

**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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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