"THE LINGUISTICS OF TEMPERATURE: A LEXICAL-TYPOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TEMPERATURE DOMAIN"
Oral / Poster
Theme session: "LEXICAL TYPOLOGY OF QUALITATIVE CONCEPTS"

The aim of this talk is to show how languages vary in their categorization of temperature and how this cross-linguistic variation is constrained. It summarizes the results of a collaborative project, involving 35 researchers and covering more than 50 genetically, areally and typologically diverse languages, the data for which were elicited according to standardized guidelines, in most cases complemented by corpus searches. Both the guidelines and the corpus searches aim at systematically collecting and testing the attributive and predicative uses of temperature terms in various typical temperature-related situations, including applicability to different kinds of entities.

One of the main results of the project has been the identification of the cross-linguistic patterns in the linguistic temperature systems. Languages cut up the temperature domain among their expressions according to three main dimensions: TEMPERATURE VALUES (e.g., the distinction between warming and cooling temperatures, or the distinction between excessive heat and pleasant warmth), FRAMES OF TEMPERATURE EVALUATION (TACTILE, *The stones are cold*; AMBIENT, *It is cold here*; and PERSONAL-FEELING, *I am cold*), and ENTITIES whose "temperature" is evaluated.

A striking fact about the temperature systems across languages is their internal heterogeneity in that their different parts behave differently. Personal-feeling temperatures are often singled out by languages (in lexical choice and/or morpho-syntactic patterns, in the reduced system of temperature value oppositions, etc), whereas the linguistic encoding of ambient temperature may share properties with those of either tactile or personal-feeling temperature. The motivation for this lies in the conceptual and perceptual affinities of ambient temperature with both other frames of temperature evaluation. On the one hand, ambient and personal-feeling temperature are rooted in the same type of experience, thermal comfort, whereas tactile temperature relates to evaluation of the temperature of other entities, based on perception received by the skin. On the other hand, tactile and ambient temperatures are about temperatures that can be verified from "outside", whereas personal-feeling temperature is about a subjective "inner" experience of a living being.

Earlier cross-linguistic research on temperature, largely inspired by the mainstream research on colour, has suggested that all languages would possess basic temperature terms, ranging between two ('cold' vs. 'hot') and four and following a certain hierarchy (Sutrop 1998, Plank 2003). The cross-linguistically recurrent heterogeneity in the organization of the linguistic temperature systems makes the notion of „basic terms" either irrelevant or uninteresting for the study of many such systems (cf. Lucy 1994). Also, both the recurrent asymmetries in the organization of the linguistic temperature systems and the close interaction between lexicon and grammar in the encoding of temperature justify a more integrated approach to these phenomena than what has been the norm in typology, with its strict distinction between lexical and grammatical typology. A constructional-typological approach (cf. Koch 2012) considers cross-linguistic patterns defined both by lexical and grammatical information and investigates the "division of labour" between the lexicon and the grammar and their "semiotic ecology" (Evans 2011: 508), i.e. whether semantic choices made in the lexicon affect those in the grammar and vice versa.

References

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