

## “Hard sun, hot weather, skin pain”: The ethnosyntax and semantics of temperature expressions in two Kwa languages in contact

Temperature is talked about in different ways across languages. In this paper I explore the linguistic expressions used to talk about temperature focussing on three domains of experience in two languages in contact, Ewe and Likpe, both Kwa languages of West Africa. The contact relation between them is asymmetric: Likpe speakers are bilingual in Ewe but not vice versa. The empirical question addressed is: how do speakers of Ewe and Likpe talk about the temperature of (i) the ambience, (ii) food, and (iii) water and the effects on the human body.

I will argue that both languages do not have equivalents for ‘temperature’ hence the question has to be phrased differently. Secondly I will show that temperature property, being a physical quality, is basically expressed using verbs than say adjectives because of the nature of the adjective class in these languages. Moreover I argue that the range of expressions available in the two languages for talking about ‘water’ is more elaborate than the other domains of experience, some of which are linked to cultural practices such as bathing. For instance, the temperature of water can be described using the following verbal expressions in Ewe:

- (1) Tsi-a        fá  
Water-DEFbecome.cold/cool  
‘The water is cool/cold’
- (2) Tsi-a        gblɔ  
Water-DEFbecome.lukewarm  
‘The water is lukewarm’
- (3) Tsi-a        xɔ    dzo  
Water-DEFget    fire  
‘The water is hot’
- (4) Tsi-a        vé  
Water-DEFpain  
‘The water is painfully hot’
- (5) Tsi-a        fie  
Water-DEFboil  
‘The water has boiled’

On the basis of such data I explore the construals of ‘hotness’ and propose semantic descriptions of the predicates involved. While the experience of the expression in (3) can be accounted for through a link to ‘fire’ as suggested by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2007), I argue that we need another prototype anchor for the expression of hotness in (4). The verb vé in Ewe in fact is used across the three experiential domains examined in this paper and it would be analysed in detail to show that it is involved in other sensory modalities. However, I will argue that it is a monosemous item. I will propose a framework (similar to Kecskes 2008) for the interpretation and understanding of such terms to maintain the unity of the experience for the speakers and explore the cognitive and pragmatic mechanisms that can be invoked to explain the cross sensory uses.

In the ambient domain, the experience of the temperature generated by the sun itself is talked about using predicates from the domain of the physical property of texture. The conceptual motivations for such usage are also explored.

## References

- Goddard, Cliff and Anna Wierzbicka. 2007. NSM analyses of the semantics of physical qualities *sweet, hot, hard, heavy, rough, sharp* in cross-linguistic perspective *Studies in Language* 31(4): 765–800.
- Kecskes, Istvan. 2008. Dueling contexts: a dynamic model of meaning. *Journal of Pragmatics* 40:385-406.