

The respective roles of culture and grammar in shaping emotion metaphors The case of the Gunwinyguan family (Australian, non-Pama-Nyungan)Forename Surname

Maïa Ponsonnet
The University of Western Australia
maia.ponsonnet@uwa.edu.au
James Bednall
Australian National University/Université Paris-7
james.bednall@anu.edu.au
Isabel O’Keeffe,
The University of Sydney
isabel.okeeffe@sydney.edu.au

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In Lakoff’s (1987) classical definition, linguistic metaphors reflect conceptual metaphors, and are therefore influenced by culturally shared representations. At the same time, some linguistic metaphors can be conceptually outdated when they are historical retentions (Geeraerts & Gevaert 2008); and in addition, metaphors may be constrained by the grammatical resources of the language in which they are expressed. For instance, in a language where emotion nouns are grammatically barred from clausal-argument status, speakers will not be able to personify emotions or attribute them metaphorical agency (Ponsonnet 2014) – even if these representations are culturally valid.

In order to assess the respective roles of culture, history and grammar in shaping figurative language, we need to improve our understanding of figurative language across a diverse range of languages and cultures (Kövecses 2005). This will be addressed in this presentation on the basis of first-hand data on emotion metaphors in at least six Gunwinyguan languages (Arnhem Land, Australia) (Bednall: Anindilyakwa; O’Keeffe: Kunbarlang and Kunwinjku; Ponsonnet: Dalabon, Rembarnga, Kune and Kunwinjku). The grammatical and geographical proximity between languages in this family, as well as cultural proximity and the dynamics of contact amongst the corresponding groups, afford us particularly insightful observations.

Firstly, data from Anindilyakwa, a fairly geographically isolated member of this language family, suggests that emotion metaphors are relatively permeable to contact influence – which, in turn, sheds light upon the role of history and culture in shaping figurative language. At the same time, the comparison between Kunbarlang and other languages in the family confirms that even when the cultural context remains the same, differences in grammar do result in differences in metaphorical representations of emotions. We will present these results and their consequences, which also highlight how the tools provided by cognitive linguistics to analyze figurative representations can help prevent racial exoticization and essentialization of linguistic minorities, in applied as well as academic contexts.

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