

Typology I: Homework for Lecture 6, 2015/06/03

(All of these could be exam questions.)

1. Find a word in your native language which is very vague or polysemous, and write down as many English translations as you can think of. (If English is your native language, find synonyms instead). Do some of your translations in turn have back-translations/synonyms in your native language which do not share a meaning with the word you started with?
2. A group of psychologists claims to finally have found a universal pattern in the mental representation of economic transactions. Participants with an impressive variety of native languages were tested in years of work. The language sample consists of the following languages: English, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Dutch, Swedish, Polish, Russian, Finnish, Hungarian, Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. Do you see any problem with this particular set of languages, given the exposure you have had to the analysis of color adjectives and number systems?
3. If a language has only three color categories, which ones do you expect according to Berlin & Kay (1969)? What is the problem with assigning English color names as translations to these adjectives? What will be the relation of the three adjectives to color space?
4. Here is some (simplified) dictionary data from five languages. Your task is to build both a semantic map and the polysemy network representing the described portion of the semantic space. Are there any interesting patterns already in this small dataset? Where do the two networks differ?

Basque:

aditu: hear; listen; understand

entzun: hear; listen

German:

hören: hear; listen

zuhören: listen

Italian:

ascoltare: listen; hear

sentire: hear; feel

Nahuatl:

caqui: hear; listen; obey; understand

Turkish:

dinlemek: listen

duymak: feel; hear