

Embodiment, Palpability, and the Cognitive State System

Guenther Lampert
JGU Mainz

This presentation focuses on some less known facets of Leonard Talmy's cognitive semantics framework: It addresses the greatly underresearched evidential and epistemic subdivisions of the Cognitive State schematic system (cf. G. Lampert 2012), pertaining to "characterizations of a sentient entity's state of knowledge" (Talmy 2006: 259-260).

The talk aims at reconstructing how the English language recruits the different senses of the human perceptual system as sources for the lexicalization of evidential markers: smell, taste, touch, hearing, and vision (cf. Whitt 2010; Gisborne 2010). It will show how the abstraction and schematization processes involved can be described in terms of Talmy's notion of palpability, which captures the different degrees of levels "with which some entity is experienced in consciousness, from the fully concrete to the fully abstract" (Talmy 2000, 1: 141).

If one were to subscribe to the embodied cognition thesis, which basically claims that concepts and categories of human languages derive from the situated interaction of human bodies with their environment (cf. Rohrer 2007), it should be expected that, apart from vision, the other human perceptual senses (hearing, touching, tasting, smelling) will likewise be potential source domains for the lexicalization of evidential markers. Looking at corpus data from American English (COHA), it turns out, however, that all the senses except vision (represented in such adverbs as *olfactorily*, *gustatorily*, *audibly*, *tangibly*, *palpably*, and by perception verbs in constructions such as *it smells like*, *it tastes like*, *it sounds like*, *it feels like*) yield low frequencies over time and are sensed at more and more abstract levels of palpability -- as are the frequently used core evidentials *obviously*, *evidently*, *apparently*, which simply state that there is some evidence to draw on.

It will thus be claimed that the embodiment theory fails to explain these (still inconclusive) results, and that, in line with caveats expressed in Talmy (2011: 636), we should instead reckon with cognitive systems of reason that associate abstract and schematic meanings in the first place, without the 'detour' via embodiment.

References

- Gisborne, Nicholas (2010), *The Event Structure of Perception Verbs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lampert, Günther (2012), "Seem: Evidential, Epistemic, or What Else. A Study in Cognitive Semantics." *International Journal of Cognitive Linguistics* 2.1, 1-26.
- Rohrer, Tim. 2007. "The body in space: Dimensions of embodiment." In: Ziemke, Tom et al. (eds.), *Body, Language, and Mind. Volume 1: Embodiment*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter: 339-378.
- Talmy, Leonard. 1996b. "Fictive Motion in Language and 'Ception'." In: Bloom, Paul (ed.), *Language and Space*, 211-276. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Talmy, Leonard. 2000. *Toward a Cognitive Semantics. Volume 1: Concept Structuring Systems*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Talmy, Leonard. 2006. "A Windowing onto Conceptual Structure and Language. Part 2: Language and Cognition: Past and Future. Leonard Talmy Interviewed by Iraide Ibarretxe-Antuñano." *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics* 4:253-268.
- Talmy, Leonard. 2011. "Cognitive Semantics: An Overview." In: Maienborn, Claudia, Klaus von Heusinger and Paul Portner (eds.), *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning. Volume 1*. 622-642. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.