image schemas really are, and more on how they come to yield the meanings that we observe, and especially on how expressions relying on them create the sense of a situation beyond its spatial structure. We take this comment to refer to the fact that a child can happily spend quite a lot of time putting a ball in the box and then taking it out, thus developing the idea of containment, but this behaviour does not explain why it may become rather unhappy when confined inside a container such as a playpen, and then again very happy when held in the caregiver's arms. These are indeed 'experiences', and they can be different, even when the same schema lies underneath. We argue in this paper that such felt differences in how schemas shape experiences depend on an additional conceptual element – that of *viewpoint*. The addition of a viewpoint may mean that the same type of structure yields

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different experiential results; for example, even a simple schema such as BLOCKED MOVE yields one kind of result if the speaker/experiencer is attempting to move and another kind if one is able to block the movement of an approaching large object.

Schemas have been studied from many angles (Hampe, 2005), and have recently come in for reappraisal and redefinition, based on new insights from studies of concept formation in infants (Mandler and Pagán Cánovas, 2014; henceforth M&PC). The emphasis in this new approach is on the essentially spatial nature of early infant concepts, with non-spatial elements such as force, time and emotion only emerging later through schematic integration. Schematic integration, essentially a form of blending, is what explains the ways in which simple skeletal spatial structures yield more complex conceptual patterns. For example, relying on the Container schema may be a starting point for understanding actions such as MOVE INTO/OUT OF. The question remains, we argue, how we move conceptually beyond simple patterns to understanding complex situations (for example, from MOVE INTO to the idea of a Military Invasion or Buying a House). While we can see how schemas participate in complex structures when they do participate, we should be more specific about how such choices are made.

We argue here that choices of expressions reflecting an underlying schema are additionally driven by the concept of *viewpoint*. So in our MOVE INTO example, Military Invasion involves a viewpoint from the inside of a country, with unwanted agents entering it by force (as different from Travel), while the idea of a house purchase involves a view from the outside, of someone who can now start occupying the inner space of the house. In such cases the schemas function as the core of culturally rich frames and it seems useful to consider how the viewpoint potential of image schemas opens some choices of relevant frames to be used to construe new situations, while limiting other choices, making frames less applicable. In this paper, we consider the viewpoint potential and resulting uses of a specific schema – that of a BARRIER.

The source of a schema's viewpoint potential lies in what Johnson (1997) and Grady (1997) have referred to as Primary Scenes – early childhood experiences, which yield conceptual foundations of more complex concepts, especially metaphoric ones. C. Johnson talks about the mechanism of *conflation*, as in the case of the verb *see* – a parent suggesting *Let's see what's in the drawer* is inviting the child to look, but also to learn what the container hides, thus conflating the primary experiences of being able to see and gaining knowledge, later solidified into Primary Metaphors such as KNOWING IS SEEING. In the context of Primary Scenes involving CONTAINERS and BARRIERS, an infant will understand the viewpoint implications of being inside a container (such as a play pen) or behind a barrier (restricted motion, or safety), and also of being outside a container/in front of a barrier – very likely wanting to enter or cross to the other side.

We show how this viewpoint potential is exploited across a range of examples through framing, metaphor and blending. Evidence is drawn from textual as well as visual artefacts, which points to shared underlying conceptual patterns of meaning-making across different modalities. Textual examples show clearly how rich the potential of the Barrier schema is, but the visual and material examples add an important piece of the puzzle – the ways in which conceptualization can effectively change the perception of material objects. Also, the added evidence from looking at visual artefacts supports the claim that schemas are psychologically real, rather than being primarily prompted and maintained through language. Thus our choice of examples from across modalities is aimed at providing broad support for the need to include viewpoint affordances of images in our discussion. Spatial primitives and the viewpointed image schemas they feature in provide, on our analysis, the *scaffolding* which allows increasingly complex creative artefacts to be built, thus revealing the nature of these underlying simple concepts. Retracing elaborate construals back to skeletal spatial concepts in this way is a promising avenue in ongoing cognitive viewpoint research (e.g. Dancygier and Sweetser, 2012; Dancygier et al., 2016; Dancygier and Vandelanotte, 2017).

2. Spatial primitives, image schemas and viewpoint

Mandler and Pagán Cánovas (2014) have recently refocused our understanding of preverbal cognitive structures formed in infancy (the first six to seven months of life), and in doing so separated out a number of levels that were previously conflated. Thus, they argue that the kinds of skeletal conceptual structures designated as image schemas, as described in the work of e.g. Johnson (1987) and Lakoff and Johnson (1999), arise from a variety of sources – ''perception, bodily movements, manipulation of objects and experience of force'' (M&PC, 2014:511) – which are in fact not yet conceptualized. Based on infant research carried out in recent decades, M&PC stress that ''with the exception of eyes seeing, all the information being conceptualized appears to be spatial in nature, either describing what something looks like and how it moves or what happens in the events in which it participates'' (2014:512). Not yet present in the first months of life are thus, for instance, conceptualizations of force, emotions, taste or touch. In order to better capture the prelinguistic development of cognitive structure, M&PC propose to distinguish three steps, in which each next step builds on the preceding, more basic one, and of which the first two are exclusively spatial:

- *spatial primitives*: the first things that infants attend to are motion along paths, locations in space, occlusion and containment, and goal-directed paths (of which sources are probably not yet a part). This observation prompts M&PC to

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