Upward and onward: “Going up on” in Modern Hebrew

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In Modern Hebrew, the verb “laalot”, meaning “to go up” or “ascend”, may be combined with the preposition “al”, meaning “on”, to produce the meaning “to go up on” in the physical world. The use of this phrase in non-spatial domains elicits a metaphoric interpretation, leading to the creation and understanding of new senses. The polysemy of “laalot al” highlights the importance of metaphor as a tool in the extension, creation, and shift of meaning. As a descriptor of physical movement and position, this particular phrase is also a prime example of the effects of embodied cognition, a general principle of Cognitive Linguistics. In this view, language is not considered separate from other human cognitive processes, but is shaped by human experience and general cognitive structure. Embodied cognition also entails that linguistic meaning is grounded in bodily experience that is interpreted by the mind, and that language use illustrates this relationship between the mind and the outside world. Language use frequency and social interaction are also analyzed as the driving forces of language development (Bybee 2006). The prototypical spatial meaning of “laalot al”, the source of the metaphors, describes a process in which an entity moves upward onto another entity. This is the least abstract, most embodied usage, and the most productive phrase combination. In this presentation, I will discuss the image schemas that are involved in the intended spatial meaning of “laalot al”, and then show how those schemas may be manipulated and applied in the domains of more abstract senses within a Cognitive Linguistics framework (Evans and Green, 2007). The senses that arise can be described through the combination of a VERTICALITY schema identified by Ekberg(1997) in her discussion of Swedish, the well known SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema, and the various embodied schematic aspects of the concept of “on” discussed by Beitel, Gibbs, and Sanders (2001), including VISIBILITY, SUPPORT, COVERING, and PRESSURE. The abstract senses were identified through searches of the infinitive form and past tense conjugations of the verb “laalot” + “al” in the National Middle East Language Resource Center’s hebrewCorpus and Google. Attached below are examples of the use of the phrase “laalot al” as a metaphor in three of the identified senses: “to exceed”, “to discover”, and “to put on a uniform/clothes”. A demonstration of the mapping of the physical source domain onto the respective target domain is also included for the sense of “to exceed”.

Examples (From hebrewCorpus or through Google search)

Sense of “to exceed”:

1) ha-metziat ala al kol ha-tzipiyot. “The reality surpassed all expectations.”
http://www.rrr.co.il/6928.asp

2) ...ve ekra be-hitlahavut mugzemet “yesh!”, ki ani ha-nivcheret, ani aliti al kulan.
“...and I will exclaim extremely excitedly “yes!”, because I have been chosen, I surpassed them all.”

Metaphor mapping for SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema of “to exceed”:
- **SOURCE**: Going up
- **PATH**: (movement upward)
- **GOAL**: NEW SIZE (X is bigger than Y)

Metaphor mapping for VERTICALITY schema of “to exceed”:
- **Source**: On
- **Target**: Size

Sense of “to discover”:

3) Neta alta al chatixat pitaron le-baayat ha-flash. “Neta found a solution to the flash problem”
http://www.flickr.com/photos/omrifuhrer/2285942294/

4) heratzti ata et ha-shem “vaffen es es” be-manoa ha-xipus ha-ivri shel ha-googel ve-be-ofen akrai aliti al maamar bikorot al ha-seret “ha-nefila”... “I ran immediately the name “waffen s.s.” in Google’s Hebrew search engine and randomly discovered a review of the movie “ha-nefila”...”

Sense of “to put on a uniform/clothes”:

5) kashe gam lispor kaloriot ben le-ben, lo yatza li meaz she-aliti al madim lihiyot be-ezor mishkal ve-livdok... “its also hard to count calories in between, since I have put on the army uniform I haven’t been near a scale to check...”

6) Eden Natan alta al bikini ve-flirteta im ha-matzlema. “Eden Natan put on a bikini and flirted with the camera.”
http://www.mynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4250998,00.html

References:


Ekberg, L. (1997). The mental manipulation of the vertical axis: How to go from "up" to "out," or from "above" to "behind".
