The Idiomatic monkey in Common Core and West African varieties of English

Name: Astrid Fiedler
Affiliation: University of Heidelberg

Abstract:
Inspired by Dirven’s (1994) approach to metaphor variation in Dutch and Afrikaans, this case study examines idiomatic variation in fixed expressions (FEs) in British and West African varieties of English. Using a corpus of newspapers containing FEs with the source domain monkey, I contrast those expressions shared by both varieties, the Common Core (CC), with those found only in the African sources. In so doing, I seek to illuminate in how far uniquely African cultural influences have affected idiomatic language use in these ‘New Englishes’ beyond the mere adoption of the CC.

In particular, I am interested in the conceptualisations underlying these new FEs. In line with the Great Chain of Being ideology, the most central conceptualisation shared by the majority of monkey FEs is the human behaviour is monkey behaviour conceptual metaphor. What is of particular interest here is the main meaning focus, i.e. the most central mapping, conveyed through the individual instantiations of the metaphor (cf. Kövecses 2010). Through these foci, the FEs reveal much about how the animal is traditionally evaluated by the speech community. As my data suggests, the CC concentrates on a few similar character traits, such as incompetence or mischievousness while the new African FEs contain far more varied mappings, ranging from condemned thieves to beloved loyal kin.

This variety of mappings is indexical of richer associations with, and knowledge of, the monkey domain on the part of African speakers, which begs an explanation. An evaluation of possible sources of the new African FEs takes into account both the natural environment and the broader cultural context, including knowledge of monkeys in their natural habitat and corruption issues denounced with the deontic load carried by many FEs.

As has been suggested by Adegbija (2003), idiomatic productivity is a strong indicator of a variety moving towards autonomy. With this contribution, I aim to highlight a fraction of this ongoing process and to stress the role of Kachru’s (1992) ‘outer circle’ on the World English stage.

References:


