

Where prepositional categories meet: the case of the *from X to Y* construction

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The English prepositions *from* and *to* constitute each other's polar opposites. In spatial terms, the former encodes the TR's orientation away from the LM and the latter – the TR's orientation towards the LM. From a functional perspective, the LM of *from* constitutes the TR's source, whereas in the case of *to* it corresponds to the TR's goal. The symmetry between both prepositions extends well beyond the spatial primary meanings described in the foregoing, as *from* and *to* have also developed several opposite senses. For example, while *from* is used to refer to distance, detachment, distinction and subtraction, *to* is frequently employed in the contexts pertaining to proximity, attachment, similarity and addition. In consequence, the two prepositions exhibit a substantial degree of compatibility, which in turn results in a number of joint instantiations, such as for instance the following:

- (1) *The ice drifted from east to west.*
- (2) *The baby was swaddled from neck to toe.*
- (3) *People just have enough being thrown from pillar to post.*
- (4) *She used to read *The Times* from cover to cover.*
- (5) *I like all kinds of music from opera to reggae.*
- (6) *We have to proceed from thought to deed.*
- (7) *The birth-rate is not constant from year to year.*
- (8) *He is doing better from test to test.*

The aim of the present paper is to account for the status of the afore-mentioned instances by means of one of the most recent cognitive linguistic methodologies, the Principled Polysemy model (Tyler and Evans, 2003). We shall specifically argue that the *from X to Y* construction constitutes a polysemous category in its own right, motivated by the meaningful combination of the central meanings of both prepositions (see Figure 1 below, which depicts the relevant proto-scene or schematic representation of the primary sense). All in all, we distinguish as many as nine distinct meanings of *from* and *to* in their semantic network, three of which appear to have been sanctioned by another sense rather than directly by the central meaning (see Figure 2 below).

References:

Tyler, A. and V. Evans, 2003, *The Semantics of English Prepositions: Spatial Scenes, Embodied Meaning and Cognition*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Figure 1 The proto-scene for *from* and *to*

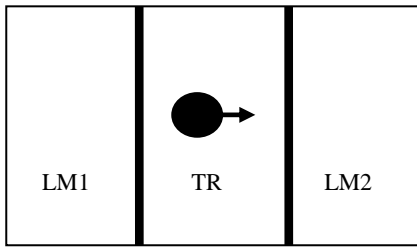


Figure 2 The semantic network for *to* and *from*

