

A NOTE ON A REFERENCE BY J. D. McCAWLEY TO ADJECTIVES DENOTING TEMPERATURE

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In his essay *The Role of Semantics in a Grammar*,¹ J. D. McCawley asserts in the context of a discussion of lexical items that there exist implicational relationships between lexical items of a language whereby the existence of an element is implied by the existence of another, although the first element does not appear in the lexicon. As an example he cites "the words for temperature ranges (*warm, cool* and so forth)", which may be used not only to denote temperature but also that temperature sensation produced by wearing an article of clothing; for instance, the English sentence

(1) *This coat is warm*

may mean either that the coat has a high temperature or that it makes the wearer feel warm. McCawley notes the same ambiguity in Hungarian, and it is certainly present in German:

(2) *Dieser Mantel ist warm*

McCawley goes on, however, to propose "that English has two lexical items *warm*, of which only one appears in the lexicon, the other being predictable on the basis of a principle that for each lexical item which is an adjective denoting a temperature range there is a lexical item identical to it save for the fact that it is restricted to articles of clothing and means 'producing the sensation corresponding to the temperature range denoted by the original adjective'". It is with this assertion that I wish to deal here.

Let us substitute for *warm* in (1) and (2) other adjectives 'denoting a temperature range', both in English

¹ J. D. McCawley, "The Role of Semantics in a Grammar", in E. Bach and R. T. Harms (eds.), *Universals in Linguistic Theory* (New York, 1968). (All quotations are taken from pp. 130-31).

- (3) *This coat is icy*
- (4) *This coat is torrid*
- (5) *This coat is lukewarm*
- (6) *This coat is temperate*

and in German

- (7) *Dieser Mantel ist temperiert*
- (8) *Dieser Mantel ist eisig*
- (9) *Dieser Mantel ist lind*
- (10) *Dieser Mantel ist lauwarm*

The obvious deviance of these examples invalidates immediately McCawley's claim that for EACH temperature adjective there is an equivalent lexical item restricted to articles of clothing. By far the majority of all adjectives denoting temperature (at least in English and German) can be shown to be inapplicable to articles of clothing. Certain involve the selection restriction [liquid] (*tepid, lukewarm, handwarm*), others [weather] (*lind, torrid*), and some are quite narrowly restricted, e.g. *piping hot*, which can only be predicated of food, and then only of liquid food plus certain items cooked in an oven (e.g. *piping hot scones*).²

Is it then the case that McCawley's double-item proposition, though not applicable to the majority of temperature adjectives, nevertheless holds good for the basic scale *hot-warm-cool-cold* and its German counterpart *heiß-warm-kühl-kalt*? (The English and German scales are not exactly equivalent; the opposite to *cold* in English is *hot*, to *kalt* in German, *warm*, etc. But note that in each language a possible centre value is always subject to selection restrictions — e.g. *tepid, lukewarm, lau, lauwarm*.) Consider the following examples:

- (11a) *The coat is warm*
- (11b) *The coat is cool*
- (11c) *The coat is hot*
- (11d) *The coat is cold*

- (12a) *Der Mantel ist warm*
- (12b) *Der Mantel ist kühl*
- (12c) *Der Mantel ist heiß*
- (12d) *Der Mantel ist kalt*

² A fuller discussion of these restrictions will be found in G. Kandler and A. Cutler, "Untersuchung zu den Temperaturbegriffen im Deutschen und Englischen" (forthcoming).

- (13a) *Bring warm clothes with you*
 (13b) *Bring cool clothes with you*
 (13c) *Bring hot clothes with you*
 (13d) *Bring cold clothes with you*
- (14a) *Bringe warme Kleidung mit*
 (14b) *Bringe kühle Kleidung mit*
 (14c) *Bringe heiße Kleidung mit*
 (14d) *Bringe kalte Kleidung mit*
- (15a) *I must change into something warmer*
 (15b) *I must change into something cooler*
 (15c) *I must change into something hotter*
 (15d) *I must change into something colder*
- (16a) *Ich muß mir was Wärmeres anziehen*
 (16b) *Ich muß mir was Kühleres anziehen*
 (16c) *Ich muß mir was Heißeres anziehen*
 (16d) *Ich muß mir was Kälteres anziehen*

Of sentences (11)-(16), only the (a) and (b) examples in each case are normal, i.e. only the adjectives *warm* and *cool* for English and *warm* and *kühl* for German are applicable to articles of clothing, and even then it could well be argued that *cool* and *kühl* in (13b) and (14b) should be replaced by *light* and *leicht* respectively. Finally, although it is possible to say

- (17a) *This coat is too hot* (for today's weather)
 (17b) *This coat is too cold* (for today's weather)

normal usage would prefer

- (18) *This coat is too warm*
 (19) *This coat is not warm enough*

respectively.

Thus the ambiguity which McCawley postulates as holding for "each ... adjective denoting a temperature range" can easily be shown to hold in fact for at the most two lexical items.