

**LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY
AND
MENTAL REPRESENTATION
WITH REFERENCE TO
INTERCATEGORIAL POLYSEMY**

by

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I declare that *LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY AND MENTAL REPRESENTATION WITH REFERENCE TO INTERCATEGORIAL POLYSEMY* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE
(B.E. Zawada)

DATE: November 2005

It is the creative potential itself in human beings that is the image of God.
Mary Daly (Theologian) (in Cameron 1995)

Why indeed must 'God' be a noun? Why not a verb ... the most active and dynamic of all?

Mary Daly (Theologian) (in Cameron 1995)

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Completing a doctoral thesis is certainly the end of the formal educational road, and at a time like this one inevitably contemplates, not only the preceding few years, but the educational road as a whole. The one thing that stands out for me is that, from a very young age, I have been extraordinarily blessed with language teachers, lecturers and colleagues that have instilled in me both an appreciation of the beauty and creativity in language, as well as an appreciation of the discipline and structure in language. This thesis, and the topics covered in it, is a reflection of my fascination with this paradox between beauty and structure, and between creativity and discipline. The last in this long line of teachers has been Prof. Hendrikse who has practised the idea that to mentor means, finally, to allow your students their own creative ideas.

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CONTENT

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	viii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Linguistic creativity	2
1.2 The mental representation of lexical knowledge as a linguistic problem	3
1.3 Intercategorical polysemy as a test case for theoretical models of linguistic creativity	7
1.4 The structure of the thesis	9
2. Linguistic creativity in the 20th century	11
2.1 Creativity as an essential trait of human beings	13
2.2 Generative creativity	19
2.3 Lexical creativity	26
2.4 What kind of problem is <i>linguistic creativity</i> ?	28
2.5 Conclusion	31
3. A new perspective on <i>linguistic creativity</i>	33
3.1 The scope of linguistic creativity	34
3.1.1 Motivations for and functions of creativity	39
3.1.2 The time frames and context of linguistic creativity	44
3.2 A survey of linguistic creativity	49
3.2.1 Lexis	50
3.2.2 Grammar	64
3.2.3 Discourse	69
3.3 Conclusion	75
4. Approaches to meaning and mental representation	82
4.1 Approaches to lexical meaning	83
4.1.1 The lexicographical approach	85
4.1.2 The referential approach	88
4.1.3 The structuralist approach	91
4.1.4 The behaviouristic approach	93
4.1.5 The functional-pragmatic approach	94
4.1.6 The logical approach	95
4.1.7 The psychologistic approach	96
4.1.8 The computational approach	100
4.1.9 The neuro- and biological approaches	102
4.1.10 Summary	104

4.2	What is a mental representation?	108
4.2.1	Concepts and mental representations in the various approaches	108
4.2.2	Is the notion of a mental representation justifiable?	111
4.3	Conclusion	116
5.	(Intercategorical) Polysemy in English	118
5.1	Defining (intercategorical) polysemy	119
5.2	The mental representation of polysemy	138
5.3	Creative intercategorical polysemy	142
5.4	Theoretical models of (intercategorical) polysemy	147
5.4.1	The representational-derivational model	149
5.4.2	The network-activation model	157
5.5	Conclusion	163
6.	Conceptual integration	166
6.1	The mechanisms of conceptual integration	166
6.1.1	Activating mental spaces	171
6.1.2	Matching elements in the mental spaces	176
6.1.3	Running the blend	180
6.2	Intercategorical polysemy as blending	184
6.2.1	Literal N–V	189
6.2.2	Metaphorical and metonymical N–V	207
6.2.3	A–N–V	210
6.3	Conclusion	214
7.	Linguistic creativity and mental representation	217
	References	229
	List of tables	
	Table 3.1 Productive word-formation processes	50
	Table 3.2 Word-creation strategies	52
	Table 5.1 Examples of creative intercategorical polysemy	144
	List of figures	
	Fig. 3.1 More productive word-formation rules vs less-productive word-creation strategies	54
	Fig. 3.2 A continuum of linguistic creativity	79
	Fig. 4.1 The semiotic triangle	84
	Fig. 5.1 The proposed continuum of semantic classes	126
	Fig. 5.2 Radial network of the senses of <i>school</i>	130

Fig. 5.3	A new continuum of polysemous phenomena in language	137
Fig. 5.4	A diagrammatic representation of the representational-derivational model	155
Fig. 5.5	A diagrammatic representation of the network-activation model	159
Fig. 6.1	<i>The child is safe</i>	175
Fig. 6.2	<i>The beach is safe</i>	176
Fig. 6.3	<i>He porched the newspaper</i>	192
Fig. 6.4	<i>He skied it!</i>	192
Fig. 6.5	<i>She ladled the soup into the bowl</i>	196
Fig. 6.6	<i>The ship sails</i>	197
Fig. 6.7	<i>She sliced the apples</i>	199
Fig. 6.8	<i>My arm aches</i>	200
Fig. 6.9	<i>She models swimwear</i>	202
Fig. 6.10	<i>He dated that girl</i>	203
Fig. 6.11	<i>My love</i>	205
Fig. 6.12	<i>He fathered three children</i>	206
Fig. 6.13	Metaphorical N-V network	208
Fig. 6.14	Metonymical N-V network	210
Fig. 6.15	A-N-V integration network	212

Abstract

In this thesis, the phenomenon of intercategoryal polysemy is approached from two related but previously unconnected perspectives, namely that of *linguistic creativity* and *mental representation*. It is argued that the creativity that is part and parcel of the linguistic abilities of each and every human being, has been neglected in the study of linguistics, and should, in fact, form the basis of studies such as these in cognitive lexical creativity. It is argued that structural productivity (the generative view of linguistic creativity) and conceptual creativity lie on a continuum, the middle ground of which is covered by phenomena which are both productive and creative and which have both a formal and a semantic aspect to them. One such a phenomenon is intercategoryal polysemy. Explaining the way in which speakers of a language such as English can systematically and productively produce and interpret words that belong to more than one syntactic category (for example, *hammer_N – hammer_V*, *table_N – table_V*, *sky_N – sky_V*), which may range from the conventionalised to the completely innovative, has long been a problem for linguists. Traditional morphological accounts involving theoretical notions such as zero derivation have always been found to be inadequate, mostly because zero derivation does not account for the variation in meaning and the background knowledge that is needed to produce and interpret novel instances. The main problem addressed in this thesis then is the question as to the nature of the lexical knowledge of speakers and its mental representation, so that it can form the basis for the cognitive processes that will enable language users to be linguistically creative. Various theoretical models that have been proposed to account for intercategoryal polysemy, namely the representational-derivational model, the network-activation model, as well as the theory of conceptual integration (also called blending), are presented and evaluated in the light of a representative sample of completely novel instances of intercategoryal polysemy.

Key terms: creativity, linguistic creativity, mental representation, polysemy, intercategoryal polysemy, conversion, multifunctionality, zero derivation, activation, network activation, mental space, conceptual integration, blending

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Abstract

Explaining the way in which speakers of a language such as English can systematically and productively produce and interpret words that belong to more than one syntactic category (for example, *hammer_N – hammer_V*, *table_N – table_V*, *sky_N – sky_V*), which range in their status from the conventionalised to the completely innovative, has long been a problem for linguists. Traditional morphological accounts of zero derivation have always been found to be inadequate, mostly because zero derivation does not account for the variation in meaning and the background knowledge that is needed to produce and interpret novel instances. With the advent of Cognitive Linguistics an attempt was made by Zawada (1996) to explain intercategory polysemy by using a network activation model. Even though this model could account for the background knowledge involved in interpreting novel instances of intercategory polysemy, it could still not account for the production of completely new examples of this phenomenon.

In this thesis, the phenomenon of intercategory polysemy is approached from two related but previously unconnected perspectives, namely that of *linguistic creativity* and *mental representation*. It is argued that the creativity that is part and parcel of the linguistic abilities of each and every human being, has long been neglected in the study of linguistics, and should, in fact, form the background of studies such as these in lexical creativity. The main problem to be addressed then is the question as to the nature of the lexical knowledge of speakers and its mental representation, so that it can form the basis for the cognitive processes that will enable them to be linguistically creative. This study has found that linguistic knowledge in general, and lexical knowledge in particular, cannot be regarded as a fixed and static separate module from general knowledge, but rather, linguistic knowledge is closely intertwined with all the other cognitive faculties (including general, individual, cultural and experiential knowledge). The mental lexicon is not a separate cognitive or linguistic module that consists of a set of the words that a speaker knows, with their respective meanings and categories linked to them (as in conventional dictionaries); rather the mental lexicon, as a set of lexical entries consisting of a specification of the meaning(s) of the concepts and their respective category labels, is a derived phenomenon which is the result of an intricate interplay

between various types of knowledge, represented in frames and cognitive models, and various cognitive processes such as conceptual integration, metaphor, metonymy, categorisation, perspectivisation, etc.

Key terms: creativity, linguistic creativity, mental representation, polysemy, intercategoryal polysemy, conversion, multifunctionality, zero derivation, activation, mental space, conceptual integration, blending