Fictive motion in Mandarin Chinese:
A corpus-based study of coextension paths

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This study investigates the linguistic distribution pattern of one type of fictive motion expressions---coextension paths---in Mandarin Chinese with authentic written data collected from a specialized corpus. Langacker (2005) has shown that language is not a pure reflection of the external world; instead, it is the product of various cognitive operations. Sometimes linguistic expressions even seem to violate our intuitions about reality, and a good example of this is fictive motion expressions. These expressions describe a static physical entity or situation using dynamic linguistic forms (motion verbs and directional prepositions), as illustrated in (1) from Talmy (2000, p. 99):

(1)   This fence goes from the plateau to the valley.

Talmy (2000) categorized English fictive motion expressions into six types, including emanation paths, advent paths, access paths, pattern paths, frame-relative motion, and coextension paths. Many related studies from then on were based on this categorization pattern.

The foundational work on fictive motion has been based mostly on English and relatively little work has been carried out on other languages. This study will explore one specific type of fictive motion expressions in Mandarin Chinese---coextension paths. In this paper we illustrate how coextension paths are encoded in Chinese and how such coextension paths are to be understood from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.

The specialized corpus is constructed in the following manner: 1) A number of coextension path sentences are manually collected from written texts. 2) Characteristic terms used in those expressions, including subjects, verbs, objects, and prepositions, are extracted and synonyms of those terms are added so that a relatively complete set of terms related to coextension-paths can be produced; 3) The terms are randomly combined to form 3-word search expressions, which are input into the Bing search engine; 4) the resulting texts from the 60,000 webpages containing those coextension-path terms are collected to form a large corpus.

Examples of coextension path sentences such as those below can then be obtained from the corpus.

(2)   路　是　从　山的　　西北，　盘曲而上。
        road is from hill's northwest, coil-and-rise
        The road rises from the northwest of the hill and goes up tortuously.

(3)   黄土高原　　　西起　日月山，　东到　太行山，　　北起　　　长城，南到　　　秦岭。
        Loess-Plateau west-from Mount-Riyue, east-to Mount-Taihang, north-from Great-Wall, south-to Qinling-Mountains
        Loess Plateau (extends) from Mount Riyue on its west side to Mount Taihang on its east side, and from Great Wall on its north side to Qinling-Mountains on its south side.

The first example above parallels one type of co-extension path sentence in English. The second example illustrates a category found in Mandarin but not English. In this presentation we provide a relatively complete picture of how Mandarin Chinese encodes coextension paths and explore ways in which this type of fictive motion relates to theories in cognitive linguistics.

Key words: Fictive motion; coextension paths; Mandarin Chinese; cognitive semantics; Talmy

References
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