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Semantic Extension of HEAD in Korean and Thai: A Contrastive Perspective

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Abstract—**Modern linguistic traditions have witnessed increasing attention to embodied cognition, culture, and typology. Embodiment is responsible for the universalities of human experience as reflected in language, due to similarities in human cognitive processes such as metaphor and metonymy. Many crosslinguistic studies corroborate the claims of similar cognitive mechanisms operating behind ontological divisions, conceptual networks, construal of events, semantico-functional change of lexemes, among others. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals an array of differences in their operations, largely attributable to culture-specific idiosyncrasies and/or typological dissimilarities, hence the significance of crosslinguistic and comparative investigations. Based on the established cognitive-linguistic theoretical frameworks, this research analyzes the semantic extension of a conceptually prominent body-part term HEAD in Korean (*meli* and *taykali*) and in Thai (*hŭa*) from a comparative perspective. HEAD is among the most perceptually-prominent and functionally-essential body parts, and thus it constitutes a convenient and effective reference point for analyzing embodiment. A comparative investigation reveals commonalities and differences in the conceptualization of HEAD and its semantic extension scenarios, which merit the attention of researchers of cognitive linguistics, linguistic typology, and comparative/contrastive linguistics. This study shows that, most notably, Korean favors contour-based conceptualizations (HEAD is ROUND; HEAD is UNIT), whereas Thai favors horizontal-axis-based conceptualizations (HEAD is FRONT; HEAD is BEGINNING). Furthermore, Korean has multiple lexemes with specialized meanings, including one for animal heads, a reflection of the monosemy strategy of lexicalization, which is in contrast with the polysemy structure in Thai. The multiplicity of HEAD lexemes in Korean is partly responsible for the emergence of pejorative meanings.**

Index Terms—**semantic extension, metaphor, Korean, Thai, HEAD**

I. Introduction

Since the ‘second cognitive revolution’ in linguistics in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2007, p. 7), modern linguistic traditions have witnessed increasing attention to embodied cognition, culture, and typology. Embodiment is responsible for the universalities of human experience as reflected in language (Johnson, 2007), due to similarities in human cognitive processes, such as metaphor and metonymy. Indeed, many crosslinguistic studies corroborate the claims of similar cognitive mechanisms that operate behind ontological divisions, conceptual networks, construal of events, semantico-functional change of lexemes, among others. However, closer scrutiny often reveals an abundance of differences in their operations (Lakoff & Kövecses, 1987; Kövecses, 2005; Yu, 2008; Khammee & Rhee, 2022, among many others), as reflected in lexicalization and grammaticalization, largely due to culture-specific idiosyncrasies and/or typological differences, hence the significance of crosslinguistic investigations (De Busser & LaPolla, 2015 and works therein; Khammee & Rhee, 2021, 2025).

HEAD is among the most perceptually-prominent and functionally-essential body parts, and thus constitutes a convenient and effective reference point for analyzing embodiment as reflected in language (Heine, 1997). Creation of new meanings, i.e., polysemization, depends on how the object, whether tangible or intangible, is conceptualized (Khammee et al., forthc.). For instance, a human ‘head’ may be conceptualized as the ‘top’ part of the body, and by extension a top-end part of any vertical object may be called the ‘head’, e.g., tree-head for the ‘tree top’, mountain-head for the ‘mountain top’, etc. If a human ‘head’ is conceptualized as the ‘controller’ of the human body, the conceptualization thus enables semantic extension to an organization, e.g., school-head for the ‘principal’, head of state for ‘leader of a nation’, etc. Considering the similarities of human experiences, the cognitive operations of conceptualization may be expected to be similar, if not identical. However, a meticulous comparative investigation into

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Korean and Thai reveals both differences and commonalities in the conceptualization of HEAD and its semantic extension scenarios.

The objectives of this paper are to elaborate the lexicalization patterns of HEAD in Korean and Thai, to analyze their relevance to cognitive processes such as metaphor and metonymy, and to highlight the commonalities and differences manifested in the semantic extension of HEAD in both Korean (*meli* and *taykali*) and Thai (*hŭa*).

II. Literature Review

The semantic structure of HEAD lexemes in Korean has been researched by Hong (1986), Woo (1988), Bae (2001, 2002), and Koo (2009), among others. In particular, Koo (2009) investigated the historical change of *meli/mali* 'head' in Korean, addressing both the lexical divergence of the two variants (*meli* and *mali*) into two separate lexemes and the grammaticalization of the latter into a classifier (CLS) for non-human animals. Most extant studies, however, address the HEAD lexeme in conjunction with other body-part terms. On the other hand, the Thai HEAD lexeme *hŭa* has been regrettably understudied, with the only earnest study being that by Lu and Park (2019), although its visibility is somewhat limited for being published in Korean. Lu and Park analyzed the semantic extension of *hŭa* 'head' in terms of the 'idealized cognitive model' (ICM) proposed by Lakoff (1987), and metonymic transfer as detailed in Heine (1997). While Korean and Thai have many distinctive characteristics (see section III for more) in their lexicalization and grammaticalization strategies (Rhee & Khammee, 2024; Khammee & Rhee, 2025), the HEAD lexemes in these two languages have not been investigated in a contrastive way, hence the rationale of the present study.

III. Theoretical Background and Research Methods

The theoretical framework for this study is cognitive linguistics, with special focus on metaphor and polysemy. The theory of metaphor and metonymy was pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and further expounded by many later researchers (Johnson, 1987; Kövecses, 2002; Fauconnier & Turner, 2008; Gibbs, 2008; among others). Regarding the theory of polysemy, Sweetser's (1990) seminal work, as created by diverse pragmatic and cognitive operations, prompted polysemy studies in the historical and pragmatic dimensions, and was followed by a substantive body of research, notably Geeraerts (1993), Nerlich and Clarke (2001), Vanhove (2008), Glynn and Robinson (2014), Vicente and Falkum (2015), Carston (2021), among others. Metaphor and polysemy are closely related since the prominent mechanism for creating a new meaning for a linguistic form (i.e., polysemy) is metaphorical extension.

The target languages of the present study, Korean and Thai, are distinct in a number of ways, namely geographical distance (based in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, respectively), genealogical unrelatedness (Altaic and Kra-Dai, respectively), and typological distinction (an agglutinating-synthetic language and an isolating-analytic language, respectively). These distinct features place the two languages among the ideal target language pairs for comparison of diverse aspects of lexicon and grammar, as demonstrated in Park (2011), Park and Rhee (2018), Khammee and Rhee (2022, 2025), and Rhee and Khammee (2024), among others.

The present research is a conceptual, descriptive analysis of linguistic data, involving no experimentation. Relevant data in the two languages have been collected from a number of dictionaries, lexica, and corpora, and their semantic designations have been rearranged for expedient comparison. The researchers have consulted two authoritative dictionaries: *Wulimalsaym*, an online searchable Korean dictionary of more than 1 million headwords by the National Institute of Korean Language, and the *Thai Royal Dictionary* of 43,000 headwords by the Thai Royal Institute. To ensure comprehensiveness of the semantic designations, two corpora, i.e., the Korean Drama and Movies Corpus (KDMC) and the Thai National Corpus (TNC), were searched. The KDMC is an off-line 24-million-word contemporary corpus based on a collection of 7,454 scenarios in dramas and movies dating from 1992 through 2015, compiled by Min Li, and the TNC is an online-searchable, 33.4-million-word corpus developed by Chulalongkorn University. The corpus texts are mostly dated from 1988 through 2017. For Korean data search, UNICONC, a concordance program developed by Jinho Park, was used[1].

The semantic designations were collected from dictionaries and lexica, and the data collected from the corpora were hand-screened to confirm the inventories of meanings. Based on these meanings, cognitive mechanisms and their reference frames in the form of conceptualization patterns enabling the semantic extension were catalogued, and accordingly individual instances were classified and analyzed.

IV. Results: HEAD in Korean and Thai

A. HEAD in Korean

The two major HEAD lexemes in contemporary Korean, *meli* and *taykali*, both denote 'head' but with different specializations. In addition to these two primary terms, *Wulimalsaym* lists other synonyms including certain pejorative (PEJ) terms (*kolthong* 'head, (lit.) brain box', *kolthongi* 'head, (lit.) one with a brain box', *taykalthong* 'head, (lit.) head box', *pak* 'head, (probably from) gourd'), a potentially pejorative term (*melithong* 'head, (lit.) head box'), an honorific term (*twusang* 'head, (lit.) head top'), and anatomical terms (*twupwu* '(lit.) head part', *twunoy* '(lit.) head brain'). The

[1] Special thanks go to the developers of these corpora and search programs for generously granting their use for research.

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multiplicity of near-synonymous forms, all basically denoting 'head', reflects the 'monosemy' strategy of lexicalization (Khammee & Rhee, 2022; Rhee, 2022). Of these dozen HEAD words, only *meli* (and its former variant and later lexical-split *mali*) and *taykali* are given focus in the present study largely because other forms are genre- and register-specific and thus occur at low frequencies.

A historical development of the HEAD terms shows an intriguing state of affairs. In the Late Middle Korean (15th ~ 16th centuries) texts, *meli* and *mali* occurred as lexical variants that were used interchangeably. Incidentally, Korean has a number of ablaut-based doublets or variants. Koo (2009, pp. 5-6, partly following Lee, 1992; Hong, 2003) observes that *mali* tended to be used in the 15th century to refer to the head of a person with the inherent semantic feature [+honorable] (e.g., Buddha), and thus its occurrence was far less frequent than *meli*, which carried no such semantic feature. By around the 17th century, the semantic distinction involving the [±honorific] feature seems to have been neutralized, and further, *mali* began to be used as a noun referring to either the head of a non-human animal or the whole animal, and as a classifier for quantifying such animals (e.g., two 'heads' of fish, three 'heads' of chicken, etc.). On the other hand, another lexeme used in Late Middle Korean is *tʌykol*, denoting 'head', 'skull', 'brain', with a number of variant forms with pejorative meanings, such as *tʌykal* (pejorative), *tʌykali* (pejorative, involving the nominalizer *-i*), *tʌykoli* (pejorative, involving the nominalizer *-i*), *tʌykangi* (pejorative, involving the diminutive *-angi*), *tʌykali* (pejorative, involving the nominalizer *-i*), *tuykwuli* (pejorative, involving the nominalizer *-i*), among others (Park & Lee, 2018). Some of these forms survived in dialects and idiolects but the form used with some degree of lexical strength is *taykali*. There is still another lexeme *kkokci* 'head, stem, knob' used as a slang term referring to the head in Modern Korean.

In Modern Korean (20th ~ 21st centuries), the two primary HEAD lexemes are *meli* 'head' (which, as a noun, has the [±honorific] feature but, as a derivational suffix, has the [-honorific] feature, i.e., the pejorative meaning), and *taykali* 'head' (which, as a noun, has the [±honorific] feature for non-human objects but the [-honorific] feature as a noun for humans or as a derivational suffix) (Koo, 2009, p. 14; Koo & Rhee, 2016, p. 304). Due to increasing semantic derogation of *taykali*, even animal heads are referred to by *meli* with increasing frequency in Modern Korean. The former HEAD lexeme *mali*, once a variant of *meli*, is now used exclusively for non-human animals either as a classifier (e.g., two 'heads' of cows) or a dependent nominal denoting quantities of animals (e.g., 'a few counts' of fish), the latter use rapidly falling into obsolescence in contemporary Korean. *Wulimalsaym* lists the following meanings of *meli* and *taykali* (translated and modified):

(1) *meli*

a. human (and animal) head	(body-part)
b. mental faculty	(function)
c. hair	(body-part)
d. top-radical in Chinese characters	('hat-head', 'plant-head')
e. leader of an organization	('head of the department')
f. frontal part of an object	('head of a boat, bow', 'head of a road')
g. top-end part of an object	('hammer head')
h. beginning part of an event	('head of a task')
i. beginning of time	('head of sunset', 'head of spring')
j. a corner of a space or an object	('head of a table', 'head of a rice-paddy')
k. a turn or round of an event	('head of a typhoon')
l. the round part of music-note	('note-head')
m. a unitized quantity	('head of donation')
n. a sum of money	('head of money')

(2) *taykali*

a. head of an animal	('a pig head', 'a fish head')
b. head of a person (pejorative)	('the head of the fellow')
c. the frontal part of a long object	('the head of the train')
d. the top part of a long object	('the head of a bean sprout')
e. (suffix for) pejoration	('head of taste', 'head of style')

In addition to the meanings listed in (1) and (2), *meli* and *taykali* add diverse related meanings when they form a compound with other nominals. Some such instances taken from *Wulimalsaym* and Koo (2009) are shown below.

(3) *meli* & *taykali* compounds

a. *meli kkoktayki*	[head top]	'thorough understanding of someone's intentions'
b. *meli kulca*	[head character]	'the first character of a word'
c. *meli kisa*	[head article]	'headline news'
d. *meli tol*	[head stone]	'cornerstone'
e. *meli mal*	[head word]	'preface'
f. *kay meli*	[dog head]	'rifle butt'
g. *kays meli*	[stream head]	'estuary'
h. *can meli*	[small head]	'petty trickery'
i. *tungsim meli*	[sirloin head]	'a lump of sirloin'

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j. *tol taykali* [stone head] 'stupid'
k. *talk taykali* [chicken head] 'stupid'

Following the premises of semantic primitives suggested by Heine et al. (1991) and Heine (1997), among others, which place HUMAN as the most basic ontological category, a reflection of ubiquitous anthropocentrism, we can hypothesize that 'human head' is the primary meaning of *meli* and *taykali* (in their earliest forms), and that attributing this label to an animal, which often occurs instantaneously through personification, is based on similarities in shape and function of animal and human heads. We can further hypothesize that all other meanings in the HEAD polysemy have been derived from it through a few conceptual motivations, based on the image schema of a human head by itself or in relation to the entire human body, as listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1
CONCEPTUAL MOTIVATIONS FOR SEMANTIC EXTENSION OF HEAD IN KOREAN

	Conceptualization	Example	Source Structure	Meaning
a.	HEAD is TOP	*san meli*	[mountain head]	'mountain top'
b.	HEAD is FRONT	*pay meli*	[boat head]	'bow'
c.	HEAD is BEGINNING	*kil meli*	[road head]	'beginning part of a road'
d.	HEAD is LUMP	*tungsim meli*	[sirloin head]	'a lump of beef sirloin'
e.	HEAD is SPATIAL UNIT	*chayksang meli*	[desk head]	'corner of a table'
f.	HEAD is CIRCLE	*umphyo taykali*	[note head]	'round part of musical notes'
g.	HEAD is SPHERE	*khongnamwul taykali*	[bean-sprout head]	'round part of bean-sprout'
h.	HEAD is CONTROLLER	*wus-taykali*	[top head]	'one in charge'
i.	HEAD is IMPORTANCE	*meli tol*	[head stone]	'cornerstone'
j.	HEAD is INTELLIGENCE	*tol taykali*	[stone head]	'be stupid'
k.	HEAD is WHOLE ANIMAL	*so han mali*	[cow one head]	'one cow' (CLS)
l.	HEAD is HAIR	*kemun meli*	[black head]	'black hair'
m.	HEAD is CONTEMPTIBLE	*kocip meli*	[obstinacy head]	'obstinacy' (PEJ)
n.	HEAD is INFERIOR	*mas taykali*	[taste head]	'(unpalatable) taste' (PEJ)

The list of conceptualization patterns in Table 1 shows a few different conceptual bases. For instance, (a) is based on the relative position in a vertical configuration of the human body, (b) is based on either the 'zoomorphic model' (Heine, 1997, pp. 40-41), i.e., the head being FRONT and UP relative to the rest of the animal body, or on the anthropomorphic model according to which human head is interpreted as being located above and in front of other parts (Heine, 1997, pp. 46-47). The pattern in (c) is an extension from (b) in that FRONT is at the boundary and thus can mean the beginning. The patterns in (d) and (e) are based on the shape of the head relative to the rest of the body, i.e., forming an object or a space with a delineable boundary. The patterns in (f) and (g) are based on the shape of the head by itself, either being round in two dimensions or globular in three dimensions. The pattern in (h) is somewhat complex as it combines the pattern (a) of vertical configuration with the 'orientational metaphor' of HAVING CONTROL or FORCE is UP (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 15) as well as the biological function of the head. The patterns in (i) and (j) imply functional basis insofar as the head encases the brain, the command center for all human activities. Since this conceptualization involves the contiguity relations from head to brain to function, these patterns are instances of metonymy. The patterns in (k) and (l) also have metonymic basis, with (k) being an instance of synecdoche (i.e., the part for the whole), and (l) being an instance of contiguity (i.e., hair attached to the head). The patterns in (m) and (n) involve conceptualization leading to pejoration, (m) by way of absorbing the negative meanings from the lexeme with which HEAD is forming a compound (cf. 'absorption', Bybee et al., 1994), and (n) by virtue of animals' inherent inferiority (note that *taykali* is for animal heads) in contrast with *meli* (note that *meli* is primarily for, though not restricted to, human heads). Some of these conceptualization patterns are further elaborated in Section V.

B. HEAD in Thai

The primary lexeme of HEAD in Thai is *hŭa* 'head', which has numerous meanings related to the human body-part head. In addition to *hŭa*, other closely-related lexemes are *sĭisà* 'head' and *sĭan* 'head'. The former is a borrowing from Pali and Sanskrit and is used in highly formal registers to refer to a human head. The latter is also a borrowing from Pali and Sanskrit and is used to refer to the head of Buddha, either the person or an image, and of the king (note that Thai possesses a strong convention of diglossic language use in which the king is treated as a divine being in contrast with humans). Due to these limiting factors, *sĭisà* and *sĭan* occur at extremely low frequencies, and only *hŭa* is regarded as a 'regular' HEAD lexeme for Thai speakers. This starkly contrasts Korean, which has nearly a dozen words denoting 'head'. This contrast has been noted in Khammee and Rhee (2022, 2025) and characterized with the notions of monosemy strategies for Korean and polysemy strategies for Thai. The *Thai Royal Dictionary* has the following list of semantic designations for *hŭa* (translated and modified):

(4) *hŭa*
a. the top part of the body of a human or animal
b. the part of a plant (e.g., bulb, tuber, root) which is underground, such as an onion or turnip
c. the circle part (beginning) of a letter
d. the part that is in front, before, or at the beginning of something
e. the beginning of time, such as the beginning of the year, day, hour, etc.

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f. the top part of the object, such as the top end of a boil on skin or pimple
g. the side of the coin with the image of the head
h. the essence of a substance or main ingredient, such as that of medicine or liquor
i. intelligence, talent, or originality (e.g., 'music head' = musical talent)
j. someone who has knowledge or is disposed to think in one way or another (e.g., 'law head' = legal mind)
k. wisdom, thought (e.g., 'good-headed' = wise; 'quick-headed' = intelligent)
l. (verb) laugh (old-fashioned term) (cf. modern *hŭa-rɔ́* 'laugh')
m. classifier for humans (limited usage)

In addition to the semantic designations listed in (4), *hŭa* adds diverse related meanings when it forms a compound with other nominals. Some such instances taken from the *Thai Royal Dictionary* are shown in (5) below.

(5) *hŭa*-compounds

a. *hŭa kâawnâa*	[head progress]	'progressive'
b. *hŭa kàw*	[head old]	'old-fashioned, conservative'
c. *hŭa khĕŋ*	[head strong]	'obstinate'
d. *hŭa rán*	[head resist]	'obstinate'
e. *hŭa dɯ̂ɯ*	[head stubborn]	'obstinate'
f. *hŭa ŋuu*	[head snake]	'womanizer'
g. *hŭa rɔ́ɔn*	[head hot]	'easily-angered'
h. *hŭa sĭa*	[head bad]	'furious'
i. *hŭa runrɛɛŋ*	[head severe]	'aggressive, extreme'
j. *hŭa sŭuŋ*	[head high]	'arrogant, snobbish'
k. *hŭa rew*	[head fast]	'smart, brilliant'
l. *hŭa dii*	[head good]	'smart, wise'
m. *hŭa mɔ̌ɔ*	[head expert/doctor]	'wise, crafty'
n. *hŭa lĕɛm*	[head sharp]	'quick-witted, smart'
o. *hŭa săy*	[head transparent]	'shrewd, bright'
p. *hŭa hòt*	[head shrink]	'fearful'
q. *hŭa ɔ̀ɔn*	[head soft]	'mild, obedient'

From the previous analysis of the Korean HEAD lexemes, we can hypothesize that in Thai the human head is the primary denotation of *hŭa* and animal head is the secondary denotation, and, further, that all other meanings have been derived from the primary (and secondary) meanings through conceptual motivations. The conceptualization patterns based on the diverse meanings of *hŭa* are listed in Table 2[2].

TABLE 2
CONCEPTUAL MOTIVATIONS FOR SEMANTIC EXTENSION OF HEAD IN THAI

	Conceptualization	Example	Source Structure	Meaning
a.	HEAD is FRONT	*hŭa rɯa*	[head boat]	'bow'
b.	HEAD is BEGINNING	*hŭa thanŏn*	[head road]	'beginning part of a road'
c.	HEAD is LUMP	*hŭa khɔ́ɔn*	[head hammer]	'hammer head'
d.	HEAD is SPATIAL UNIT	*hŭa mum tó*	[head corner table]	'corner of a table'
e.	HEAD is CIRCLE	*hŭa nóot*	[head note]	'round part of musical notes'
f.	HEAD is SPHERE	*hŭa phàkkàat*	[head turnip]	'round part of a turnip'
g.	HEAD is CONTROLLER	*hŭa cook*	[head leader]	'gang lord'
h.	HEAD is DOMINANCE	*hŭa yaa*	[head drug]	'main ingredient of medicine'
i.	HEAD is INTELLIGENCE	*hŭa rew*	[head fast]	'intelligent'
j.	HEAD is EMOTION	*hŭa sĭa*	[head bad]	'furious'
k.	HEAD is CONATION	*hŭa rán*	[head resist]	'obstinate'
l.	HEAD is ATTITUDE	*hŭa sŭuŋ*	[head high]	'arrogant'
m.	HEAD is MINDSET	*hŭa kâawnâa*	[head progress]	'progressive'
n.	HEAD is SKILL	*hŭa ŋuu*	[head snake]	'womanizer, skillful in alluring'
o.	HEAD is WHOLE PERSON	*hâa hŭa*	[five person head]	'five persons' (CLS)
p.	HEAD is IMAGED SIDE	*hŭa rĭan*	[head coin]	'imaged side of a coin'
q.	HEAD is LAUGH (archaic)	*hŭa-rɔ́*	[head utter]	'laugh'

The list of conceptualization patterns for Thai listed in Table 2 shows both notable similarities and differences as compared to those for Korean listed in Table 1 (see section V for more). The conceptualization patterns are based on horizontal configuration (as in (a) and (b)), or the shape of the head itself (as in (c), (d), (e), and (f)). The patterns in (g) through (n) relate to the diverse aspects of mental faculty, obviously from the function of the brain. The pattern in (o) is an instance of synecdoche for humans, and the pattern in (p) is the part-whole metonymy whereby the image of a head represents the entire side of the coin. The pattern in (q) is puzzling because the connection between 'head' and 'laugh' is not immediately clear. If one is inclined to think that laughter originates from the 'head' physiologically, and thus 'head' can mean 'laugh' (note that Thai is a language of high transcategoriality and parts of speech are more fluid), this may

[2] It is to be noted that *hŭa* is also used with the pattern 'HEAD is REPRESENTATIVE' (as in 'head of the department', 'head of the institute', etc.), but this usage requires *nâa* 'face', which is primarily responsible for the creation of the representation meaning (see Khammee & Rhee, 2022).

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qualify as an instance of metonymy. This type of metonymy, however, seems to be rather rare or non-existent crosslinguistically, the only head-laugh(ter) connection commonly observed is the English expression *to laugh one's head off*, meaning 'laugh uncontrollably or heartily', suggesting that the head is affected by laughing. Although, it remains a puzzle as to how exactly HEAD can denote LAUGH. Incidentally, *hŭa* in this usage is being, or has been, replaced by a new yet related lexeme *hŭa-rɔ́* in Modern Thai, in which the compound-forming verb *rɔ́* denotes 'utter, make sound', thus prompting the reinterpretation of 'sound (coming from the) head', i.e., to 'laugh'.

V. Discussion: Lexicalization Patterns

Based on the semantic extension patterns of HEAD in Korean and Thai as elaborated in the foregoing exposition, we will now discuss commonalities and differences in lexicalization patterns. All the patterns observed in the two languages can be summarized in Table 3.

Table 3
Conceptual Motivations for Semantic Extension of HEAD in Korean and Thai

	Conceptualization	Example	Korean	Thai
a.	human head	'head (of a person)'	√	√
b.	animal head	'head (of a dog, fish, insect)'	√	√
c.	HEAD is TOP	'mountain top'	√	N
d.	HEAD is FRONT	'bow (of a boat), beginning of events'	√	√
e.	HEAD is BEGINNING	'beginning part of a season, road, bridge'	√ (season, road); N (*bridge)	√ (season, road, bridge)
f.	HEAD is LUMP	'hammer head'	√	√
g.	HEAD is UNIT IN SPACE	'corner of a table'	√	√
h.	HEAD is UNIT OF EVENT	'incident of typhoon'	√	N
i.	HEAD is UNIT OF QUANTITY	'sum of money'	√	N
j.	HEAD is CIRCLE	'round part of music notes, script'	√ (note); N (*script)	√ (note, script)
k.	HEAD is SPHERE	'round part of a bean-sprout, turnip'	√ (sprout); N (*turnip)	√ (sprout, turnip)
l.	HEAD is CONTROLLER	'head of state'	√	√
m.	HEAD is IMPORTANCE	'cornerstone'	√	N
n.	HEAD is DOMINANCE	'main ingredient of medicine'	N	√
o.	HEAD is INTELLIGENCE	'intelligent'	√	√
p.	HEAD is EMOTION	'furious'	N	√
q.	HEAD is CONATION	'obstinate'	N	√
r.	HEAD is ATTITUDE	'arrogant'	N	√
s.	HEAD is MINDSET	'progressive'	N	√
t.	HEAD is SKILL	'womanizer, skillful in seducing'	N	√
u.	HEAD is WHOLE PERSON	'five persons' (CLS)	N	√
v.	HEAD is WHOLE ANIMAL	'five cows' (CLS)	√	N
w.	HEAD is HAIR	'black hair'	√	N
x.	HEAD is CONTEMPTIBLE	'obstinacy' (PEJ)	√	N
y.	HEAD is INFERIOR	'(unpleasant) taste' (PEJ)	√	N
z.	HEAD is IMAGED SIDE	'imaged side of a coin'	N	√
aa.	HEAD is LAUGH	'v. laugh'	N	√

A. Commonalities

Table 3 shows that in both Korean and Thai the primary use of HEAD is to refer to human and animal heads, and that a few other categories of conceptualization patterns are found in both languages, which drive semantic extension. It is noteworthy that some common conceptualization patterns may have different degrees of application, as indicated by "N" for specific instances.

Those that show complete overlap are (d) FRONT, (f) LUMP, (g) UNIT IN SPACE, (l) CONTROLLER, and (o) INTELLIGENCE. Obviously, these are the most basic image schemas, as partly elaborated in IV-A above, i.e., FRONT, by virtue of the human head being in the front relative to other body-parts (especially when a human body is in motion) or of animal bodies. The LUMP conceptualization is by virtue of the human head having a noticeably protruding, lump-like mass (thus resembling an appendage extended from the torso), and SPATIAL UNIT, by virtue of the human head having a clearly delineable contour. These are straightforward instances of metaphorization involving cross-domain transfer from the human domain to non-human domains based on the similarity of the relative location or the shape.

The remaining two patterns, CONTROLLER and INTELLIGENCE, are clearly related to the human brain, which is the organ responsible for mental faculty including intelligent thought and all bodily activities. Thus, these extensions constitute the shift based on contiguity, i.e., from HEAD to BRAIN to MENTAL FACULTY, an extension pattern also found in many languages, e.g., English, Chinese, Swahili, Polish, French, and others (Kraska-Szlenk, 2019).

B. Differences

There are notable differences in the conceptualization patterns of HEAD in Korean and Thai, marked in Table 3 by shading in the cell. First of all, as alluded to briefly above, there are instances when the global conceptualization patterns are identical but the scopes of their applications show differences, e.g., (e) BEGINNING, (j) CIRCLE, (k) SPHERE, in the lightly shaded cells. BEGINNING is a concept directly derivable from 'front', expressing the first part of a season,

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road, and bridge by means of HEAD in Thai, whereas in Korean HEAD cannot be applied to structures such as a bridge. This is possibly due to the fact that bridges are symmetrical and do not have an inherent 'beginning' point, whereas in Thai the 'beginning' or 'front' is interpreted with reference to the location of the conceptualizer, i.e., the side closest to the speaker, a situation reminiscent of the 'face-to-face' model of object orientation (Heine, 1997, p. 12). As for CIRCLE, the round part of music notes and circles in scripts are HEAD in Thai, whereas in Korean circles in scripts are not HEADs but simply circles (*tongkulami* or *wen*). This likely arises from the fact that the circular part of Thai letters of the alphabet is the 'beginning' of writing the letter (note that 42 of 44 consonants in the Thai alphabet contain the 'head' and are written beginning with it). In Korean, there are only two alphabetical characters among 14 consonants, and their position is not pre-determined in the syllabic characters. Regarding SPHERE, the globular part of bean-sprouts and the round edible part of a turnip are both HEADs in Thai, whereas in Korean the HEAD of a plant is the top (i.e., greens or leaves) over the ground, and the underground bulb, tuber, or root is simply 'root' (*ppwuli*). The Thai conceptualization pattern may be partly due to the fact that the globular shape of bulbs is more tightly associated with the shape of the human head, whereas in Korean *meli* 'head' can also refer to 'hair', and thus the leafy part of some vegetables can be more easily referred to as 'head/hair', further aided by the HEAD is TOP conceptualization that is prominent in Korean but absent in Thai (see below).

Table 3 also shows a number of conceptualization patterns found only in one language and not in the other, noted in the dark-shaded cells. Those only in Korean are: (c) TOP, (h) UNIT OF EVENT, (i) UNIT OF QUANTITY, (m) IMPORTANCE, (v) WHOLE ANIMAL, (w) HAIR, (x) CONTEMPTIBLE, and (y) INFERIOR; and those only in Thai are: (n) DOMINANCE, (p) EMOTION, (q) CONATION, (r) ATTITUDE, (s) MINDSET, (t) SKILL, (u) WHOLE PERSON, (z) IMAGED SIDE of a coin, and (aa) LAUGH. These are explored in more detail in the following paragraphs.

First of all, considering that (c) TOP is among the most immediately derivable conceptualizations of HEAD and is among the most widely attested in corporeal orientation from HEAD across languages (Heine, 1997; Kuteva et al., 2019), the fact that Thai does not use this schema for semantic extension of HEAD makes Thai an exceptional language. In this context, it is noteworthy that the top end of a staff or a scepter is called the 'head' in Thai (e.g., *hŭa khatha* [head staff] 'head of staff'), as is the top part of a wooden club used as a weapon by hooligans (e.g., *nakleng hŭa mai* [gangster head wood] 'gangster's wooden-club head'). These instances of semantic extension, however, seem to be based on the LUMP conceptualization (see V-A above), considering that for a walking-stick without a visible lumpy part, the end point is not called a 'head', nor is the top part of a bottle in an upright position, a state of affairs strongly suggesting that the LUMP conceptualization is in operation, rather than the TOP conceptualization. The Thai situation stands out as a special case, but, at the same time, it points to the fact that languages often have different conceptualization patterns that are favored as part of their idiosyncratic characteristics. For humans, the vertical and horizontal axes are the two major references in the planar dimension, and Thai seems to favor conceptualization along the horizontal axis (e.g., FRONT and BEGINNING), whereas Korean favors conceptualization along the vertical axis (e.g., TOP). For example, a pencil, whose prototypical configuration is vertical while in use, is said to have a 'head' in Thai, which is the sharpened end, in contrast with Korean, in which the 'head' is the top end where the eraser is attached.

The second group concerns the conceptualizations of (g) UNIT IN SPACE, (h) UNIT OF EVENT, and (i) UNIT OF QUANTITY, which are all based on the overarching conceptualization of HEAD as an object with a clearly marked boundary or contour that separates it from the rest of the body. This contour-based conceptualization is more extensively employed in Korean than in Thai. Therefore, in Korean, a sum of money given as a donation can be said to be 'money head' and one episode of a series of typhoons is a 'typhoon head', etc., which is not acceptable in Thai.

The third group concerns the pejoratives, i.e., (x) CONTEMPTIBLE and (y) INFERIOR, found in Korean only. The notion of pejoration originates from two sources. One is related to the fact that Korean HEAD lexemes indicate the split between human and non-human heads, e.g., *meli* and *taykali* (see IV-A, above), and that animals are regarded as being inferior to humans. Thus, most compounds with *taykali* (animal head) strongly signal a pejorative attitude of the speaker, e.g., *mas-taykali* [taste-head] '(bad) taste', *kep-taykali* [fear-head] '(lack of) prudence', etc. The other source is the context of compounding. For instance, the expressions *pelucang-meli* [manner-head] '(bad) manners', *kocip-meli* [obstinacy-head] 'extreme stubbornness', *cwupyen-meli* [sensibility-head] '(lack of) minimum tactfulness', *hayngsil-meli* [conduct-head] '(bad) behavior', etc. all involve the nominals with negative evaluation. It is likely that *meli* contributes the notion of protrusion (i.e., prominent quality) to the negative meaning of the host noun, hence the distastefulness.

The fourth group concerns the classifiers, i.e., (u) WHOLE PERSON and (v) WHOLE ANIMAL. HEAD is a well-known source of classifiers across languages, including Mandarin Chinese (Li & Thompson, 1981; Erbaugh, 1986, p. 400), Mundurukú (Mithun, 1986, p. 390), Tai (DeLancey, 1986, p. 451), and some Austroasiatic languages (Adams, 1986, p. 248). It is unclear why the HEAD-based classifiers indicate different human-animal splits in Korean and Thai. It is possible that honorification and politeness in Korean human reference terms (Rhee, 2019) served as the inhibiting factor of using a body-part term to denote the whole person. A relevant historical fact is that the lexeme *swu* 'hand' was once used to create compounds denoting a person, typically in working-class occupations, e.g., *wuncen-swu* [operation-hand] 'driver', *ko-swu* [drum-hand] 'drummer', *sek-swu* [stone-head] 'stone-mason', etc., but these compounds later semantically deteriorated and were either replaced with terms carrying more connotations of prestige or were entirely avoided. Another possibility is that in Korean there have been multiple, well-established person classifiers with plain-honorific distinction. The presence of these classifiers could have been the deterrent factor for the development of HEAD

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into another person classifier. On the other hand, the development of the Thai *hua* into a person classifier, though relatively infrequent in Modern Thai, is a scenario observed in other languages such as Burmese (Becker, 1975, pp. 115-116; as cited in Kilarski, 2013, p. 280).

The fifth group concerns the conceptualizations based on mental faculty: (p) EMOTION, (q) CONATION, (r) ATTITUDE, (s) MINDSET, and (t) SKILL, all used in Thai only. The only conceptualization used in Korean based on mental faculty is INTELLIGENCE, although the conceptualization (m) IMPORTANCE may be related to it. The Thai conceptualizations suggest that Thai has a strong tendency to associate HEAD with its inherent mental faculty, an instance of metonymization, which, notably, is characteristic of Thai's well-known use of body-part terms to create diverse lexemes denoting emotion, conation, attitude, etc., particularly in the instance of *jai* (*cay* (IPA)) 'heart' (Moore, 2006; Bovonwiwat & Rhee, 2023). Despite such a strong tendency in Thai, it is not clear why such patterns are favored in one language while, in another language, they are far less prominent or even nonexistent.

The remaining cases of (w) HAIR in Korean, (z) IMAGED SIDE (as of a coin), and (aa) LAUGH in Thai seem to be incidental. The lexical convergence of 'head' and 'hair' is peculiar, and not reported in any other language to date. Since Korean has another term for 'hair', i.e., *melikhalak* (< *meli* 'head' + *kalak* 'long, thin object'), *meli* as a lexeme for 'hair' is likely a contraction of *melikhalak*. If *meli* 'hair' is a contraction *meli-kalak* 'head-hair', this polysemy is a result of incidental lexical convergence, which must have occurred before Late Middle Korean since *meli* 'hair' is already attested in the 15th century data. As for coins, Korean uses 'front side' and 'back side', while the Thai convention of using HEAD for the imaged side may indicate influence from English, because coins were first introduced by the British in the mid-nineteenth century when Britain gifted Thailand with a coin mint machine (during King Rama IV's reign). The peculiarity of the HEAD-LAUGH association has been briefly mentioned in Section IV-B. All these cases point to the fact that, despite the regularity frequently observed across languages, many aspects of language development are arbitrary, not deterministic, and subject to diverse influences.

From the foregoing exposition of the HEAD polysemization in Korean and Thai, conceptualizations, their conceptual networks, and metaphorical-metonymic links can be diagrammatically presented in Figure 1.

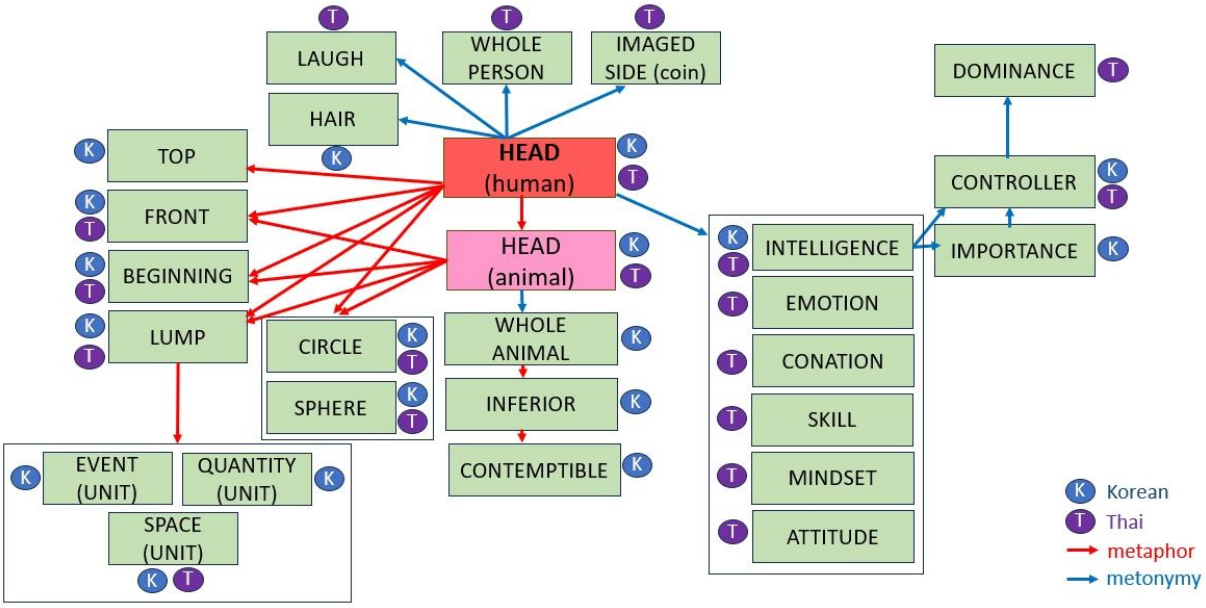

Figure 1. Networks of HEAD Conceptualizations in Korean and Thai

VI. Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, we have addressed lexicalization and semantic extension patterns of HEAD in Korean and Thai. Korean has approximately one dozen HEAD lexemes, in contrast to Thai, which has only one 'regular' word for HEAD. This state of affairs aligns with observations in extant literature comparing Korean and Thai, particularly that Korean tends to create new lexemes to encode semantic differences whereas Thai tends to use a single word for a wide range of related meanings. The finer semantic compartmentalization in Korean has been labeled an instance of monosemy strategies, whereas the coarse-grained looser semantic compartmentalization in Thai is an instance of polysemy strategies (Khammee & Rhee, 2022, 2025).

Semantic extensions from HEAD abound in both Korean and Thai, and often indicate similarities, such as conceptualizing HEAD as FRONT, LUMP, UNIT IN SPACE, CONTROLLER, and INTELLIGENCE. These are based on different factors, such as the anthropomorphic model of object conceptualization, the distinctive configuration of a human head, or the function of mental faculty by virtue of the HEAD encasing the brain. However, clear differences in

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conceptualization patterns do exist. Certain patterns, such as HEAD as BEGINNING, CIRCLE, and SPHERE, are attested in both languages but their scopes of application differ. More importantly, certain patterns, such as TOP, UNIT OF EVENT, UNIT OF QUANTITY, IMPORTANCE, WHOLE ANIMAL, WHOLE PERSON, HAIR, CONTEMPTIBLE, INFERIOR, DOMINANCE, EMOTION, CONATION, ATTITUDE, MINDSET, SKILL, and IMAGED SIDE OF COIN, are attested in only one of the two languages. The presence and absence of certain patterns and differential scopes of pattern application may be due to diverse factors, including language-specific idiosyncrasy of favoring particular patterns, the history of the lexemes, and even borrowing. In particular, Korean seems to favor the vertical configuration, contour-based unit-formation, and pejoration from lexical contrasts between human head and animal head, while Thai, on the other hand, seems to favor the horizontal conceptualization and diverse aspects related to mental faculty. Certain aspects may only be reflecting the arbitrary nature of human language, and remain unexplained at the current level of understanding.

Drawing upon extensive data from dictionaries, lexica, and corpus data, this paper has analyzed conceptual extension patterns of HEAD in Korean and Thai, and postulates a number of cognitive-linguistic implications. However, the meanings associated with any lexeme are of different lexical strength, and some may even be becoming obsolete. In further research, a quantitative analysis, preferably involving survey questionnaires, is expected to clarify the current state of affairs more dynamically.

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