

An Instructional Syllabus for Teaching Persian Prepositions to Non-Native Speakers Based on Cognitive Semantics: Case Study, Preposition "Az"

Tahereh Vahidi Ferdowsi¹

M.A. in Linguistics, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

Dr. Ali Alizadeh

Associate professor of Linguistics, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

Zahra Badamdari

M. A. in Linguistics, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

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Extended abstract

1- Introduction

Language learning is one of the most complex issues in teaching a foreign language. Prepositions having different meanings in different contexts are mostly problematic issues for both language instructors and non-Persian learners. Although prepositions are frequently used in Persian textbooks and daily conversations, learners fail to incidentally acquire them and often show low achievements in using them correctly. The strategy commonly employed by language instructors is teaching the multiple senses of prepositions by rote learning (Song, 2013). Rote learning lacks comprehensive analysis of different concepts of prepositions. Hence, students have to memorize them merely by repetition. In contrast, Cognitive Linguistics (CL) suggests a different approach to teaching prepositions that may have a strong impact on the methodologies of foreign language teaching and meaningful learning (Song, 2013). Compared to traditional approaches, cognitive linguistics offers an account of language structure that is arguably more comprehensive (Langacker, 1995). It opens up a new perspective of the CL-inspired meaningful learning approach on language teaching demonstrating the unification of the integrated model of text and picture for comprehension (the ITPC model). It also integrates the new knowledge with related prior knowledge in the cognitive structure of the learner mind (Ausubel, 2000). In addition, the ITPC model illustrates thoroughly how information is processed through each stage of the cognitive procedure. Prepositions are considered as having different meanings that are presented in a very systematized and related way in this model that in turns provides a fruitful basis for explaining the use of prepositions in different contexts. Thus, it seems to have a great effect on the methods of foreign language teaching and learning (Song, 2013).

The present study focuses on the preposition, "Az" which is frequently used for presenting spatial meaning. So, the aim of the study is to provide an instructional syllabus based on cognitive semantics perspective for teaching different senses of

¹ Corresponding Author: vahidi.taherh@gmail.com

this preposition to non-Persian speakers (in intermediate level). This preposition has 26 different usages as illustrated in Farhange Sokhane Anvari (2003). We have determined its prototype and different meanings based on this dictionary and the criteria of Tyler and Evans (2003). For this purpose, some sentences and phrases including this preposition were selected from non-Persian speaker's textbooks in Jameat-almostafa center of Mashhad. According to Farhange Sokhane Anvari (2003), the first usage of this preposition is to show the "source" as far as the spatial and metaphoric concept is concerned. In this study, we introduced a suggested model of teaching in its abstract spatial usage. The proposed instructional method is an integrated model of text and picture (by PowerPoint and poster) for teaching semantic structure of the preposition, regarding its central and other meanings. The use of images, containing sensory and perceptual experiences of students, can make meaningful relationship between their new and previous knowledge. The findings open up an effective perspective in teaching and meaningful learning of this preposition for non-native speakers.

2- Theoretical Framework

Cognitive linguistics is one of the new schools of Linguistics derived from new cognitive sciences. In their interactions with environment, human beings perceive one thing in terms of another thing metaphorically. This is known as "conceptualization" in which abstract meanings are discovered based on their physical counterparts. We assume that a preposition designates a conceptual spatial relation between a TR (trajectory) and an LM (landmark), which constitutes an abstract spatial scene. Conceptual content can be abstracted away from specific spatial scenes, giving rise to a more abstract representation, which is called a proto-scene. A proto-scene is associated with prototype of a particular preposition. According to Langacker (1987), an image schema includes a trajectory, a landmark, and relationship between the trajectory and the landmark. Thus, prepositions are able to extend the spatial senses to their abstract senses by metaphorical mappings.

3- Methodology

In this study, first, according to the criteria of Tyler and Evans (2003), prototype and different meanings of preposition "Az" were selected from Farhang Sokhan (Anvari, 2003). Then, some sentences and phrases containing the preposition were investigated by random sampling in the textbooks of Jameat-Al-Mostafa center in Mashhad. Finally, a suggested model was introduced for teaching the Persian preposition "Az" to non-native speakers, based on the domain theory of Langacker (1987) and the notion of image schemas (Lakoff & Johnson, 1987). The proposed instructional method is an integrated model of text and picture (by PowerPoint and poster) for teaching semantic structure of the preposition, regarding its central and other meanings. At the end of each session, the related exercises were given to the students including multiple choice, filling the gap, and matching.

4- Results and Discussion

Based on the cognitive approach, the prototype meaning of preposition “Az” is the “source” in which trajectory (TR) runs away from landmark (LM). In the present study, the focus was on high frequency concepts, such as “source” and “part of whole”. In the first session, an interesting prologue was used to attract students. Since the image schema of “Az”, is “source”, explain its spatial and abstract meanings. In the second session, another concept of it, “part of whole” is explained for spatial and abstract meanings. Finally, students should do the exercises.

5- Conclusion and Suggestions

This study focused on a cognitive approach to teaching Persian prepositions to non-native speakers. In cognitive approach, learning has more effects on knowledge acquisition in constructing cognitive schemata. In this approach, students can integrate new knowledge with relevant prior knowledge, so learning is meaningful and satisfying. In the present study, an instructional model for teaching two different concepts of preposition “Az” in the spatial and abstract domains are presented. Future studies are required to investigate other prepositions as well as their different meanings.

Key Words: Cognitive semantics, Teaching, Preposition, Image schema.

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