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## PROTOTYPES IN LINGUISTICS

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**Annotation:** This article deals with the important information about Prototype Theory in linguistics, its special features in language. In addition to this, in the article historical background of Prototype Theory and linguistic researches were analyzed.

**Key words:** *contemporary linguistics, a key assumption, prototype supporters, internal structure, anecdotal cases, fundamental tenets, typicality structure.*

Discover the fascinating world of Prototype Theory in linguistics, an influential approach that fundamentally changed our understanding of meaning in language. Initially developed in the field of semantics, this groundbreaking concept has had a lasting impact on linguistic research and contributed to the ongoing debate around classification and meaning. In exploring its origin, delve into the work of cognitive psychologist Eleanor Rosch, who pioneered this theory, and examine the importance of her contributions to contemporary linguistics. The term prototype, as defined in psychologist [Eleanor Rosch's](#) study "Natural Categories", was initially defined as denoting a stimulus, which takes a salient position in the formation of a category, due to the fact that it is the first stimulus to be associated with that category. Rosch later defined it as the most central member of a category. Cognitive psychology has been successful in formulating and experimenting a battery of models of theory of concepts and categorization with a key assumption that human's theories of the world embody conceptual knowledge and that their conceptual organization is partly represented in their theories. One model among the theory of concepts is the prototype theory[1].

Lexical decomposition can, in theory, be used for lexical (concrete) meaning and grammatical (abstract) meaning in the same way. Various semantic theories have developed much more elaborate mechanisms for decompositions and featural structures. However, the defenders of the prototype approach saw two main problems with featural decomposition:

1. it is categorical

A either a concept has a property and belongs to a category,  
B or it does not.

2. there is a single set of features that defines a concept

A a feature either is necessary for the definition of a concept  
B or it is not.

In addition, prototype supporters objected that the cognitive representation of meaning would involve purely linguistic mechanisms and be independent from other cognitive mechanisms. Prototype Theory thus aimed at providing a mechanism that allows for more flexibility and that integrates with other cognitive domains. Prototype view is a product of cognitive psychology of the 1970s mainly due to Rosch's ground breaking research of the internal structure of categories. It came into existence in cognitive psychology at the juncture when there was a growing dissatisfaction of the cognitive linguistics classical –definitional theory of necessary and sufficient conditions of a category. In the same vein there was the growing pain and dissatisfaction with the inapplicability of the feature based componential analysis of Chomskian school except for words of the closed class which belong to the same semantic field or domain, like kinship terms. Prototype gave a blow for both the classical and componential analysis theories at the same time[2]. Cognitive psychology has advanced much since then in experimenting and formulation of alternative models and theories and tackling the main problem of concept study, i.e., conceptual combination. However, cognitive linguistics lag behind in theorizing and experimenting except using some unsystematic anecdotal cases as evidence. In short, neither the prototype is properly explored, nor a new theory is adopted and formulated. In actuality, cognitive linguistics clings to prototype theory till now as it is considered by almost all students of cognitive linguistics as one of the three cognitive linguistics's fundamental tenets with schemas and basic level categories. The initial success of cognitive linguistics as it manages to bridge the gap between formal syntax and morphology and relate the semantic aspects of grammar with their common conceptual basis is reported by Ungerer & Schmid [3]. Prototype, has still persists in a chaotic form despite protests, reviews and cautions raised as early as 1989. This is partly due to its properties like fuzzy boundaries, family resemblance, central and peripheral members which give room for throwing out inadequate analysis to readers. It seems that for every exception in linguistics, prototype is used as a fire fighter, face saving mechanisms. This creates chaos and confusions for students of linguistics who recently join the exploration. So the review though, brief help in understanding

prototype theory by comparing and contrasting it with cognitive psychology prototype view of the study of concepts.

If we go back to the historical background of the prototype theory, Rosch and others developed prototype theory as a response to, and radical departure from, the classical theory of concepts, which defines concepts by necessary and sufficient conditions.[4] Necessary conditions refers to the set of features every instance of a concept must present, and sufficient conditions are those that no other entity possesses. Rather than defining concepts by features, the prototype theory defines categories based on either a specific artifact of that category or by a set of entities within the category that represent a prototypical member. The prototype of a category can be understood in lay terms by the object or member of a class most often associated with that class. The prototype is the center of the class, with all other members moving progressively further from the prototype, which leads to the gradation of categories. Every member of the class is not equally central in human cognition. As in the example of furniture above, couch is more central than wardrobe. Contrary to the classical view, prototypes and gradations lead to an understanding of category membership not as an all-or-nothing approach, but as more of a web of interlocking categories which overlap.

Further development of prototype theory by psychologist James Hampton,[5] and others replaced the notion of prototypes being the most typical exemplar, with the proposal that a prototype is a bundle of correlated features. These features may or may not be true of all members of the class (necessary or defining features), but they will all be associated with being a typical member of the class. By this means, two aspects of concept structure can be explained. Some exemplars are more typical of a category than others, because they are a better fit to the concept prototype, having more of the features. Importantly, Hampton's prototype model explains the vagueness that can occur at the boundary of conceptual categories. While some may think of pictures, telephones or cookers as atypical furniture, others will say they are not furniture at all. Membership of a category can be a matter of degree, and the same features that give rise to typicality structure are also responsible for graded degrees of category membership.

To sum up all given facts above, it should be noted the explanatory depth of prototype theory resides partly in its generalizable character, but also in its interdisciplinary nature. The importance of its genetic link with psycholinguistics can only be fully appreciated against the background of the Chomskyan requirements with regard to theories of grammar. Chomsky's methodology is, in fact, in the awkward position of declaring linguistics a cognitive science,

but refusing to deal directly with the findings of the other sciences of the mind. Roughly stated, Chomskyan linguistics claims to reveal something about the mind, but imperviously prefers a strictly autonomist methodology over the open dialogue with psychology that would seem to be implied by such a claim. Prototype theory's linguistic application of psycholinguistic findings, on the other hand, takes the Chomskyan ideal of cognitive explanatory depth to its natural consequences, viz. of giving up the methodological autonomy of linguistics in favor of an interdisciplinary dialogue with the other cognitive sciences. Prototype theory takes the cognitive claims of Chomskyanism methodologically seriously by its interdisciplinary openness. This is all the more important at a moment when Cognitive Science is emerging as an interdisciplinary cluster of psychology, neuroscience, Artificial Intelligence, and philosophy. It is probably one of the reasons for the appeal of prototype theory that its interdisciplinary connections hold the promise of linking linguistics to the most important development that the human sciences are currently witnessing.

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