“Building Words via Metonymy: A Comparison of Russian, Czech and Norwegian”

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Main Idea

• **Role of metonymy in grammar**
  – Metonymy as the motivating force for **word-formation**
  – Metonymy is **more** diverse in grammar than in lexicon

• **Why this has been previously ignored**
  – Most linguistic research on metonymy has focused on
    • lexical phenomena
    • languages with relatively little word-formation
Overview

1. The Big Picture: why study metonymy in grammar?
   • Cognitive structure of information

2. Relevant Previous Scholarship

3. Databases: Russian, Czech, Norwegian
   • Size & structure of databases
   • Metonymy & Word class designations
   • Specificity of suffixes

4. Observations
   • Comparison across domains (lexicon vs. grammar)
   • Directionality of metonymy
   • Comparison across languages

5. Conclusions
1. The Big Picture

- Metonymy is a way of establishing a mental address system
- A more salient item (vehicle) is used to access another item (target)
Example 1 of (lexical) metonymy

- We need a **good head for this project**

(good) head

vehicle

part

(smart) person

target

whole
Example 2 of (lexical) metonymy

- *The milk tipped over*

```
milk  
vehicle  
contained
```

```
glass  
target  
container
```
Russian example of grammatical metonymy

- брюхан ‘pot-bellied person’

брюхо
vehicle
part

брюхан
target
whole
Czech example of grammatical metonymy

- květináč ‘flower-pot’

květina vehicle contained
květináč target container
Why study grammatical metonymy?

• Grammatical structures are more systematic, more indicative of information structure than lexical structures
• Compare lexical vs. grammatical metonymy
• Compare grammatical metonymy across languages
• May indicate information structure in brain
2. Relevant Previous Scholarship

• Works on metonymy
  – say almost nothing about word-formation

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Works on metonymy

• Focus on lexical metonymy and on describing difference between metonymy and metaphor

Jakobson [1956] 1980

• Metonymy is based on contiguity.
• “Also, as a rule, words derived from the same root, such as grant -- grantor -- grantee are semantically related by contiguity.”
• “Thus the Russian word mokr-ica signifies ‘woodlouse’, but a Russian aphasic interpreted it as ‘something humid’, especially ‘humid weather’, since the root mokr- means ‘humid’ and the suffix -ica designates a carrier of the given property, as in nelepica ‘something absurd’, svtlica ‘light room’, temnica ‘dungeon’ (literally ‘dark room’).”
• Scholarship has neglected metonymy
Langacker 1993

• “Metonymy is prevalent because our reference-point ability is fundamental and ubiquitous, and it occurs in the first place because it serves a useful cognitive and communicative function.”

• “By virtue of our reference-point ability, a well-chosen metonymic expression lets us mention one entity that is salient and easily coded, and thereby evoke -- essentially automatically -- a target that is either of lesser interest or harder to name.”

• Principles of relative salience:
  – human > non-human; whole > part; concrete > abstract; visible > non-visible; etc.
Panther & Thornburg 2002

• Discuss role of metonymy and metaphor in English -er

Padučeva 2004

• Shows that the same metonymic semantic relation can be lexical in one language, but marked by word-formation in another
Peirsman & Geeraerts 2006

• Most comprehensive inventory of metonymy designations
• Focuses primarily on lexical metonymy; grammatical uses do not involve word formation
• Serves as the basis for the system used in my databases
• Will serve as basis for comparisons also (henceforth “P&G”)
Works on word-formation

• Mainly lists of suffixes and/or relationships


Lönngren 1978

- Meanings of suffixes are relations rather than components, having a converting rather than additive function; 16 are “associative” and 46 are “situative”

Araeva 2009

- Mentions metonymy as a possible motive for word formation, but limited to whole-part/part-whole relationships; her examples are медведь ‘bear’ - медвежатина ‘bearmeat’, горох ‘peas’ - горошина ‘pea’, зверь ‘animal’ - зверье ‘animals’
3. Databases:

Russian, Czech, Norwegian

• Based on data culled from Academy/Reference Grammar of each language

• Suffixal word-formation signalling metonymy
  – includes conversion (zero-suffixation)

• Each database is an inventory of types
  – no duplicates
A Type is a unique combination of

• Metonymy designation: vehicle & target
  – брюхан is part-whole
  – květináč is contained-container

• Word class designation: vehicle & target
  – both брюхан and květináč are noun-noun

• Suffix

(See sample types on handout)
What the databases do NOT contain

• Word formation that is not metonymical
  – hypocoristics
  – caritives
  – comparative adjectives & adverbs
  – secondary imperfectives

• Compounding
  – all types have only ONE root

• Isolated examples, dialectisms

• Information on frequency
Challenges in constructing the databases

- Allomorphy or separate suffixes?
- Overlap in metonymies (e.g., part-whole, contained-container, located-location, possessed-possessor)
- Examples with multiple interpretations (e.g., Norwegian *maling* ‘paint, painting’)
- Extending the P&G inventory to cover all attested types (see next slide)
Vehicles & Targets

- Relating to **Actions**: action, state, change state, event, manner, time, *price-ticket* (Czech)
- Relating to **Participants**: agent, product, patient, instrument
- Relating to **Entities**: entity, abstraction, characteristic, group, leader, material, quantity, female (target only), male (target only)
- Relating to **Part-Whole**: part, whole, contained, container, located, location, possessed, possessor

Underlined items have been added
More distinctions made within Actions and Participants
The sum is more than the parts

• I do not assume a strict componential analysis via vehicles and targets!
• The unit is the vehicle-target relationship -- a construction that is not just the sum of parts
• Each vehicle-target relationship is unique
• For example, action-agent is different from action-product, not just because of the second member of the relationship
# metonymy designations

- **Russian**: 112
- **Czech**: 109
- **Norwegian**: 61
Top 13 Metonymy Designations

• 10 items found on all 3 top 13 lists:
  – abstraction-characteristic
  – action-abstraction
  – action-agent
  – action-characteristic
  – action-instrument
  – action-product
  – characteristic-abstraction
  – entity-characteristic
  – characteristic-entity
  – action-event

  action is vehicle for six of them!
Word-class designations

• Vehicles and targets common to all three languages:
  – adverb, noun, numeral, qualitative adjective, relational adjective, verb
• Vehicles found only in Russian and Czech:
  – pronoun, interjection, sound, preposition (R only).
Top Ten Word Class Designations

- 8 items found on all 3 top 10 lists:
  - noun-noun
  - verb-noun
  - noun-relational adjective
  - qualitative adjective-noun
  - noun-qualitative adjective
  - noun-verb
  - verb-qualitative adjective
  - relational adjective-noun
To what extent does a suffix specify metonymy?

- Number of metonymies per suffix
  - Highs: 16 (Czech), 15 (Russian), 11 (Norwegian) metonymies per suffix
  - Lows: only one metonymy for 128 suffixes (Russian), ... 94 suffixes (Czech), 21 suffixes (Norwegian)
  - Average is about 3 metonymies per suffix

- Number of targets per suffix
  - 60% have only one target, but 15% have more targets than vehicles
average # metonymy designations per suffix

- Russian: 2.6
- Czech: 2.7
- Norwegian: 3
word-class designations per suffix

- Russian: 1.55
- Czech: 1.56
- Norwegian: 1.61
Suffixes and specificity

- **Not** specific for metonymy
- **Target** specific for word class

- **What does a suffix mean?**
- “Given this vehicle X, perform a metonymy such that the target is a member of word class Y.”
4. Observations

• Comparison lexicon vs. word-formation
  – Metonymy is more diverse and prevalent in word-formation
  – But some division of labor between the two domains

• Directionality
  – Some metonymies are uni-directional
  – Most bi-directional metonymies are skewed

• Cross-linguistic comparisons
# metonymy designations

- Cited in P&G, not attested in this study
- Cited in P&G and attested in this study
- Attested only in this study
Lexicon vs. word-formation

- Some frequent lexical metonymies are not attested in word-formation
  - agent-product, potential-actual, hypernym-hyponym
- Some frequent word-formation metonymies are not attested in lexical use
  - abstraction-characteristic, characteristic-abstraction, action-abstraction, action-characteristic
Directionality of metonymies in word-formation

• Robust uni-directional metonymies
  – product-agent, instrument-agent, state-location

• Balanced bi-directional metonymies
  – entity & characteristic, abstraction & characteristic, action & product

• Skewed bi-directional metonymies
Distribution of the 137 metonymy designations by language
Special investments: **Russian and Czech**

- location-characteristic
- possessor-possessed
- state-characteristic
- characteristic-location
- part-whole
- characteristic-material
Special investments: Russian

- entity-female
- instrument-characteristic
- characteristic-characteristic
Special investments: Czech

• contained-container
• product-location
• quantity-entity
Special investments: Norwegian

- location-located
- product-agent
5. Conclusions

• The main purpose of word-formation is to signal metonymy
• Metonymy in word-formation is more diverse than in lexical use
• Different languages make different investments in word-formation to signal metonymy
• Compare lexical vs. grammatical systems of meaning (Talmy 2005)