

Physical and Emotional Pain: Metaphors, Metaphonymies and Grammaticalization

Due to its specific nature, the notion of “pain” is of particular interest for research in cognitive linguistics. This universal and basic area of human experience is totally dependent on language, since subjective painful sensations of different people cannot be observed, verified or compared except through their verbalization. Thus, our access to others' pain is mediated through language. This explains both the role of PAIN-concepts in philosophical debates on the possibility of inter-subjective understanding in general (cf. Wittgenstein) and the importance of correct and consistent semantic analysis of verbal descriptions of pain for medical diagnostics (cf. Melzack 1975). Less attention so far has been paid to the proper linguistic study of pain systems.

On a purely linguistic ground, however, pain domain seems to be unique as well. As opposed to other semantic domains, the pain zone normally has very few of its own lexical means in languages (like *hurt* or *ache* in English, *schmerzen* or *wehtun* in German, etc., cf. Lascaratou 2007 on Greek) and is generally described metaphorically.

This paper presents the results of an international typological project devoted to the study of the conceptual domain of pain in a sample of approximately 30 languages. As (Authors 2007) has shown, the types of metaphorical sources for physical pain are consistent throughout the language sample. These are “instrumental destruction” (e.g., Balkar *bašym čančady* lit. ‘my head pricked’), “fire destruction” (Hungarian *égeti a nyelvemet* ‘it burns my tongue’), “sound” (Russian *nogi gudjat* lit. ‘legs are hooting’), “movement” (English *my stomach is churning*), and some others.

This study considers those semantic shifts which result in denoting a state of “emotional pain” associated to specific body parts (cf. Hindi *kalejā kaTtā hai* lit. ‘the liver is cutting’ for ‘to envy’). Cross-linguistically, they seem to derive from the same groups of verbs. Our analysis shows, however, that the meaning of emotional pain cannot be considered either a secondary metaphor on the basis of physical pain, or an independent semantic shift. In fact, native speakers of different languages do not seem to distinguish accurately between emotional and physical pain. This means that there is no shift from one domain to another in this field (cf. Lakoff 1987, Croft 1993) and, therefore, no metaphor in the strict sense. (Interestingly, this view is supported by neurophysiologic investigations postulating that there are brain centers responsible both for pain and emotions).

There are, however, cases of a regular semantic shift from physiological domain to the emotional one, cf. English *my fingers are itching (to do smth.)*, Spanish *los pies me hormiguean* lit. ‘my feet are swarming with ants’ (e.g., for the desire to dance), Agul (Daghestanian): (Converb) + *ugaa zun* lit. ‘I am burning’ (for the impatience to do smth.). This shift is discussed in greater detail; it is argued that this combination of metaphor and metonymy differs from what was described previously (as “metaphonymy” in Goossens 1995, or “metaphor remetonymization” in Riemer 2001) and displays some characteristics of “incipient grammaticalization” (cf. Hopper, Traugott 1993).

References

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