The exploitation of conceptual metonymies:
A cross-linguistic perspective

Klaus-Uwe Panther & Linda L. Thornburg
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1. Introduction:
Why is this topic relevant?
Relevance of the topic

- **Theoretical relevance**: new insights into the differences among languages – both on the conceptual-pragmatic level and that of grammatical structure (morphosyntax)
- **Practical relevance**: competence in how to use a language idiomatically, which includes knowledge about possible metonymic associations and metaphorical mappings
2. Cross-linguistic analysis of high-level metonymies
2.1. POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY:

English, Hungarian, French, Spanish
Exploitation of the **POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY** metonymy in English and Hungarian
(Panther & Thornburg 1999b)

- Sense Perceptions
- Mental States/Processes
- Hedged Performatives
- Indirect Requests
- Indirect Commissives
- Actions
- Character Dispositions
- Acquired Skills

Diagram from: Panther & Thornburg (2003: 7)
Exploitation of the POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy in English and Hungarian

From: Panther & Thornburg (2003: 7)
Perception verbs in English 1

Basic sense perception verbs in English are: 

*see, hear, taste, smell, feel*

In English it is possible to express **actual** events of perception even if the perception verb is modified by the modal auxiliary *can/could*.

Cognitive operation at work:

**POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY**

(Panther & Thornburg 1999b)
Perception verbs in English 2

(1) We could see the northern lights today, thanks to solar flare.  
[Google search] ➔ We saw the northern lights, [...]

(2) Madam President, I can hear a ripple of laughter from the Socialists. [European Parliament] ➔ I hear a ripple of laughter from the Socialists.

(3) I could taste the fried Oreos, funnel cakes, and bags of popcorn.  
[WebCorp] ➔ I tasted the fried Oreos, [...]

(4) I could smell the tobacco and onions on his breath. [COCA] ➔ I smelled the tobacco and onions on his breath.

(5) My uncle clasped my arm, and through my sleeve I could feel the calluses from ironmongery on his hand. [COCA] ➔ [...] through my sleeve I felt the calluses [...]

➔: ‘metonymically stands for’
English vs. Hungarian

• English (also German) exploits the POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY metonymy systematically with perception verbs; Hungarian does not make use of this metonymy with perception verbs.

• The use of the metonymy in the domain of perception is more restricted in Romance languages such as French, Spanish, and Portuguese.
English vs. Hungarian: seeing

English: Can you see him?

Hungarian: Látod?

See-2.SG.PRES.IND.DEF

'Do you see him?'

For details, see Panther & Thornburg (1999b).
English vs. Hungarian: hearing

English: I could hear his sneering laughter [...] [LOB*]

Hungarian: hallottam [...] hear-1.SG.PAST.IND.DEF

*The abbreviation LOB stands for Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen Corpus.
English vs. Hungarian: tasting & smelling

English: I can taste the vanilla.

Hungarian: Érzem a vanília ízét.
Feel-1.SG.PRES.IND.DEF the vanilla taste-ACC

English: I can smell the garlic.

Hungarian: Érzem a fokhagyma szagát.
Feel-1.SG.PRES.IND.DEF the garlic smell-ACC
English vs. Hungarian: feeling

English: I'm on the right streak tonight, I can feel it. [LOB]

Hungarian: Ma este jó úton járok, érzem.

feel-1.SG.PRES.IND.DEF
Expression of PERCEPTION in English vs. Romance languages (French, Spanish)

Data are from the parallel corpus CLUVI (University of Vigo, Spain)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>can see</em></td>
<td><em>‘see’</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When they do hire us, they want us to work in the kitchen, up on the scaffolding or in the storeroom, where nobody <em>can see</em> us.</td>
<td>Quand ils nous recrutent, ils veulent que nous restions à la cuisine ou dans l'arrière-boutique, là où personne ne nous verra...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## English vs. French

### seeing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>can see</em></td>
<td><em>‘sees’</em>  PRESENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You <em>can see</em>  it from many parts of town.</td>
<td>car on le <em>voit</em> de beaucoup d'endroits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From where I sit, I can see people crammed into a bus, their faces streaming with sweat, lined up like sardines, Saturday travelers with lacklustre eyes, patiently waiting.

De ma place, j'aperçois les gens entassés dans les autobus, les visages gluants de sueur, immobiles, alignés comme des harengs, les voyageurs du samedi qui, le regard éteint, patiemment, attendent.
Of course, when I looked at my face in the mirror I **could see** that it was black, but for me, colour was totally unimportant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>could see</strong></td>
<td>‘saw’ (IMPERFECTIVE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bien sûr, je **voyais** bien que j'étais noire, mais je n'accordais aucune importance à la couleur de ma peau.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>could see</strong></td>
<td>lit. ‘<strong>have seen</strong>’ COMPOSED PAST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I <em>could see</em> everything</td>
<td>J'ai vu que tout se passait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was happening inside a circle,</td>
<td>à l'intérieur d'un cercle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>just like in Africa, ...</td>
<td>comme en Afrique, ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English vs. French
cognitive seeing

Meaning extension from perceptual *seeing* to cognitive *seeing*:

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<tr>
<td><em>can see</em></td>
<td>‘sees’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>can see</em></td>
<td>PRESENT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mother knows she is repeating a cycle that trapped her, but there is no way out that she *can see*.

La mère sait qu'elle perpétue un cycle dont elle est prisonnière, mais elle ne *voit* pas comment elle pourrait s'en sortir.
## English vs. French
cognitive **seeing**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>can see</strong></td>
<td><strong>‘see’</strong> PRESENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I <strong>can see</strong> myself doing it for a living but not as a photo-journalist or a portrait photographer.</td>
<td>Je me <strong>vois</strong> bien faire ça dans la vie mais pas comme photographe de portrait ni reporter.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English vs. French: cognitive **seeing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French ‘<strong>see</strong>’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You <strong>can see</strong> there's a big difference.</td>
<td>Vous <strong>voyez</strong> la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>grande différence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard assumption: metaphor: **UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING**
Panther (2006: 163): **underlying metonymy**: **SEEING FOR UNDERSTANDING**
**English vs. Spanish:**

*feeling*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>could feel</em></td>
<td><em>‘felt’</em> (PRETERIT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through the knife he <em>could feel</em> the muscle tighten hard.</td>
<td>En el acero, <em>sintió</em> la fuerza del músculo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English vs. Spanish: 

**feeling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish <code>felt</code></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>could feel</strong></td>
<td><strong>IMPERFECTIVE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I could feel</strong> it grip me at the throat and stop my breathing.**</td>
<td><strong>Sentía que me agarraba por la garganta, cortándome la respiración.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English vs. Spanish: *feeling & hearing*

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>could feel</em></td>
<td><em>‘felt’</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>could hear</em></td>
<td><em>‘heard’</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kino <em>could feel</em></td>
<td>Kino <em>sintió</em> la sangre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warm blood running</td>
<td>caliente manar de su</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from his forehead,</td>
<td>frente, y <em>oyó</em> que</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and he <em>could hear</em></td>
<td>Juana le llamaba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juana calling to him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English vs. Spanish: 

**hearing**

He **could hear** the pat of the corncakes in the house and the rich smell of them on the cooking plate.

Oyó: **PRETERIT**

Oía: **IMPERFECTIVE**

Oyeron: **PRETERIT**

He **could hear** Juana whispering the old magic again, and he could hear the evil music of the enemy.

They **could hear** the splashing water and the singing of caged birds and the sweep of the long brooms on the flagstones.

Oyeron allí también el rumor del agua, y el canto de los pájaros enjaularos, y el movimiento de las largas escobas sobre las losas.

Oyó: **PRETERIT**

Oía: **IMPERFECTIVE**

Oyeron: **PRETERIT**
Research question 1

• What are the aspectual meanings of the *can/could + perceptual verb* construction?
• The equivalent expressions in French and Spanish provide some clues: These languages (and other Romance languages) distinguish between PAST IMPERFECTIVE, PRETERIT (simple past), and COMPOSED PAST.
Research question 2

IMPERFECTIVE (cf. the English PROGRESSIVE):
  unbounded event
PRETERIT (cf. English PAST tense):
  bounded event

For example, is sentence (1) (from slide 27) IMPERFECTIVE, i.e. equivalent to (2)?

(1) He could hear Juana whispering the old magic again, [...]
(2) He was hearing Juana whispering the old magic again, [...]

The issue of ASPECTUALITY needs more careful investigation.
2.2. RESULT FOR ACTION:

   English, German, French
In English, the RESULT FOR ACTION metonymy is at work in action constructions in which lexical meaning and construction meaning are in conflict. Examples are . . .
ACTION constructions 2

Imperatives
   (1) Wash the dishes!

Infinitive complement clauses requiring action verbs
   (2) He asked him to wash the dishes.

What about Vp_{ing}?
   (3) What about washing the dishes?

How to VP
   (4) How to do things with words.

Why not VP?
   (5) Why not paint your house purple?
The **How to** $VP_{\text{ACTION}}$ construction

(see Panther & Thornburg 1999a, 2000)

**How to** $VP_{\text{ACTION}}$

*Example:*

**How to** write a term paper

*Meaning:*

‘The author offers instruction in how to VP’
Examples of the \textbf{How to VP_{ACTION} construction}

(1) How to \textit{do} things with words. \textit{[do: ACTION]}
(2) How to \textit{install} Word for Windows. \textit{[install: ACTION]}
(3) *How to \textit{be tall} in three weeks. \textit{[tall: STATE]}
(4) How to \textit{be rich} in three months. \textit{[rich: STATE]}

(1) and (2): contain \textit{ACTION} verbs that fit the \textit{ACTION} meaning of the construction.

(3) is problematic/unacceptable because \textit{be tall} is not an \textit{ACTION}; it conflicts with the construction meaning.

(4) is acceptable because one could think of \textit{ACTIONS} that result in the \textit{STATE} of being rich.

\textit{Encyclopedic knowledge} has an influence on \textit{acceptability judgments}!
‘S offers to teach H how to achieve happiness’

How to **be happy**

**STATE**<sub>H</sub> → **RESULTANT STATE**<sub>H</sub> → **ACTION**<sub>H</sub>
How to become happy

‘S offers to tell H how to achieve happiness’

PROCESS\textsubscript{H}\textsuperscript{*} 

RESULTANT PROCESS\textsubscript{H} 

ACTION\textsubscript{H} 

*The PROCESS is telic, i.e., it has a goal/endpoint.
The English $\text{How to VP}_{\text{ACTION}}$ construction and its equivalents in German & French

**English** *happy*, German *glücklich*, French *heureux*

English: *How to be happy* (STATIVE coding)
English: *How to become happy* (PROCESS + RESULT coding)

German: *Wie man glücklich ist* (STATIVE coding)
German: *Wie man glücklich wird* (PROCESS + RESULT coding)

French: *Comment être heureux* (STATIVE coding)
French: *Comment devenir heureux* (PROCESS + RESULT coding)
How to be/become happy in English, German and French

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>STATIVE CODING</th>
<th>PROCESS CODING</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RESULTANT STATE FOR ACTION</td>
<td>PROCESS FOR ACTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>58,000</td>
<td>97.1%</td>
<td>1680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>1,680</td>
<td>98.5%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Google search: May 1, 2005
Conclusion: The English $\text{How to VP}_{\text{ACTION}}$ construction & its equivalents in German and French

- The RESULTANT STATE FOR ACTION metonymy is very productive in English and French; the RESULTANT PROCESS FOR ACTION metonymy is restricted in English and French.

- The RESULTANT PROCESS FOR ACTION metonymy is very productive in German; the RESULTANT STATE FOR ACTION metonymy is restricted in German.
2.3. MANNER OF SPEAKING FOR SPEAKING:

English, Hungarian, Croatian
Predicatively used adjectives of MANNER OF SPEAKING (Brdar & Brdar-Szabó 2003: 241)

(1) I must be open with her, whatever the cost.
(2) Dear colleagues, I’ll be brief.
(3) The President was clear on the matter.
(4) The buyers were emphatic in declaring that they were right.
(5) Livingstone, even when being humorous about a very distressing period, could not disguise the discomfort.
The MANNER OF SPEAKING FOR SPEAKING metonymy in English

(1) be open FOR speak openly
(2) be brief FOR speak briefly
(3) be clear FOR speak clearly
(4) be emphatic FOR speak emphatically
(5) be humorous FOR speak humorously
More MANNER OF SPEAKING adjectives

accurate, articulate, baroque, bitter, blunt, boring, brief, bullish, coherent, cynical, definite, direct, dramatic, earnest, emphatic, explicit, harsh, entertaining, factual, firm, forthright, frank, lukewarm, lyrical, poetic, open, pompous, precise, sarcastic, serious, short, silent, specific, vague

(Brdar & Brdar-Szabó 2003: 245)
Varying productivity of the metonymy MANNER OF SPEAKING FOR SPEAKING

Brdar & Brdar-Szabó (2003) observe that, in contrast to English, in Croatian and (especially) Hungarian, the use of the metonymy MANNER OF SPEAKING FOR SPEAKING is restricted.

In other words, what can be expressed implicitly via the MANNER OF SPEAKING FOR SPEAKING metonymy in English, must (often) be expressed explicitly in Hungarian and Croatian.
I must be open with her: Hungarian

(1) *Nyíltan kell vele lennem.

open must with-her be
‘I must be open with her’

(2) Nyíltan kell vele beszéllem.

open must with-her speak

(Brdar & Brdar-Szabó 2003: 246)
The president was clear on the matter:

Hungarian

(1) *Az elnök világos volt ezzel az üggyel kapcsolatban.
   DEF President clear was this-with DEF matter concerning
   ‘The President was clear on this matter’

(2) Az elnök világosan szólt ezzel az üggyel kapcsolatban.
   DEF President clearly spoke this-with DEF matter concerning
   ‘The President spoke clearly on this matter’
   (adapted from: Brdar & Brdar-Szabó 2003: 247)
4. Outlook and Conclusion
Theoretical importance of cross-linguistic research on metonymy 1

• Metonymy is, like metaphor, more than a rhetorical trope – it is also a figure of thought.
• Languages differ in their exploitation of metonymies. A metonymy may be productive in one language and blocked or restricted in another language.
• Comparing languages in terms of the metonymies they exploit (or don’t exploit) leads to new insights into language typology.
Theoretical importance of cross-linguistic research on metonymy 2

• New research questions are opened up through cross-linguistic research on metonymy:
  – What is the impact of metonymy on grammatical structure?
  – How does grammatical structure, in turn, facilitate or restrict the exploitation of metonymies?
Practical importance of cross-linguistic research on metonymy 3

• For the language learner, knowledge about which metonymies are possible/impossible in the foreign language (in comparison to the source language), is relevant to the acquisition of a native-like or, at least, near-native linguistic competence of the target language.
References


