

Muye Zhang - Abstract

## **Individual Differences Drive Word-Meaning Variation along Conceptual Structure Pathways: Contextual-Priming of the Location-Possession Continuum**

Cross-linguistically and diachronically, linguistic markers expressing location are gradually recruited to express possession, suggesting conceptual proximity between the two domains. We hypothesize that (a) possessive marking (e.g. have) is compatible with locative meaning; (b) speaker's ability to extract locative meaning from sentences containing possessive marking is modulated by context and by individual differences in cognitive processing style that guide how individuals may mine context. In a context-retrieval-dependent task, a target sentence "The maple tree has a car" followed contexts expressing locative-relations ("The motorcycle is under the pine tree"), possession-relations ("The pine tree has big branches"), and attributes ("The pine tree is very green").

Predictions: A. Speakers will rate higher (Study-1) and read faster (Study-2) locative have-sentences following only locative contexts; B. Speakers' responses will depend on their cognitive flexibility/innovation style, (indexed by sex/Autism Quotient) (Study-3).

Results: Predictions were borne out: higher acceptability ratings (S1:  $p < .001$ ) and lower reading times (S2:  $p < .01$ ) for the target have-sentence only after the locative context. Cognitive flexibility/tolerance measures significantly predicted individual differences in ratings/RTs ( $p$ 's  $< .05$ ).

Conclusions: A. Language-specific markers capture different subsets of a unified location-possession conceptual space; B. Individual speaker innovation can drive specific markers' meaning shifts within this space; C. Meaning variation/change depend on real-time processing asymmetries.