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Cognitive Metaphors in Hupa

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The study of cognitive metaphors is a recent one in linguistics, and has opened up new doors in our understanding of language, as well as of the cognition that underlies language. Until recently, metaphor was considered to be a phenomenon that occurred only in literary language. However, George Lakoff and others have shown that metaphors are in fact deeply embedded in everyday language¹ and provide a window into both the minds and cultures of speakers. Metaphor does not only exist in language, however. It is a cognitive process that structures the way in which human beings reason about the world. Psychological studies such as those performed by Gentner and Gentner² have shown the large extent to which metaphor is used in understanding and structuring the world around us. This paper discusses preliminary findings on the cognitive metaphors of Hupa, an Athapaskan language spoken in Northern California. The study of metaphor has, to date, focused primarily on metaphors in English³ and other Indo-European languages, with a few studies done on metaphors in non-Indo-European languages, such as Thai⁴ and Japanese.⁵ Only one metaphor study that I know of has been done on a Native American language. That paper studied metaphors as they appeared in the prepositional system in Mixtec.⁶ One of the goals of this paper is to expand the cross-linguistic study of

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cognitive metaphors, a study that is essential to typological and universal issues as it will add to the general corpus of knowledge of cross-linguistic metaphors. This paper also has applications in other areas of linguistics such as second language acquisition, which I will address at the end of this paper.

Cognitive metaphors allow human beings to understand one domain (typically abstract) in terms of another (typically concrete) domain.⁷ These are not examples of just literary or poetic language—as they were thought to be until recently—they are an essential tool in human cognition and may be seen at the most basic levels of language. The easiest way to show exactly what is meant by such an abstract definition is to give an example of a metaphor. In English, as in many languages around the world, we have the metaphor “more is up.” When a metaphor is named, it is conventional to put the target domain first (*more*) and the source domain (*up*) second. The target domain is the abstract domain which we are trying to understand and structure, at least partly, in terms of the concrete source domain. This particular metaphor can be seen in such sentences as “The price of milk went up”; “Stocks plummeted”; and so on. In each of these cases a non-tangible object, such as price or stocks, is spoken of as if it were capable of moving in an up or down direction. This metaphor, like many metaphors, is based on our day-to-day experiences.⁸ We know that if we pour water into a glass, the level of water rises. If we pile books up, the top of the pile rises. Thus, we can generalize based on our knowledge of the behaviors of these concrete objects and reason about non-concrete objects metaphorically in the same way. This is called an entailment or an epistemic mapping.

While it has been postulated that metaphors such as “more is up” will be found fairly consistently in languages throughout the world because they are based on bodily experience, there are many other metaphors that are based on day-to-day cultural experience, and these can vary greatly from one language to the next. These metaphors give the clearest picture of the culture that uses a given language. An example of this in English would be the metaphor, “time is a valuable resource.” In this metaphor, we take our understanding of how one uses a valuable resource (like money, for example), and we apply that understanding to time. Thus we talk about “spending time,” “wasting time,” “giving time,” and so on. This metaphor did not arise in English until around the time of the Industrial Revolution when people were paid by the hour, and thus in

their day-to-day cultural experience time became equated with money. This metaphor is particular to a limited group of languages and in fact has been at the root of some conflicts that have arisen when speakers of these languages have come into contact with people whose languages and cultures do not have this metaphor. Because metaphors such as these are used totally unconsciously, all the time, to talk about all areas of life, it is difficult to think about them consciously. Thus, people who have these metaphors worry about being on time, about wasting time, and so on, to the surprise of those who take a more relaxed view of time.

I will now turn to the metaphors in Hupa. Like English, Hupa appears to have many metaphors based on general human bodily experience. Since they are based on such experience, we would expect them to be consistent from culture to culture. That is, if a language speaks of the concept of *more* in a metaphorical, orientational way, it will always use *up* rather than *down*, since *down* is not coherent with their day-to-day experiences. I found this to be true in Hupa.

I will begin with the metaphor "more is up." In Hupa, one can say,

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|---|----------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. <i>ta'nan jena tesiya</i> ⁹ | water up going | "The water level
went up." |
|---|----------------|-------------------------------|

One can also use the same word for "up," *jena*, in a sentence such as,

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. <i>midhulen mitso: nahdiyaw jadah jena tesiya</i> | cow milk price too:much up going | "The price of
milk went up." |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|

It is interesting to note that there are other words meaning "up" in Hupa, which cannot be used in this construction, for example *teLton*, in the sentence,

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 3. <i>mike'ne:s teLton gawkyohme tok</i> | squirrel up among:redwood:limbs tree | "Squirrel went up
a tree." |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|

but,

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 4. * <i>midhulen mitso: nahdiyaw jadah teLton tesiya</i> * | cow milk price too:much up going | "The price of milk
went up." |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|

This would indicate that price, at least, is viewed as rising more in the manner of a body of water than in the way that a small discrete object would rise.¹⁰ This also raises one of the problems with metaphor elicitation in languages which are not the elicitor's native language. Without knowing that there are multiple words for "up," depending on the object which is being described, it would be possible to attempt to elicit a sentence with a metaphorical use of *teLton*, to fail to do so, and therefore to conclude that "more is up" does not exist in Hupa.

This metaphor also exists in the converse, that is,

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|--|-----------------------------------|
| 5. <i>ninj'un tsiya ta'nan</i>
low going water | "The water went
down." |
| 6. <i>midhulen mitso: nahdiyaw ninj'un tsiya</i>
cow milk price low going | "The price of milk
went down." |

A related metaphor also exists in Hupa, namely "happiness is up." This metaphor is based partly on the metaphor above (in that the more one has of a good thing, the happier one is likely to be) as well as on general bodily experience, in that people who are happier tend to walk more upright, their facial expression (the eyebrows, the corners of the mouth) goes up, and so on. This metaphor can be seen in the examples below, where the same words for "up" and "down" above are used to talk about happiness.

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|---|--------------------|
| 7. <i>whoje'-jena¹¹ tsiye an'aweste'</i>
up, higher it:went happiness | "She got happier." |
| 8. <i>hai'-an'uweste' ninjen tsiya</i>
her-happiness down went | "She got sad." |

There are other metaphors in Hupa which also appear in English. One of these is "life is a journey." In this metaphor, life is understood as a place one can come into (be born), walk through (live), and, finally, leave (die). We can see this in the following sentences:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 9. <i>minejit na'asiya</i>
center his:walking | "middle-aged,
middle of his life" |
| 10. <i>nowhon ch'ininya</i>
somebody has:arrived
(to us) | "somebody is born" |

11. *s'a na'esiya* "He lived a
a:long:time he:walked long life."

or

12. *no'whohqo na'esiya* "He lived a
good he:walked good life."

13. *nowhon na-testiyih* "somebody died"
somebody he-left:us

All of these words can be used both in these metaphorical senses and in their physical senses. We can not only map the stages of a journey to the stages of a person's life, but talk about the conditions of the road on which she travels:

14. *tin mechwe'* "The road is rough,
road is:no:good bumpy, narrow, etc."
or, "Life is difficult
(i.e., things are going
badly)."¹²

We also know that if there is something blocking a road, the person who is traveling must stop and either move the object or go around—that is, the object stops the traveler from moving forward. We can therefore reason in the same way about life:

15. *diwho'oh man tinik'eh nonawlse'* "There's something
something because roadway is blocked in the road."
16. *diwho'oh man doteseye* "Something is stop-
something because I did not go ping me from doing
what I want" (lost a
job interview, etc.).
(polysemous)

Thus we can see that these metaphors are used not only for descriptive purposes, but to reason with. We can transfer knowledge about the source domain (*journey*) to the target domain (*life*). For example, if there is a roadblock in a traveler's path, the traveler has several options. She can turn around and go back, try to go around the roadblock, or try to go over it. This is true in life as well. If something is stopping a person from doing what he wants, he can do something else entirely,

try to circumvent the problem, or try to overcome (note that the metaphor is used here and in circumvent, above) the problem.

Two more metaphors in Hupa are similar to metaphors in English and many other languages. These are “time is a moving object” and “time is a landscape.” We see these in English sentences such as “Halloween is coming up fast” and “We’re coming up on Halloween.” These two metaphors are called duals of each other, since the only difference between them is a figure/ground reversal.¹³ In the first, time is an object which moves towards us while we stand still and watch it pass by. In the second, time is a landscape through which we move, while it stays still. Here, significant events are landmarks on the road. “Time is a moving object” and “time is a landscape” are pervasive in English—in fact, it is difficult to talk about time without using them, showing once again how fundamental metaphors such as these are in day-to-day human communication. They are based on our everyday experience of going to a place and arriving there later than the time at which we started out. Thus, we begin to associate movement through space with movement through time, and this metaphor arises.

An example of the “time is a moving object” metaphor in Hupa is:

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|-----|--------------------------|---|---|
| 17. | <i>Danny nana'asdena</i> | <i>yaLno-j'ungje-tesiya</i> ¹⁴ | “Danny’s coming
towards us.” |
| | he:turned:around | X-toward:us-he’s:coming | |
| 18. | <i>mijung-tesiya</i> | <i>xaych'idilye</i> | “It’s getting to be
time for the
Jump Dance.” |
| | towards:us-going | Jump:Dance (subj) | |

In the second case, the occasion of the Jump Dance is conceptualized as moving towards the speaker through time in the same way that the real person Danny moves towards the speaker through space. Interestingly, one cannot use the word *juk'oth*, “is coming/walking,” to talk about time, as we can in the English “time marches on.”

The metaphor “time is a landscape” may be seen in such examples as:

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|-----|---------------------|----------------|------------------------------|--|
| 19. | <i>xaych'idilye</i> | <i>ch'ung'</i> | <i>yateseL</i> ¹⁵ | “We’re going
towards where the
Dance is.” Or,
“It’s almost time for
the Jump Dance.” |
| | Jump:Dance | towards | we’re:going | |

20. *se:na nukyau nohnatse s'an¹⁶* "The boulder is
 rock big in:front:of:us sitting in front of us."
21. *LinoyundeLte nohnatse* "The meeting is
 we're:coming:together in:front:of:us ahead of us."

Some sentences can be explained by either the "moving object" or the "landscape" metaphors, such as:

22. *we:neck* "behind me"
23. *we:neck astele'n LiyundeteLte* "The meeting is
 behind it:happened meeting behind us."

In this case, either the speaker has moved through time past the meeting and so it is behind her, or she has had the event of the meeting pass her while she was standing still and thus it is behind her. Note that this indicates that the speaker is conceptualized as facing in the direction of the future, something which is not the same for all languages.

Hupa also has instances of metaphors in which the basic metaphorical mapping is the same as in English, but in which the everyday linguistic phrases used to express the metaphor are different. We saw some of this in "life is a journey": Hupa speaks of a man "walking a long time" to mean that he is old, a usage that is not possible in everyday English. However, it is interesting to note that usages such as this are possible in poetic English. One could say "I've traveled a long road" to mean that one has come a long way in life. And this is the metaphor that allows us to understand Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Less Traveled." The reason for this is that both English and Hupa have the same metaphor, but it can be evidenced in many different ways, and languages often prefer disparate expressions of the same metaphor. This can also be seen in the Hupa metaphor "marriage is a journey." The equivalent to this in English, "love is a journey," shows many of the same mappings, but we cannot say, as in Hupa,

24. *nayaseL* "They're married."
 (they are) walking together

Thus, metaphors that connect the same two domains do not necessarily have to be expressed in the same way from language to language.

Hupa also has the metaphor “illness is a fight,” which can be seen in English sentences such as “He was battling cancer.” However, this metaphor is much more fully mapped out in Hupa than in English. In Hupa, winning a fight is mapped onto getting well after being sick, losing a fight is dying from an illness, and even the idea of a draw in a fight, where neither combatant clearly wins, is mapped onto living with a chronic illness. We can see these in the examples below:

- | | | |
|--|---|-------------------------------|
| 25. <i>na'nelayh</i> | | “I won a fight.” |
| 26. <i>na'nelayh wita' haych'idun'cha' ne'en</i> | he:won my:father from:his:illness it:happened | “My father got better.” |
| 27. <i>haydita-huL-we'</i> | | “illness, what afflicted him” |
| 28. <i>hubose huL-whe</i> | my:cat beat-me | “My cat licked (beat) me.” |
| 29. <i>iLtakaya-hul-ay dodeh Luwonghe naya'nulai</i> | they:fought nobody won the:fight | “Nobody won the fight.” |
| 30. <i>dodeh Luwonghe naha'nulai</i> | nobody won the:fight | “He had a chronic illness.” |

There also appears to be an understanding of the opponent as an animal or something that can bite and eat the victim:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 31. <i>yutiya' sile'</i> | it ate/gnawed it:seemed:like | “arthritis, joint pain” |
| 32. <i>diwhoh hiwhungya'</i> | something is:eating | “cancer” |

And even the name of an illness can arise due to the metaphor “illness is a fight.”

- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| 33. <i>xos xoL-we</i> | phlegm fights-with:him | “He has a cold.” |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------|

This is an initial small selection of metaphors that appear to be systematically present in Hupa. All of these metaphors are instances of broader mappings that also appear in English. This could be due to the method of elicitation, which to date has involved looking for metaphors I know from my experience

with English and French. However, further research will involve looking at metaphors that are uniquely Hupa. One of the best ways to find metaphors that are not in common with those in English is to ask native language speakers to be aware of the metaphors that they use when speaking their own language. Often just one hint of a metaphor can allow both consultant and researcher to find an entire metaphor system at work. A researcher can also look for abstract uses of concrete vocabulary in texts, word lists, and conversations. Often the relationship between the abstract uses and the concrete uses is metaphorical in nature. Looking for these clues can indicate metaphors that exist in Hupa but not in English, and which could be used in bilingual enterprises such as those mentioned below.

The study of metaphors in Hupa has great value in the study of metaphor cross-linguistically and in the search for a typology of metaphor. It also is of practical value, especially in the field of second language learning. The Hupa tribe, like many others in this state, is working to teach its language to younger members who did not learn their language at home. The language is, in fact, endangered in spite of the efforts of tribal members to teach the language and create contexts for its use. Being aware of the metaphors that underlie the language can help to increase fluency in second-language speakers. In many ways, it is metaphor that makes a language distinct from other languages—it reflects the culture of the speakers more clearly than morphology or syntax can. It is through metaphor that values and worldview show up most strongly in language; therefore, instruction in a language's metaphor system could be a powerful language teaching tool.

It is also interesting to note that one of the prime ways of creating new vocabulary, and of changing language in general, is via metaphor. Many words that we use in English today with a purely abstract meaning, such as *comprehend*, used to have a concrete meaning as well (in this case, *to grasp*) which reflects a metaphor at work. In Hupa, many words for new culture items are created on the basis of traditional knowledge, using metaphoric image-mappings—for example, *spaghetti as eel tendons*. To the extent that metaphor is used to tie the traditional to the new, a language can change without leaving behind old values and worldview.

And, finally, understanding the metaphors in a language makes conscious the cultural values of the people who use that

language. They give another way to talk about and transmit those values to new learners of the language. In sum, I believe that research such as this, continued and expanded, can be of great use in language maintenance and restoration.

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NOTES

1. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

2. Derrde Gentner and Donald R. Gentner, "Flowing waters or teeming crowds: Mental models of electricity," in ed. D. Gentner and A. Stevens, *Mental Models* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1982).

3. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*; George Lakoff, "The contemporary theory of metaphor," in ed. Andrew Ortony, *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

4. Leela Bilme (Manuscript, 1993).

5. George Lakoff, "Sorry, I'm not myself today," in ed. G. Fauconnier and E. Sweetser, *Spaces, Worlds, and Grammars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

6. Claudia Brugman, "The use of body-part terms as locatives in Chalcatongo Mixtec" (Manuscript, 1983); George Lakoff, *Women, fire, and dangerous things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

7. Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By*; Lakoff, *Metaphor and Thought*.

8. Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By*, 19-21.

9. In writing Hupa, I am using the orthography laid out by Victor Golla, *A Short Practical Grammar of Hupa* (Hoopa, CA: Hupa Language Program, Hoopa Valley Tribe, 1985). Most of the letters are pronounced as in English (including *sh*, *ch*, *wh*, and *ng*, all of which are pronounced as one sound), but there are a few special symbols. The symbol *L* is a lateral fricative. The apostrophe is a glottal stop. The *q* is a uvular stop. The *x* is a voiceless velar fricative. And the colon indicates a long vowel.

10. I should note that more research will be needed to verify that this is indeed the difference between *teLton* and *jena*.

11. I will be breaking words into morphemes by using a dash when the morpheme on which I am concentrating appears as part of another word.

12. This sentence is ambiguous between these two meanings. Context would be used to disambiguate.

13. Lakoff, "The contemporary theory of metaphor," *Metaphor and Thought*.
14. This is a literal usage of the verb *yaLnoj'ungjetesiya* ("he's coming toward us"), whereas the usage in example number 18 is non-literal, since the Jump Dance, as an inanimate event, cannot literally come towards anybody.
15. This sentence is ambiguous between a literal and a metaphorical meaning.
16. This example, like number 17, is literal. The next, 20, is metaphorical, as a meeting is not a physical object that could be literally in front of somebody.