Cognitive Categories in the Landscape: *Hill, collado, apu*

The topic of cognitive and linguistic categories of geographic features is "an important but unexplored area of linguistics", in the words of the editors of a recent special issue of *Language Science* entitled "Language and landscape: a cross-linguistic perspective" (Burenhult & Levinson eds. 2008). It is comparable to other areas of classification such as life forms, body parts and color. These areas all raise interesting, and sometimes controversial, broader questions about the relationships between language, human cognition and culture, in particular, whether there are universal categories (e.g. "do all people have the cognitive category of 'mountains'?") and to what extent culture shapes how people describe the external world in different languages. (See e.g. Fillmore 2006, Smith & Mark 2001).

In this paper I will present a cross-linguistic comparison of landscape terms, for example the English language *hill*, the Spanish *collado*, and the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara *apu* ('mountain, hill, rock') (an Australian Aboriginal language). I will draw on typologically different languages including English, Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara (Australia), Spanish, Duse (Papua New Guinea) and Chinese. My data consists of naturally occurring language taken from corpora, texts, media, personal observation, and field notes and recordings.

I will access geographic conceptual categories by unraveling the meanings of landscape terms. For this task I will use the NSM (Natural Semantic Metalanguage) method of semantic explanation (e.g. Goddard ed. 2008) – a method which has proved fruitful in the examinations of other domains such as social categories, color and life forms (see e.g. Goddard & Wierzbicka Forthcoming, Wierzbicka 2008, 1985).

I will argue that geographic categories derived from English language classifications like *mountains* and *hills* are not universal but rather are culture-and language-specific. Understanding the geographic categories in a particular culture offers us a window on the worldview of that culture. I will also explore to what degree concepts such as *rivers* and *creeks* are built on semantic templates. I will also submit that the detailed semantic analysis of landscape terms allows us to extract elements of cognitive categories which are universal or near universal, even if categories such as *mountains* are not. These elements include basic concepts like "place" and "kind", as well as more complex concepts such as "ground" and "water".

My findings are relevant to the long-running and ongoing debate about to what extent cognitive categories are shaped by the environment or to what extent they are shaped by the cognitive processes of humans (see e.g. Berlin 1992, Enfield 2008, Lakoff 1987, Malt 1995, Rosch 1977). This paper also contributes to the growing use of semantic templates. Furthermore my study of geographic categories, being based in the NSM method of semantic analysis, offers a new way exploring the emerging field of cognitive geography (Burenhult and Levinson eds. 2008, Mark, Turk & Stea 2007).

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