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CROSS-LINGUISTIC COMPARISON OF MOTHER EARTH METAPHORS IN BRAZIL AND THE US

Abstract:
The way a person conceptualizes the planet can impact the way they makes decisions in their life. Indigenous communities in Brazil, in the US and around the world have adopted metaphors such as 'Mother Earth' and 'Mother Nature'. Evidence suggests that these metaphors have been part of traditions related to respect for land. The modern conception of land appropriation and of thinking of the environment only as backdrop/commodity for human beings may systematically contribute to the present environmental crisis. The objective of this study is to compare data collected in urban regions and in indigenous rural communities in Brazil and the US in order to understand intercultural similarities and differences in the conceptualization of the Mother Earth metaphor and how men and women incorporate them, generating perspectives that shape the way they think about the planet. We are conducting this interlingual and intercultural comparison to reveal how cultural associations shape cognitive processes. Some questions we want to answer are: Do members of both genders report bodily experiences as often or do they present another strategy to explain the concept of Mother Earth? Do members of urban and rural communities, in the case of indigenous people, do this with the same frequency? Are there any culturally specific preferences in the way that Brazilians or Americans conceptualize the planet? This study uses a mixed (qualitative-quantitative) methodology. Data collection is ongoing. Our analysis will utilize a data-centric approach, according to the metaphorical themes. In a pilot study we asked 10 Brazilian and 28 US speakers from urban areas to answer a number of open questions about their conception of 'Mother Earth', as well as two Likert scale questionnaires, used to measure the degree to which speakers find in 'Mother Earth' to be fierce and cruel or benevolent and considerate. We also plan to collect video data with an indigenous MG community and analyze the gestures in our multimodal data. The data will be discussed in light of the Theory of Conceptual Metaphor and Linguistic relativity, specifically exploring Conceptual Relativity or the idea that the metaphors that a group adopts changes the way that speaker's simulate while thinking about a topic and structures the way that they reason about the topic domain. This data holds, not only social and cultural value, but also reveals important aspects of human cognition. Finally, the results show how this metaphorical structure can affect behavior in decision making.