



RESEARCH PAPER

Are Meanings of Exocentric Compounds Really Idiosyncratic or Systematic? An Experimental Study

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ABSTRACT

Exocentric compounds, also referred to as bahuvrihi compounds, are distinguishable from other classes of compounds, e.g., endocentric, in the ground that their meanings are unpredictable and idiosyncratic. For this single most important reason, these compounds have been marginalized and didn't receive as closer attention as the other classes. But the question is, are these types of choices really random? Their mere scale of productivity would deny the assumption that they are random and unsystematic. This paper originates in the assumption that these compounds in fact lend sufficient evidence that their formation and 'idiosyncratic' interpretation is on the other hand very systematic and can be explained elegantly if we bring into perspective the cultural aspect which regulates their formation through the mechanism of metonymic/metaphoric relations. In order to substantiate the claim, this study designed an exercise for Punjabi language speakers/experts where they were given novel (non-prevalent) exocentric compounds and were asked to interpret them. The study lent a great deal of support to the view adopted that the culturally shared knowledge allowed the respondents to interpret these exocentric compounds fairly correctly. The results are encouraging that the cultural aspect of the compounds holds true which explains the assumption that these types of compounds are systematic and a rule governed phenomenon.

KEYWORDS Compounding, Cultural linguistics, Exocentric compounds, Metonymic/Metaphoric relations

Introduction

Compounding refers to a phenomenon where two or more words are combined together to make a new word (Booij, 2010). The purpose of combining two or more words is twofold; one is to enrich the language and the other is transferring new meaning by combining together already known lexical items (Libben, 2006, p. 2). It is a very productive word formation process where new words are formed with the help of already existing words new complex words are formed to enrich the vocabulary of the language (Booij, 2010a, p. 93). The mechanism of compounding help in generating new and understandable words for the native speakers (Downing, 1977). Compounding is a language universal phenomenon and it is no known language is without compounds (Aikhenvald 2007, p. 2) & Bauer, 1988, p. 33).

Indian grammarians Panini and Patanjali in 5th century BC, introduced compounds in Sanskrit and classified compounds as *Avyayibhava*, *Tatpuruṣa*, *Dvandva* and *Bahuvrihi* (Kulkarni, 2012). Later a lot of knowledge is poured in this field. The scholars from various research field such as structuralist linguists (cf. Bloomfield 1933), transformational generative grammar (Lees 1960; Levi 1978), lexicalist approaches (Allen 1978; Jackendoff 1975; Lieber 1980, 1983; Roeper & Siegel 1978; Scalise 1984; Selkirk 1982) explored many perspectives of compounds such as definitions, classification morphology, syntax, semantics etc. Plag (2002), states that in terms of linguistic analysis compounding is not only the most important process, but is also the most controversial

process. Due to the controversial issues in compounding even after so many researches the issues related to classification, definition etc. are still unresolved and no convincing solutions are found (p. 169).

There are various categories of compounds; endocentric, exocentric and copulatives. In the research world as compared to the endocentric compounds the exocentric compounds are less research as these are considered problematic due to their unpredictable and idiosyncratic meaning (Booij, 2005; Katamba, 1993 and Bauer, 2008). Exocentric compounds are known as semantic headless compounds. A head in a compound always determines the semantics of the compound. For example in the endocentric compound *sabzi mandi* 'vegetable market', the constituent *sabzi* 'vegetable' works as a semantic head and helps in arriving at the meaning. Whereas in an exocentric compound *siana kaan* 'wise crow' there is no semantic head to help in arriving at the meaning 'a wise person'. According to Scalise and Guevara (2006) to analyze the exocentric compounds is impossible as there is no logical link between the meaning of the compound and the meanings of the constituents, for example bird brain 'a stupid person'. The meaning of the compound is entirely different from the meaning of the constituents and no clue is there how to arrive at the given meaning. Furthermore, the exocentric compounds are considered less productive in the languages of the world. Bauer (2008) while discussing the less-productivity of exocentric compounds states that only in the languages such as Turkana (Dimmendaal 1983), Seediq (Holmer 1996), Kayardild (Evans 1995) the exocentric compounds are very productive (cf. Bauer 2010:174). In English the exocentric compounds are very less productive and only *bahuvirih* types of compounds such as *red-head*, *bird brain* etc. are found where someone has the attribute X and X is a compound (Bauer, 1983)

In the research field as compared to exocentric compounds the endocentric compounds due to their interesting and complex structural and semantic process are more popular and more researched. The exocentric compounds are marginalized on the ground that these are less, productive, meanings are unpredictable and idiosyncratic. The lack of semantic head does not help in arriving at the meaning and the meaning refers to somewhere outside the word. This is the reason that these are semantically headless compounds cannot be accounted within the most popular models, where a semantic head constituent helps in arriving at the meaning (cf. Lieber, 1980, 1983, 1992 & Scalise, 1984).

Here the question arises whether exocentric compounds are non-productive and their meanings are unpredictable? Although a lot of work is done in the research field but this question is still unanswered. Furthermore, it is very interesting that every exocentric compound refers to metaphorical meaning means some abstract notion or concept. The most interesting feature of these compounds is that the native speakers not only form novel exocentric compounds but easily can infer their meaning. Thus, it concludes that the meaning of these compounds is not unpredictable and idiosyncratic. But the question is, are these types of choices really random? Their mere scale of productivity would deny the assumption that they are random and unsystematic. This paper originates in the assumption that these compounds in fact lend sufficient evidence that their formation and 'idiosyncratic' interpretation is on the other hand very systematic and can be explained elegantly if we bring into perspective the cultural aspect which regulates their formation through the mechanism of metonymic/metaphoric relations. In order to substantiate the claim, this study designed an exercise for Punjabi language speakers/experts where they were given novel (non-prevalent) exocentric compounds and were asked to interpret them. The study lent a great deal of support to

the view adopted that the culturally shared knowledge allowed the respondents to interpret these exocentric compounds fairly correctly.

The present study argues that every exocentric compound interprets a new abstract concept. Moreover, every constituent in an exocentric compound does have multiple hidden interpretations based on some cultural conceptualizations and some metonymical relations and every interpretation becomes active depending on the meaning of the other constituent in the compound. The metaphorical or metonymical sense of any exocentric compound as a whole is the result of cultural conceptualizations deeply rooted in cultural traditions, practices, social behaviors and religion. To strengthen the argument an experiment was conducted with some native speakers, linguists and experts of Punjabi.

Literature Review

Sharifian (2003) states that various linguistics (e.g., Humboldt, 1767–1835, Boas, 1858–1942, Edward Sapir, 1884–1939 & Benjamin Whorf, 1897–1941) have done a lot of work on language and culture. Now it is being used as a theoretical tool in various disciplines. Now, it is used as a theoretical tool for the analysis of language in various other disciplines, e.g., cognitive psychology, intercultural communication, intercultural pragmatics, and anthropology etc. (Sharifian, 2011a). Cultural linguistic approach takes languages as culture specific phenomenon based on the individual and shared conceptualizations. Palmer (1996) opines that by using language as a tool people share their experiences and conceptualizations. This is the reason that there is diversity of conceptualizations. The native speakers in their everyday communication use different types of metaphorical expressions which are always culture bound and present the socio-cultural behavior of that speech community (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Thus looking the behaviour of cultural linguistics it seems very appropriate that the cultural linguistics is the best approach for looking at the metaphorical expressions in a language. Before moving towards the experiment let's have a brief look on language and culture, cultural linguistics, metonymy and metaphors.

Language and Culture

Language, a human phenomenon, cannot be studied in isolation and without culture. With the help of culture many aspects of language get clarity. The identity of a speech community is presented via language. Without culture language cannot exist. Both are two sides of the same coin (Thanasoulas, 2001). Thanasoulas (2001) opines language helps in describing past, present, thoughts and beliefs of a speech community.

Wardhaugh (2002) makes certain claims to establish the relationship between language and culture;

- a) language helps the speakers in establishing their own world view
- b) the culture of people is reflected through language

Langacker (2001) states that the contextual understanding is in fact reflected via language. (p. 14). Presently, many research disciplines (e.g., sociolinguistics, ethno linguistic, cultural linguistic etc.) take interest in studying about the interaction between culture and linguistic, especially the cultural linguistics.

Language is culture specific and every culture has its own conceptualizations based on the personal or shared experiences and the cultural and religious norms of that

particular community. In a broader perspective it is the product and carrier of the culture. It is the reflection of everything; history, economy, social system, rituals, religion and customs etc. It is very true to say that languages and cultures both are integrated, but as for the meaning is concerned, the culture carries a much broader meaning as the beliefs, ideas, institutions etc. are understood via culture. According to some social scientists, language is the keystone of culture, as both are considered twin sisters.

Cultural Linguistics and Cognitive Linguistics

Langacker (1994) used the term cultural linguistics for the first time while defining the relationship between language and cultural linguistics. He further opines that the cognitive linguistics is in fact a return to cultural linguistics and meaning is always embedded in culture and with the help of cognition can be arrived at (p. 31). Being a new discipline in the research field cultural linguistics has grasped the attention of the researchers (Sharifian, 2003). It works as a mirror and looks at the functions performed by language. Sharifian (2017) states that the major focus of the approach is to explore how human being with the use of language express cultural cognition and conceptualizations.

Palmer (1996) gave the proposal about the direct application of cognitive linguistics for studying language and culture. In his proposal he takes language as a system of verbal symbols, based on imagery which are embedded in the culture. These culturally embedded images provide basis for narrative, figurative language, semantics etc. Imagery is not confined to visuals, but it is also the taste, the music and walk etc.

Sharifian (2003) opines that conceptualization holds the status of an umbrella term in the process of meaning making. While all other process (e.g., schematization, categorization, metaphors and conceptual blends) lie under this it (p. 188). Conceptualizing culture in different ways is known as cultural conceptualizations and are the result of group member's negotiations done in different times and spaces (Sharifian, 2007, p. 34). Thus people start to think in a same manners for speech acts, metaphors etc., (Sharifian, 2003, p. 198).

Sharifian (2003) states that in the real world these conceptualizations, do not have a one-to-one relationship with the entities. These are the shared knowledge of a cultural community often negotiated and re-negotiated with the people sharing the same collective cultural cognition. So, two inherent aspects of cultural cognition are the cultural conceptualizations and language.

In 1970's cognitive linguistics entered in the research field with a vision to work against the formalistic view of defining linguistic meaning. Cognitive linguistics mainly focuses on how human being gain linguistic knowledge and add to the language (Taylor, 2002). It defines meaning with conceptualization as mental experiences, established concepts along with sensory emotive experiences, whereas the linguistic meaning is socio-cultural mental activity (Langacker, 2000b, (p.26). In cognitive linguistics metaphors have been studied for a long time. There is a strong relationship between cognitive linguistic and metaphors. Cognitive linguistics studies the various aspects of human cognition presented by the use of language and metaphors are the clear illustration of this relationship (Grady, 2007).

Metaphors and Metonymies

In everyday life human beings use a lot of metaphoric expressions which vary from language to language (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). In traditional linguistics metaphors are rhetoric and decorated measures of language. Lakoff (1993) states, in language metaphors play the role of surface phenomenon. Human language is a symbol system having metaphors as characters. The metaphors which are concealed in human cognition work better. In everyday life people use familiar and concrete concepts and relate them with immaterial concepts and experiences for better and easy understanding (Zhao, 2001). Metaphors help people in expressing their world view or reality. These also contribute in diffusing folk beliefs.

According to cognitive linguists in metaphors one conceptual domain is understood in terms of another for e.g., life is understood in the war domain as life is war. In metaphorical expressions there are two domains; the target domain known as A and the source domain B domain. Addressing the correspondence between A and B domain is called mapping. With the use of metaphors it becomes easy to describe abstract entities into concrete form and understand the world around us (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Metaphors are always culture specific and based on the personal and shared experiences of the speech community (Barcelona, 2000). There are some universal metaphors too like metaphors based on bodily experiences but these are understood some conceptual metonymies which are associated with some specific concept (Kövecses, 1990, 2000).

In the rhetorical style the metonymy, a figure of speech is used as an ornamental device. According to the traditional view the metonymic expressions are relied on conceptual relations such as; procedure for product, place for the event etc. Metaphors means mapping of two different domains while metonymy being a cognitive process provides where an access to a conceptual entity is provided by another conceptual entity in the same idealized cognitive model (Barcelona, 2000 p.4).

In cognitive linguistics the metonymies are also viewed as metaphors, means these are conceptual in nature and focuses on the relationship between the concepts and not only on the words. In cognitive linguistics metonymies are more regarded than metaphors. These are the most basic processes in the meaning extension (Taylor, 1989, p. 124).

Methodology

The study is experimental in nature for collecting the idea about the formation of exocentric compounds, so an experiment is performed which is presented in the upcoming section.

The Experiment

The main focus of this study is to investigate how the Punjabi exocentric compounds are metaphorically interpreted by the native speakers, so an experiment was conducted. For the experiment some novel compounds were formed. In the formation of the novel compounds formed for the experiment the principle of cultural conceptualizations worked as a main tool. In Punjabi exocentric compounds there are some metonymic relations between the constituents and the meaning of the compound which help in the formation of compounds. These relations are not arbitrary but reflect some deeper metaphorical mapping.

The experiment consists of three parts. In Part I, 50 novel exocentric compounds were given to the native speakers/linguists and experts were given and were asked what the meanings of newly formed compounds are? In Part II the participants were requested to create at least five novel compounds on their own and infer their intended meaning. While in Part III the participants were interviewed to get the idea how did they arrive at the meanings of the given novel compounds and how did they form new compounds.

The Participants

In this experiment fifty people (25 female and 25 male) participated. All of them are Punjabi native speakers and have post graduate degrees in linguistics. The basic purpose for the experiment was to provide an insight how the metaphorical meaning in Punjabi exocentric compounds is arrived at.

Material

Fifty novel exocentric compounds are used as a material in this experiment.

Procedure

Participants were provided a list of 55 Punjabi exocentric compounds. They were further asked to read them and provide the exact meaning or closely related meaning. As the experiment was consisted of three parts so, for Part I, 40 minutes and for Part II, 20 minutes were given. Whereas, for the Part III (interviews) every participant was interviewed for 10 minutes each. It took round about 4 hours to record the responses, as at some places some of the respondents took some extra time in answering the question and the recording needed to be stopped.

Results and Discussion

After conducting the experiment the collected data is presented in tabular form.

Part I

In the table 1 below a few examples of the novel compounds are given. The table also shows the original meaning of the compounds along with the respondent's responses with numbers.

Table 1
Respondent's Responses

Constituent 1	Constituent 2	Novel Compound	Intended Metaphorical Meanings	Right Responses
<i>thundi</i> 'cold'	<i>chaan</i> 'shelter'	<i>thundi chaan</i> 'cold shelter'	'Mother'	50
<i>chiri</i> 'sparrow'	<i>Roza</i> 'fast'	<i>chiri roza</i> 'sparrow fast'	A false fasting	50
<i>phar</i> 'mountain'	<i>mathaa</i> 'forehead'	<i>phar mathaa</i> 'forehead mountain'	A very broad forehead	44
<i>soti</i> 'stick'	<i>bawaan</i> 'arms'	<i>soti bawaan</i> 'stick arms'	Very slim arms	44
<i>dangar</i> 'animal'	<i>jussa</i> 'body'	<i>dangar jussa</i> 'animal body'	A de-shaped body	44

<i>dadoo</i> 'frog'	<i>charger</i> 'charger'	<i>dadoo charger</i> 'frog charger'	Universal charger'	44
<i>cheene</i> 'chinese'	<i>akhaan</i> 'eyes'	<i>cheene akhaan</i> <i>chinese eyes</i>	'Very small eyes with dropped eye- lids'	50
<i>habshi</i> 'negro'	<i>buul</i> 'lips'	<i>habshi buul</i> <i>negro lips</i>	'Very fat lips'	50
<i>jin</i> 'giant'	<i>bachae</i> 'children'	<i>jin bachae</i> 'giant children'	'Very naughty children'	50
<i>hara</i> 'green'	<i>pinda</i> 'body'	<i>hara pinda</i> 'green body'	'A healthy person'	44

Part II

Table 2
Novel Exocentric Compounds the Respondents formed

Constituent 1	Constituent 2	Novel Compound	Intended Metaphorical Meanings
<i>burger</i> 'burger'	<i>bachae</i> 'children'	<i>burger bachae</i> 'burger children'	'The children who eat only fast food'
<i>latha</i> 'fallen'	<i>jobaan</i> 'youth'	<i>latha jobaan</i> 'fallen youth'	'An old age'
<i>gindi</i> 'small'	<i>gadvi</i> 'pot'	<i>gindi gadvi</i> 'small pot'	'A short heighted person'
<i>sianai</i> 'age'	<i>umer</i> 'age'	<i>sianai umer</i> 'intelligent age'	'An age of maturity'
<i>bhari</i> 'heavy'	<i>raat</i> 'night'	<i>bhari raat</i> 'heavy night'	'A difficult night'
<i>taar</i> 'wire'	<i>gher</i> 'house'	<i>taar gher</i> 'wire house'	'Post office'
<i>mesa</i> 'innocent'	<i>malap</i> 'earth worm'	<i>mesa malap</i> 'innocent earth worm'	'A cunning person'
<i>aqabi</i> 'eagle'	<i>akh</i> 'eye'	<i>aqabi akh</i> 'eagle eye'	'A very sharp eye sight'
<i>Dana</i> 'grain'	<i>pani</i> 'water'	<i>dana pani</i> 'grain water'	'Livelihood'
<i>pathar</i> 'stone'	<i>yar</i> 'friend'	<i>pathar yar</i> 'stone friend'	'A very hard hearted friend'

Part III (Interview)

In this part the interviews were conducted. The participants were provided a peaceful and friendly atmosphere to feel free and comfortable. The atmosphere was maximum participants friendly, so that the true information may be recorded. A recording system was installed for recording the responses which were later transcribed. The recording was done with the consensus of the participants with an assurance of security of their views. They were allowed to stop the recording at any time and may ask to repeat the question. With the help of this question answer session it was investigated how they were able to arrive at the given responses for the compounds given to them in Part I. By asking different questions it was investigated how they arrived at the meanings

they provided in Part I of the experiment. The main purpose of the whole activity was to find the underlying cognitive process which helps in the formation of exocentric compounds and in arriving at metaphorical interpretation.

Discussion

When they looked at the list of novel exocentric compounds presented to them and they were asked to provide their meanings, at first they looked at the constituents and tried to find out the salient features of the constituents and develop a link with the thing or concept it is associated within his culture and language. In this way a connection between what is said and what it stands for is developed. For example one participant while talking about the compound *thundi chaan* 'cold shelter' means 'mother' said that he knows that *thundi* 'cold' means a thing which is cold and gives soothing effect. On the other hands *chaan* 'shelter' is a thing or place which gives us protection from hot and cold and keeps us safe. As per my cultural conceptualization about both the constituent it became easy for me to arrive at the meaning of compounds as 'mother'. In the world only mother is the person who is ever ready to sacrifice and protect her children at any const. The lap of a mother is the only place where everyone feels comfort and gets relaxed. The mother always proves a cold shelter, so on the basis of similarities between the salient features of the constituents and the behavior of the mother helps in interpreting the compound metaphorically. Thus the role of cultural conceptualization seems very obvious in compounds formation and their interpretations. Furthermore, every exocentric compounds refers to a person, thing or entity. Thus the results show that the formation of exocentric compounds is a systematic and rule governed phenomenon based on the cultural conceptualization.

For conducting the experiment the cultural perspective as the cultural conceptualization about the constituents and their roles provide a solid base for the formation of exocentric compounds. 98% of the given responses match to the responses given by the respondents in Part I with the real metaphorical meaning of the compounds. Only 2% of meanings could not arrived at the exact meaning but the provided meanings were maximum near to the exact meaning.

Part II is the proof of the native speaker's creative abilities, their linguistic background knowledge for constituents and their in that specific culture. They very well know that which constituent can be put together with which constituent to form a novel compound.

Part III three strengthens the above discussion as in every day conversation the native speakers consciously or unconsciously use a lot of exocentric compounds. The linguistic cultural knowledge and cultural conceptualization about the constituents help them in arriving at the metaphoric meaning. In the whole process the cognition and image schema also play an important role. The knowledge about the metonymic relations between the constituents, association between the attributes/traits helps a lot not only in the formation of the compound but also in arriving at the metaphorical meanings of exocentric compounds.

Conclusion

After conducting the experiment and compiling the results it concludes that the linguistics and extra linguistic knowledge of the participants not only help them in forming exocentric compounds but also for arriving at the metaphorical interpretation. The culturally shared knowledge about the different constituents, their multiple

meanings, usage and implicit associations stored in long-term memory helped them too. The results are encouraging that the cultural aspect of the compounds holds true which explains the assumption that these types of compounds are systematic and a rule governed phenomenon.

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