CHAPTER 6: Polysemy of perception verbs

“God! This woman sees more with her nose than she does with her eyes. That’s because she is blind with love, Sir.”

(Plautus Miles Gloriosus)

An attempt is made in this Chapter to discuss the various semantic extensions in the semantic field of perception verbs in Ladakhi.

The semantic field of perception verbs is one of the favorite domains in linguistic research. Due to their wide variety of constructional and syntactical possibilities and their rich polysemous structures, these verbs have been the object of study not only in morpho-syntax (Dik and Hengeveld 1991; Enghels 2005; Fernandez Jaen 2006; Garcia-Miguel 2005; Gisborne 1996; Horie 1993; Roegiest 2003) but also in semantics (Alm-Arvius 1993; Horno Cheliz 2002, Ibarretxe-Antunano 1999a, Rojo and Valenzuela 2004-2005; Sweetser 1990; Viberg 1984).

According to Sekuler and Blake (1994), perception is a biological process wherein the brain derives descriptions of objects and events in the world, using information gathered by the senses.

In the area of polysemy, one can find numerous studies devoted to the analysis of the semantic extensions that these verbs lexicalize. Within the
framework of Cognitive Linguistics, Sweetser (1990) reviews some of the semantic extensions of perception verbs in English. Her main aim is to provide a motivated explanation for the relationships between senses of a single morpheme or word and between diachronically earlier and later sense of a morpheme or word. She proposes a semantic link-up that can account for this pervasive tendency in the Indo-European languages to borrow concepts and vocabulary from the more accessible physical and social world to refer to the less accessible worlds of reasoning, emotion, and conversational structure; what she calls the ‘Min-as-Body metaphor’ that can be considered as what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call ‘conceptual metaphor’. The Mind-as-Body is motivated by correspondences between our external experience and our internal emotional and cognitive states. These correspondences are not isolated; they are parts of a larger system. This metaphor involves our conceptualizing one whole area of experience (i.e. the mind) in terms of another (i.e. the body).

In this chapter, I analyze the different meanings that perception verbs can convey in Ladakhi language.

6.1. Prototypical meanings of perception verbs

The semantic field of perception verbs has five components: vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste. Although the label ‘perception’ refers to verbs such as see, look, hear, listen, sound, smell, touch, feel and taste among others, as an overall group it is very important for our analysis to bear in mind that these
verbs can be classified in three different groups according to the semantic role of their subjects.

The first group of verbs is traditionally described as “the receiving of an expression by the senses independently of the will of the person concerned” (Poutsma 1926: 341. As for instance example 1 and 2 shows:

1. \( t^h\omega n^t\sigma s \) ‘to see’ (LED: RN)
   
   \( \ddot{t}iwi \, t^h\omega nduga \)
   
   television see-pr-Q
   
   ‘Can you see the television?’

2. \( t^s^h\omega r^t\sigma s \) ‘to hear’ (LED: RN)
   
   \( \eta as \, k\ddot{u}t\ddot{\sigma}o \, t^s^h\omega r \)
   
   I-erg noise heard
   
   ‘I heard a noise.’

In examples 1 and 2 above, the subject does not consciously control the stimuli; it refers to a state or inchoative achievement. The process described in both the verbs used above, namely \( t^h\omega n^t\sigma s \) ‘to see’ and \( t^s^h\omega r^t\sigma s \) ‘to hear’ are that of the perception of various phenomena via the relevant sense organ: eye and ear respectively.

with experiencer subject’ (Lehrer 1990: 223), and ‘experience’ (Viberg 1984: 123).

The second group of verbs is those exemplified in 3 and 4 below:

3. ltatʃes ‘to look at, to watch’ (LED: RN)

kʰos ɳaa ltas

he-erg I-dat look-pst

‘He looked at me.’

4. ŋantʃes ‘to listen’ (LED: RN)

ŋas şnastshul ɲanspin

I-erg news listen-pst

‘I listened to the news.’

These verbs are called ‘active perception verbs’ (Poutsma 1926: 341; Leech 1971: 23; Rogers 1971: 206, 1972: 304), ‘active experiencer subject’ (Lehrer 1990: 223), and ‘active’ (Viberg 1984: 123). They refer to an “unbounded process that is consciously controlled by a human agent” (Viberg 1984: 123).

The last group is formed by that verb whose subject is the stimuli of the perception as illustrated in 5 below:

5. thọṇṭʃes ‘to be looked’ (LED: RN)

miɡra takna kʰeraŋ rdemo thọṇḍuk
spectacles wear-cond you good look-pr

‘You look good if you wear spectacles.’

This group is called ‘flip verbs’ (Rogers 1971: 206, 1972: 304), ‘stimulus subject’ (Lehrer 1990: 223), ‘copulative’ (Viberg 1984: 123), and ‘percept’ (Gisborne 1996: 1).

Viberg (1984) established the differences between experience and activity verbs on the one hand and copulative verbs on the other, on the basis of what he calls ‘base selection’, i.e. the choice of grammatical subject among the deep semantic case roles associated with a certain verb. In the former case, verbs are ‘experiencer-based’; that is to say the verb takes an animate being with certain mental experience as a subject. In the later case, verbs are ‘source-based’ or ‘phenomenon-based’, as the verb takes the experienced entity as a subject.

As seen from the description of each group above, these different types of perception verbs receive different terms according to different authors. In this study, I follow Viberg’s terminology for the experiencer-based verbs (i.e. active and experience) and Gisborne’s for the source-based ones (i.e. percept). Therefore, the basic paradigm of the verbs of perception in Ladakhi is show in table 1 below:
6.2. Non-prototypical meanings in perception verbs

In this section I analyze the non-prototypical meanings in perception verbs in Ladakhi. Non-prototypical meanings are all those extended meanings, both physical and metaphorical, that these verbs can convey apart from the central prototypical meaning of physical perception.

6.2.1. Vision

Vision is by far the most studied sense of the five. The semantic field of sight has been analyzed not only from the point of view of polysemy (Bauer 1949; Prevot 1935; Garcia Hernandez 1976; Alm-Arvius 1993) but also from the language acquisition perspective (Landau and Gleitman 1985; C. Johnson 1999). This section presents an analysis of the main extended meanings that vision verbs convey in Ladakhi.
The verbs used for the following analysis are $t^{h}o$n ‘see’ and $lta$ ‘look’ in Ladakhi extensions of above stated examples 1 and 3 of first group and second group respectively.

1.1 ‘to be visible, to look (a certain way or like something)’ (LED: RN)

$k^{h}o$ ladakspa tsoks $t^{h}o$nduk

he ladakh-person like see-pr

‘He looks like a Ladakhi.’

The sense in example 1.1 above is an extension from the prototypical meaning of the perception verb $t^{h}o$n ‘see’ used metaphorically to refer to ‘to be visible, to look (a certain way or like something)’.

3.1 ‘to face, to be pointed towards’ (LED: RN)

$g^{n}pa$ $n$osl$a$ ltase $t^{h}$akp$h$ul

monastery towards watch prostrate-offer

‘Do the prostration facing toward the monastery.’

3.2 ‘to look after, to take care of’ (LED: RN)

$k^{h}as$ $p^{h}$amaa maltas

he-erg parents-dat neg-watch-pst

‘He did not look after (his) parents.’

The senses in examples 3.1 and 3.2 above are extensions of the prototypical meaning of the perception verb $lta$ ‘look’ used metaphorically to
refer to ‘to face, to be pointed towards’ and ‘to look after, to take care of’ respectively.

6.2.2. Hearing

Hearing is said to be the sense of linguistic communication and in fact in all the meaning, both concrete and abstract, it seems to be so. There are always two elements involved in this sense: the hearer and the speaker. The latter could be a person or an object, known or unknown, but the fact is that it is always present.

The verbs analyzed in this sense are ʼtsʰor ‘hear’ and ʼpañ ‘listen’ in Ladakhi extensions of above stated examples 2 and 4 of first group and second group respectively.

2.1 ‘to perceive, to feel (that something) is good, bad, delicious etc.’ (LED: RN)

ŋaa kʰardʒi ʒimbo matsʰor

I-dat food tasty neg-hear

‘I did not feel the food tasty.’

In example 2.1 above, the sense is extended metaphorically used to refer to ‘to perceive, to feel (that something) is good, bad, delicious etc.’. It is an extension from the prototypical meaning of the perception verb ʼtsʰor ‘hear’.

4.1 ‘to obey’ (LED: RN)

gərgani kʰaa maŋangs
‘The students did not obey the teachers.’

The sense in example 4.1 above is an extension of the prototypical meaning of the perception verb नाँ ‘listen’. The sense is metaphorically extended to refer to ‘to obey’.

6.2.3. Taste

The physical sense of taste is generally linked to personal likes and dislikes in the mental world. Perhaps the reason why this is so lies in the fact that the sense of taste is most closely associated with fine discrimination. According to Buck (1949: 1031), among Hindus there are six principal varieties of taste with sixty-three possible mixtures and among Greeks six, including the four fundamental ones: ‘sweet’, ‘bitter’, ‘acid’ and ‘salt’. This makes the sense of taste very accurate from a descriptive point of view as it allows us to express ourselves very precisely when we want to describe a taste. The verb used in this sense is नूक ‘to taste’ in Ladakhi.

The diverse uses of नूक ‘taste’ are grouped under two major categories: one signifies ‘prototypical’ meaning; the second designates metaphorically extended senses in physical domain. These two major categories are semantically related to each other by means of metaphorical shift from the prototypical meaning. The following study on the polysemy of नूक implies that the senses of
the word are related to one another more or less closely by means of metaphorical extensions.

(A) **Prototypical meaning of ɲuk**

The word taste described in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (1996) as “To be able to recognize flavors in food and drink”. This definition corresponds to the prototypical understanding of the perception verb ɲuk ‘taste’ as illustrated in example 6 below.

6. ɲuktʃəs ‘to taste, take a taste’ (LEUD: AH)

\[
\text{khārdʒiān tsʰa gazuktʃikək ɲuk}
\]

food-in salt how-v.be search

‘Taste whether the salt is enough in the food.’

The most central meaning of the perception verb ɲuk in Ladakhi is almost same as “taste” in English. In this sense, the meaning in example 1 above refers to ‘taste’.

(B) **Metaphorical transfer of ɲuk (in physical domain)**

An important kind of motivation for meaning extension comes from metaphoric mappings. Metaphor involves a transfer from one domain of conceptualization onto another. Consequently, there is one meaning involved that is called ‘prototypical’ and another one that is ‘transferred’ or metaphorical.
There are several ways in which senses develop from the prototypical meaning, but very often they develop through the process of metaphor. Consider the following examples:

5.1 ‘to search by touch, feel around with the hand’ (LEUD: AH)

\[\text{møtudpo garðak nuk}\]

Match box where-v.be search

‘See where the match box is?’

5.2 ‘to test’ (Additional)

\[\text{sikelpo ṇas rdzaʃik ṇuga}\]

bicycle I-erg little search-Q

‘Can I test the bicycle little bit?’

The senses in examples 5.1 and 5.2 above are alike, because their objects are concrete and physical. All these senses are metaphorically transferred within the physical domain to refer to ‘to search by touch, feel around with the hand’, and ‘to test’ of some concrete objects.

In this Chapter, I have presented and analyzed the different semantic extensions in the semantic field of perception verbs in terms of prototype and metaphor that are central to Cognitive Linguistics.