

The perceptive verbs: a matter of experience

Marilena Thanassoula

University of Cologne - Germany

In terms of the traditional semantic theory verbs expressing the activity of the senses build their own genus verbi. The bare label is not a solution for the problems considering the argument structure of perceptive verbs, either their syntactic behaviour or their rich polysemie. Since the '90s and in the course of the cognitive linguistics some comparative work has been done on the semantic field of perception and cognition in order to formulate universal claims for the semantic extension and the use of these verbs. Despite the fact, that the concept of the "Mind-as-body" metaphor introduced by Eve Sweetser has been criticized as eurocentric, her theory opened new ways and lead the linguists to facing the real problem: unfortunately the body is not a stable and constant entity, thus it cannot not function as a tertium comparationis for the mind. In other words, considering the nature and the abilities of the human body, it doesn't seem to be any common... sense among different cultures. The body and its function are as much a matter of interpretation as the semantics of perceptive verbs.

The general linguists have reached a problem, which is for africanists a common experience: on the one hand the lacking of data from languages needed for comparison, on the other hand a theoretical and methodological apparatus based on European languages which proves to be inappropriate for the languages of the world. A little has been done for analysing the tricky semantic fields of cognition and sensuous experience in African languages. I will try to sum up the previous works and represent new data from my fieldwork in Uganda.