

Lexical motivation and speaker judgements

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The study we present has two aims: the first aim is to define which data type should be used in the research on lexical motivation. We make two claims that contrast with what is tacitly assumed in motivational and word-formation research (e.g. Ullmann 1966, Grossmann/ Rainer 2004):

- introspective speaker judgements and introspective linguist judgements on lexical motivation have not the same status and
- the only valid data for the research on lexical motivation are speaker judgements.

We have to carefully distinguish between synchronic and diachronic research data concerning word-formation and polysemy and what we call motivational data, that is introspective naïve speaker judgements concerning word-formation and polysemy.

Secondly, we will discuss how to obtain introspective speaker judgements on lexical motivation and we will present two different questionnaire methods which promise to set new standards in motivational research.

One could sustain that it is sufficient that the linguist – as a native speaker – gathers data about lexical motivation by introspection. We are nevertheless convinced that linguists are not the best candidates for that job.

Leaving aside studies on the level of mental representation, there are mainly four ways to research relations between lexical units in the field of linguistics, i.e. etymology studies on the evolution of words, etymological studies on the evolution of different senses of one and the same word, research in word-formation and polysemy. Etymology tracks down the evolution of words and their meanings which is documented in texts of different time periods. These etymological facts are usually unknown to the “normal” speaker. Word-formation tries to explain in a synchronic perspective how words are formed on the basis of other words of the same language and tries to determine which rules operate behind those processes. As for etymology, the relations between words that can be established by the help of these rules do not necessarily correspond to the relations that are actually perceived by the normal language user. The same holds for the normal language users’ perception of relations between the senses of polysemous words: he may perceive them differently than a

polysemy researcher may classify them. All these synchronically perceived relations belong to the realm of lexical motivation. If we take in consideration the French word *voiture* from the perspective of etymology, word-formation, and lexical motivation, we get differing results:

Etymology: Lat. *vehere* > Lat. *vectura* > Old Fr. *veiture* > Fr. *voiture*

Word-formation: Fr. *voiture* cannot be considered as derived.

Lexical motivation: Speakers relate Fr. *voiture* ‘car’ < Fr. *voie* ‘path’ explaining the sem. relation by “in order to be able to use a car, we need a path”

Interpreting the speaker judgment in terms of our rather fine grained concept of lexical motivation (Koch 2001) we can say that the speakers detected a formal similarity between the soundchains [vwa] and [vwatyr], we could maybe talk about a sort of speaker induced suffixation. On the semantic level we can find a relation of conceptual contiguity - our inventory also includes the universal relations of metaphorical similarity, cognitive identity, co-taxonomic similarity, taxonomic super-/subordination and conceptual contrast. However, the relation *voiture* ‘car’ < *voie* ‘path’ does not correspond to word-formation rules. In French exists indeed a suffix –ure/-ture, but its semantic structure doesn’t include anything comparable to what would be needed here (cfr. Dubois/Dubois-Charlier (1999, 204, 211, 264) and Morvan (1988, XIX)).

It is highly improbable that motivational relations like the one between *voie* and *voiture* could be found by the linguists’ introspection: the problem with the linguists’ introspection is that linguists are guided either by etymological or by morphological knowledge. Even if they distance themselves from their expert knowledge, they still cannot be sure to pick the motivational relation the majority of speakers would favour.

To give a notion of how lexical motivation should be investigated using speaker judgements we present two different questionnaire studies: in both of them German subjects are confronted with a well-defined sample of frequent German words. They are first asked to name a motivational base and then to explain the semantic relation between the stimulus and their response. The difference between the two questionnaires mainly relies in the type of question concerning the semantic relations. In questionnaire I the latter part is entirely open: the subjects have to formulate their answers by themselves. The corresponding part of questionnaire II is semi-open containing a multiple-choice part (cf. Blanchet 2000): subjects have to choose between different semantic relation types formulated in an easily understandable manner (for example: “Meaning 1 is the opposite of meaning 2” etc.) and to justify their choice in their own words. Both of these questionnaires have clear advantages over the existing methods in motivational research (e.g. Augst 1975, Fill 1980, see also Marzo/Rube in press).

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