

Synaesthetic Metaphors in Indonesian: Preliminary Investigations

Yeshayahu Shen and David Gil

All languages make use of a variety of kinds of figurative expressions, such as metaphors, similes, oxymorons, analogies, proverbs and idioms. The cross-linguistic study of figurative expressions reveals the existence of important universal properties alongside a significant amount of diversity. To cite just one example: many languages make use of a universal conceptual metaphor in accordance with which emotions are stored in a physical container which is associated with a particular body organ. However, languages differ with respect to the choice of organ: while in English it is the heart, as evidenced in expressions such as *broken heart*, in Indonesian it is the liver, as in *patah hati*, literally "break liver".

This paper presents some preliminary results from a large-scale ongoing cross-linguistic study of figurative expressions. Its concern is with metaphors of one particular type, namely, *synaesthetic metaphors*: metaphors that involve a mapping between two sensory domains. For example, the English expression *sweet silence* is a synaesthetic metaphor, since it involves a mapping from the source domain of taste to the target domain of sound. The paper presents some results of a preliminary study of synaesthetic metaphors in Indonesian, drawing upon two complementary sources of data: (a) production, as manifest in naturalistic texts of different kinds, written and oral, artistic and everyday; and (b) production and comprehension, as evidenced by experimental tasks of various kinds, such as recall, judgements of appropriateness, context generation and interpretation generation.

The Indonesian data support a proposed universal generalization, in which synaesthetic metaphors are governed by the following *hierarchy of senses*:

- (1) touch < taste < smell < sound < sight

The above hierarchy of senses determines the structure of synaesthetic metaphors in accordance with the following principle:

- (2) Metaphors in which the source domain is lower on the hierarchy than the target domain are preferred over metaphors in which the source domain is higher on the hierarchy than the target domain.

For example, in a metaphor such as *sweet silence* the source domain taste is lower on the hierarchy than the target domain sound and hence this metaphor is preferred over its counterpart *silent sweetness*, in which the source domain sound is higher on the hierarchy than the target domain taste. Indeed, our findings suggest that in Indonesian corpora, synaesthetic metaphors in compliance with principle (2) tend to occur more frequently than their counterparts in violation of the principle. And correspondingly, subjects in Indonesian perform better on a variety of experimental tasks when presented with synaesthetic metaphors that satisfy principle (2) than they do when faced with other metaphors that violate the same principle. On the basis of the above results, it would seem, then, that the hierarchy of senses and principle (2) are promising candidates for universality in the domain of synaesthetic metaphors.