

Metonymy in upper and lower limb nomenclature
Oral/Poster

A considerable amount of effort has been placed on describing PART TO WHOLE metonymy in body-part terminology, as demonstrated by Old Irish *lām* 'hand' and Modern Irish *lamh* 'hand', 'arm'. While it is generally agreed that languages often use PART TO WHOLE to name terms associated with the limbs, such as 'arm' or 'leg', other metonymies remain under described in the body-part domain. The naming of the arms, hand, feet and legs as units has dominated discussions of metonymic changes in limb nomenclature, resulting in little cross-linguistic observations regarding how languages name other body-parts associated with the limbs, such as the elbows or ankles. Using etymological data, Wilkins (1996) observes that there is also a natural tendency for languages to develop body-part terms from verbal actions associated with them, such as the development from a term meaning 'walk' to mean 'foot' or 'grasp' to mean 'hand'. In the case of semantic change, it is reasonable to hypothesize that languages utilize metonymic processes to name other body-parts associated with the limbs. The question is what types of metonymies languages use to name the elbows, wrists, ankles and knees.

In a genetically- and areally-balanced sample of 153 non-Indo-European languages, it is found that the notion of bending or turning is prevalent in the terms for elbow, wrist, and ankle. Examples such as Emai *uguobo* [nominalizing prefix.bend.hand] 'elbow' show how terms develop from verbal actions associated with them, whereas examples such as Q'eqchi' *kux uq'm* [neck hand] demonstrate an extension of other body-parts that also bend or turn. Using roughly 85 terms meaning 'elbow', 'wrist' and 'ankle' with morphological glosses from my cross-linguistic data, I show that there is a cross-linguistic tendency to name parts of the limbs by their physical functions.

These results not only affirm the claim made by Wilkins (1996), they also support using etymological data as a useful tool to help identify cross-linguistic metonymies. As has been shown with cross-linguistic studies, semantic change is regular, thus it is not surprising that languages use the same types of metonymies to talk about body-parts as for other objects in the world, such as tools, or animals.

References

- Hilpert, Martin. 2007. Chained metonymies in lexicon and grammar: a cross-linguistic perspective on body part terms. In G. Radden et al. (eds.), *Aspects of Meaning Construction*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 77-98.
- Wilkins, David P. 1996. Semantic change and the search for cognates. In M. Durie & M. Ross (eds.), *The Comparative Method Reviewed: Regularity and Irregularity in Language Change*. New York: Oxford University Press. 264-304.