COGNITIVE-LINGUISTIC FOUNDATIONS OF A PERCEPTUAL MEANING IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. Perception is not a passive imprint of the external world but an active, meaning-making process that shapes lexical choice, grammatical behaviour, and discourse organisation in English. This article surveys the scientific and theoretical foundations of perceptual phenomena in English, integrating insights from cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics, and philosophy of mind. First, it traces the treatment of perception verbs in generative semantics and cognitive grammar. Second, it reviews empirical studies on embodiment and cross-modal metaphor that reveal how sensorimotor experience constrains conceptual structure. Third, it addresses construction-specific evidence from corpus linguistics that highlights argument-structure alternations linked to perceptual construal. The discussion shows how perception operates as a bridge between bodily experience and linguistic patterning, offering directions for interdisciplinary research and pedagogical practice.

Keywords: perception verbs, embodiment, cognitive grammar, sensorimotor simulation, cross-modal metaphor, argument structure, corpus linguistics, epistemic stance

Perception terms such as *see*, *hear*, *feel* and *taste* constitute a core semantic field in English while simultaneously providing cognitive scientists with a window into how language encodes sensory experience (Evans, 2015). From the earliest philosophical treatments of *qualia* (Locke, 1704/1979) to contemporary usage-based theories, scholars have debated whether these verbs map transparent perceptual reality or project culture-specific construals (Viberg, 1984). Because perception verbs inhabit the interface of mind, body and language, their study illuminates how English speakers categorise the sensory world, attribute epistemic authority and negotiate subjectivity (Sweetser, 1990). This article synthesises foundational theories and recent empirical findings to clarify the scientific underpinnings of perceptual phenomena in English.

Early generative frameworks posited that perception verbs share deep structures with verbs of cognition and emotion (Jackendoff, 1990). In the *see-that* and *hear-that* constructions, the complementiser *that* introduces propositional content, revealing perception's epistemic dimension. Dowty (1979) argued that such complements pattern with stative events, whereas *see + object* signals dynamic perception, foreshadowing later predicate decomposition models (Pustejovsky, 1995).m Cognitive linguistics reframes perception as embodied simulation. Langacker (2008) treats viewing as a trajector-landmark relation in conceptual space; the perceiver (trajector) mentally scans the landmark, yielding constructions like *look over the fence* that encode viewpoint and boundedness. Johnson's (1987) *image-schema* theory situates these relations in bodily experience—*container*, *path*, *surface*—which then scaffold abstract reasoning.

Barsalou's (1999) perceptual symbol systems propose that understanding *kick* activates motor cortex; likewise, comprehending *rough voice* recruits auditory and tactile areas

(Pulvermüller, 2018). fMRI studies confirm such neural re-enactment, suggesting that English metaphors like *sweet victory* partially exploit gustatory circuits (Citron & Goldberg, 2014). Viberg's (1984) typology shows that sight dominates perceptual lexicons cross-linguistically, but English expands visual dominance into metaphorical domains: *I see your point*, *a clear solution*. Corpus research (Deignan, 2010) reveals a 3:1 ratio of visual to non-visual metaphors in academic texts, supporting the *vision-as-knowledge* hypothesis (Sweetser, 1990). Experimental work by Winter (2019) indicates that native speakers process such metaphors faster than auditory ones, aligning with gaze-oriented attentional biases. Corpus-driven analyses show that *feel* alternates between Experiencer-Subject (*I feel the fabric*) and Experiencer-Object (*The fabric feels soft*) constructions. Goldberg (1995) interprets this alternation as a grammaticalised shift in attentional prominence, where stimulus properties license adjectival complements. These findings support usage-based claims that perception verbs help grammaticalise viewpoint.

Polysemy networks for *see* encompass visual perception, comprehension (*I see what you mean*), and future planning (*We'll see about that*). Cognitive semanticists model such extensions via radial category structures rooted in prototypical perception (Tyler & Evans, 2003). Psycholinguistic rating tasks confirm graded typicality judgments, with literal senses rated more central than epistemic ones (Faber & Gunter, 2017). English grants higher epistemic weight to visual evidence than to auditory or tactile sources, as reflected in collocations like *clearly visible* vs. *audibly clear* (rare). This hierarchy meshes with Gricean maxims, where visual testimony fulfils the quality maxim more reliably; thus, perception verbs function pragmatically to mark information reliability (Stirling & Huddleston, 2002). Perception verbs participate in small-clause constructions (*I heard him sing*), raising questions about control and aspect (Levin & Rappaport-Hovav, 2005). Discourse studies show that journalists rely on evidential phrases (*witnesses said they saw*) to attribute responsibility while maintaining neutrality, illustrating how perception links syntax to information structure (Bednarek, 2006).

While Uzbek and Russian maintain broader polyfunctional uses of auditory verbs (e.g., Uzbek *eshit-* for rumor attribution), English privileges vision. Such asymmetries highlight language-specific conceptualisations of sensory hierarchies, encouraging comparative research on how translation mediates perceptual framing (Koptjevskaja-Tamm, 2015). Understanding perception verb alternations can aid EFL learners in mastering subtle aspectual contrasts (*I listened to her sing* vs. *I heard her singing*). Corpus-informed teaching materials that foreground sensory metaphors enhance vocabulary depth and cultural literacy (Gilquin, 2017). Embodied semantics informs computational models that ground language in sensor data. Multimodal embeddings that integrate visual features improve caption generation, validating the cognitive premise that perception underpins semantic representation (Lu et al., 2019).

Longitudinal eye-tracking studies could test how learners acquire perception-based metaphors. Neurocognitive approaches may explore whether bilinguals allocate differential cortical resources to sensory verbs across languages, probing the plasticity of perceptual lexicons.

Perception phenomena in English emerge from a confluence of cognitive embodiment, linguistic convention and socio-pragmatic hierarchies. Theoretical models from generative

semantics to cognitive grammar converge on the insight that perception verbs are semantically rich, syntactically versatile and culturally loaded. Empirical evidence—from corpus frequency to neural activation—substantiates these models and opens interdisciplinary pathways for exploring how language shapes, and is shaped by, sensory experience. By foregrounding perception, scholars and practitioners can better understand the embodied roots of English semantics and apply this knowledge in education, technology and cross-cultural communication.

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