EMBODIED COGNITION THESIS

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of image schemas, first introduced by Johnson (1987), as fundamental cognitive structures grounded in embodied experience. Image schemas such as *container, source-path-goal, balance,* and *object* arise from recurrent sensory and perceptual interactions with the world and provide the foundational patterns through which humans conceptualize and organize experience. They serve as the basis for more complex ideas through metaphorical mappings between concrete and abstract domains. The study of image schemas is topical because it reveals how embodied experience structures thought and language, offering valuable insights for cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, and the interdisciplinary study of human cognition.

Keywords: embodied cognition thesis, image schema, concept, sensory and perceptual experience, container, conceptual metaphor

Image schemas were put forwards by Johnson in "The Body in the Mind" which denote abstract representations that arise from our everyday sensory and perceptual experience, from our interactions with the world (Johnson, 1987). In other words, embodied experience leads to the formation of image schemas in a human being's conceptual system. Bodily experiences structure concepts and influence language. These schemas enable an individual to understand and organize experience, as well as affect how a human uses language to express these concepts. They are used to build more complex concepts and ideas (Evans & Green, 2006).

Language helps convey meanings and concepts that originate from our bodily interactions with the world. Leonard Talmy studied how the structure of language reflects conceptual structure, and how these structures arise from embodied experience (Talmy, 2000). Lakoff and Johnson investigated where the complexity

of our conceptual representations comes from. They proposed that this complexity is largely related to close correlations between bodily experience and abstract conceptualization (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Image schemas are not rich or detailed concepts, but rather abstract constructs consisting of patterns that emerge from recurring cases of embodied experience. They are based on sensory-perceptual experience and therefore have a high degree of schematicity (Evans & Green, 2006).

A wide range of image schemas are distinguished, such as "**up-down", "left-right", "container", "source-path-goal", "balance", "force", "merging", "splitting", "part-whole", "identity", "object".** The **"container" image schema** is a cognitive structure that arises from an individual's repeated and pervasive experiences with containers and allows for perceiving and interpreting various phenomena and experiences through the concept of a container, which has an internal space, boundaries, and the ability to hold or include something. It is a fundamental pattern used to organize an individual's understanding of boundedness and inclusion in space through analogy with a physical container. The concept of "container" underlies specific lexical notions such as the prepositions *"in", "into", "out of", "outside", "inside"* (Evans & Green, 2006).

Schematicity level of image schemas

Image schemas can have different levels of schematicity, meaning that more specific schemas can derive from more fundamental or schematic ones. Image schemas may be more general and basic, or more specific and detailed, depending on which aspects of experience they describe. For example, the **"container" schema** describes the general principle of boundedness or containment. This may include concepts such as *inside* and *outside,* which can be applied both to physical objects and to abstract ideas. For instance, the schemas can include motion and container in one form or another. The schemas of this kind are more detailed and specific in their applications (Evans & Green, 2006).

Image schemas are subject to transformations

Since image schemas arise from embodied experience, which is ongoing, they can transform from one schema into another. When a human sees a herd of cows up close, they can distinguish each cow separately. In this case, this experience corresponds to the "**count"** schema, since each cow is an individual entity that can be identified and counted. This schema allows an individual to perceive and work with individual objects within a group. As an individual moves farther away from the herd, the ability to distinguish individual cows decreases. At some point a human stops seeing them as individuals and starts perceiving them as a single mass. At this moment, the experience shifts to the "**mass"** schema, where the entire herd is perceived as a homogeneous entity without distinct parts. This schema allows for perceiving objects that seem internally uniform (Lakoff, 1987).

Image schemas and abstract thought

An **image schema** is a schematic representation that arises from embodied experience and generalizes what is common to objects: for example, that they have physical characteristics such as color, weight, and shape, that they occupy a certain bounded area of space, and so on. Cognitive semanticists argue that abstract thinking is grounded in our physical experience of interaction with the world (Evans & Green, 2006).

Lakoff and Johnson suggest that conceptual system is organized in the form of metaphorical connections between concrete and abstract domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Image schemas provide a concrete basis for metaphorical mappings.For instance, the "O**bject"** image schema is based on a human being's everyday interaction with concrete objects such as tables, chairs, cars, and so on. Image schemas can also be "projected" onto abstract entities (Evans & Green, 2006). For example, the "o**bject"** schema can be applied to the abstract concept of *inflation.* Although inflation has no physical form, it is understood as an object with certain characteristics. Through metaphorical mapping, it is possible to talk about abstract concepts in terms of physical objects. This allows for quantifying abstract concepts and discuss their effects. For example, by saying that *"inflation causes a headache,"*

physical properties are attributed to inflation in order to better understand and describe its impact (Lakoff & Johnson, 1987).

Conclusion

Image schemas are fundamental cognitive structures that emerge from embodied experience and shape the way we think, perceive, and use language. They provide schematic patterns such as *container, object, source-path-goal,* and others, which organize both physical and abstract domains of human experience. Their flexibility allows for different levels of schematicity and even transformations from one schema to another, as illustrated by the shift from QUANTITY to MASS. Serving as the foundation for metaphorical mappings, image schemas reveal how abstract reasoning is deeply rooted in bodily interaction with the world. Thus, they are crucial for understanding the embodied basis of cognition and language.

References:

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