

Language Documentation and Description

ISSN 1740-6234

This article appears in: *Language Documentation and Description, vol 10: Special Issue on Humanities of the lesser-known: New directions in the description, documentation and typology of endangered languages and musics*.
Editors: Niclas Burenhult, Arthur Holmer, Anastasia Karlsson, Håkan Lundström & Jan-Olof Svantesson

The perception verbs in Lussese (Bantu J10): a matter of experience

MARILENA THANASSOULA

Cite this article: Marilena Thanassoula (2012). The perception verbs in Lussese (Bantu J10): a matter of experience. In Niclas Burenhult, Arthur Holmer, Anastasia Karlsson, Håkan Lundström & Jan-Olof Svantesson (eds) *Language Documentation and Description, vol 10: Special Issue on Humanities of the lesser-known: New directions in the description, documentation and typology of endangered languages and musics*. London: SOAS. pp. 307-328

Link to this article: <http://www.elpublishing.org/PID/124>

This electronic version first published: July 2014



This article is published under a Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC (Attribution-NonCommercial). The licence permits users to use, reproduce, disseminate or display the article provided that the author is attributed as the original creator and that the reuse is restricted to non-commercial purposes i.e. research or educational use. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

EL Publishing

For more EL Publishing articles and services:

Website:	http://www.elpublishing.org
Terms of use:	http://www.elpublishing.org/terms
Submissions:	http://www.elpublishing.org/submissions

The perception verbs in Lussese (Bantu J10): a matter of experience

Marilena Thanassoula

1. Introduction

In this paper I discuss the existing work on language theory and perception and further present some introductory information about Lussese, a language which I am presently documenting in Uganda.

Secondly, I explore the polysemies of the perception verbs as we find them in the dictionaries of some Bantu languages spoken in the Great Lakes Region. Then I give some examples of the use of two perception verbs, the counterparts of *hear* and *smell* in Lussese and I argue that the grammar and the vocabulary of the senses reflect cultural parameters rather than universal principles. This is followed by various arguments showing that our analysis and understanding of languages and the grammar of the senses fails if we treat cultural, social and historical parameters as subordinate matters or even not at all.

2. Language and perception

In this section I outline the debate regarding metaphor in general and polysemy in particular. Polysemy often rises, even if not solely, out of metaphorical processes. According to Hopper & Traugott (1993: 77), metaphor can be defined as follows:

Metaphorical processes are processes of inference across conceptual boundaries and are typically referred to in terms of ‘mappings’, or ‘associative leaps’, from one domain to another.

Heine (1997: 136f.) discusses the conceptual transfer-patterns of metaphor, mentioning bidirectional development through metonymic processes; he points out that metonymy can be the base of metaphorical processes. Heine (1997: 139) proposes that criteria for assuming that a metaphor is involved are:

- (a) the source and target concept should be different referents
- (b) two different domains of experience are involved in the transfer
- (c) the transfer should not be formally expressed, and
- (d) the predication expressed by the metaphor is false if taken literally.

Perception verbs have the prototypical meaning of expressing an activity or reaction of the human sensory apparatus; e.g., *see* is used prototypically for the domain of vision. Previously, scholars discussed the metaphorical use of the perception verbs in European languages, but it is due to the analysis of Viberg (1984) that this idea of prototypical meaning changed.

Viberg (1984) was able to show that there is a modal hierarchy that connects perception verbs. Hence, he reconstructed this hierarchy on an etymological base. In his later work, he expanded this model to include the metaphorical use of the perception verbs. He considers the binary feature of contact as the crucial one. In his model, both the etymological source and the metaphor chain begin with the visual sense, followed by the auditory and tactile senses for the expression of sensual experience [+/- contact], respectively. That is applicable, of course, if the language provides evidence for an etymological relation between the verbs and/or metaphoric use.

Within the paradigm of cognitive linguistics, Sweetser (1990: 37) formulated the following universals about sensory verbs and their semantic extensions: ‘the objective, intellectual side of our mental life seems to be regularly linked with the sense of vision’. Furthermore, Sweetser (1990: 43) proposes that:

Hearing is connected with the specifically communicative aspects of understanding, rather than with intellection at large. [...] the sense of smell has fewer and less deep metaphorical connections with the mental domain than the other senses. Taste, however, is deeply linked with our internal self, and it is used to represent our personal likes and ‘tastes’. And the vocabulary of touch and tactile sensation is generally used for emotional sensations of all types.

Her ‘Mind-as-Body’ metaphor, though criticized for being Eurocentric, led linguists to tackle a problem that arises time and again in different academic disciplines: does human conceptualization and language depend on nature, on culture, or on both, and for which reasons? Unfortunately, considering the nature and the abilities of the human body, there does not seem to be any consensus among different cultures, as Classen (1993: 5) notes:

When almost every other aspect of human bodily existence – from the way we eat to the way we dress – is now recognized as subject to social conditioning, it is surprising that we should still imagine that the senses are left to nature.

Evans & Wilkins (1998: 54) were among the first to explore the relationship between body conceptions, cultural practices and linguistic expressions, exemplified with Australian languages. Their critique of Sweetser's universal claims is that the body and its function are even more a matter of interpretation than the semantics of perception verbs. Evans & Wilkins (1998: 54) conclude as follows:

We have demonstrated that the same domain can have its 'universal' and 'relativistic' sides; a foot in nature and a foot in culture.

However, the relation between language and the human body in cognitive science is still a work in progress, not only for cognitive linguists, but also for neurologists and psychologists. Zlatev (2007) summarizes the theoretical problems that concern the concept of embodiment within the cognitive sciences and argues for the concept of bodily mimesis and its derivative concept, mimetic schemas. One of the problems Zlatev (2007: 272) points out is the strong individualist orientation even in the approaches that try to connect embodiment to society and culture¹:

In particular, within the work of those emphasizing the role of the 'body in the mind' there is no adequate notion of convention or norm, which is essential for characterizing both human culture and the human mind.

Another major problem of linguistics in general, but especially in the field of linguistic expression of sensory experience, is that of metalanguage: how do you ask something if you do not even know whether it exists, and how do you describe unknown senses, emotions and conceptions without getting lost in translation? Anna Wierzbicka's approach was, and still is, to 'de-naturalize' English semantics. Since 1972, she has consequently been criticizing the Eurocentric character of science. In Wierzbicka (2009: 3), she points out that work about language and emotion is biased:

Contemporary psychology like present-day science in general is dominated by English, and it is common practice for scholars to write about human emotions using English emotion terms, as if these English words could give us an accurate, objective and

¹ This criticism is also a form of self-criticism regarding former work, as the author himself points out (Zlatev 2007: 243).

culturally independent perspective of human emotional experience in general. [...] In reality any discussion of human emotions which relies on English emotion terms is necessarily Anglocentric.

In that sense, we should note that the following examples are approximately translated in English, but the English terms have neither the same basic, nor the same expanded meaning, nor the same use as their counterparts in Lussese. Rather than the question of translation, we should reflect on whether the emotions themselves are felt and interpreted in the same way around the world.

3. Polysemies in the dictionary

Turning now to the expressions of perception, let us first compare the meaning of the perception verbs as given in dictionaries of some Bantu languages spoken in the Great Lakes region in East and Central Africa. All the languages we will look at next, except Nyankole and Luganda, share the status of being endangered, i.e. lacking young speakers. Table 1 presents the meanings of perception verbs as found in the dictionaries. The last column ‘Extensions’ includes meanings that are translated with the verbs in the second column ‘Verbs’, but these meanings are not specified as extensions in the dictionaries²:

Table 1: Perception verbs in the dictionaries

<i>Language</i>	<i>Verb</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Extensions</i>
Jita	<i>-mwa</i>	HEAR	FEEL
Haya	<i>-kwáàta</i>	TOUCH	REMEMBER
Lega	<i>-móna</i>	SEE	FEEL
	<i>-kwáàta</i>	TOUCH	REMEMBER
Kiga	<i>-húrira</i>	HEAR	FEEL/TASTE
Nyankole	<i>-húrira</i>	HEAR	FEEL
Ziba	<i>-bona</i>	SEE	FEEL
	<i>-úngwa</i>	HEAR	PERCEIVE; SMELL; TOUCH/TASTE

² Sources for the data are as follows: for Jita see Kagaya (2005), for Haya see Kaji (2000), for Lega see Botne (1994), for KigaKiga see Taylor (1959), for Nyankole see Davis (1952) and Kaji (2004), for Ziba see Rehse (1915).

First, we observe that HEAR more often has metaphorical extensions in these languages than the other sensory verbs, with the exception of Lega (if my hypothesis is in fact correct that the extensions in Table 1 are the result of metaphor). The extension of HEAR to emotion, i.e. to the meaning of FEEL, occurs very often.

In Ziba, FEEL leads to the meaning of ‘perceiving senses’, and through this extension, HEAR in this language can express all senses except vision. In the same language, Ziba, SEE can also mean FEEL, so the question arises: what is the difference of HEAR-FEEL and SEE-FEEL?

For none of the above languages do we find an extension of SEE to the meaning of THINK, UNDERSTAND or REMEMBER, so there seems to be no connection between vision and these mental activities. On the contrary, the verb TOUCH leads to the meaning of REMEMBER, in Haya and Lega.

In Kiga, we find HEAR having the extension of TASTE. This calls for an explanation. The way through the extension of hearing as ‘to perceive senses’ may be relevant of course in this case as well, but still: why does only this language have this less prototypical extension?

To summarise, in all of the above languages, we arrive at a conclusion commonly found in the literature, namely the extension of HEAR to the domain of emotion, i.e. the meaning of FEEL. The idea of a universal connection between vision and cognition seems to be contradicted by this observation. Apart from these matters, there are some additional cases that need explanation, but we still have no clue as to what these verbs really mean in use.

Before we take a look at the counterparts for *hear* and *smell* in Lussese, let us first look at the meanings of the perception verbs in the lexicon of Luganda (Table 2).³

³ Luganda is a tone language, but since tones are not noted in the source dictionary (Murphy 1972), they are absent here as well.

Table 2: Perception verbs in Luganda

<i>Luganda</i>	<i>Basic meaning</i>	<i>Extensions</i> ⁴
<i>-komba</i> (v.tr.)	TASTE	LICK, LAP, KISS
<i>-lega</i> (v.i. & tr.)	TASTE	TRY
<i>-kwata</i> (v.tr.)	TOUCH	HOLD, GRASP, APPREHEND, ARREST, CAPTURE, RAPE
<i>-laba</i> (v.tr.)	SEE	PERCEIVE; FIND; GET; GREET
(v.i.)		BE CONSCIOUS; BE ALIVE; BE AWAKE; BE ALERT/PERCEPTIVE
<i>-wulira</i> (v.tr.)	HEAR	LISTEN, OBEY, BE OBEDIENT; FEEL/PERCEIVE SENSE
<i>-wunya</i> (v.i.)	SMELL/TO PRODUCE A SMELL, ODOUR, STINK	

In Luganda, we find two verbs for TASTE with different extensions. Both the sexual connotation and the concept of trying are common extensions of TASTE in the world's languages⁵.

We also find the verb SEE being extended to the meaning of consciousness, i.e. to the domain of mental activities. However, this extension is only possible in an intransitive sentence. SEE, with a direct object, can be extended to the domain of emotion (FEEL; PERCEIVE). How can we explain the semantic and syntactic pattern of SEE in Luganda? The transitive SEE has additional meanings in the domain of social interaction: GREET and MEET, which is not really surprising inside or outside Africa.

Another extension of SEE, namely to the meanings of FIND and GET, needs an explanation, because we are more familiar with exactly the opposite connotation: LOOK FOR in the meaning of SEARCH, the opposite of FIND or GET. Let us recall Wierzbicka's warning about the danger of English, because, after all, the connotation of sight to the act of searching and finding seems to be common. However, in Luganda the pattern has been turned into the opposite. I have no suggestion for why this is so. Henceforth I concentrate on

⁴ Again the meanings listed here as 'extensions' are not specified in the dictionary as such.

⁵ Compare Backhouse (1994), among others.

the two verbs that promise, at least at a first glance, no surprises, namely HEAR and SMELL.

HEAR in Luganda means also to FEEL/PERCEIVE and has, besides that, another common extension to social domains, due to the speech-acts concerned. For example, imperatives demonstrate how somebody can cause the action of somebody else who hears and obeys only because of speaking. SMELL is at first glance quite trivial in Luganda: it means only to SMELL GOOD/BAD.

After some introductory remarks, we will now turn to the analysis of the meaning and the use of perception verbs in Lussese.

4. Notes on Lussese

Lussese⁶ is spoken on the Ssesse Islands in Lake Victoria. The archipelago consists of 84 islands, about 37 of which are inhabited. The islands became known among scientists at the beginning of the 20th century because of Robert Koch's experiments. In his field diary, Koch describes the outbreak of the sleeping sickness epidemic and how the inhabitants interpreted this illness as spirit-possession. In his notes, we can find the first description of the body concept of the Bassese people. On the Ssesse Islands, Robert Koch carried out the first experiments to treat malaria. His work caused hundreds of deaths as well as many births of disabled children. The Bassese remember the European medicine man and the forced migration ordered by the colonial masters because of the epidemic. They regard both the science and the politics of the early 20th century as the reason for the loss of their language. Today, the few remaining Lussese speakers are over 80 years old and do not have regular contact with each other.

The local Lingua Franca is Luganda, and Lussese is seen as one of four dialects of the former.

⁶ The language expresses nominal gender through nominal class prefixes. In this system the prefix *lu-* attached to a name X denotes 'language of X', the prefix *ba-* attached to a name X denotes 'people of X'.

Table 3: Linguistic affiliation

Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Narrow Bantu, Central, J, Nyoro-Ganda (J10): Hema, Hima, Ganda, Soga, Gwere

Lexical similarity: Luganda compared with Lusoga and Lugwere:
71–86% of the basic vocabulary shared with
Lusoga, 68% with Lugwere

Dialects of Luganda: Kooki (Olukooki), Ssese (Olussese), Vuma
(Luvuma), Diopa (Ludiopa)

In Lussese, the pragmatically unmarked and most frequently used word order is (S)VO. The subject is either pronominalized through a nominal class prefix preceding the verbal root or it occurs in initial position. Adverbs and other adjuncts may appear before or after the verbal phrase. Lussese has an agglutinating morphology with a strong inflecting tendency. In the ideal case, a word is composed of a lexical root, prefixes for the grammatical categories and suffixes for derivation, but both portemanteau morphemes and root-alternation are common phenomena. The notes on the grammar in Table 4 give a typological overview of Lussese.

Table 4: Typological features of Lussese

Word order: (x) (S)VO (x)

Phrase: Head – Dependent

Morphology: agglutinating, with a strong inflecting tendency

Within the phrase, the head is followed by its dependents. In the nominal phrase only quantifiers and demonstrative pronouns can be placed before the head, but this word order is a pragmatically marked one.

Before we consider the meanings and use of perception verbs in Lussese, some information about the methodology applied during fieldwork is needed. The documentation of Lussese is based on three fieldwork trips between 2009 and 2011. Data on perception and especially on the use of perception verbs and other expressions of perception were collected during cooking sessions in 2009 and 2010 and through a theatrical project with the speaker community in

2011. In addition, I used the stimuli developed by the Language and Cognition Group of the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen⁷.

5. Perception verbs in Lussese

The basic list of Lussese perception verbs has almost the same lexemes as Luganda (compare Table 2), involving regular sound correspondences, except for the counterparts of *see*. Furthermore, Lussese has two lexemes for SMELL.

Table 5: Perception verbs in Lussese's basic wordlist

<i>Verb</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>-bonà</i>	SEE; MEET
<i>-gèedhà</i>	TASTE
<i>-gombà</i>	TASTE
<i>-gwá(i)tà</i>	TOUCH, HOLD
<i>-húlrà</i>	HEAR, LISTEN, FEEL, PERCEIVE
<i>-hunyà</i>	SMELL
<i>-núuka</i>	SMELL

6. Words in use

Let us see how the verb *-húlrà*⁸ (HEAR, PERCEIVE) and the verbs *-hunyà*, *-núukà* (SMELL) are used in Lussese. In example (1) we see *-húlrà* in its basic meaning of general state of condition:⁹

⁷ I would like to express my deep gratitude to Asifa Majid and her colleagues for kindly supplying stimuli and for other support.

⁸ Due to morphophonological processes the velar fricative may change to a plosive after nasals.

⁹ The following abbreviations are used: 1 = nominal class 1, 1SG = first person singular, ADV = adverb, APPL = applicative, CONJ = conjunction, D = derivational morpheme, IV = initial vowel (augment, nominal preprefix), LOC = locative, NEG = negation, PASS = passive, PAST = past tense, POSS = possessive pronoun, PRES = present tense, RED = reduplication, REFL = reflexive, VE = verbal suffix, v.i./tr. = verb intransitive/transitive.

- (1) *M-pùlirà* *bu-gè/bu-bì.*
 1SG:PRES-feel/hear 14-good/bad
 ‘I feel good/bad.’

Furthermore, *-hùlirà* is used for external and internal physical experience. In example (2) we see the use of the verb for expressing an external physical experience:

- (2) *M-pùlirà* *e-i-búgumu.*
 1SG:PRES feel/hear IV-9-heat
 ‘I feel hot.’

-hùlirà is used also to express internal physical experience, in example (3a) ‘feel pain’, and in (4a) ‘get ill’. Compared to other possible constructions for the expression of physical experience, note that use of *-hùlirà* is more frequent and not emphatic. In (3b) we see a common expression for localizing the pain through the use of the verb ‘bite’ in a passive sentence, and in (4b) the copula is employed to express the present condition of illness:

- (3) (a) *M-pùlirà* *o-bu-lúmi.*
 1SG:PRES feel/hear IV-14-pain
 ‘I feel pain.’
- (b) *E-bi-béngudò* *bi-lum-ír-w-a*
 IV-8-shoulder 8-bite-APPL-PASS-VE
 ‘My shoulders pain me.’
- (4) (a) *M-pùlirà* *o-bu-lwáirè.*
 1SG:PRES feel/hear IV-14-illness
 ‘I feel, I am getting ill.’
- (b) *N-dì* *mu-lwáirè.*
 1SG:PRES-be 1-ill
 ‘I am ill’.

It is worth mentioning that *-hùlirà* is the only perception verb that can be followed by the conjunction (or complementizer) *nti*, that normally only follows speech verbs and introduces indirect speech. The construction in (5b) is used emphatically compared to the more frequent expression in (5a).

- (5) (a) *N-kóoh-ire*
 1SG-get_tired-PAST
 ‘I was getting tired.’
- (b) *M-púlira* *nti* *n-kóoh-ire.*
 1SG:PRES-feel/hear CONJ 1SG-get_tired-PAST
 ‘I really feel very tired.’

If the direct object of *-húlirà* is a source for primarily audible perception, then the verb is used in the sense of HEAR or LISTEN TO:

- (6) *O-húlira* *e-ki-nyóni?*
 2SG-feel/hear IV-7-bird
 ‘Do you hear the bird?’

The Bassese refer to tangible categories and categories of flavour by using the verb *-húlirà*:

- (7) *O- húlira* *o-bú-lio* *bu-hóma?*
 2SG-feel/hear IV-14-food 14-sweet
 ‘Do you like the food?’

Further emotions are also usually expressed by *-húlirà*:

- (8) (a) *M-púlirà* *e-i-sányu*
 1SG:PRES-feel/hear IV-9-happiness
 ‘I am happy.’
- (b) *M-púlirà* *e-i-náku*
 1SG:PRES-feel/hear IV-9-day¹⁰
 ‘I am sad.’

Compared to other possible verb constructions for the expression of emotions, the use of *-húlirà* is again more frequent and not emphatic. Comparing (8b) and (9b) we see that the verb *-húlirà* expresses a general emotion, in

¹⁰ The negative association of the *day* might be explained through the negative association of the day(light) with the sun, to be observed in many African languages.

combination with the noun ‘day’: sadness. In (8b) the verb is stative in contrast to the medium verb in (9a), which expresses an emotion as a temporary experience, and the copula verb in (9b), which accompanied by the noun ‘day’, expresses a more specific aspect of sadness, mourning:

- (9) (a) *Na-isányukí-ire* (inyo).
 1SG:PAST-be_happy-PAST (ADV)
 ‘I am (very) happy’.
- (b) *N-di mu-i-náku*
 1SG:PRES-be 1:10-days
 ‘I am grieving for somebody.’

Some emotions cannot be expressed by any other construction, like excitement:

- (10) *M-púlirà e-n-síisi*
 1SG:PRES-feel/hear IV-9-earthquake
 ‘I am excited.’¹¹

The lexeme ‘earthquake’ is related to the earthquake spirit *Musiisi*. In the general Lussese register, the following sentences are not grammatically correct and might thus not be immediately intelligible. However, the two traditional healers among the research assistants use and interpret them in the sense of the secret Lussese register that is known by traditional healers and priests of the local religion:

- (11) (a) *M-púlirà Musiisi*.
 1SG:PRES-feel/hear Musiisi
 ‘Musiisi is going to appear to/possess me.’
- (b) *Musiisi ya-n-gwáit-irè*
 Musiisi 3SG:PAST-1SG-catch/hold-PAST
 ‘Musiisi possessed me.’

¹¹ The same expression is used in case of an earthquake in the meaning ‘I feel the earthquake’, so the sentence can be ambiguous.

The examples with the Lussese counterparts for ‘smell’ show that the basic verb for the olfactory domain, *-hunyà*, has an inherent interpretation for negative odours. Furthermore, the notion for good smells is also lexicalized. Perceiving odours seems to be important for the Bassese people. In major neighbouring languages like Luganda and Lusoga only a verb which is phonetically and semantically similar to *-hunyà* is used and there is no second verb for the olfactory domain. Furthermore, we saw that both verbs can extend their meaning but they follow different patterns within the domains of personal taste, social interaction and cognition. Compared with the brief notions found in the dictionaries, the use of the perception verbs shows both the flexibility of grammar and the variety of semantics regarding the linguistic expression of senses.

Table 6 summarizes the possible meanings of the perception verbs in Lussese according to their use.

Table 6: The polysemy of perception verbs in Lussese according to their use

<i>Verb</i>	<i>Sense</i>	<i>Other semantic domains</i>
<i>-hùlirà</i>	FEEL/HEAR	Perception: TOUCH, SMELL, TASTE
		Emotion: FEEL SAD/HAPPY etc.
		Physical experience: FEEL PAIN etc.
		Cognition: UNDERSTAND
		Pragmatic: BE ATTENTIVE
		Social interaction: OBEY
REFL <i>-wée-hùlirà</i>		Emotion: BE ARROGANT
<i>-gwá(i)tà</i>	CATCH/HOLD	Sexual connotation: COPULATE
		Neg. phys. experience: SUFFER
		Intensive emotions: a.o. BE POSSESSED
<i>-hunyà</i>	SMELL	Personal taste: LIKE
		Cognition: WONDER
REFL <i>-wée-huny-ísha</i>		Emotion: BE ASTONISHED
<i>-núukà</i>	SMELL+ GOOD	Personal taste: LIKE
<i>-bonà</i>	SEE	Social interaction: MEET
<i>-geedhà</i>	TASTE	Action: TRY

7. A cultural approach

For the sake of better comprehension of the semantic fields that perception verbs can cover in Lussese, we need to take into account the following cultural concepts.

First, regarding the human body; the Bassese consider the body as a whole and if a part of it suffers, then the whole body is influenced. This holistic concept of the human body is reflected in the rich polysemy of the verb *-hùlirà*, which expresses external and internal physical experiences, as well as emotions. To put it in the wording of one research assistant:

All is one, don't you see, when the forest suffers, the lake is ill, when the brain suffers, the body is lame and when the body suffers you can't concentrate on anything else but the pain. We don't say 'I am fine, but my leg is broken', like you whites do, because if the leg is ill, the whole body gets out of health and must be treated as a whole.¹³

Secondly, the Bassese concepts of identity and social affiliation are based on collective memory. The concept of identity is flexible, as identity depends on social roles. The prominence of social networks, relations, and the concept of a flexible and always relative identity are factors that clarify why – among the perception verbs – only the one that expresses *hearing* (*-hùlirà*) is extended to the cognitive domain of understanding. To hear speech and be able to interpret it in the appropriate social and cultural context means to understand the spoken message. The fact that the language is not written may be relevant in this conception¹⁴. Understanding without personal involvement and experience is an alien concept for the Bassese. In other words, there is no objective, external, constant truth. This is why the Bassese prefer to use different lexemes for abstract concepts like science or democracy. This is also why the reflexive form of *-hùlirà*, *-wée-hùlirà*, means 'to be arrogant'. Someone who is listening to themselves separates themselves from the social environment and their attitude receives a negative evaluation by the community as being arrogant.

The same path of the sense-giving and flexible social environment leads to the extension of obeying, or in other words, perceiving and understanding a

¹³ For more evidence about the holistic body concept of the Bassese see Thanassoula (forthcoming).

¹⁴ About the influence of writing on language and cognition see among others Evans & Wilkins (1998).

speech act further to the pragmatic use of getting or showing attention in a dialogue.

Regarding the local religion, we should finally consider that spirits have no body, i.e. you cannot feel them or smell them, you can only see them in your dream and you can hear what they say, if they *sit on your head*, i.e. possess you. The limited amount of data I collected from the Lussese secret register might allow us to observe the influence of metaphysical concepts both in grammar and semantics. Sentences rejected as ungrammatical in common speech still have a meaning and are identified as correct in the secret register. But it is not easy to describe the meaning of the verb *-hùlirà* in the secret register. Rather it resembles the construction of ‘to get’, and not that of ‘to be ill’, as we saw in example (4a) and (11a), repeated here as (18a) and (18b), respectively, and indeed spirit possession has clear symptoms and is regarded as an illness.

- (18) (a) *M-pùlirà* *o-bu-lwáirè.*
 1SG:PRES-feel/hear IV-14-illness
 ‘I feel that I’m getting ill’.
- (b) *M-pùlirà* *Musiisi.*
 1SG:PRES-feel/hear Musiisi
 ‘Musiisi is going to appear to/possess me.’¹⁵

The verb cannot be translated by *hear* or *feel* in (18b). Moreover, it expresses an approximate change of state which can still be interpreted as FEEL in everyday Lussese, demonstrated in (18a). Common words from daily Lussese, like *-hùlirà*, cannot be understood or correctly interpreted if they are used in the secret register, except by people who have a special knowledge. In this case, the specialist has experience between the obvious, and thus superficial ‘real’ world and the hidden, but essential world of the spirits, the world of power and wisdom. Furthermore, this knowledge consists of rituals of abandoning one’s own identity and agency, where the body indulges in the spirit’s identity. The linguistic expression for possession, demonstrated in (11b) and repeated below as (19b), resembles the linguistic expression for intensive feelings and strong negative physical experience by the use of *-gwá(i)tà* ‘to catch/hold’ in (19a):

¹⁵ This sentence is here interpreted in the secret register. The majority of the speakers do not use this register, thus interpreting the sentence as ‘I feel the earthquake’.

- (19) (a) *O-bu-lúmi bu-n-gwáit-íre*
 IV-14-bite 14-1SG-catch/hold-PAST
 ‘The pain is killing me.’ (lit.: ‘The pain caught me.’)
- (b) *Musiisi ya-n-gwáit-irè*
 Musiisi 3SG:PAST-1SG-catch/hold-PAST
 ‘Musiisi possessed me.’ (lit.: ‘Musiisi caught me.’)¹⁶

Note the thematic roles and the syntactic relations in (19): The human entity appears in the role of Patient and in the syntactic position of the direct object.

The use of the verb *-hunyà* can be better understood if we consider the relation between odours and social roles; smell is a strong metaphor for hierarchical relations. Van Beek (2010: 263) gives an example of the olfactory society of the Kapsiki in Cameroon and discusses the importance of smell in West African societies: ‘Smell [...] reveals identities, however hidden from sight; [...] an olfactory identity endures despite changing visual appearances.’

The data from Lussese reveals the urgent question of semantic domains: according to which criteria do we consider physical experience, emotion and cognition as three basic and different domains of human experience? The first is the area of prototypical meaning for perception verbs, whereas the domains of feeling and thought are considered as areas to be covered by peripheral meanings only. At least the Bassese make no difference, neither at the level of grammar, nor at the level of semantics; for them, the three domains constructed towards a theory of language and perception seem to be only one¹⁷. Evans & Wilkins (2000: 548) again summarize the questions regarding the current ‘anthropology of the senses’ and refer to extra linguistic evidence:

The anthropology of the senses – emphasise (i) the degree to which different cultures weight the relative importance of sensory modalities, (ii) the range of cultural variation in the conscious use of, and appeal to, sensory modalities, and (iii) the culture specific patterns of sensory symbolics, including different patterns in the linking of specific-sensory modalities with specific cognitive states.

¹⁶ This sentence is used in the secret register to connote spirit possession.

¹⁷ European languages also have metaphors and polysemies that go beyond the concept of strictly distinct domains as well as the idea of one to one mapping between sense and extension domain or the supposed hierarchy of the senses. Ulrike Claudi reminded me of the German verb *be-greifen*, which means ‘understand’ and is based on the verb *greifen* ‘hold/catch’, to give just one example (compare also the use of *grasp* in English).

Storch (2010: 13) brings to the fore the polarity between nature and culture regarding perception and its linguistic expressions:

Although sensual perception is likely to proceed equally worldwide in a rather universal way, the values, which are allocated to the various senses in different cultures and societies, differ considerably.

Hence, considering the general theory of perception verbs and the findings in the Bantu languages spoken in the Great Lakes region, further questions spring to mind: how do we explain the differences in the use and grammatical behaviour of words shared by two varieties that are considered to be almost the same, like Standard Luganda and Lussese?

How relevant is the fact that Luganda speakers know English, but Lussese speakers do not?

Are the Bantu languages of the Great Lakes region also in matters of perception and its linguistic expressions a ‘linguistic area’ or not? How can we explain the similarity and the differences between them?

At present, is it too early to even make an attempt at answering these questions. When documenting Lussese, we have to consider the influence of language contact on the one hand, and the religious status of Lussese on the other. Interpreting the linguistic expressions of perception in this language will not be adequate without understanding the cosmology and the religious and moral categories that arise out of it. When we claim that the meaning of linguistic expressions deriving from the senses is a matter of experience, this is not at all a metaphor. The only way to avoid the failures of the past in analyzing and interpreting language is to develop a methodological apparatus which will enable us to explore and experience together with the speakers their sense of the world. Sharing experiences can start, for example, with everyday cooking and talking about it. Today, we have the technical possibility of using tactile, audio and olfactory samples as well as plenty of visual materials¹⁸ to explore the worlds of senses together with the speakers.

In this paper I tried to analyze the meanings of the verbs of perception in Lussese according to their use and in favour of a metaphorical analysis based on polysemy. The interpretation of these verbs in Lussese does not support the hierarchy proposed by Sweetser (1990), and consequently her claims cannot

¹⁸ See publications of the Language and Cognition Group of the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, most recently Burenhult & Majid (2011).

be regarded as being universal. An analysis based on the concept of semantic generality of these verbs seems to be plausible especially regarding the counterpart of *hear* in Lussese, but it is not possible to be discussed properly here¹⁹.

The theories of language and perception may appear academic, compared with the urgent need to document endangered languages. However, I believe that the theoretical and methodological developments in the fields of perception and its linguistic expression will not only contribute to the understanding of the language in and through the cultural and social context of the speakers in general, but may also help to formulate more or less universal universals. To include endangered languages in the field of language and perception means to try through interaction with the speakers to capture some of the 'sense' of their language, some of their experience and reality before it is lost forever.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the German Research Society and the Institute for African Studies in Cologne which support my research. For their patience and their willingness to cooperate with me I would like to thank the Bassese speakers, especially Mrs. Nassali Rowinsa, Mrs. Nampomwa Nalongo, Mr. Erasto Lubandi, Mr. Eliphaz Lubinah, Mr. Andronikos Magatto and the late Sseluwaji Dominic.

¹⁹ See Thanassoula (forthcoming).

References

- Backhouse, Anthony E. 1994. *The lexical field of taste: a semantic study of Japanese taste terms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Botne, Robert. 1994. *A Lega and English dictionary*. (East African studies and dialects, vol. 3). Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.
- Burenhult, Niclas & Asifa Majid. 2011. Olfaction in Aslian ideology and language. *The Senses & Society* 6(1), 19–29.
- Classen, Constance. 1993. *Worlds of sense: exploring the senses in history and across cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Davis, Margaret B. 1952. *A Lunyoro-Lunyankole-English and English-Lunyoro-Lunyankole dictionary*. London: Macmillan.
- Evans, Nicholas & David Wilkins. 1998. *The knowing ear: an Australian test of universal claims about the semantic structure of sensory verbs and their extension into the domain of cognition*. Arbeitspapier Nr. 32. Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, Universität zu Köln.
- Evans, Nicholas & David Wilkins. 2000. In the mind's ear: the semantic extensions of perception verbs in Australian languages. *Language* 76(3), 546–592.
- Heine, Bernd. 1997. *Cognitive foundations of grammar*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hopper, Paul J. & Elizabeth Closs Traugott. 1993. *Grammaticalization*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kagaya, Ryohei. 2005. *A Jita vocabulary*. Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Tokyo: Fujiwara Printing.
- Kaji, Shigeki. 2000. *A Haya vocabulary*. Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Tokyo: Fujiwara Printing.
- Kaji, Shigeki. 2004. *A Nyankole vocabulary*. Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Tokyo: Fujiwara Printing.
- Murphy, John D. 1972. *Luganda-English dictionary*. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press.
- Rehse, Hermann. 1915. *Wörterammlung des Ruziba (Jahrbuch der Hamburgischen wissenschaftlichen Anstalten XXXI, 10. Beiheft)*. Hamburg: Lucas Gräfe & Sillem.
- Storch, Anne (ed.). 2010. *Perception of the invisible: religion, historical semantics and the role of perception verbs (Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika, Band 21)*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.
- Sweetser, Eve. 1990. *From etymology to pragmatics: metaphorical and cultural aspects of semantic structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, Charles. 1959. *A simplified Nyankole-Kiga-English and English-Nyankole-Kiga dictionary*. Kampala: The Eagle Press.

- Taylor, Charles. 1959. *A simplified Nyankole-Kiga-English and English-Nyankole-Kiga dictionary*. Kampala: The Eagle Press.
- Thanassoula, Marilena. forthc. *Documentation of Lussese with special reference to a grammar of the senses*. Dissertation, University of Cologne.
- Van Beek, Walter E.A. 2010. Eyes on top? Culture and the weight of the senses. In Anne Storch (ed.), *Perception of the invisible: religion, historical semantics and the role of perception verbs (Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika, Band 21)*, 245–271. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.
- Viberg, Åke. 1984. The perception verbs: a typological study. In Brian Butterworth, Bernard Comrie & Osten Dahl (eds.), *Explanations for language universals*, 123–162. Berlin: Mouton.
- Wierzbicka, Anna. 2009. Language and metalanguage: key issues in emotion research. *Emotion Review* 1(1), 3–14.
- Zlatev, Jordan. 2007. Embodiment, language and mimesis. In Tom Ziemke, Jordan Zlatev & Roslyn Frank (eds.), *Body, language, and mind. Vol 1, Embodiment*, 297–337. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.