Panel: Capital Punishment – The Right to Kill/The Right to Die

Respondent: Robert N. St. Clair, University of Louisville, USA

The panel on death and dying provides a unique contribution to the cognitive sciences and to the sociology of knowledge. It uses metaphor as a research tool and complements and strengthens that research with other layers of methodology.

First Paper: Capital Punishment
Eric Berendt, Seisen University, Tokyo, Japan

It was noted that the occurrence of death is universal, but the experience of death is cultural. This study focused on divulging the various aspects of this domain from a cultural perspective. This was done by investigating six conceptual categories of death within the context of conceptual metaphors. These included death as an action or event, a container, an entity, a journey, a status, or as time. These conceptual patterns of death functioned well. During the presentation of the paper, the respondent noted the vital role played by the lexicon I doing an analysis of the salient values within a culture. Cultures reveal themselves by the proliferation of lexical entities within a semantic domain. English, for example, has many words for death and dying. It functions as a salient category in that cultural framework. What is unique to the Japanese lexicon is the concept of dying on the job from overwork (*karooshi*).

It was surprising to see that although life is a journey is a dominant metaphor in Asian cultures, death as a journey was not. Other categories played a larger role. For example, death is considered to be an action or event. It is the end of a process. Could this concept be interpreted as death being the end of a journey? Actions may be described in many ways. If it is punctual, then it can be seen as a one-time event. If it is durational, then it can be seen as the unfolding of a process that has a beginning, middle, and an end. Can the conceptual category of death as an action also contain a journey metaphor? The other dominant category was that of death as a container. It implies that death is an entity and that the contents of life are lost in death. Nevertheless, death as a contained entity played a larger cultural role in Japan.

During the presentation, the author made a distinction between logos and mythos discourse. At the time when Aristotle and Plato wrote their philosophical treatises, the concept that dominated Greek thought were logos and chaos. The Greeks were concerned with the transition from disorder to order and feared a reversal of that process. One of the words used by Aristotle and Plato to describe this process was the concept of "becoming" (Greek: *physis*). Hence, the concept of logos was a desire for order. It was the process of coming into being. Mythos, on the other hand, had to do with rhetoric. Aristotle used rhetoric as a marker of established patterns within discourse and Plato used metaphor as a way of going beyond established patterns of expression. Plato wanted to create new systems of meaning. Hence, he used myth and metaphor as his tools of intellectual investigation. Both were forms of reason. One was established (the rhetoric of logos) and the other was dialectic (the invention of new worlds through myth and metaphor). What this means is that

modern research into metaphor is concomitant with the dialogical reasoning of Plato (Cornford, 1934, 1937).

Second Paper: Abortion as an Instance of the Right to Kill
Keiko Tanita, Seisen University, Tokyo, Japan

This paper begins with a comparison of how the Word "abortion" is used in Japanese and English. These etymologies were insightful and provided cultural insight into how these terms are being used in Japan. Perhaps the most important aspect of this paper was the use of metaphor not only to investigate cultural differences but also as a means of understanding semantic categories. It was argued in St. Clair (2002) that clusters of metaphors can be used to create a cognitive profile of a culture. This is what the authors of this panel have accomplished in the Lakoffian investigation of death and dying. What is entirely new and unique to this investigation, however, is the fact that metaphors were used to investigate the semantic domain of death and dying. Tanita has provided an original use of as an instrument of lexical analysis. In her research, for example, she used conceptual metaphors as semantic categories. Each item in the semantic domain was subjected to a componential analysis based on these conceptual metaphors. The results were very insightful.

Third Paper: English and Japanese Conceptual Patterns on Suicide.
Aya Maeda, Seisen University, Tokyo, Japan.

The focus of this paper was on how language is used with regards to the act of suicide. Maeda explained how the Japanese culture has changed and how suicide in modern times is no longer seen as an honorable act. She referred to suicide as "death by design." This is a very interesting expression because it brings into focus that there are many ways in which the act may be committed. Why do some people, for example, drown themselves, and others resort to hanging, self-inflicted cuts, or an overdose of pills? Are these acts seen as symbolic attempts to dissolve oneself in water, purify the troubled body by fire, or drain the energy of life by bleeding to death? How does the individual wish to have his body remembered? Is he or she in a posed position waiting to be found? Is the message of death meant for just one person or for many? It appears that this investigation into death by design has much in common with the science of forensics and this connection merits further investigation. Are there cultural differences into the forensics of death by design?
Another aspect of this paper that merits comment has to do with the reactions of people who are related either directly or indirectly to the suicide victim. Some are ashamed and others are into denial. Some take responsibility for the act and others do not. All of these actions are reminiscent of what happens during a Hospice seminar. Those who knew the victim are heavily invested in sharing their own projections of the event, either consciously or unconsciously. This raises another issue for future research. Are there cultural differences in coping with the experiences of suicide?

FINAL COMMENT
The panel deserves recognition for their original research into the cross-cultural experiences of death and dying. The authors, it should be noted, command cultural