WHAT IS UNIVERSAL AND WHAT IS LANGUAGE-SPECIFIC IN THE POLYSEMY OF PERCEPTION VERBS?

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Abstract. A major focus in contemporary lexical semantics has been accounting for polysemy and semantic flexibility. The paper intends to present, from a cognitive linguistic perspective, the polysemous meanings of prototypical verbs from the semantic field of perception in English, French and Romanian. The present approach not only highlights similarities and differences between the perception verbs in the three languages, but also attempts to find an explanation for them. With this aim in view, we use the distinction between 'conceptual polysemy' and 'gradual polysemy'. The former type refers to the conceptual mappings that take place between different domains of experience and is universal because the bodily basis of the semantic extensions of perception verbs is shared by and common to all humans within the same cultural background. The latter type is actually the overt realization of conceptual polysemy and can be language-specific, i.e. the semantic content of lexical items varies in different languages.

Keywords: bodily basis, property selection processes, metaphor, conceptual polysemy, gradable polysemy, verb-driven extensions, argument-driven extensions, unpredictable polysemy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Perception verbs have concerned cognitive linguists who focused their attention on issues such as: grammaticalisation (Heine *et al.*, 1991), complementation (Horie 1993), semantic change (Sweetser[2] 1990, Haser 2003) and polysemy (Ibarrexte-Antuñano 1999, 2008). The present study analyzes the meanings of perception verbs in English, Romanian and French, starting from one important tenet of cognitive linguistics: meanings are motivated and grounded more or less directly in experience, in our bodily, physical and social/cultural experiences, and then elaborated by the cognitive process of metaphor.

The domain of physical perception is polysemous because it does not only refer to physical perception itself, but also to other domains of experience such as knowledge, reasoning, emotion, etc. Therefore, internal mental processes such as cognition and affection, thinking and emotion are metaphorically represented as perceptual processes. The first of this, COGNITION IS PERCEPTION, is extremely prolific in terms of lexis,

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[2] Both Sweetser (1990) and Heine *et al.* (1991) argue that the semantic change that underlies grammaticalisation involves metaphorical extention. According to Sweetser (1990: 27) grammaticalisation refers to "the routes by which words travel from lexical content word status to grammatical morpheme status".

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especially the mapping (i.e. conceptual correspondence) UNDERSTANDING/KNOWING IS SEEING, where SEEING is the source domain and UNDERSTANDING or KNOWING stands for the target domain: e.g. *He could see what was behind my actions* or *She sees only what she wants to see*.

Taking the MIND-AS-BODY conceptual metaphor as the background of our discussion, we follow Sweetser (1990: 29) and assume that this metaphor is motivated by our tendency to derive our vocabulary of the mind from our vocabulary of the body; in other words, we conceptualize one area of experience, i.e. the mind, in terms of another, i.e. the body.

Sweetser's view is that this metaphor is probably motivated by the correspondences between our external experience and our internal emotional cognitive states. Another important point is that the correspondences between these two domains of experience are unidirectional: from the vocabulary of bodily experience to the vocabulary of psychological states and not the other way round.

However, as we will see in the ensuing sections, at a closer look, the polysemy of perception verbs in different languages (e.g. English, Romanian, and French) includes, apart from the prototypical sense perception, both metaphorical, abstract senses and physical extended meanings. Our main purpose, therefore, will be to account for both types of semantic extensions in the polysemy of perception verbs and to identify commonalities and differences in the semantics of English, Romanian, and French perception verbs. The focus of our analysis will be on the following prototypical perception verbs[3]: *see, hear/listen, touch, smell/sniff* and *tast.* We will approach them in the following manner: Section 2 gives a brief overview of important previous research on this subject. This is followed by our analysis in section 3, based on the complementary model of polysemy proposed by Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999). Finally, in section 4, we will include final remarks and issues for further research.

2. PERCEPTION VERBS REVISITED

2.1. Sweetser's (1990) approach of metaphors of perception

Sweetser (1990) analyzes the semantic extensions of perception verbs in Indo-European languages, from a cognitive and diachronic viewpoint. As shown in the Introduction, the American linguist shares the cognitive linguistic view concerning the motivation of polysemy and argues that

> "The vocabulary of physical perception (...) shows systematic metaphorical connections with the vocabulary of internal self and internal sensations. These connections are not random correspondences, but highly motivated links between parallel or analogous areas of physical and internal sensation." (Sweetser 1990: 45)

[3] According to the semantic role of their subjects, perception verbs are classified in three groups: (1) involuntary/passive (or verbs of experience), (2) agentive/active (or verbs of activity), and (3) percept /stimulus subject verbs or copula verbs.

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Examining various Indo-European languages, she proposes the following generalization: 'seeing' verbs are extended into the meaning of 'knowledge' or 'mental vision', while 'hearing' verbs are linked with the meaning of 'internal receptivity' or 'obedience'. Furthermore, 'taste' verbs are linked with our internal self, and are used to represent our personal likes and dislikes.

The idea that the semantic extensions of perception verbs are strongly influenced by cultures appears both in Sweetser (1990) and Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999, 2008). For example, Sweetser (1990: 39) emphasizes that the verbs of 'seeing' are mainly associated with intellection in Indo-European languages because "vision is our primary source of objective data about the world." Besides, she interestingly notes that:

"In the older Indo-European cultures physical and spiritual vision were so strongly connected that physical blindness was considered to be a necessary concomitant of the highest level of internal (intellectual and spiritual) vision; the great prototypical mythical and prophets were blind ... But in these cultures the spiritual realm ... was objective and real and only to be seen by those with appropriate inner vision."

However, Evans and Wilkins (2000) maintain that Australian languages (approximately 60), recruit verbs of cognition like *think* and *know* from *hear*, but not from *see.* They argue that "the same semantic domain can have its UNIVERSAL and its RELATIVISTIC side, a foot in nature and a foot in culture (...)".

2.2. Ibarretxe-Antuñano's (1999) model of polysemy in perception verbs

Another cognitive linguist, Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999), discusses the polysemy of perception verbs in a synchronic typological study focused on English, Basque, and Spanish. Reviewing Sweetser's semantic account of perception verbs and Pustejovsky's (1995) Generative Lexicon, she identifies advantages and shortcomings in the two approaches and proposes a complementary view that we will present next and subsequently follow in our analysis in section 3.

2.2.1. *The bodily basis of the semantic field of perception*

In Cognitive Linguistics it is claimed that the semantic extensions of perception verbs are accounted for by the bodily basis of these verbs (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Sweetser 1990), but there is no discussion about what is exactly the bodily basis in the field of perception. Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999) characterizes the five senses (vision, hearing, taste, touch, and smell) in terms of properties[4] which she believes to be the bodily basis of the semantic extensions of perception verbs. She classifies the main properties that characterize the different sense modalities in terms of three parameters: (1) the relation between the three main elements in perception: the perceiver (PR), the object perceived

[4] The description of these properties is based on physiological and psychological studies on senses.

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(OP) and the act of perception (P); (2) the applicability of the properties of the senses; (3) the interrelation among properties.

According to criterion (1) she identifies properties such as contact, closeness, internal, limits and location. Contact has a negative value in the senses of vision, hear and smell; and a positive value in the senses of touch and taste. Closeness has a negative value in the case of vision and hearing (hence, their label of 'far senses') and a positive value in the case of the remaining three senses (hence, the label 'near senses' for touch, smell, and taste). The property 'internal' has a positive value in hearing, smell and taste; and a negative value in vision and touch. The property 'limits' refers to whether the perceiver (PR) is aware of the boundaries imposed by the object perceived (OP) when perceived. For example, when we touch something we are invading the space of that thing/person we are touching. The property 'location', which applies to vision and hearing, refers to whether the perceiver (PR) is aware of the situation of the object perceived (OP) when perceiving. For example, vision gives us information about how far the object perceived (OP) is from the perceiver (PR). In the case of hearing, one can also identify the direction from which sounds are coming (sound localization).

Criterion (2) refers to the distribution of the properties mentioned above in the senses. For instance, the distribution of the properties 'limits' and 'location' is restricted only to some senses, as shown above.

Finally, criterion, (3), refers to whether the properties are pure or composite, i.e., whether or not they are the result of the interrelation of several properties.

The properties characterizing the source domain of sense perception can explain how some meanings are conveyed by certain perception verbs, and not others. They can also show what elements can take part in the generation of extended meanings. Relative to what and how much information from the source domain (SD) is selected and transferred onto the target domain (TD) Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999) puts forward the hypothesis of 'Property Selection' which can account for semantic extensions that remain physical[5].

In previous Cognitive Linguistic literature the mapping process in metaphorical production and comprehension was viewed as being constrained by the so-called 'Invariance Principle' (Lakoff 1993) according to which "metaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology of the source domain in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain." (Lakoff 1993: 215). The process called 'Property Selection', reminding, to some extent, of the 'Invariance Principle' states that the properties selected in the target domain must be part of the properties identified in the source domain and no others.

2.2.2. *The compositional approach to polysemy*

The semantic extensions of perception verbs are constrained by the bodily basis of the source domain from which they originated, structured by metaphor and property selection processes and also triggered by the semantic content of the different elements that co-occur in the same sentence, to a bigger or smaller degree. The relation between the

[5] The absence of any detailed discussion regarding physical semantic extensions of perception verbs in Sweetser's (1990) account of polysemy is viewed as a gap by Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999); we do not entirely share this view because Sweetser's work mainly concentrates on metaphorical aspects of semantic structure and metaphor applies only to abstract meanings.

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polysemous senses of perception verbs and the semantic content of the co-occurring elements in the construction or sentence is the last issue discussed in Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999).

Her view is in line with cognitive semantics where the traditional distinction between word meaning (lexical semantics) and sentence meaning (compositional semantics) is not seen as a useful division. Cognitive semanticists argue that while words do have well-entrenched meanings, the meaning of any given word is constructed 'online', that is in the context in which it is being used. The principle of compositionality[6] assumes that "words carry meaning in neatly packaged self-contained units and that meaning construction results from the combination of these smaller units into larger units of meaning within a given grammatical structure" (Evans and Green 2006: 214).

Pustejovky's assumption[7] that a core set of word senses is used to generate a larger set of word senses when individual lexical items are combined with others into phrases and clauses has been used in the case of verbs, where meaning extensions are achieved by the combination of the verb with its arguments.

The close connection between the actual senses of perception verbs and the syntactic configurations they enter has been emphasized in Nicula (2012). The Romanian linguist analyses the semantic field of perception verbs in Romanian by combining the semantic criterion with the syntactic criterion and argues that the meanings of perception verbs depend on the semantic nature of the selected arguments. She also establishes a link between the selected argument type and the different types of perception: physical/cognitive, direct/indirect, concrete/abstract. We will refer to this connection in our analysis from section 3.

Ibarretxe-Antuñano tests the hypothesis that meanings are achieved by the combination of the verb with its arguments in the semantic field of perception verbs and finds that the verb *touch* can express (1) an activity where contact is implied (e.g. *John hardly touched the food*) and (2) an accomplishment containing two subevents: an activity and a result (e.g. *John touched Mary*). In the latter example the verb *touch* is ambiguous in the sense that John can affect Mary physically (e.g. making her shiver) or metaphorically, that is, affecting her emotionally.

According to the degree of influence that the semantic content of the different lexical items has on the overall meaning, Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999) identifies three degrees of compositionality:

(a) ambiguous extensions, when it is not possible to predict what the interpretation is by means of argument selection[8]:

(1) John touched Mary.

(b) verb-driven extensions, when it is the verb that mainly governs argument selection and meaning:

[6] The notion of compositionality can be traced to Frege reference who originally formulated the idea that semantics need to be compositional.

[7] This claim lies at the basis of Pustejovky's model, called the Generative Lexicon.

[8] This type of semantic extension is referred to as 'unpredictable polysemy' (Ibarretxe-Antuñano 1999: 214).

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(2) Mary can smell danger from miles away.

(c) argument-driven extensions, when the meaning is mainly determined by the verb arguments and other elements of the sentence:

(3) John hardly touched the food.[9]

These three degrees of compositionality relate to 'gradable polysemy', a hypothesis which states that extended meanings are obtained through the interaction of the different elements of a sentence. Ibarretxe-Antuñano's (1999) model of polysemy includes both conceptual polysemy, which is based on the bodily basis of the semantic field under analysis, and gradable polysemy, which is the overt realization of conceptual polysemy. The analysis of perception verbs in the next section, based on the distinction between conceptual and gradable polysemy, will try to provide an answer to the question in the title of this study.

3. CROSS-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTION VERBS

3.1. Seeing

Vision has been the most studied sense of the five; the parallel between vision and intellection has been made on the basis of these arguments:

(a) the ability to pick out one stimulus at will from many is a salient characteristic of both vision and of thought;

(a) vision gives us data from a distance and the intellectual domain is understood as being an area of personal distance, in contrast to taste or touch that require actual physical contact with the thing sensed, that is closeness or intimacy.

The semantic field of sight provides a vast number of extended meanings which Ibarretxe-Antuñano's (1999, 2002) organizes into four different classes according to the mappings between the (source) domain of physical visual perception and other (target) domains of experience. These categories are: (1) intellect or mental activity (2) social relationships, (3) reliability and assurance and (4) witness and refer to. The Spanish linguist believes that apart from class two, i.e. social relationships, all these classes can be considered subcases of the MIND-AS-BODY metaphor, a conceptual metaphor "motivated by correspondences between our external experience and our internal emotional and cognitive states". (Sweetser 1990: 30)

[9] The reason why we interpret this sentence with this sense lies not only on the presence of the verb 'to touch', but also on those elements that directly complement it, such as "the food" and the adverbial "hardly". Without either of these two elements, it would be impossible to infer a meaning like 'to partake of food'. If we removed the adverbial, as in *John touched the food,* the meaning would correspond to either the prototypical meaning of *touch*, or to the semantic extension 'affect'. If we change the complement that denotes some kind of edible object for some other concrete element as in *John hardly touched the table*, the interpretation of this sentence would be the same as in the case before: a prototypical 'touch' or 'affect' (Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2006: 242).

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The first group of metaphorical extensions is that which relates physical vision with the **intellect** or **mental activity**. In examples (4), (5), (6) and (7), where the meanings of *see* are 'to understand' (4), 'to imagine' (5), 'to consider' (6) and 'to study' (7) the 'perceived entities' are denoted by nominals or constructions with abstract reference**:**

− 'to understand, to foresee':

(4) a. I can see what will happen if you don't understand.
b. Je vois ce qui va suivre si tu ne comprends pas.
c. Nu văd ce te poate împiedica să dormi.
'I do not see what could prevent you from sleeping.'

− 'to imagine, to visualise':

(5) a. I can't see him as a teacher.
b. Elle ne se voyait pas comme professeure.
c. Nu mă văd în locul lui.
'I can't see myself in his place.'

− 'to consider/to regard/to judge':

(6) a. Every one has their way of seeing things.
b. Tout homme a sa manière de voir.
c. Văd că totul e în zadar.
'I see everything is in vain.'

− 'to revise, to study':

(7) a. I have to see how I fix it.
b. Je dois voire comment le réparer.
c. Vezi ce zice Hugo în 'Les Misérables'.
'See what Hugo says in 'Les Misérables''.

Gradually, the verb *see* acquires meanings pertaining to a wider perceptual domain, where visual perception is associated with agentive processes[10] such as 'meeting' (8), 'visiting' (9) 'receiving' (10) and 'going out with someone' (11), all of them referred to as **social relationships.** In these examples the verb *see* expresses physical, direct perception and the perceived entities, marked [+ concrete] are in the visual area of the speaker:

− 'to meet':

(8) a. I'll see you at seven.
b. On se voit à sept heures.
c. Ne vedem deseară.
'I'll see you tonight'.

[10] Nicula (2012: 123) relates the agentive use of the verb *see* expressing physical, direct perception with arguments that have concrete reference.

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− ‘to visit’:

(9) a. I'm going to see my solicitor now.
b. Je vais voir l'avoue.
c. S-a dus să-şi vadă părinţii.
‘He went to see his parents.’

− ‘to receive’:

(10) a. The doctor will see you now.
b. On va vous voire maintenant.
c. Vă vede imediat domnul doctor.
‘The doctor will see you next.’

− ‘to go out with’:

(11) a. They have been seeing each other for a year.
b. −
c. Se văd de ceva vreme.
‘They have been seeing each other for some time.’

− ‘to get on badly’ (in negative forms):

(12) a. They can't see each other.
b. −
c. Nu mă vede cu ochi buni.
‘He cannot bear me’.

Though belonging to the group of meanings related to social relationship, we believe that the use of the verb *see* in (12) is non-agentive (passive) rather than agentive, as in the previous examples.

A third group of extended meaning is that which links vision to **reliability and assurance**. Nicula (2012) observes that these semantic extensions, relating to the agentive use of *see* usually occur in imperative sentences and that sometimes *see* functions as a downtoner of a directive act[11], as in (14b) and (14c):

− ‘ascertain/find out, make sure’:

(13) a. See that it gets done right away.
b. Les hôtes voient à ce que tous les invités soient à table.
c. Vezi dacă sunt locuri pentru toţi.
‘See if there are seats for everybody.’

− ‘take care’:

[11] Other pragmatic values attached to the Romanian verb *a vedea* ‘see’ in the imperative form are ‘warning’ and ‘prediction’ (see Nicula 2012: 127).

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(14) a. It's up to you to see the job done properly.
b. Voyez à accueillir ce jeune homme avec chaleur.
c. Vezi să fie lucrarea gata!
'See that the work is through!'

The fourth group of meanings possible in vision verbs includes **witness:**

(15) a. He has seen much unhappiness in this life.
b. Il a vu beaucoup de malheur dans sa vie.
c. Câte n-am văzut şi eu în viaţa mea!
'I have seen a lot in my life!'

and **to refer to**:

(16) a. Persons interested in the history of this book should see page one of the preface.
b. À voir les instructions à la page 15.
c. Vezi Bidu-Vrănceanu 2010: 63.
'See Bidu-Vrănceanu 2010: 63.'

In the four major groups of semantic extensions relating to vision that we have identified in English, French and Romanian, there are very few instances in which one language (e.g. French) does not share two meanings: 'go out with' (11) and 'get on badly' (12). In English there is also the meaning 'to escort' (*I'm seeing Jane home now*.) that is not shared by French and Romanian. In terms of compositionality, we notice cases of verb-driven expressions (4-8) and argument driven-extensions (14). An interesting combination that achieves the meaning 'to visit' in the three languages is GO + SEE (9).

3.2. Hearing

The metaphorical senses of the verbs of hearing can be easily inferred if we understand hearing as being universally connected with the internal as well as the external aspects of speech perception. Sweetser (1990: 41) argues that "it is natural that physical auditory reception should be linked with heedfulness and internal receptivity ("not being *deaf* to someone's plea") and hence also to obedience ...."

Internal receptivity in the sense of **understanding** what is heard, is certainly often connected with the vocabulary of physical hearing:

(17) a. If I have heard well, you want to say that there is no solution.
b. Il n'entend pas l'anglais.
c. N-am auzit ce-ai spus.
'I didn't hear what you said.'

Readiness to internally receive and understand involves also a readiness to subject oneself to the speaker's influence and perhaps to respond in desired way. In fact, verbs of hearing by themselves do not mean 'obey' or 'pay attention'. It is in the context of conversation, hence interpersonal relation, that they acquire that meaning. Ibarretxe-

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Antuñano (1999) supports this idea by giving examples from English (*be deaf to a plea*), French (*faire le sourd*) and Spanish (*Hacer oidos sordos*). To these examples we can add the Romanian expression *a rămâne surd la* 'turn a deaf ear to'.

Hearing is said to be the sense of **linguistic communication;** actually, in all the meanings, both concrete and abstract, it seems to be so. Some of the extended meanings that can be found cross-linguistically are, therefore, 'heed'/'pay attention to' (18), and 'to obey' (19) expressed by the agentive verb *listen to,* the French *écouter*, and the Romanian *asculta*:

(18) a. Listen to what I'm telling you!
b. Écoute-moi bien!
c. Ascultă-mă cu luare-aminte!

(19) a. I told you to listen to your mother.
b. Il n'écoute jamais les conseils de sa mère.
c. Asculta-mă și du-te să o vezi.
'Take my word and go to see her!'

Other extended meanings of verbs of hearing are 'to be told', 'to be informed':

(20) a. I heard you are going to Scotland.
b. J'ai entendu que tu vas aller en Ecosse.
c. Am auzit că pleci în Statele Unite.
'I heard you're going to the USA.'

Like the verb *see*, *hear* can have a cognitive sense, i.e. understanding (17). The difference is that hearing is connected with the specifically communicative aspects of understanding rather than with intellection in general, as in the case of seeing.

One of the extended meanings found cross-linguistically was 'to heed, to pay attention to' (18). A further development of this meaning is that in some contexts the speaker does not only demand attention, but also that the hearer should or shouldn't do what the speaker is telling him to do (19).

The meanings 'pay attention to' and 'obey', illustrated in (18) and (19) respectively, involve the use of the agentive (active) counterparts of *hear*, *entendre* and *auzi*, i,e. *listen to, écouter* and *asculta.* This is not surprising, as any act of linguistic communication (the target domain in this case) also involves the feature /+voluntary/. In other words, the property /+voluntary/, which is part of the source domain, also characterizes the target domain. This is an instance of 'Property Selection', discussed in Section 2.2.1.

As for the meaning 'to be told', 'to be informed', it can be linked with the idea of evidentiality, in the sense that hearing verbs can provide two kinds of evidence: attached or direct when the source of the speaker's information is of a primary source; and indirect reported when the source is of secondary origin, that is hearsay. The contexts provided in (20) exemplify the latter type, i.e. mediated, indirect perception where the verb *hear* expresses a cognitive act (KNOWING/BEING TOLD IS HEARING) rather than a perceptual act proper.

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3.3. Touch

Unlike sight and hearing that are connected with intellectual processing, the sense of touch has always been related to the field of **emotions** *(e.g. I'm deeply touched, touching words).* The cognitive explanation for the mapping between the source domain of touching and the target domain of emotions is provided in Sweetser (1990: 44), who points out that "Physical pain of any serious nature is bound to make the subject unhappy emotionally and physical pleasure or well-being certainly promotes a cheerful emotional state". As will be shown below, the verb *touch* does not map only onto the field of emotions, but onto other semantic fields as well. The physical extended meaning 'to partake of food or drink' is exemplified in (21):

(21) a. He hardly touched any food.
b. Il n'a pas touché au plat.
c. Abia s-a atins de mâncare.
'He hardly touched the food.'

As far as metaphorical meanings are concerned, they are:

− 'to affect'[12]

(22) a. His appeal touches us deeply.
b. Votre propos m'a touché au coeur.
c. Cuvintele lui m-au atins până la lacrimi.
'His words moved me to tears.'

− 'to reach':

(23) a. He touched the highest point in his career.
b. L'année scolaire touche à sa fin.
c. Euro a atins cel mai redus nivel din acest an.
'The Euro has reached the lowest level this year.'

− 'to deal with':

(24) a. I wouldn't touch that business.
b. C'est un taboo. Ne touchez pas à ce sujet!
c. Nu vrea să atingă acest subiect sensibil.
'He won't touch this sensitive issue.'

The verb *touch* 'partake of food or drink' can occur cross-linguistically in argument-driven expression (21) and *touch* 'affect' occurs in verb-driven expression (22). In other words, the same elements were crucial in the lexicalisation of those meanings in English,

[12] As shown in section 2.2.2, in English, *touch* 'to affect' can be ambiguous between a physical and a metaphorical interpretation.

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French and Romanian, and as a result they were classified under the same degree of compositionality. We further notice that in French and Romanian, in order to obtain the meaning 'to affect', it is necessary to add a verb complement (e.g. *au coeur* and *până la lacrimi* 'to tears' that denotes feelings.

These examples show that, although the same conceptual mappings between different domains take place cross-linguistically, the strategies that each language follows to express such meanings are different. What in one language can be expressed by a single lexical item (e.g. the verb *touch* in English), in other languages may require several lexical items (e.g. *toucher au coeur* in French and *a atinge până la lacrimi* in Romanian) to generate the same meaning. This statement can be viewed as an answer to the question in the title of this study.

Besides these meanings that can be found cross-linguistically, there are also meanings specific to each language. For example, in English, we can also find *touch* with the sense "to ask for a loan" (*Touch a friend for five dollars*).

In colloquial Romanian and French we can find the meaning "give a beating", related, in our opinion, to the physical interpretation of 'affect', i.e. 'to harm':

(25) a. −
b. Il ne faut pas toucher à cet enfant!
c. Îl mai atingea din când în când.
'He used to give him a beating from time to time.'

We believe that a metaphorical extension of the meaning in (25) is the meaning 'to offend' which can be found in French and Romanian, but not in English:

(26) a. −
b. Il m'a touché au vif.
c. S-a simțit cam atins de gluma ta.
'He felt rather offended by your joke.'

3.4. Smell

The sense of smell is considered a weaker source domain for metaphorical meanings in comparison with the other senses. Sweetser (1990: 43) takes the view that this sense "has fewer and less deep metaphorical connections with the mental domain than the other senses". The verbs used in this analysis (*smell* and *sniff* in English, *sentir* and *renifler* in French and (*a-i*) *mirosi* in Romanian) are mainly used in colloquial language. Apart from its physical meaning, *smell* has two metaphorical senses: 'suspect' (27) and 'to guess beforehand, to sense something intuitively' (28), both of them shared by French and Romanian:

(27) a. I smell something fishy about this deal.
b. Ça sent la duperie.
c. Afacerea îi mirosea a corupție.
'The deal smacked of corruption to him'

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(28) a. Mary can smell trouble a mile away.
b. J'ai reniflé une bonne affaire.
c. Mirosise că se petrec nereguli.
'He had smelled something fishy about that.'

Although sometimes 'guess' and 'suspect' can be taken as synonyms, in the above examples they appear to be different. 'Suspect' always carries a negative meaning, while 'guess' might refer to either something negative or positive.

'To guess' and 'to suspect' are not the only two possible metaphorical extensions in the domain of smell. In English, the smell verbs *sniff* can mean 'to investigate' (*The police has been sniffing around here again*.) and 'to disdain', 'to show contempt' (*The critics sniffed at the adaptation of the novel to film.*). These two senses are not shared by French and Romanian.

3.4. Taste

Taste is a physical sense which seems to be universally linked to personal likes and dislikes or 'tastes' in people's mind. Personal likes and dislikes in other domains − clothing, music, friends − are subjective, in the sense that they are variable across people.

The extended meanings that taste verbs have cross-linguistically are:

− 'to experience something':

(29) a. He has tasted the frustration of defeat.
b. Elle goûte trop les plaisirs de la vie.
c. A gustat din viața de marinar.
'He experienced a sailor's life.'

− 'to enjoy'[13]:

(30) a. He tasted of the life of the rich.
b. En été on goûte la fraîcheur du bois.
c. În ultimii ani ai vieții a gustat farmecul vieții rurale.
'In the last years of his life he enjoyed the charm of rural life.'

4. CONCLUSIONS

Perception verbs are not only used to describe physical perception (see an object, hear a sound, touch an object, taste an object) but also to convey other meanings from different domains of experience, such as 'to understand' (*I see what you mean*), 'to obey' (*Listen to your mother*), 'to affect emotionally' (*John touched me very deeply*), 'to guess' (*Mary can smell trouble a mile off*), 'to experience' (*He has tasted the frustration of defeat*), etc.

[13] In English this sense is archaic.

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By providing and discussing examples in English, French, and Romanian we wanted to stress the idea that the same conceptual mappings take place between different domains of experience, that is, the same meanings can be identified at the level of conceptual polysemy. However, the systematic relations between semantic elements (meanings) and surface elements (forms) do not usually show one-to-one correspondence across languages. This relationship may take different forms, with multiple semantic elements being expressed by one surface element (e.g. the meanings 'affect physically' and 'affect emotionally' are expressed by *touch* in English), or a single semantic element being expressed by multiple surface elements (e.g. the meaning 'affect emotionally' conveyed by *toucher au coeur* in French and *a atinge până la lacrimi* 'move sb. to tears' in Romanian). Therefore, conceptual polysemy which is universal in the semantic field of perception, can be expressed by different strategies in various languages.

We have also shown that the extended meanings of perception verbs are obtained by the interaction of the semantic content of both the perception verb and its arguments. We have referred to this interaction as gradable polysemy. The role of the semantics of both the perception verb and its arguments is not the same in all extended meanings; in some cases, the verb is more important and in some other cases, the arguments (e.g. *hardly* and *food* in 'He hardly touched any food', *fraicheur du bois* in 'En ete on goute la fraicheur du bois', *subiect sensibil* 'sensitive issue' in 'Nu vrea să atingă acest subiect sensibil'/He won't touch this sensitive issue).

Our discussion of perception verbs in English, French, and Romanian is only tentative as further research is needed into explaining (1) why some senses of perception verbs are language-specific and (2) how do senses of perception verbs relate to each other? One last interesting issue that could be further explored relates to the predictability (if any) of meanings of perception phrasal verbs (e.g. *see out, hear out, smell out*) in English.

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