Relatoría General del Symposium

Eve Danziger
Universidad de Virginia

danziger@virginia.edu

Website:
http://pages.shanti.virginia.edu/evedanziger/
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:

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.

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

How exciting! This would be so cool. The exotic usage must be monoosemy. (“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)?
   Chunches 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.

Getting On With It

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

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

Empirical strategies are possible. See for example:


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


(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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holonym is:</th>
<th>+ ANIMATE + STABLE (living thing)</th>
<th>- ANIMATE + STABLE (artifact)</th>
<th>- ANIMATE - STABLE (substance)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yucatec</td>
<td>Body Part</td>
<td>Body Part</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Body Part</td>
<td>Function</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P’orhépecha</td>
<td>Function</td>
<td>Function</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Role of Substance in the Meronymy Construction (pay attention to the Holonymm!)

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)