

RESPONSE TO TYSON

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It is a pleasure to comment briefly on Rodney Tyson's paper. The predominant attitude in American linguistics, at least since Bloomfield, has been that the lexical meaning of most content words is idiosyncratic, unsystematic, and beyond the realm of scientific study--in short, simply too flaky to bother with. Connected to the attitude was the view that loanwords and semantic change are especially unsystematic; such studies can be no more than lists--amusing to read perhaps, but of little semantic interest.

In contrast, the European tradition stressed the existence of lexical-semantic structure. Saussure (1916, 1959) and especially Trier (1931), who introduced the notion of semantic fields, argued that semantic content, like phonetic content, is structured. Trier's view that the semantic structure of a semantic field is like a mosaic, without gaps or overlaps, has turned out to be wrong, but he was right in arguing that introducing new words in a field are bound to create shifts elsewhere in the field. Bréal's Law of Differentiation (1897) predicts that synonyms are very unstable and will in a short time become differentiated in meaning.

Tyson's paper presents evidence for the correctness of the European perspective. He shows that the introduction of English loanwords into semantic fields in Korean is affecting the meanings of the native words, in some cases restricting or shifting their meaning, and in other cases replacing them. In the cases where two items seem to be synonymous now, there is evidence that younger speakers are imposing a semantic difference. This phenomenon supports Clark's view that children learning language assume that two different forms must reflect different meanings (1992).

Many of the Korean loanwords are nouns denoting concrete physical objects, and such words may not enter into particularly interesting structures; they are likely to be basic-object level words in a simple taxonomy. However, a deeper, more complete study may show interesting changes and shifts in Korean semantic structure.

The next step I would recommend in Tyson's study would be to examine the structure of several semantic fields in detail--fields that have borrowed a number of English words. In such a study, modeled after Trier's work on verbs of knowledge in medieval German, the investigator would compare the semantic structure before and after the borrowing. He would assemble all the lexical items in each field, show their relationships in terms of the relevant lexical-semantic concepts (hyponymy, synonymy, antonymy, etc.). This way we could determine whether the borrowing was relatively superficial, e.g., simply added items to an existing taxonomy, or whether there were substantial shifts, e.g., where a basic object word became superordinate or vice-versa, where a two-way contrast became a three- or four-way contrast (or vice-versa).

A further part of such a study would look at the other parts of speech associated with loanwords, examining the collocations and selectional restrictions. For example, do *kuki* 'cookie' and *pūrenchipūrai* 'French fry' simply collocate with the same items as their Korean counterparts? Initially, one would not expect anything very unusual, but then one has to investigate these matters to be sure.

Finally, this study can serve as the basis of a longitudinal one. Tyson makes predictions about changes in the future. Labov introduced the notion of 'apparent time', where differences in speech patterns between younger and older speakers can be used to predict changes. Labov concentrated on phonological change, but the method could be used for semantic change as well.

In short, I find Tyson's paper an exciting beginning for a whole program of research on lexical borrowing and lexical change. I hope he continues with his work.

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