ABSTRACT

Perception verbs have supplied a rich field of research in linguistics: grammaticalisation (Heine, B. & al. 1991), complementation (Horie, K. 1993) and semantic change (Sweetser E. 1990). Sweetser in From Etymology to Pragmatics. Metaphoricaí and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure (1990) states that inside the semantic field of perception, there are metaphorical mappings from concrete or physical meanings onto abstract meanings and regards vision and hearing as the most salient senses, whereas the sense of smell has fewer and less deep metaphorical connections with the mental domain. The aim of this paper is to show that the verbs of smelling extend semantically into the cognitive domain in more than the ways cited by Sweetser, and that as predicted by her, these connections between the physical and mental domain are not language specific but cross-linguistic. These statements will be supported with data drawn from Basque, Spanish and English.

KEY WORDS: semantic change, perception verbs, smell, cross-linguistic

RESUMEN

Los verbos de percepción han proporcionado un amplio campo de investigación dentro de la Lingüística: gramaticalización (Heine, B. & al. 1991), complementación (Horie, K. 1993) y cambio semántico (Sweetser, E. 1990). Sweetser en From Etymology to Pragmatics. Metaphoricaí and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure (1990) afirma que dentro del cambio semántico de la percepción se producen conexiones metafóricas entre los significados concretos o físicos y los significados abstractos, y presenta la vista y el oído como los sentidos más relevantes, mientras que relega el olfato a un segundo plano, ya que lo considera con menos conexiones y no tan profundas con el dominio mental. El objetivo de este artículo es demostrar que los verbos relacionados con el olfato se extienden semánticamente hacia el dominio cognitivo en más formas de las que Sweetser cita y que, como ella misma predice, estas conexiones entre el dominio físico y mental no son específicas de un idioma sino cruz-linguísticas. Estas ideas se apoyarán con ejemplos del euskera, español e inglés.

PALABRAS CLAVE: cambio semántico, verbos de percepción, olfato, cruz-lingüístico

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I. INTRODUCTION: SWEETSER'S ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTION VERBS

Eve Sweetser (1990) states that our experience and knowledge of the world model how we understand language and thought, how we express ourselves. Our linguistic expressions can be modelled in three ways, which lead to three different domains and these domains are linked metaphorically by our cognitive system.

a. As a description (model of the world) a. Real world domain
b. As an action (an act in the world being described) b. Speech-act domain
c. As an epistemic or logical entity c. Epistemic domain (premise or conclusion in our world of reasoning)

Making use of this systematic metaphorical structuring of one domain in terms of another, Sweetser claims that the paths of semantic change are unidirectional: from concrete source domain to an abstract target domain; from the external (sociophysical) domain to our internal (emotional, psychological) domain.

In the field of perception, these metaphorical mappings link our vocabulary of physical perception (external source domain) and our vocabulary of internal self and sensations. As a result, she establishes the following confections:

VISION — KNOWLEDGE
HEARING — HEED
TASTE — LIKES / DISLIKES
TOUCH — FEELINGS
SMELL — DISLIKEABLE FEELINGS

These metaphorical mappings seem not to be language specific.

In the explanation of the structure of these metaphors of perception, Sweetser distributes these senses into two groups: the former comprises vision and hearing and the latter touch and taste. The focusing ability of vision and hearing, i.e., their ability to pick up one stimulus more or less consciously is what makes them be connected to objectivity and intellect; whereas subjectivity, intimacy and emotion are linked to touch and taste, due to their necessity of actual real contact with the thing sensed.

Taking English as a basis, Sweetser establishes the following relations within the sense of smell:

- Bad smell to indicate bad character or dislikeable mental characteristics (e.g., sink)
- Detection of such characteristics (e.g., the active verb smell)

With only these two abstract meanings, it is understandable that she concludes that smelling is not as salient as the rest of the senses. However, in this paper, it will be argued that the sense of smell has more meanings than those cited above and that these meanings are shared by different languages, to conclude that smell is a very salient sense in terms of the development of cognitive meanings of verbs of perception.

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Ⅱ. THE VERBS OF SMELL IN BASQUE

Basque seems to be very rich in respect to the terms used for the sense of smell. In the Diccionario Retana de Autoridades del Euskera (1976) more than twenty-one verbs related to smelling can be found. Many of these verbs are dialectal variations and some of them have very specific meanings such as usainoneztatu ‘to scent, to perfume’ or ufetztu ‘to stink’.

The most common and central verbs in the field of smell, together with their meanings are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>smell, sniff</th>
<th>‘suspect’</th>
<th>guess</th>
<th>‘investigate’</th>
<th>others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>usaindu</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘stink’, ’scent’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usain egin</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usain hartu</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>’guess right’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usainkatu</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usnatu</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>‘interfere, meddle’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usmatu</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>perceive, notice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sumatu</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>susmatu</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Verbs of smell in Basque

The central verb of smell is usaindu (usaitu, usendu, usandu). This verb expresses both the perception and the emission of a smell and abstract meanings such as ‘suspect, guess’. It is used to express a mental meaning as well as a bad smell. Usnatu, usmatu and sumatu can be used in both senses too, concrete or abstractly. It is worth noticing that in the case of usnatu and sumatu, the nouns they come from usna ‘sense of smell’ and suma ‘sense of smell’, respectively, do not have this abstract meaning of ‘suspicion’, which indicates that a semantic shift has taken place from the ‘perception of smell’ to ‘suspect, guess’. A further evidence that corroborates this statement is the verb susmatu. In Table 1, susmatu means ‘suspect’ but it does not share any of the other physical meanings. However, if we go back to its etymology, it appears that this verb is also directly connected to the sense of smell. According to Michelena (1990:292) and Mujika (1982:209), susmatu has an expressive S-, which has been added to the verb usmatu. This verb ultimately seems to be related to the Spanish word husmear ‘sniff (at)’1. Thus, susmatu is related to smelling in two ways: through usmatu and through its Spanish cognate husmear.

To sum up, the physical meanings that these Basque verbs lexicalise are both the emission and the perception of smells, either good or bad. As Sweetser claims, bad smells, when interpreted metaphorically, indicate bad characteristics:

(1) Urrun adini ganik, usaindua (Retana:1976) go away IMP 1.SG:ABL smell:ABS

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'Go away from me stinker!'

However, contrary to her predictions, Basque verbs seem to establish more connections with the cognitive domain than those expected. Basque verbs do not only link the physical domain with the mental domain when they are used for the detection of bad characteristics, but also the following categorisations seem to take place:

**Physical smell** → ‘suspect’

2) **Poliziak** Mikelen *hitzetan* gemrra usaindu men
   police.ERG Mike POSS words.ABL lie smell 3.SG:PAST
   'The police smelt something fishy in Mike’s words'

**Physical smell** → ‘guess’

3) **Arriskua** usaindu men
   danger smell 3.SG:PAST
   'He smelt the danger'

**Physical smell** → ‘investigate’

4) Mikel *nere* *gauzen* arteen usnaten harrapatu nuen
   Mike my things.POSS between.ABL smell catch
   1.SG:PAST
   'I caught Mike nosing into my things'

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that Sweetser’s assertion that the verbs of smell are associated with only two types of perceptual development is false. The question remains whether the Basque data indicate a parochial or a cross-linguistic property.

III. THE VERBS OF SMELL IN SPANISH

The most common verbs of smell and their meanings can be seen in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>emit odours</th>
<th>perceive odours</th>
<th>‘suspect’</th>
<th>‘guess’</th>
<th>‘investigate’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>oler</em></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>olfatear</em></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>husmear</em></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Verbs of smell in Spanish

The central verb of smell in Spanish is *oler*. This verb can be used transitive or intransitively, although its Latin cognate *olfare* was only used with the subject of the thing that emits odour, and *olfacere* was left for transitive use.
According to Corominas, J. & J.A. Pascual (1983), *oler* was used for both transitive and intransitive instances already in Berceo (13th century), where the nominalisation of the verb *oler* as 'the sense of smell' can be found and therefore, it indicates that the verb *oler* was used in the sense of perception of odours. The explanation of this could be found in the loss of the verb *heder* 'to stink, stench' in the vocabulary of the educated people and also in the disappearance of *Latin putère* to decompose; to have a bad smell; as a consequence, *oler* is used for either good or bad smells. Other Romance languages use different verbs, so that they distinguish between bad and good smell. For instance, French *sentir* 'smell' and the verb for 'stink' *empêster* (cf. Spanish *apestar*), *[puir]*, *puer* (<*Latin putère*) verb and noun for 'stink'; Italian *sentire*, *odorare* 'smell' and *puzzare* (<*Latin putère*) 'stink'; Portuguese seems to have only one verb too: *cheirar* 'smell, stink'; it also has *empestar* for 'to smell out' (cf. French *empêster*, Spanish *apestar*).

An interesting point here is the fact that some Romance languages have adopted the Latin word *sentire*, in the place of *oler-olfacere*. *Sentire* 'perceive, feel' is usually the verb used for describing general perception and it can also mean 'perception by the ear', as it is the case of Italian *sentire* and Catalan *sentir*.

The verb *olfatear* and its noun *olfato* 'sense of smell, intuition, instinct' in Spanish can be applied to animals, usually dogs, and to humans. If it is used with dogs, which are known for having an excellent sense of smell, its meaning is not abstract or figurative, but physical; for instance:

(5) El perro olfatea el rastro
the dog smells the trail
'the dog smells the trail'

However, if this verb is used with people, the meaning is both physical and abstract. It means 'to nose into, to pry into' or 'to have instinct for something'. An example with the noun is more illustrative in this case; compare:

(6) Ese perro tiene buen olfato
that dog has good sense of smell
'that dog has a good sense of smell'

(7) Ese hombre tiene buen olfato
that man has good sense of smell
'that man has a good sense of smell/instinct'

Here it can be seen how in (6) the meaning is physical and in (7), the same words can have a physical meaning as well as metaphorical one, when used with human beings; (7) can mean that this man has a good/accurate sense of smell, but also that he has a natural instinct to see things, or that he has an instinct for business, for example.

In conclusion, it seems that both oler and olfatear have concrete and non-concrete meanings. The concrete meanings 'to perceive and to emit an smell' are already present in their Latin cognates: *oler* 'to give off a smell, to smell sweet, to stink' and olfacere 'to detect the odour of, to smell at'. However, their figurative meanings seem to be particular to the Spanish verbs, as the Latin ones do not share them. This supports the idea that the

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semantic change is from concrete to abstract meanings. (Sweetser 1990:30)

Finally, husmear, which as seen before, seems to be related to Basque usmatu, offers another abstract meaning 'investigate, nose into', also shared by its Basque cognate. The verb husmear, whose primitive form is usmar, osmar, shares the same etymological origin as French humer 'smell, inhale', Italian ornare 'follow a trace' and Rumanian urma 'follow'. According to Corominas, J. & J.A. Pascual (1983), these verbs could derive from Greek osmasthai > osmé 'odour'.

Spanish verbs then seem to support what has been said about Basque in the previous section. Sweetser's abstract categorisations do take place as in the case of apear ‘stink’ or in (8), where the sentence can be interpreted both as a physical bad smell or as the detection of something wrong.

(8) Eso huele mal 
that smells badly
'That smells bad'

However, once again, other cognitive meanings are possible too:

Physical smell ——> ‘suspect’

(9) La policía se olió que algo era m e n t i r a
the police smelt that something was lie
‘The police smelt something fishy in Mike’s words’

Physical smell ——> ‘guess’

(10) Olió el peligro
smelt the danger
‘He smelt the danger’

Physical smell ——> ‘investigate’

(11) Pillé a Miguel husmeando entre mis cosas
caught Mike nosing between my things
‘I caught Mike nosing into my things’

It seems that the cognitive meanings proposed for Basque do work for the Spanish verbs too, and therefore, we have evidence for the general falsity of Sweetser’s statement.
IV. THE VERBS OF SMELL IN ENGLISH

So far it has been seen that Basque and Spanish seem to follow the same metaphorical mappings into the mental domain, and hence, this supports our claim that the sense of smell is not as weak sense in respect to cognitive meanings, as suggested by Sweetser.

As Sweetser based most of her study on perception verbs on English, it will be instructive to review the verbs of smell in English in order to see whether these cognitive meanings can be also applied to this language.

Table 3 summarises the most common verbs of smelling in English and their meanings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>emit odours</th>
<th>perceive odours</th>
<th>'guess'</th>
<th>'investigate'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>smell</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sniff</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Verbs of smell in English

Stink and stench have not been included in Table 3, because of the specific meaning they have nowadays, i.e. 'bad smell'. However, it is worth noting that Old English stine was first used for neutral smell and then, when smellen was introduced it came to mean 'bad smell'. The development of stench is somehow similar, as Old English stenc meant 'bad smell' but nowadays it is stronger than stink itself. Stink, as its cognates in Spanish apestar and Basque ufeztu, usaindu, can be also used in the abstract sense to indicate dislikeable mental characteristics as in (12):

(12) That idea stinks (Sweetser, 1990:37)

Therefore, the cognitive meanings that English verbs develop are:

Physical smell  →  'suspect'

(13) The police smelt something fishy in Mike's words

Physical smell  →  'guess'

(14) He snelt the danger

Basque and Spanish share another meaning, i.e. 'investigate'. This meaning can be expressed with the verb sniff as in (15), and also with the verb to nose (cf. Sp. meter las narices en algo). Although, to nose is not a verb of perception itself, but a verbalisation of the noun nose, the nose is the organ of smell and hereby, it is related to this group.

(15) The police have been sniffing around here again

From the data in Table 3, it can be concluded that English verbs of smell seem to
follow the same patterns observed in the other two languages, both physical and abstract. This further supports our claim that the verbs of smell do have more metaphorical meanings than those established in Sweetser’s analysis and also that these mappings are not language specific.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we demonstrate that in the sense of smell there are more metaphorical connections than the ones identified by Sweetser. From the data supplied, the following connections could be established:

- bad smell → dislikeable characteristics
- smell → detection of these characteristics → suspect (always in a negative context)
- smell → guess, conjecture, surmise
- smell → investigate

These cognitive extensions are present in the three languages of the sample. Languages with very different backgrounds: Basque (non-IE) and Spanish and English (both IE, but Romance and Germanic respectively). This fact seems to indicate that these mappings are indeed cross-linguistic, and not particular of a specific language.

For other senses such as vision and hearing, Sweetser offers a detailed analysis of their metaphorical connections with their mental domains. Sight is linked both with knowledge, intellection and mental vision; and hearing is connected to heeding and to internal receptivity. Sweetser considers the sense of smell less salient than the rest of the senses. However, throughout this paper, smell has been proved to have various cognitive meanings. Therefore, we cannot conclude with Sweetser that the sense of smell is weaker than the other senses, but that it should be placed at the same level as sight and hearing as far as cognitive meanings is concerned.

NOTES

1. I am very grateful to Jon Altuna for his help and comments on previous versions of this paper.
2. The etymological origin of usnati is unclear.
3. Guess vs. suspect. These two verbs could be considered synonyms in some cases. However, based on the examples, we prefer to regard them as different verbs. Suspect always carries a negative meaning and seems to be a process type verb, whereas guess has a more neutral meaning and seems to be an achievement verb type.
4. In the Northern dialect of Labourdian, some verbs such as usnati (ûsnatü) can also be interpreted as "prophesy".
5. In previous subjects, it has been mentioned that these verbs could denote either good or bad smells. This is also the case of English. However, it seems that the bad or good quality of the smell is not dependable upon the verb of smell itself, but upon the other elements of the sentence, as well as the context. For instance:

\[(15) \quad \text{The shoes smell} \]
\[(16) \quad \text{My perfume smells} \]

In (15), smell is immediately identified with a "bad smell", whereas (16) is the opposite: it is a very nice smell; the different meaning depends on the subject, on the agent that emits the odour. The nature of subjects, as well as other issues, such as complementation, are not analysed in depth in this article but they remain as a potential field for further research.
WORKS CITED


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