

Comparison of *beat* and *hit* from the Perspective of Cognitive Semantics*

Youngju Choi
(Chosun University)

Choi, Youngju. 2012. Comparison of *beat* and *hit* from the Perspective of Cognitive Semantics. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*. 20(3). 17-37. This study compares the partially synonymous verbs *beat* and *hit* based on corpus data and shows, from the perspective of cognitive semantics, how they build up their own paths by focusing on different aspects of the prototypical senses. *Beat* and *hit* are both related to *strike*. However, when they extend their meanings, their foci diverge. The former pays more attention to repeatedness and forcefulness and the latter to one-time occurrence and accuracy of the striking behavior, resulting in very different meanings especially when they occur in abstract domains. The finding demonstrates that the major devices of cognitive semantics, metaphor and metonymy, can effectively explain how synonymous words develop their polysemous meanings along bifurcating paths.

Key Words: *hit*, *beat*, cognitive semantics, metaphor, metonymy, corpus study, prototypical meanings, extended meanings, synchronic variations

I. Introduction

According to the classical view of categorization, whether an entity belongs to a category is decided based on sufficient and necessary conditions. The entity has to meet the conditions in order to be a member of the category. Thus,

* I gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments made by three reviewers of this journal. But all the remaining errors are mine. This research was supported by the 2008 Chosun University research grant.

various meanings of a word are supposed to have something common. They have to share core senses and they are not supposed to be radically different from each other. Synonymous pairs, too, are assumed to share core senses and development of different or opposite meanings is not predicted.

However, in cognitive semantics, it is assumed that two synonymous words can develop drastically different meanings since its categorization is based on family resemblance of Wittgenstein (1978). With the example of *game*, he illustrates how different types of games, such as board-games, card-games, ball-games and Olympic games, all fall into the same category *game* even though they do not share something common. Some games have a winner and a loser, but others do not. Some games are amusing and others are not. Some games requires skills and luck but others do not. The various games are categorized as a *game* based on a overlapping and criss-crossing network of similarities (Taylor 1995).

By the same token, various meanings of a word are licensed based on the complicated meaning network, not based on a common core sense all the members share. Thus, synonymous words can take very different paths in extending their meanings because they can form different meaning chains. For example, in one word, a meaning A licenses B, B licenses C, and C licenses D, while, in the other word, the similar meaning A' licenses E, E licenses F and F licenses G. Due to the similar meanings A and A', they are considered as (partially) synonymous but they can diverge very far.

With the aim of demonstrating how cognitive semantics can explain synchronic meaning variations of synonymous words, the study will compare the current usage of the partially synonymous verbs *beat* and *hit*. The two verbs similarly mean *to strike* in their prototypical senses but they take different paths until they reach almost unrelated senses, even in the similar context, as in *hit the world* and *beat the world*.

When they take something animate as a complement, they both mean *to strike something*, even though *beat a person* is more serious than *hit a person*. However, when they take something abstract as a complement they mean very different things as in *hit a nerve* and *beat the odds*. Even when they take the same object, as in *beat/hit the market*, the phrases diverge. *To beat the market* means *to make profit* while *to hit the market* means *to be introduced to the public by being*

displayed at the market. Cognitive devices, metaphor and metonymy, will explain how they reach the point where the two verbs do not share any aspects of their meanings.

The structure of the study is as follows: In section 2, research methodology is introduced. In section 3, the analytic tools of cognitive semantics, *metaphor* and *metonymy* will be introduced with examples related to the meaning extension of *beat* and *hit*. In sections 4 the meanings of *beat* and *hit* is compared from the perspective of cognitive semantics, focusing on how the prototypical meaning *to strike* is extended to the various meanings and take different routes highlighting different aspects of the central meanings. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Methodology

Examples including the verbs *beat* and *hit* were searched from the corpus COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English)¹. Considering that the meaning extension of these verbs is closely related to the way they extend their possible range of compatible complements, noun phrases following the target verbs are compared mainly to observe the similarities and differences between the two verbs. Both *beat*[nn*]* and *hit*[nn*]* are tested in the search word section. The search option *** means a wildcard and *[nn]* means a common noun. Thus, the results have the string of *beat/hit* + a word + a common noun. Based on frequency, the results give one hundred types for each phrase. Among the two hundred, eighty instances are provided in Table 1. Eliminated are instances which do not include the verbal use of *beat* or *hit*. For example, in *beat of silence* and in *hit TV show*, the target words are nouns. After eliminating them, each instance is searched again to elicit various tokens in contexts and then compared from the perspective of cognitive semantics.

1) COCA contains 425 million words distributed over spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers and academic texts, including 20 million words each year from 1990-2011.

Table 1. Search Result from COCA

N	<i>beat * {m*}</i>	Freq.	<i>hit * {m*}</i>	Freq.
1	BEAT THE ODDS	170	HIT THE GROUND	781
2	BEAT EGG WHITES	143	HIT THE BALL	566
3	BEAT THE SHIT	93	HIT THE ROAD	553
4	BEAT IN FLOUR	88	HIT THE FLOOR	316
5	BEAT THE EGG	87	HIT A HOME	295
6	BEAT THE SYSTEM	87	HIT THE WATER	258
7	BEAT THE HEAT	85	HIT THE MARKET	224
8	BEAT THE HELL	82	HIT THE WALL	204
9	BEAT THE EGGS	80	HIT THE STREETS	201
10	BEAT THE MARKET	80	HIT THE JACKPOT	156
11	BEAT CREAM CHEESE	71	HIT THE NAIL	146
12	BEAT THE CRAP	61	HIT THE BRAKES	141
13	BEAT THE CLOCK	58	HIT ROCK BOTTOM	135
14	BEAT A PATH	55	HIT HIS HEAD	117
15	BEAT THE BUTTER	54	HIT A WALL	111
16	BEAT IN EGG	49	HIT A BALL	103
17	BEAT IN EGGS	49	HIT THE TARGET	97
18	BEAT HIS WIFE	45	HIT THE BUTTON	92
19	BEAT OF SILENCE	38	HIT THE GYM	91
20	BEAT IN VANILLA	37	HIT A NERVE	88
21	BEAT THE BAND	34	HIT HER HEAD	86
22	BEAT THE DRUM	31	HIT PAY DIRT	86
23	BEAT IN SUGAR	30	HIT THE TRAIL	82
24	BEAT THE RUSSIANS	30	HIT THE BEACH	81
25	BEAT THE TRAFFIC	30	HIT THE DECK	81
26	BEAT A TEAM	27	HIT MY HEAD	78
27	BEAT THEIR WIVES	27	HIT THE BACK	77
28	BEAT THE GIANTS	26	HIT THE PAVEMENT	77
29	BEAT THE YANKEES	26	HIT THE WORLD	75
30	BEAT THE CROWDS	25	HIT THE GAS	73
31	BEAT THE RAP	25	HIT THE BOTTOM	72
32	BEAT THIS THING	25	HIT THE FAN	71
33	BEAT THE BUSHES	24	HIT A RECORD	70

34	BEAT THE COMPETITION	24	HIT A SACRIFICE	69
35	BEAT TO DEATH	24	HIT THE MARK	66
36	BEAT THE PRICE	23	HIT A TREE	65
37	BEAT OHIO STATE	22	HIT BY LIGHTNING	65
38	BEAT WHIPPING CREAM	21	HIT TV SHOW	63
39	BEAT THE MAN	20	HIT THE STORES	62
40	BEAT TOGETHER EGGS	20	HIT THE TOP	60
.
.
100

3. Metaphor and Metonymy

Metaphor is to understand a concept A in terms of another concept B (Lakoff, 1987, 1993, Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). The conceptual domain we try to understand is called a target domain and the one we use to understand another concept is called a source domain. For example, in the following examples, *love*, *argument*, and *theory* are target domains and *journey*, *war*, and *building* are source domains. Based on the correspondences between constituent elements of a target and a source domain, understanding is made possible. The linguistic expressions show how we understand abstract concepts with more easily accessible concepts.

(1) a. LOVE IS A JOURNEY

Look *how far* we've *come*.

We're *at a crossroads*.

We'll just have to go *our separate ways*.

b. AN ARGUMENT IS A WAR

Your claims are *indefensible*.

He *attacks every weak point* in my argument.

His criticisms were *right on target*.

c. THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS

Is that the *foundation* for your theory?

The theory needs more *support*.

We need to *construct* a *strong* argument for that.

(Kövecses, 2002, p. 5)

Metonymy is to refer to a concept A with another concept B (Lakoff, 1987, Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). While metaphor is based on similarity between two concepts, the association of two concepts in metonymy is based on contiguity (Kövecses and Radden, 1998, Panther and Thornburg, 2005, Panther and Thornburg, 2007, Peirsman and Geeraerts, 2006, Radden and Kövecses, 1999). For example, in the expression, *the ham sandwich is waiting for his check*, *the ham sandwich* refers to *the person who ordered the ham sandwich* not due to the similarity between the customer and the food he ordered but to the contiguity, namely, their proximity.

Metonymies, related to the meaning extensions of *beat* and *hit*, are introduced in (2). In (2a) the whole *my car* represents the part of it, *the engine of the car*. In (2b), the body parts, *strong bodies* and *good heads*, all refer to the whole, *people*. In (2c), *the milk* represents *the milk glass* which is a container. In (2d), *heart* is used to express *feelings* which are contained in one's heart. In (2e), *a long face* stands for his blue mood and *a spring in his step* stands for his happiness. The physiological and behavioral reactions are effects of experiencing the causing emotions. In (2f), the cause of the emotion *fear* is used for the effect *fear*. Finally, in (2g), the final event *grading* represents the complex event of reading, correcting, and finally grading papers.

(2) a. WHOLE FOR PART

My car has developed a mechanical fault.

(Evans & Green, 2006, p. 314)

b. PART FOR WHOLE

We need a couple of *strong bodies* for our team.

There are a lot of *good heads* in the university.

c. CONTAINED FOR CONTAINER

The milk tipped over.

(Norricks, 1981, p. 58)

d. CONTAINER FOR CONTAINED

I love you *with all my heart*.

e. EFFECT FOR CAUSE

He has *a long face*.

He has *a spring in his step* today.

(Evans & Green, 2006, p. 314)

f. CAUSE FOR EFFECT

Greek phobos 'flight' for 'fear'

(Peirsman and Geeraerts 2006:276)

g. SUBEVET FOR COMPLEX EVENT

I have to *grade* hundreds of papers

(Kövecses & Radden, 1998, p. 52)

With the analytic tools introduced in this section, the various meanings of *beat* and *hit* will be analyzed and compared in the next section.

4. Comparison of BEAT and HIT

The two verbs *beat* and *hit* are partially synonymous. They both mean to *strike* but in different ways. The former conveys the meaning to *strike repeatedly and forcefully* and the latter conveys the meaning to *strike once with accuracy*. This shade of difference causes the two verbs to diverge drastically in meaning when their meanings are extended.

4.1. Comparison of Prototypical Senses

As seen in the expressions, *beaten to death* and *beaten unconscious*, and as seen in the contrast between (1) and (2), the forcefulness and violence of the striking behavior is more emphasized in *beating* than in *hitting* since *beating* denotes *repeated striking* in its central sense.

- (1) a. More than 10 years ago, she was nearly **beaten to death** by her ex-husband².
- b. People were dragged from their cars. They were **beaten unconscious**.

- (2) a. There is no evidence, or even an indication, that he **hit his wife**.
- b. He **hit me on the head** because I refused to return to fight.

2) All of the examples in the paper are taken from COCA.

Intense beating is also expressed in the ways human beings are treated as containers of *shit*, *hell*, *sense* and *crap*. The purpose of beating, in its literal sense, is for the container to let out these elements. Among these elements, *sense* sometimes needs to be put back to the beaten person as a result of beating, as shown in (3d).

- (3) a. His mother didn't love him, and his father **beat the shit out of** him.
 b. Young or old, rich or poor, human beings love to **beat the hell out of** each other.
 c. They'd **beat the crap out of** me if I spoke in another manner.
 d. You need someone to **beat the sense back into** you!

On the other hand, the serious result of repeated *striking* is not implied in *hitting*. It means *one-time and accurate striking*, as observed in the examples in (4). People *hit a computer key*, *hit a button*, and *hit brakes* to activate them. In those activities, the hitting action occurs once and has to be done with precision.

- (4) a. Max couldn't help but crack a smile as he entered the message. Then he **hit enter**, sat back, and awaiting the response.
 b. Survivors say they **hit the red button** on the rig to activate the system.
 c. I **hit the brakes**, stopping the car short of skidding into the soft left shoulder of the expressway.

If the verb *beat* is used instead of *hit* in the examples in (4), it will be implied that the striking action was done repeatedly. The repeated action in *beating* is very well observed in a cooking domain. Cooking ingredients have to be beaten to be mixed well. Culinary instruments are used to beat them and the action of beating the ingredients is a repeated one. The search results from the COCA show that eggs, egg whites, cream cheese, and butter are the most frequent objects which need to be beaten in the cooking schema. The number inside the parentheses means the number of occurrences of the expressions. Among 2667 occurrences of *beat*[NN*]*, 785 are for cooking ingredients, comprising 27.5 percent.

(5) In a medium bowl, **beat egg whites** until glossy and soft peaks form.

(6) usage of beat with cooking ingredients < among total 2667 > beat egg whites (139) / beat in flour (86) / beat the egg (84)/ beat the eggs (78)/ beat cream cheese (65) / beat the butter (54) / beat in egg (47) / beat in eggs (47) / beat in vanilla (36) / beat in sugar (26) / beat whipping cream (21) / beat together eggs (17) / beat egg yolks (16) / beat brown sugar (13) / beat egg white (13) / beat remaining egg (11) / beat the cream (11) / beat granulated sugar (10) / beat together butter (10) / beat together egg(10) / beat in milk (9)

As in the human examples of (3), in the cooking domain, some ingredients such as *dough* are also treated as containers in that they contain a hell inside and can let it out by repeated and forceful striking.

(7) They're called **beaten biscuits**. You have to **beat the hell out of** the dough before you bake it.

On the contrary, *hit* does not imply repeatedness. Instead, it occurs once but with accuracy. Accurate striking of deadly weapons, even when it occurs once, results in a great damage in affected patients, as in (8).

(8) Mr. Brown was **hit** by nine bullets and died in a closet, slumped over a laundry basket.

The accuracy part of *hit* is also observed in the expression *hit the target* and *hit the nail on the head* as in (9) and (10)³). Striking the right point is expressed by the verb *hit* instead of *beat*.

3) In Korean there is the expression *cengkok-ul ciluta*, which basically means 'hit the nail on the head'. The noun *cengkok* means 'the center of a target' and the verb *ciluta* means 'pierce (with an awl)'. Literally it means 'pierce the center of the target with an awl'. When the Korean and English expressions are compared, it is evident that the two languages use different verbs, *hit* in English and *pierce* in Korean, and different instruments, a hammer in English and an awl in Korean, to make the point.

- (9) a. The long missile **hit the target**, then bounced back.
 b. They don't always hit the target where you want them to go.
- (10) a. She wagged her index finger at me, as if to say, Yes, that's it, you've **hit the nail right on the head**.
 b. I think you **hit the nail on the head** with the word efficient.

The same accuracy is revealed in a baseball domain as in (11). You never *beat* a homer since striking a ball with a bat is not a repeated action.

- (11) He said he wasn't old enough to remember when Babe Ruth **hit a homer** over the right-field fence here during a barnstorming game in 1920.

4.2. Comparison of Extended Senses

When patients of *beating* are human beings or cooking ingredients, the meaning of *beat* is *to strike physically*. However, when the domain is moved to a competitive setting, *beat* extends its meaning to *to win (over)*. The repetitive part of the meaning of *beat* is highlighted in its extended sense. In a fighting schema, if one beats the other repeatedly, then the former will win over the latter.

As in (12a), *beating* is interpreted as *winning a competition* through the metaphor COMPETITION IS FIST FIGHTING. (12b) shows that election is one type of competition between candidates and (12c) shows that business is also understood as competition between rival companies.

- (12) a. He ran away with the first prize and continued to **beat the very competition** he had feared in his first full series of rodeos.
 b. The Democratic leadership of the state party doesn't think Janet Reno can **beat** Jeb Bush in the fall.
 c. The Volkswagen factory in Wolfsburg, for instance, is openly setting out to **beat** Toyota.

When a competitor is not a rival, but an abstract concept, the verb *beat*

means *to be better than* or *to be superior to*, as shown in (13).

- (13) a. It expects to **beat Wall Street expectations** when it releases first quarter results later this month.
- b. Last time, when we **beat the record**, I really trained for big wall climbing, to have stamina.
- c. If you start a sports-car company, you're basically telling the world that you hate being rich. There are exceptions, but even those who **beat the odds** -- legends like Ferrari and Porsche -- have spent years struggling with red ink.
- d. He enjoyed his security job and outsmarting the criminal element who thought they could **beat the system**.

In (14), metonymies are responsible for the meaning extension of *beat*. The beaten objects are physical and abstract ones which represent (another) abstract concepts. For example, in (14a), *the clock* is used for the concept of a limited time. In (14b), *the price and quality* is used for the price and quality competition. In (14c), *the deadline* which is originally a space concept represents a time limit which in turn represents competition with the time limit. In (14d), *the market* stands for the competition in the market. The prototypical meaning of *to strike* is extended to *to win over competitors*, physical or abstract.

- (14) a. Schwarzenegger's mega movies are based around the element of time. He has to **beat the clock**. He has to save someone before time runs out.
- b. Despite the added cost of a middleman, neighborhood stores can match or **beat the price and quality** of large stores.
- c. Some questioned whether the original scheduled completion date was pushed back to make the state look good when it **beat the deadline**.
- d. The researchers found that a significant minority of investors can **beat the market**, not through luck but through what appear to be superior stock-picking skills.

When beaten objects are abstract concepts which are considered problematic, such as *heat*, *traffic* and *disease*, *beating* means *overcoming* or *avoiding* because troubles are metaphorically interpreted as obstacles to overcome or to avoid. Obstacles, in turn, are interpreted as competitors to be beaten.

- (15) a. When I was growing up in Michigan, it was tough to **beat the summer heat**.
 b. I leave early, a little after seven, to **beat the traffic**.
 c. She **beat the disease** and spoke with Katie Couric about overcoming the tough times.

While *beat* mainly denotes *to win (over)* in its metaphorical and metonymical extension, *hit* has various meanings such as *to collide*, *to make contact*, *to reach*, *to attack*, *to affect*, and *to visit*. Through repeated striking, an agent *beating* a patient necessarily *wins over* the patient. However, because hitting is a one-time occurrence, it does not necessarily denote *winning over* a patient, and thus gives rise to multiple meanings: If an agent has a stronger force than a patient, *hitting* can be *attacking* or *affecting*; If a patient of *hitting* has a stronger force than an agent, the result will be *collision*; When there is no force dynamic between two participants, the meaning can be *to make contact*, *to reach*, and *to visit*. How metonymies and metaphors effect the various extended meanings of *hit* will be illustrated in the following discussion.

First, *hit* means *to attack* in (16) through the SUBEVENT FOR COMPLEX EVENT metonymy. In the fighting domain, hitting is the first signal to start an actual physical fight. Thus, the initial event *hitting* metonymically means *attacking* in a war domain.

- (16) I have no doubt that we will be attacked again. Saddam Hussein is **hitting** us because he can't hit New York.

Natural disasters are metaphorically construed as enemies of places by the EVENTS ARE HUMANS metaphor. They attack certain places by *hitting* and the places are affected badly, as in (17).

- (17) a. Many people have not forgotten **the earthquake that hit L'Aquila** in the Abruzzo region of Italy in 2009.
- b. Since **the flooding hit the city**, the population is struggling to cope without reliable electricity or fresh water.
- c. The weather service said that **what hit the city** was not a tornado, it was a severe microburst.

Problematic concepts such as *economic chaos* and *crime waves* are similarly understood as attacking enemies by the ABSTRACT CONCEPTS ARE HUMANS metaphor, as in the following examples.

- (18) a. They say that despite **the economic chaos that hit the world** this summer and all those warnings that chaos will lead to serious economic troubles here.
- b. As Edie Magnus discovered in her EYE TO EYE investigation, **a new crime wave hit the city**, and beefing up the force wasn't the solution.
- c. Coming up, we will explain how California's economic and **political crises should hit home** no matter where you live.

Second, *hit* means *to affect in a negative way* in (19) through the CAUSE FOR RESULT metonymy. The event of death attacks the staff hard and leaves a bad influence on it. The result of the hitting (or attacking) event is referred to by the causing event, namely *hitting*.

- (19) His death **hit** the staff hard.

Third, *hit* means *to collide*. The result of hitting will sometimes be collision, especially when the agent is weaker than the patient of the hitting event. In (20), the result *collision* is meant by the verb *hit* through the metonymy CAUSE FOR EFFECT since the effect *collision* is meant by the cause, namely *hitting*.

- (20) a. He said he and his friends were driving along when they **hit a bump** and the Mercedes exploded.
- b. We can see the planes. The planes **hit the building**. It wasn't a controlled demolition, and the buildings came down.
- c. Marjorie Robb was 13 years old when the Titanic **hit an iceberg** on its maiden voyage and sank in the North Atlantic.
- d. The plane went down and slammed into the Hudson River and everyone **hit the ceiling**.

While *a bump*, *a building*, and *an iceberg* are physical obstacles in (20), *a snag*, *the wall*, and *the skids* are abstract ones to be collided with, as in (21).

- (21) a. It sounded perfect until I **hit a snag**: There were no video or audio lectures.
- b. Some has **hit the wall** of their talents too early.
- c. Since the economy **hit the skids** in 2008, more people are going to bed on an empty stomach.

Fourth, *hit* means *to make contact* and *to reach* through the COMPLEX EVENT FOR SUBEVENT metonymy. The initial event of hitting is making contact. Physical hitting cannot be guaranteed without physical contact. Thus the complex event of *hitting* metonymically represents for the initial event *making contact*. The sense *physical contact* is again extended to the sense *reaching* through the metonymy FINAL EVENT FOR COMPLEX EVENT, since the final event of reaching is making contact. If you want to reach an object, you stretch your arms and finally contact the object. The physical items, for example *wall*, *surface*, and *floor*, can be finally reached by hitting.

- (22) a. This impactor was so small it explosively broke apart in the atmosphere and never **hit the surface**.
- b. A day before the ceremony, my parents came over and their jaws really **hit the floor** when they saw the condition things were in.

When the reaching points are not physical but abstract such as *a bottom*, *a*

plateau, or *a limit* in (23), agents metaphorically move toward it and are located in the same position.

- (23) a. Lisa **hit rock bottom** two years ago. The marijuana had started to affect her negatively. Her mood swings became more extreme.
 b. Apartment rents are falling, car buying is stalled, home prices have **hit a plateau** and empty office buildings are selling at huge discounts.
 c. Since she signed up for the plan last November, she has never **hit those limits**.

Musical notes and pitches are also viewed as places to reach. You move upward or downward to find the right note or pitch.

- (24) a. The man may be a stranger, but his story **hit a familiar note** in Jared's chest, one he had to heed.
 b. Sometimes when I **hit the pitch right**, it's just like something is singing through me.

Fifth, *hit* means *to visit* in (25) through the INITIAL EVENT FOR COMPLEX EVENT metonymy. In order to visit a place, you have to hit the place with your feet first. A person represents his feet through the metonymy WHOLE FOR PART.

- (25) a. As soon as we **hit the beaches**, we dug foxholes. We tried to take a wide enough area so that we could set up our howitzers.
 b. Don't sit there feeling like a sad and lonely loser. **Hit the restroom** to freshen up your makeup, then stop at the bar on your way back.
 c. More general retailers are also expected to see a small uptick as many people **hit the shops** on their extra day off.
 d. More than 75 percent of all Americans **hit the stores** for gifts this weekend.
 e. Let's **hit the streets** and find out what the ladies have to ask.

While the person in (25) denotes his feet, the person in (26) refers to his back or his head. In order to sleep, one's head has to hit the pillow and one's back has to hit the sack, which traditionally was used for a bed.

- (26) a. "The most important time to clean your face is before you **hit the sack**," says Doris Day, MD, a New York City-based dermatologist.
 b. A good night's sleep doesn't just begin when you **hit the pillow**.

Visiting the road metonymically means taking a trip. The action you have to take in order to take a trip is to get on the road first. The initial action, *getting on the road* is the beginning of the complex event, *taking a trip*.

- (27) a. All right. It is time to **hit the road** for that summer vacation, but what should you do before leaving home.
 b. You'll only exhaust yourself by the time you **hit the trail**, and set yourself up for a miserable vacation.

A product can be understood to visit a market to be introduced to the public if it is considered to have a will like a human being by the metaphor THINGS ARE HUMAN. In (28c) and (28d), *the scene* refers to the world by the metonymy PART FOR WHOLE since one of many scenes of the world refers to the whole, namely *the world*.

- (28) a. The product finally **hit the market** in the spring of 2005. Only a few hundred were sold, but General Electric found the technology so promising that it offered to buy Equinox Energy for an undisclosed sum.
 b. Two years after the product **hit the stores**, DuPont had captured more than 30 percent of the market for full-fashioned stockings.
 c. In 1958, this small, plastic hoop **hit the scene** as a children's toy. Twenty five million sold in four months.
 d. That's when John was born. Joe had **hit the scene** five minutes earlier. They've been collaborating ever since.

If a story shows up in the news, it will be known to the public. Thus, *hitting* in (29) has a similar sense to that of (28).

(29) At least the CTA hasn't had a scandal **hit the news** in a while.

In sum, the two verbs *beat* and *hit* extend the prototypical meaning 'to strike' in divergent directions. Repeatedness and forcefulness of the striking behavior is more perspectivized in *beat* and activates the sense of 'to win over' and 'to be better than', since if an agent repeatedly and forcefully strikes a patient, the former will be in control over the latter. On the contrary, accuracy and one-time occurrence of striking is more focused in *hit* and extends its meanings in a richer way, denoting *to attack*, *to affect*, *to collide*, *to contact*, *to reach* and *to visit*. Depending on the agents and the patients the verb takes and depending on the relationship between them, the meaning extension arises in various ways.

4.3. Comparison of *beat* and *hit* in the Same Context

In this section, *beat* and *hit* will be compared when they are used in similar phrases in order to observe their meaning disparity more easily. The comparison will show that their meanings are bifurcating in various ways, due to the attention focused on the different aspects of the prototypical meaning.

For example, the phrase *it beats/hits someone that~* means almost the opposite, as shown in (30). The repetition in the sense of *beat* and the accuracy in the sense of *hit* are perspectivized respectively. When you cannot understand things and are confused, the same idea occurs to you repeatedly and you may be bothered by the idea. Thus, if some idea beats someone, it means it is not fully understandable. On the other hand, hitting occurs once with precision. Thus, if an idea hits a person, he gets the idea.

- (30) a. It **beats** me how he got the job.
 b. It **hits** me that she's gone.

The frequency is also different between *beat* and *hit*. When raindrops either beat on or hit something, the occurrence of hitting is counted once while in

beating it is counted many. Since each drop of rain is counted once due to the verb *hit* in (31a), the expression *drops* is marked as plural.

- (31) a. Sissy heard the **first drops of rain hit the roof** and saw the sky flash white. A small face peered through the kitchen window.
 b. Holmes grunted again and looked toward the window where **the rain beat heavily on the glass**.

The verbs *hit* and *beat* convey very different meanings with the complement *the world*. The former verb denotes *to affect people in the world very badly*, while the latter verb means *to defeat the world record holder or the world's best*. The same expression *the world* represents two different things; *people in the world* through the metonymy CONTAINER FOR CONTAINED in (32a), and *the world record* through the metonymy WHOLE FOR PART in (32b).

- (32) a. There hasn't been a totally new form of flu virus since 1919, when it **hit the world** in epidemic proportions, killing millions.
 b. We can endure a lot, and we can win. We can **beat the world**.

Similarly, when the two verbs take the same complement *the market*, their senses diverge. The expression *hit the market* means *to be introduced to the public*, while *beat the market* means *to dominate the stock market*.

- (33) a. And new pocket-size gadgets have **hit the market** that let you do it yourself.
 b. If the smartest minds on Wall Street can't consistently **beat the market**, how does it help readers to pass along their stock tips?

The similar noun phrases *a record* and *the record* occur as complements of *hit* and *beat* respectively. *Hit a record* means *to reach to a certain record*, while *beat the record* means *to do better than the top record or to break the record*. The number of striking occurrences is important in distinguishing between the two verbs. If you strike a certain point once, you will be located at the same place with the point, while if you strike it many times, you will reach a higher position because, due

to the repeated striking, the point breaks.

- (34) a. Global steel production will **hit a record** 950 million tons this year.
 b. Last time, when we **beat the record**, I really trained for big wall climbing, to have stamina.

5. Conclusion

The comparison of *beat* and *hit* demonstrates that partially synonymous words become extremely different in their extended senses. The different aspects of the prototypical senses receive more attention when polysemous meanings arise through metaphoric and metonymic extension.

To observe similarities and differences, the two verbs are compared when they have prototypical and extended senses, and when they occur in the same context. Different aspects in prototypical senses are more highlighted in the meaning extension, resulting in very different senses. The aspect of repeatedness in *beating* is more focused in the extended sense *to win (over)*. On the contrary, one-time occurrence and accuracy of *hitting* is more focused and activates multiple meanings, such as *to attack*, *to affect*, *to collide*, *to make contact*, *to reach*, and *to visit*, based on force dynamics between two participants of the *hitting* event.

Comparison of the two verbs in the same context reveals the meaning contrast effectively. When they take the same complement, as in *beat the world* and *hit the world*, it is easily observed that they develop distinct denotations in their extended senses.

Metaphor and metonymy, the major analytic tools of cognitive semantics, explain how the partially synonymous words develop very different meanings, showing the links between multiple senses.

References

- Evans, V., & Green, M. (2006). *Cognitive linguistics: An introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Kövecses, Z. (2002). *Metaphor: A practical introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kövecses, Z., & Radden, G. (1998). Metonymy: Developing a cognitive linguistic view. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 9(1), 37 – 77.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G. (1993). The contemporary theory of metaphor, In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought* (pp. 202-251). Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphor we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Panther, K.-U., & Thornburg, L. L. (2005). The role of conceptual metonymy in meaning construction. In F. J. Ruiz de Mendoza & M. Sandra Peña Cervel (Eds.), *Cognitive linguistics: Internal dynamics and interdisciplinary interaction* (pp. 353-386). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Panther, K.-U., & Thornburg, L. L. (2007). Metonymy. In D. Geeraerts & H. Cuyckens (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics* (pp. 236 – 263). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peirsman, Y., & Geeraerts, D. (2006). Metonymy as a prototypical category. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 17(3), 269 – 316.
- Radden, G., & Kövecses, Z. (1999). Towards a theory of metonymy. In K.-U. Panther & G. Radden (Eds.), *Metonymy in language and thought* (pp. 17-59). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Taylor, J. R. (1995). *Linguistic categorization: Prototypes in linguistic theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1978). *Philosophical investigations* (G. E. M. Anscombe, Trans.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Corpus of Contemporary American English* from <http://corpusbyu.edu/coca/>

Youngju Choi

Department. of English Language and Literature

Chosun University

375, Sesek-dong, Dong-gu

Gwangju 501-759, Korea

Phone: 82-62-230-6540

Email: ychoi1@chosun.ac.kr

Received on July 22, 2012

Revised version received on September 10, 2012

Accepted on September 10, 2012