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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)

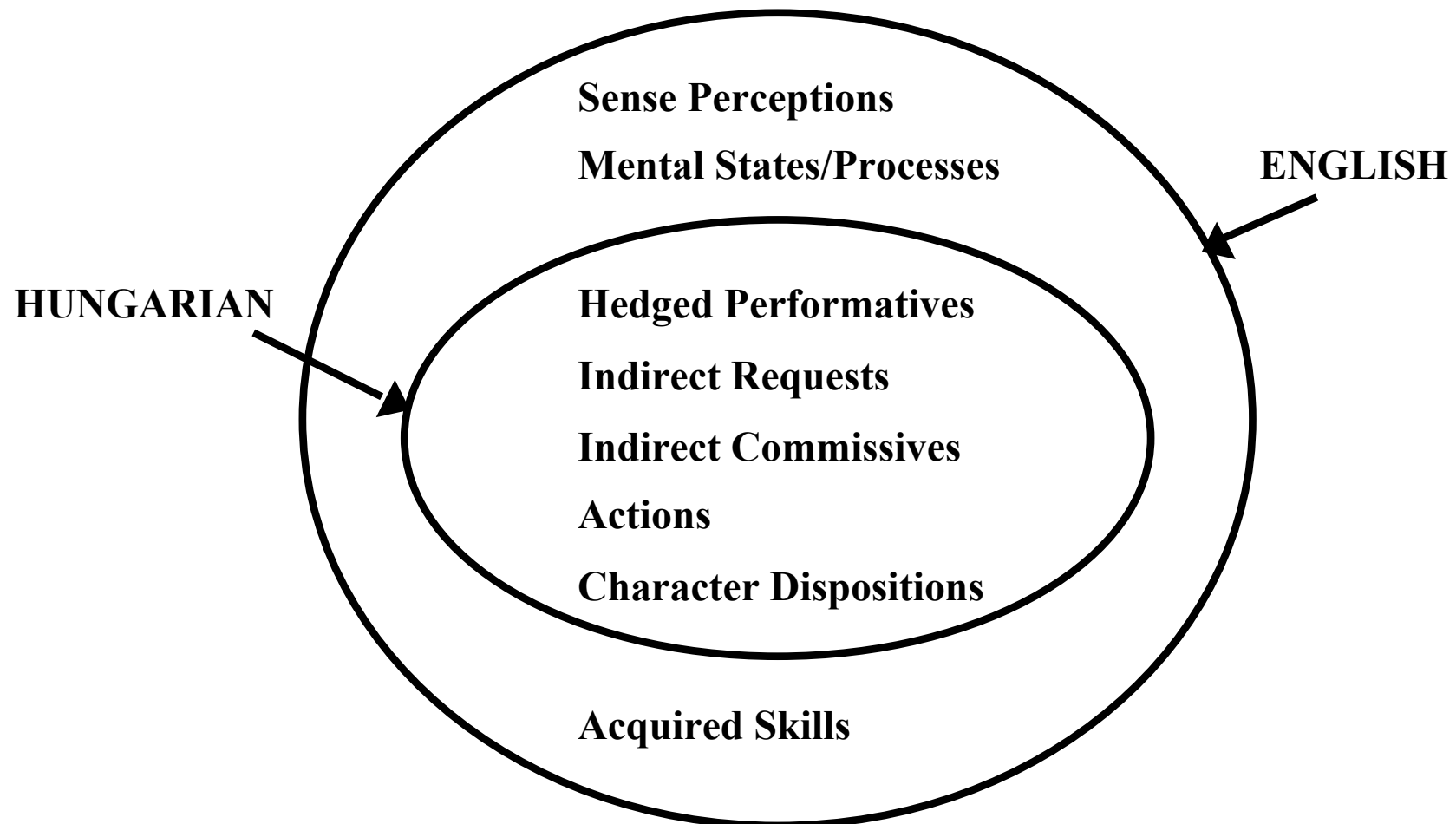
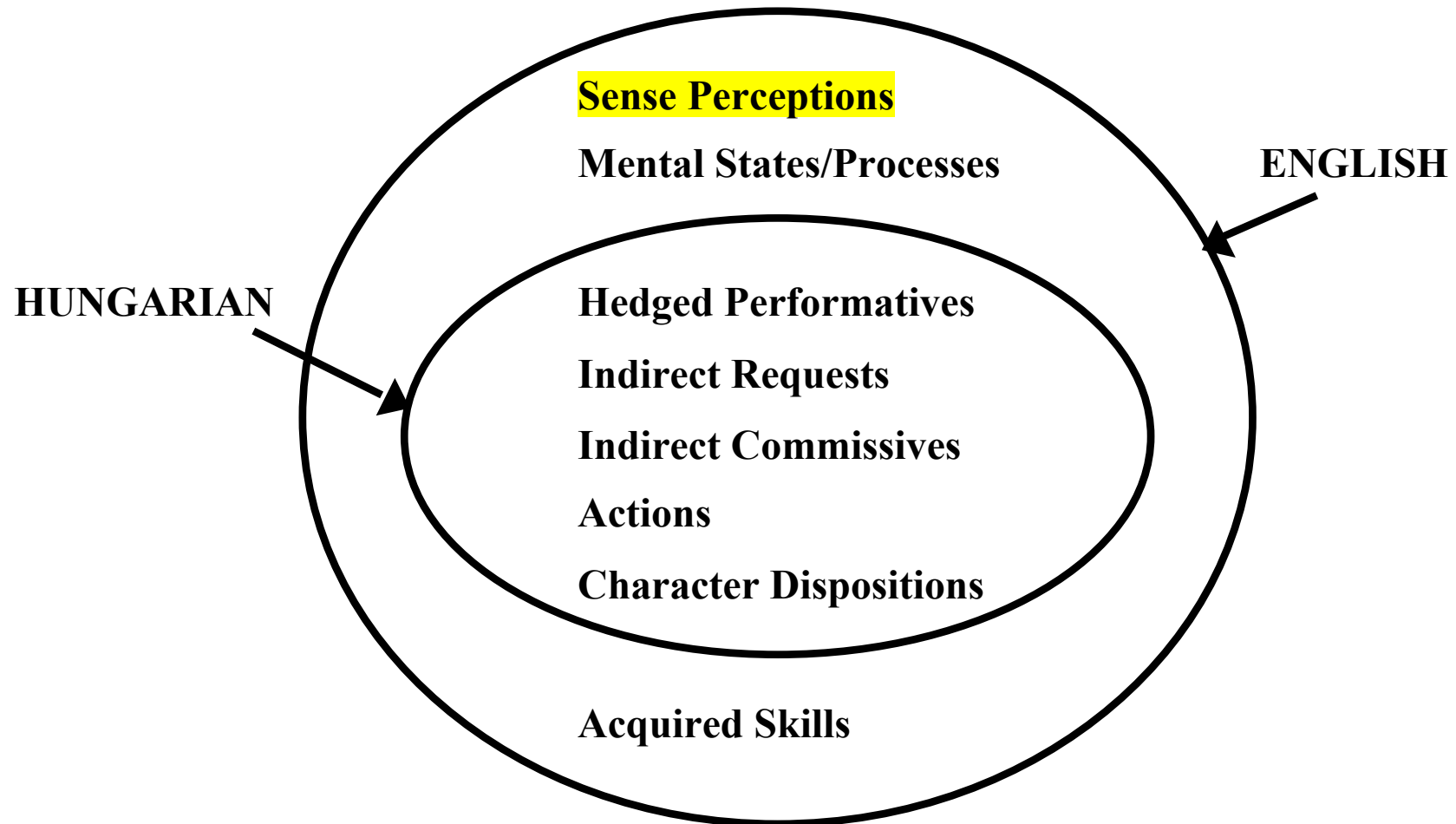


Diagram from: Panther & Thornburg (2003: 7)

Exploitation of the **POTENTIALITY FOR ACTUALITY** metonymy in English and Hungarian



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)

English vs. French

seeing

English can see	French ‘see’ FUTURE
When they do hire us, they want us to work in the kitchen, up on the scaffolding or in the storeroom, where nobody can see us.	Quand ils nous recrutent, ils veulent que nous restions à la cuisine ou dans l'arrière-boutique, là où personne ne nous verra...

English vs. French

seeing

English can see	French ‘sees’ PRESENT
You can see it from many parts of town.	car on le voit de beaucoup d'endroits.

English vs. French

seeing

English can see	French ‘notice’ PRESENT
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.

English vs. French

seeing

English could see	French ‘saw’ IMPERFECTIVE
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.	Bien sûr, je voyais bien que j'étais noire, mais je n'accordais aucune importance à la couleur de ma peau.

English vs. French

seeing

English could see	French lit. ' have seen ' COMPOSED PAST
I could see everything was happening inside a circle, just like in Africa, ...	J' ai vu que tout se passait à l'intérieur d'un cercle comme en Afrique, ...

English vs. French

cognitive **seeing**

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

English can see	French 'sees' PRESENT
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**

English can see	French 'see' PRESENT
I can see myself doing it for a living but not as a photo-journalist or a portrait photographer.	Je me vois bien faire ça dans la vie mais pas comme photographe de portrait ni reporter.

English vs. French: cognitive **seeing**

English	French ' see ' PRESENT
You can see there's a big difference.	Vous voyez la grande différence.

Standard assumption: metaphor:
UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING

Panther (2006: 163): **underlying metonymy**:
SEEING FOR UNDERSTANDING

English vs. Spanish:

feeling

English could feel	Spanish ‘felt’ PRETERIT
Through the knife he could feel the muscle tighten hard.	En el acero, sintió la fuerza del músculo.

English vs. Spanish:

feeling

English could feel	Spanish ‘felt’ IMPERFECTIVE
I could feel it grip me at the throat and stop my breathing.	Sentía que me agarraba por la garganta, cortándome la respiración.

English vs. Spanish:

feeling & hearing

English could feel could hear	Spanish ‘felt’ ‘heard’ PRETERIT
Kino could feel warm blood running from his forehead, and he could hear Juana calling to him.	Kino sintió la sangre caliente manar de su frente, y oyó que Juana le llamaba.

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 batir la masa de las tortas de maíz dentro de la casa, y de la plancha de cocer le llegó su dulce aroma.

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

Oía a Juana susurrar nuevamente el antiguo conjuro, y la maligna música del enemigo.

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 enjaulados, 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

ACTION constructions 1

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_{ACTION} construction

(see Panther & Thornburg 1999a, 2000)

How to VP_{ACTION}

Example:

How to **write a term paper**



Meaning:

‘The author offers instruction in how to VP’

Examples of the **How to VP_{ACTION}** construction

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

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

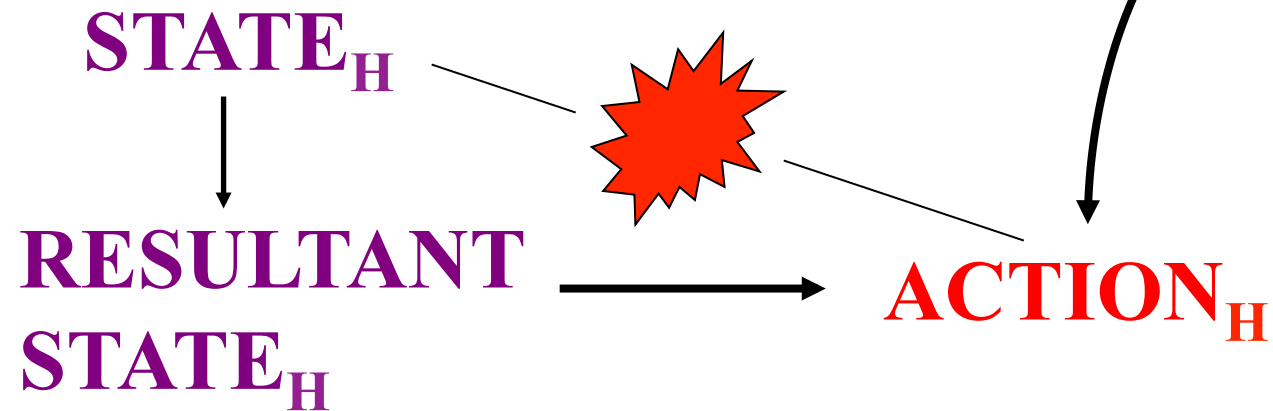
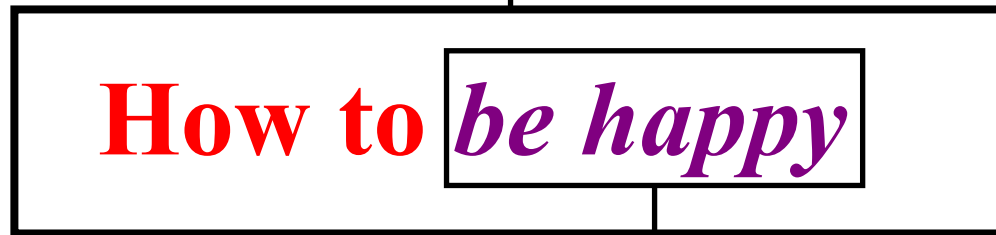
(3) is problematic/unacceptable because **be tall** is not an ACTION; it conflicts with the construction meaning.

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

Encyclopedic knowledge has an influence on **acceptability judgments**!

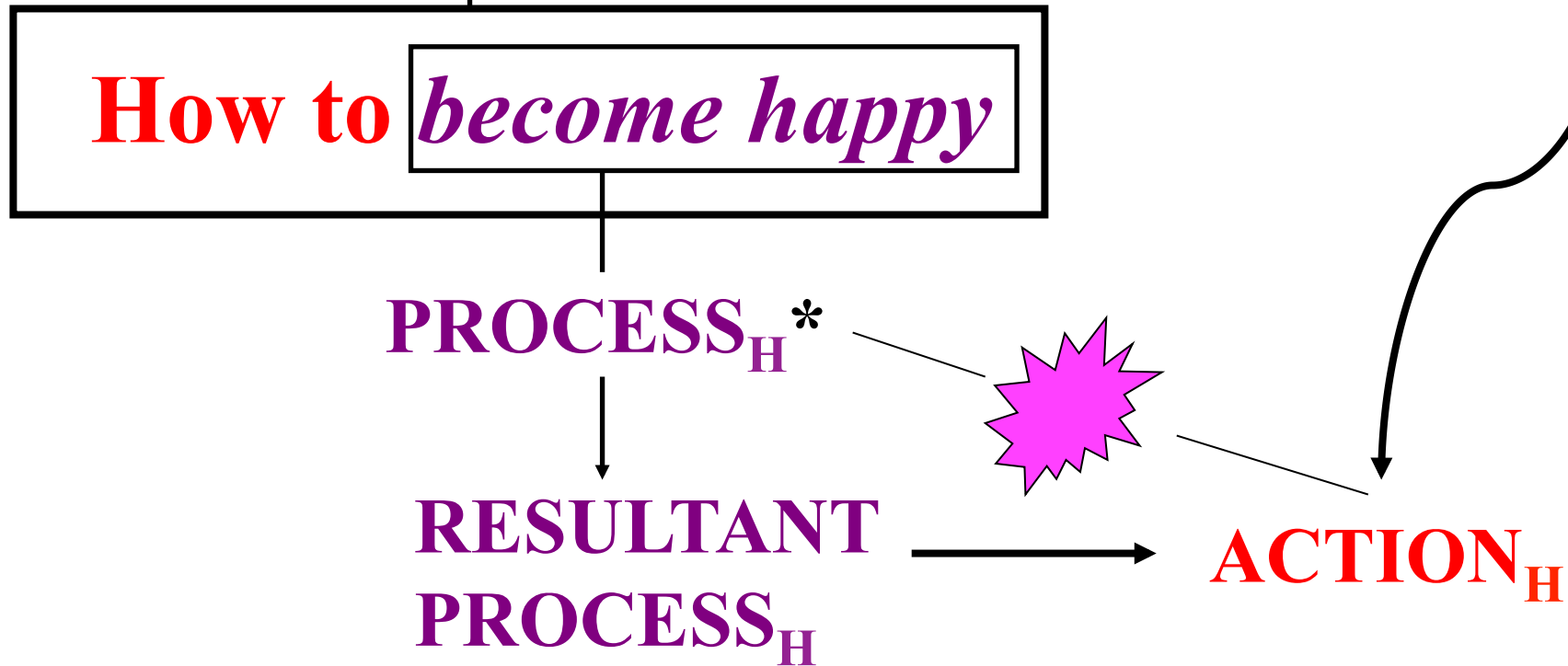
RESULTANT STATE → ACTION

‘S offers to teach H how to achieve happiness’



RESULTANT PROCESS → ACTION

‘S offers to tell H how to achieve happiness’



*The PROCESS is *telic*, i.e., it has a goal/endpoint.

The English **How to VP_{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

LANGUAGE	STATIVE CODING RESULTANT STATE FOR ACTION		PROCESS CODING PROCESS FOR ACTION		TOTAL
<i>English</i>	58,000	97.1%	1680	2.9%	59,680
<i>German</i>	66	12.7%	452	87.3%	518
<i>French</i>	1,680	98.5%	25	1.5%	1,705

Google search: May 1, 2005

Conclusion: The English **How to VP_{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 **beszélnem**.

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
ügygel kapcsolatban.

DEF President clear was this-with DEF
matter concerning

‘The President was clear on this matter’

(2) Az elnök **világosan szólt** ezzel az
ügygel 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.

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