Abstract of the Dissertation

Prominence: from Sensation to Language

by

Tracy Cameron Mansfield

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Professor Ronald W. Langacker, Chair

Two written corpora were sifted to uncover 1,452 contemporary American English words in declarative sentences that were isolated for prominence with italics. This research shows that conversants rely upon a **_direct iconic proportion_** between phonological and semantic intensity, resolving ambiguous form-meaning associations by exceeding the dimensional limitations of sequential segmentation. A speaker/signer aligns a model of reality adopted by a looker/listener with its own, either identifying a word-internal meaning disparity through ELABORATION, or revealing a word which can repair a word-external mismatch with REVELATION. These functions have their basis in the cognitive abilities of POWER and PRECISION, whose primitive progenitors provided the threshold across which sensation was adapted for communication. Elaboration signifies either an increase in semantic power ('huge' is 'very huge') or a discharge of EMOTION. Meanings portrayed with essentially spatial imagery are articulated with greater PRECISION, often as INTOLERANCE ('all' is 'absolutely all'). Also, parcelling semantic variations as a type's instances allows a POSITION in that type to elaborate a word's meaning. PROPER instances are paragonal (where 'green' is 'a real green-green'), and odd ones are PERIPHERAL (where 'green' is 'a weird green'). In revelation, contextual mismatches are identified by shifting the intensity or location of primary prominence. The prominent word is exchanged for a counterpart located in a parallel setting either in discourse or in common knowledge. SUBSTITUTION exchanges an explicit, single-word discourse counterpart. DERIVATION exchanges implicit or multi-word counterparts through an appeal to conventional or contextual associations. Greater prominence is used to repair broader mismatches in construal, correcting errors which are rooted more deeply inside common knowledge or memory. With LINKED close instances, mutual prominence is /interpreted/ as significant. Mutually prominent words are taxonomically DISSOCIATED as labels, or COORDINATED according to their pre-existing causal or consequential links. Both dissociation and coordination can be augmented by the TIMING provided by close structural parallels.