

You can smell it, but it doesn't really smell.

On non-canonical uses of main olfactory verbs

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The last two decades have reported a growing interest in investigating languages having a rich repertoire of olfactory expressions, cf. O'Meara & Majid 2016 on Seri (isolate, Mexico), Tufvesson 2011 on Semai (Mon-Khmer, Aslian), and Wnuk & Majid 2014 on Maniq (Mon-Khmer, Aslian), among many others. Indo-European languages, on the other hand, usually possess only two or three olfactory verbs. Remarkably, they simultaneously express a hedonic value of what is perceived, as Table 1 shows:

	positive	neutral	negative
German	<i>duften</i>	<i>riechen</i>	<i>stinken</i>
English	-	<i>smell</i>	<i>stink</i>
Afrikaans	-	<i>ruik</i>	<i>stink</i>
Norwegian	<i>dufte</i>	<i>lukte</i>	<i>stinke</i>
Danish	<i>dufte</i>	<i>lugte</i>	<i>stinke</i>
Swedish	<i>dofta</i>	<i>lukta</i>	<i>stinka</i>
Icelandic	<i>ilma</i>	<i>lykta</i>	-
Polish	<i>pachnieć</i>	-	<i>śmierdzieć</i>

Table 1: Main olfactory verbs in selected Indo-European languages

In this talk, I will concentrate on non-canonical uses of the olfactory verbs given in Table 1 and illustrate to what extent the languages under investigation differ. The main focus will be on neutral olfactory verbs and their hedonic implicatures (cf. Krifka 2010). As it will turn out, there is a variation across Germanic languages, showing that whereas German *riechen* and Swedish *lukta* are inclined to be used in contexts with unpleasant odors, Icelandic *lykta* and Afrikaans *ruik* are more restricted in this respect. However, there are also languages, for instance Polish, lacking a formal counterpart of what we call a neutral olfactory verb in the Germanic languages. I will illustrate how Polish speakers fill this gap. Finally, in order to embed my findings into a theoretical framework, I will use the Bidirectional Optimality Theory advocated in Jäger (2002).

References

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