

## Basic level categories in multilingual cognition

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In her work on the principles of human categorization Eleanor Rosch demonstrated that there is a basic level in categorization at which categories are defined as relying on perceptual characteristics, mainly attributes of shape (Rosch 1978). Since language plays a defining role in human categorization (Harnad 2005), Rosch also claimed that the words for basic level categories are the most fundamental in language, and thus it is an obvious assumption that the meanings of basic level terms are based on “gestalt perception” (Gallese & Lakoff 2005: 446). This would suggest that the meanings of basic level terms are mostly universal across languages. In spite of this, there are often considerable cross-linguistic differences in the range of referents designated by the respective terms naming these categories (Győri 2017). While one language may view a range of objects as belonging to one category, in another language the same range is divided up linguistically into two (or sometimes more) categories. This suggests that the meanings of basic level terms do not rely completely on perceptual attributes, which means that they are not directly names for perceptual basic level categories, but their meanings are influenced to a great degree by culturally conventionalized conceptualizations. Since human cognition relies mostly on language because of the relevance of cultural orientation (Lupyan 2016; Tomasello 1999), these cross-linguistic divergences provide an equally functional and adaptive view of the world for the speakers of a language.

However, beside the cross-linguistic explanation it is an equally relevant question from a cognitive perspective how the multilingual mind handles these divergences in linguistic categorization. The major questions we go after in this presentation is how the multilingual mental lexicon might be organized with respect to these divergences and what interlingual interactions – due to the dynamics of the mental lexicon – might take place among the languages stored in it. We also present an empirical pilot study on lexical transfer related to basic level terms with Hungarian-German-English trilinguals. The study examines “the influence of word knowledge in one language on a person’s knowledge or use of words in another language” (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008: 72) in the above respect.

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