

What plants tell us about the Mayangna Meronymy System.

This paper examines the meronymy system of the Mayangna language, as initially described in Eggleston (2012) and Eggleston et al (2010) and evaluates the productivity of such system as applied to the plant/flora domain. We will see that the system is indeed productive, that it is shape-based and that it is orientation independent. The system supports an algorithmic levinsonian approach to meronyms, rather than a human-body projection.

Data for this study stems out of an ethnobotany project conducted by the Mayangna community in conjunction with the authors under a Participatory Action Research approach. During this project, 370 plants were identified and documented by elders of the community, together with their physical properties and cultural usage.

Initial analysis of these data indicates that the meronymy system is being productive: all 6 of the meronymy classes identified in Eggleston (2012) (volumes, extensions, facets, columns, borders and negative space) are represented in the sample. The examples below are nominal terms also used in at least 2 other domains (e.g., human body ; animal; artifact).

For volume meronyms, we find documented:

mak (minik) for seeds/(round) fruits;

tun (tunun) for 'heads' or groupings of certain non-round fruits

For 'extension' meronyms, we find:

Bas (basan, basni) for leaves (e.g., flexible extension)

Bikis (bikisni) for the smaller finger-like branches

Ting (tingni) for the longer, out-of-trunk upper extension branches

Nangtak (nangnitak) for small protuberance

For 'facet' meronyms:

Dang (dangni) for the convex hard(er) part of a plant or part of a plant, whether in a leaf (the 'back') or a flower; it is orientation independent.

Pirin

Sait

Sar (saran), for the planar base in contact with the ground, for a tree or smaller plant

For 'column' meronym:

Pan (panan), for the spine-like part (stem or trunk)

For border:

Kung (kungni), the edge in a leaf

For negative space:

Rahrah, the Y-shaped space defined by the confluence of two branches

Other:

Úntak, the outer layer (of trunk or stem), cork or bark

Wah, the long, flexible snake-like parts (as in climbing stems or roots)