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BLIND and DEAF: towards a lexical typology

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- Words that refer to the quality of being unable to see or to hear something: 'blind', 'deaf'
- Both literal and figurative uses → lexical typology

REVIEW & BACKGROUND

- Vast research on the sensory lexicon ([Viberg 1983], [Majid, Levinson 2011], [Rakhilina et al. 2012], [San Roque et al. 2015], [Koptjevskaja-Tamm (ed.) 2015], etc.).
- Our research: takes into consideration not only the straightforward sensory lexicon, but also
 - ✓ its caritives (cf. [Zimmer 1964], [Koptjevskaja-Tamm, Miestamo 2015] on general theoretical issues; [Tolstaya 2008] on caritives in Slavic, [Tagabileva et al. 2013] on ‘empty’, [Kruglyakova, Reznikova 2013] on ‘dry’);
 - ✓ the metaphors it entails.

METHODOLOGY

- Frame-based approach to lexical typology [Rakhilina, Reznikova 2013, 2016; Maisak, Rakhilina (eds.) 2007; Koptjevskaja-Tamm (ed.) 2015].
- Collocational analysis of lexemes => clustering the extralinguistic situations in which they are involved.
- Consultants & experts, dictionaries, corpora.
- Moscow lexical typological group (MLexT).

LANGUAGE SAMPLE

12 languages:

- Slavic (Russian, Polish)
- Germanic (English, German)
- Romance (French)
- Uralic (Estonian, Moksha, Nenets)
- Turkic (Tatar)
- Sino-Tibetan (Chinese)
- Mon-Khmer (Khmer)
- Semitic (Hebrew)

ETYMOLOGY

- The meanings in question are not primary in some languages.
- The typology of sources for ‘blind’, ‘deaf’
- Caritives

FRENCH *aveugle* < *ab oculis*

NENETS *sæw-s'i* ‘blind’ (lit.: eye-CAR), *xa-s'i* ‘deaf’ (lit.: ear-CAR)

- ‘Dark’ → ‘blind’

ESTONIAN *pime* ‘dark’ → ‘blind’ [Rédei 1988: 381–382]

KHMER *ŋɔŋu:t* ‘dark’ → ‘blind, visually impaired’ (along with *khvak* ‘blind’)

LITERAL MEANINGS & METONYMIES - 1

- Inability to see / hear
- Metonymy: sense organs.

GERMAN ***tauben*** *Ohren*, ***blinden*** *Augen*

FRENCH *oreilles* ***sourdes***

RUSSIAN ****gluhie*** *uši* (lit.: deaf ears)

- Metonymy: objects intended for a blind person.

ENGLISH ***blind*** *school*, ***blind*** *courses*, ***blind*** *alphabet*

CHINESE 聋人教学 ***lóng rén jiào xué*** – lit.: ‘deaf-person education’, 盲人教学
máng rén jiào xué – lit.: ‘blind-person education’

LITERAL MEANINGS & METONYMIES - 2

- Permanent quality vs. temporary quality

GERMAN

*Von dem hellen Aufblitzen ist der Fahrer auf einige Zeit **blind** geworden* ‘ The driver has become temporarily blind due to intense bright light’

ENGLISH

*Why do we go temporarily **deaf** when yawning?* [Google]

NENETS

sæws’i ‘blind’, *xas’i* ‘deaf’ – only permanent quality

LITERAL MEANINGS & METONYMIES - 3

- Inability to perceive VS poor ability to perceive

ESTONIAN

*Töötades palju arvutiga olen jäänud täitsa **pimedaks**, kardan, et tuleb minna arsti juurde* ‘I work with my computer a lot and my eyesight has weakened (lit.: I’ve become totally blind), I’m afraid I’ll have to consult a doctor’

- Inability to perceive ≠ Poor ability to perceive

NENETS *sæws’i* ‘blind’, *xas’i* ‘deaf’ – only inability to perceive

CHINESE 半瞎 *bàn xiā* ‘visually impaired’ (lit.: half-blind)

半聋 *bànlóng* ‘hard-of-hearing’ (lit.: half-deaf)

LITERAL MEANINGS & METONYMIES - 4

- Variation in semantic scope.

ENGLISH *colour-blind*, GERMAN *farbenblind*, ESTONIAN *värvipime*, RUSSIAN
???cvetosl'epoj

ENGLISH *tone-deaf*, RUSSIAN *Sovsem **gluxoj**, ničego sp'et' n'e možeš!* Lit.:
'You're totally deaf, you can't sing anything' (a reproach to a person having no
ear for music)

ENGLISH ***blind** landing* (+ possible calques in many other languages)

METAPHORS: BLIND & DEAF - 1

- Something closed or hidden

RUSSIAN *gluxaja stena* (lit.: a deaf wall) vs. ENGLISH *a blind wall* (cf. also *window blinds*)

+ spaces

RUSSIAN ***gluxaja ul'ica*** 'a back (lit.: deaf) street', ***gluxaja d'er'evn'a*** 'a remote (lit.: deaf) village'

+ feelings and attitudes

RUSSIAN ***gluxaja bol'*** 'a dull (lit.: deaf) pain', ***gluxaja n'enavist'*** 'suppressed (lit.: deaf) hatred'

FRENCH *offense sourde* 'suppressed (lit.: deaf) grudge'



METAPHORS: BLIND & DEAF - 2

- Unwilling to pay attention to.

ENGLISH *Sukey tries to reason with her father but he is **deaf** to her pleas*
[Google] (cf. also *Her pleas **fall on deaf ears***)

ENGLISH *Love makes us **blind** to faults* [Google]

ENGLISH Many compounds: *race-blind, gender-blind, cost-blind, sex-blind, religion-blind, culture-blind* etc.

Cf. also *to turn a **blind** eye / a **deaf** ear to sth.*

METAPHORS: DEAF

- Low (sound): someone who cannot hear → something that cannot be heard

RUSSIAN *gluxoj udar* ‘a dull (lit.: deaf) knock’

POLISH *gluchy głos* ‘a faint (lit.: deaf) voice’

- Something very loud and deafening

KHMER *spmle:ŋ thloŋ* ‘a very loud (lit.: deaf) voice’

- Growing numb

GERMAN *Der Arm ist mir taub geworden* ‘My arm has grown numb (lit.: deaf)’

METAPHORS: BLIND - 1

- Tarnished

GERMAN *blinder Spiegel* 'a tarnished (lit.: blind) mirror'

- Faint (colour)

FRENCH *couleur aveugle* 'a faint (lit.: blind) colour'

- Dazzling

FRENCH *lumière aveugle de la vérité* 'a dazzling light of the truth'

- False

GERMAN *blinder Alarm* 'a false (lit.: blind) alert'

FRENCH *fenêtre aveugle* 'a false (lit.: blind) window'



METAPHORS: BLIND - 2

- Random

ENGLISH *blind* choice

FRENCH *fortune aveugle* = ENGLISH *blind luck*, *blind fortune* (+ *blind draw*)

- Incompetent in sth.

CHINESE 文盲 *wénmáng* 'illiterate' (lit.: characters-blind),

技术盲 *jìshù máng* 'incompetent in technology'

(lit.: technology-blind),

乐盲 *yuè máng* 'ignorant in music' (lit.: music-blind)



METAPHORS: BLIND - 3

- One can't see or doesn't want to see something & has an intense feeling or performs an intense action.

CHINESE 盲目的爱情 *mángmù de àiqíng* 'blind love' (lit.: blind-eye ATTR love), 盲目服从 *mángmù fúcóng* 'to obey blindly' (lit.: blind-eye obey), 盲目的吃醋 *mángmù de chīcù* 'blind jealousy' (lit.: blind-eye ATTR jealousy')

ENGLISH **blind** love, hatred, faith, desire, passion, rage, obedience, panic etc.
(so strong that one doesn't question it)

RUSSIAN **sl'epaja l'ubov'** 'blind love', **sl'epaja n'enavist'** 'blind hatred', **sl'epoje želan'ije** 'blind desire,' etc.

METAPHORS: BLIND - 4

- Cross-linguistic variation when used as an intensifier. Various degree of connection to the basic meaning?

FRENCH *lutte* ***aveugle*** 'fierce (lit.: blind) struggle', *terrorisme* ***aveugle*** 'fierce (lit.: blind) terrorism'

ENGLISH ***blind*** *struggle*, ***blind*** *terrorism* (all attested in Google, 8000-12000 occurrences).

RUSSIAN ****sl'epaja*** *bor'ba* (lit.: blind struggle), ****sl'epoj*** *t'errorizm* (lit.: blind terrorism)

SEMANTIC SHIFTS & MORPHOSYNTAX: BLIND

- Possible loss of transparent connection to visual perception & constructional changes.
- In general: semantic shift to a completely different domain can involve a morphosyntactic shift [Rakhilina et al. 2010; Reznikova et al. 2012].

SEMANTIC SHIFTS & MORPHOSYNTAX: BLIND

ENGLISH *blind drunk* (adverbial modifier)

ENGLISH ... *putting a number of politicians in jail for **robbing** the county **blind**...*

[Google] (a depictive-like modifier); *to know sth. **blind** and upside down* (an adverb of manner)

ENGLISH *a blind bit of notice / difference / attention / interest*

- ✓ NPI only: *He didn't pay a blind bit of attention; I wonder if anybody pays a blind bit of attention; If my teachers had paid a blind bit of attention to me, then may be I...*
- ✓ Superlative form possible: *a blindest bit of...*

PERCEPTION TYPES - 1

- Some overlap in the metaphors of visual and auditory perception, but most metaphors are different => different cognitive associations with visual and auditory perception.
- The cognitive difference between perception types shows itself not only in their direct categorization, but also in their caritives and in the metaphors.

PERCEPTION TYPES - 2

- ‘Blind’ develops metaphors more productively than ‘deaf’ and ‘dumb’ => the priority of visual perception as regards metaphors.
- ✓ BNC data – 100 most frequent collocations for each:

Adjective	Literal uses	Figurative uses
<i>Deaf</i>	87	13
<i>Blind</i>	37	63

- Cf. also Moksha: there is a word for ‘blind’ – *sokər* (a Tatar borrowing), but no special word for ‘deaf’.
- Cf. also 2 to 3 times more tokens of idioms with *blind* than those with *deaf* in different English corpora.

PERCEPTION TYPES - 3

- Discussion on the hierarchy of perception types.
- [Viberg 1983]: see > hear > touch > taste, smell
- [San Roque et al. 2015] and some references therein:
 - ✓ The biological primacy of vision over the other senses.
 - ✓ Higher frequency of vision verbs as compared to verbs referring to the other senses => the linguistic primacy of vision.
- Counter-examples: [Maslova 2004] on Yukaghir perception verbs, [Rakhilina et al. 2012] on Russian polysemous adjectives.
- Our data are in line with the research claiming the primacy of vision.



Thank you for your attention!

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