



**LLCd Symposium.
POSTER PRESENTATIONS.**

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Title of Presentation: Conceptual combinations – Interpretation of modifier-noun combinations by Kannada-English bilingual children

Abstract: Concepts are mental representations that aid us in interactions with the world by way of communication which employs linguistic units. . Murphy (2002) provides theoretical description and empirical evidence to demonstrate that word meanings are a medium for expressing our conceptual knowledge. It is important to note that there is no simple, straightforward relation between concepts and word meanings. One word (e.g., synonyms or ambiguous words) may be connected to more than one concept or several concepts may not have one linguistic entity to represent them.

When words are combined to form phrases or larger linguistic structures, concepts are combined (Wisniewski, 1997; Hampton, 1996). In syntactic terminology, in a noun phrase such as 'criminal lawyer' the head noun is 'lawyer' and the word 'criminal' is considered as the modifier. This can be construed in two ways, an advocate who holds criminal records or an advocate who specialises in criminal law. An average adult with proficiency in English might consider 'criminal lawyer' as a familiar modifier-noun combination and assign the latter meaning. When you combine words like 'bovine' and 'watch', the same individual would rate this as a novel combination. The interpretation could either be watching over a herd of cows, a television show about cows or a wrist watch in the shape of a cow. Here, the interpretation of the novel combination depends on which concepts the individual wants to combine. One of the strategies for interpretation of novel combinations noted by Wisniewski (1996) was forming a hybrid. A "horse cow" could be some hybrid creature that was half horse and half cow. The influence of background knowledge and theories on the process of conceptual combination can then be assessed effectively utilising these novel/ unfamiliar combinations. Combinations like 'facebook' started off as a novel modifier-noun combination but with increasing popularity of the social networking website, it has gradually become lexicalised.

The current study was conducted as a part of Master's dissertation which aims to check cross-linguistic conceptual combination in Kannada-English bilingual children. Performance of 12 and 14 year-old Kannada-English bilingual children

on tasks designed to evaluate interpretation of modifier-noun combinations is presented and discussed.

Forty participants (twenty each in the age range of 12 years \pm 3 months and 14 years \pm 3 months) with Kannada as their native language and English, the second language were considered for the study. The participants were screened for disability on 'A Ten Question Disability Screening Test' (Singhi, Kumar, Malhi & Kumar, 2007) and for proficiency of language use with 'Languages of School-going Children in Mysore' (Shanbal & Prema, 2007). The language proficiency questionnaire was designed by the authors to be answered by the parents of school-going children. 53 questionnaires were collected back from parents of children studying in five different schools in different parts of Mysore city. The parents were asked to respond to questions 1 to 6 in the questionnaire on a 3-point rating scale. The numeric data obtained was subjected to statistical analysis. The results of the survey conducted were summarized in the following sections (1) the native language background of the children surveyed (2) languages spoken or used most of the time, sometimes or always by the children at home. For the current study, those children with Kannada as the native language and with Kannada and English as the frequently used languages were considered.

A corpus of English modifier-noun lexicalised, familiar and novel combinations were compiled from NCERT text books, Karnataka state syllabus text books, newspapers and magazines. The lexicalised and familiar categories of modifier-noun combinations were chosen from NCERT and Karnataka state syllabus text books of grade V through grade X. The combinations were considered as novel through two categorisation. First, those selected from higher grade textbooks and newspapers and magazines and the second, formulated by the investigators choosing from constituents of the modifier-noun combinations from the text books.

The study comprised of two tasks. The first was familiarity rating on a three-point rating scale by the teachers of the participants. Two teachers of English for 12 year-old participants and two teachers of English for 14 year-old participants were asked to rate the familiarity level of their students with respect to the compiled combinations and their constituents (modifier and head noun separately). The combinations that were rated as familiar and highly familiar (in comparison to not so familiar) were presented to the participants to be depicted in the results as interpretation of familiar combinations. The combinations that were rated as not so familiar were considered as novel combinations. The list of lexicalised, familiar and novel modifier-noun items were randomised and presented to the participants to interpret the meaning of the combinations. All the participants were instructed by the examiner to note down their interpretations of modifier-noun combinations on a sheet of paper. The study was conducted in three sessions on three different days.

Results were analysed and discussed in light of the following: (1) interpretation made by the participants as against the familiarity rating by the teachers, (2) interpretation of novel combinations made by the participants with respect to the two categories described earlier, (3) type of relation assigned by the participants, whether it is combined metonymically (Wisniewski, 1996), thematically (Gagne & Shoben, 1993), hybrid (Wisniewski, 1996) or using an analogy (Hampton, 1996b). Interpretations made by the participants were

categorised under the four categories mentioned above by two judges and reliability testing was done for the same. Percentage of combinations listed under the four mentioned categories and the interaction of age and type of lexical combination was analysed by employing ANOVA. The results of the study are discussed with reference to noun phrase interpretation through conceptual combination by Kannada-English bilingual children.

By exploring which concepts are combined, this study has attempted to add to the existing literature on noun phrase interpretation of conceptual combination by bilingual children. The study has addressed the issue of compositionality, correlating the results with the weak and strong notions of compositionality. In the strong notion of compositionality, the study addresses the dominant category chosen by the participants of the two age groups (thematic, analogy, metonymy or a hybrid relation). The study has also attempted to explore the presence of a developmental trend in interpretation of conceptual combinations.

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Corpus - Linguistics: a body of utterances, as words or sentences, assumed to be representative of and used for lexical, grammatical, or other linguistic analysis.