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Beyond a reasonable calque: On the role of metaphor and metonymy in conceptual construal and the creole lexicon

Abstract:

Creolistics literature does not lack examinations of lexico-semantic contributions from substrate sources on word formation in Afro-Caribbean English-lexifier Creoles (AECs). Indeed, we have found considerable cultural and linguistic continuities from West African languages to Afro-Caribbean Creoles. The identification of certain phraseological manifestations in contact languages have allowed creolists to trace uses of metaphorical and metonymic language to West African sources (Hutter, Essegbey, & Ameka, 2007; Smith, 2015). In Bahamian Creole, for instance, West African influence is apparent in the use of the metonym putting mouth on it, which means ‘to curse it’; there are parallels in Yoruba with enu rè and in Twi with n’ano, as both mean ‘his mouth’ and express the notion of cursing (Alleyne, 1980, p. 87).

Creolists have identified idiosyncratic uses of body part terms that convey property concepts in relevant African languages and, because speakers of those languages were at the right places at the right times, they have argued that those languages were involved in establishing uses of body part terms for ears and eyes, for example, to mean ‘stubbornness’ and ‘greed’ in certain AECs. Current literature suggests that metaphorical and metonymic extensions of property items were based on calques from structures in those relevant West African substrates (Farquharson, 2012; Parkvall & Baker, 2012; Hollington, 2015). In addition to the etymology of calques, we should also emphasize that property items that express stubbornness and jealousy were (and still are!) processed thanks to the imaginative capacities of the human mind, including the interaction of metaphor and metonymy in grammaticalization processes.

It is true that certain lexical items were copied from structures in languages that are known to have been present during contact language formation. But, their continued polysemous uses are due to universals in language, namely in metaphorical and metonymic conceptualizations of abstract expressions that make up the “human semantic potential” in language use (Regier, 1996). Superstratist and substratist approaches underscore that potential, but each camp stresses in different ways how persons in contact situations drew on their creative capacities to bridge diverse backgrounds. In this paper, I deconstruct seemingly idiomatic language use, for example eyes and ears to convey abstract notions of ‘greed’ and
‘stubbornness’, to underscore the regular and unsurprising nature of the mind’s creative capacities when it comes to languaging, whether it emerges in pidgins and Creoles, their West African substrates and adstrates, or in regional varieties of European languages today.

References:


