



# Relatoría General del Symposium

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# I. Levinson versus MacLaury

Who wins?

And why do we care?

# Whorf is always in the background



# This is a debate over what is in people's minds when forms vary across languages

Can it really be that others would think so differently from myself as actually to process 'exotic' forms at face value?

If so, then many of my basic intuitions about the way things 'naturally' are, would have to be re-examined.

For full discussion of how the Metaphor/ Monosemy debate relates to linguistic relativity, see:

Danziger, Eve, 2001. Kinship, Semantics, and Linguistic Relativity. In Relatively Speaking: Language, Thought and Kinship in Mopan Maya. pp. 3-17. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

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How unsettling! Surely not. The exotic usage must be metaphorical. ("MacLaury" position)

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Can it really be that others would think so differently from myself as actually to process 'exotic' forms at face value?

If so, then many of my basic intuitions about the way things 'naturally' are, would have to be re-examined.

How exciting! This would be so cool. The exotic usage must be monosemy. ("Levinson" position)

This is a debate over what is in people's minds *when forms vary across languages*

1a. Is there variation across languages?

In what respect(s)? To what extent?

1b. Does this variation have anything to do with thought (or is it more lexical than conceptual)?

Chunchees tasks were designed to deal with a version of this question.

1c. How do we empirically distinguish metaphor (polysemy) from monosemy?

# Ia. Is there variation across languages?

## What is a Meronym anyway?

In order to avoid circularity  
given the underlying  
Whorfian interest, we need  
a non-semantic criterion.

Can formal criteria successfully  
fence out:

kinship terms?

Activity nouns?

etc.

Idea from Rodrigo Romero Mendez:

Meronyms do not add an additional  
referent/ increase valency of verb,  
whereas other possessed items do?



# Mopan (and other MA): Possession also covers kinship terms and activity nouns

## Man's child

U	mejen	aj		Juan
3POSS	seed	MASC		Juan
'Juan's child'				

## Woman's child

Uy	al	ix		Maria
3POSS	burden	FEM		Maria
'Maria's child'				

Tan-0	uy	al	ix	Maria
be_busy-3B	3POSS	burden	FEM	Maria
'Maria is giving birth'				

# English (and other IE): Possession also covers classifiers

Are these Meronyms?

A slice of bread

A pinch of salt

A tub of butter

etc.

# What “body-parts” Leaves Out

Meronyms might have cognitive/ conceptual attributes in common with other possessed forms, in ways that vary across languages.

Danziger, Eve 1996. Parts and their Counter-Parts: Social and Spatial Relationships in Mopan Maya. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (n.s.) 2(1):67-82.

# Getting On With It

Combining a syntactic definition (“possessed item”) with a Referential Task (Churches) can be a way of proceeding with research. But there may be some costs.

Danziger, Eve 2001. Cross-Cultural Studies in Language and Thought: Is there a Metalanguage? In The Psychology of Cultural Experience. Carmella C. Moore and Holly F. Mathews (eds.), pp. 199-222. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

# 1c. How do we empirically distinguish metaphor (polysemy) from monosemy?

Empirical strategies are possible. See for example:

Danziger, Eve, 2001. Relatively Speaking: Language, Thought and Kinship in Mopan Maya. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Complicated by cross-cultural differences in attitudes to (and apprehension of?) metaphor:

Danziger, Eve 2010. On Trying and Lying: Cultural Configurations of the Gricean Maxim of Quality. Intercultural Pragmatics 7(2):199-219.

(Gricean or Lakoffian metaphor?)

(Can metonymy and simile pick up the slack?)

Once we have decided on the empirical criteria --  
Metaphor/ Monosemy strategies might be different  
when naming novel objects from what they are in  
everyday speech



# Back to Who Wins?

If MacLaury is right, then certainly the starting point is not always the human body. But -- is there necessarily a starting point at all? Unresolved.

If Levinson is right, then certainly the algorithm for calculating axes and relevant volumes is not always the same one across languages. But – is it a matter of calculating axes and volumes at all?  
Unresolved

## II. Function

A set of issues apart from the Levinson -  
MacLaury debate

An English or IE strategy (maybe), where some  
MA languages (or at least Yucatec) use body  
part terms. e.g. “handle”





# Implicational Hierarchy of Free Meronym Naming across Languages?

Holonym is:	+ ANIMATE + STABLE (living thing)	- ANIMATE + STABLE (artifact)	- ANIMATE -STABLE (substance)
Yucatec	Body Part	Body Part	
English	Body Part	Function	
P'orhépecha	Function	Function	

# Role of Substance in the Meronymy Construction (pay attention to the Holonym!)

## English (IE?):

The aluminum is NOT a piece of the bicycle. The bicycle is a piece of aluminum.

The substance noun is the Holonym. Artifact nouns are syntactic “classifiers” of their substance? [ Classifiers are a type of meronym]

A slice of bread

A bicycle of aluminum

## Mopan (MA?):

U           tutz'                   naj

3POSS   cohune-palm           house

‘The roof of the house’

U           jool                           baay

3POSS   bark(species)           string-bag

‘The bag’s tump-line’

The substance noun is the Meronym.

Artifact nouns are syntactic

“containers” of their substances?

# But if Substance is so Important, Why are We Seeing so many Body-Parts?

Where body-parts appear in MA languages, are they playing a role analogous to that of numeral classifiers in IE languages? Note that names for artifacts are often substance terms in Yucatecan (and other MA?) languages (Lucy 1996)

Is body-part meronymy a MA strategy for naming parts of artifacts only when their material or manufacture is unfamiliar, or when they are uniform in material? (go beyond Chunches task for the answer)

Lucy, John A. 1996. Grammatical Categories and Cognition: A Case Study of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis. Cambridge: University Press.

Just slightly older novel objects?

