

## **Description for the general public**

Not only linguists, but likewise philosophers, biologists, anthropologists and researchers of other disciplines posit questions about origin and development of such a complex semiotic system as human language. What is the relation between the concept and the word for it? How much do languages reflect the culture of people using these languages? Why, in spite of their constant evolution in different directions, are languages still similar in various respects? The present project initiates a research program which will approach these questions by demonstrating a strong relation between language and the domain of the human body which provides a natural, always available source for constructing and organizing more complex and abstract concepts. We will examine many different languages of the world, including familiar languages of Europe and Asia, as well as little known languages of Africa, South America and New Guinea, and investigate how body part terms are used in various contexts where they refer to particular body parts or have other figurative meanings. For example, the word *head* may refer to the body part, but not in the expression *head of the household* where it refers to a person, or in the expression *head of cabbage* where it refers to a thing. Languages of the world typically have many extended meanings similar to these which pertain into various domains of people's activities, feelings, reasoning, or objects. We will find out why some of such uses co-occur in language after language and why some are unique. The outcome of the long-term project will be a series of monographs, each on a different body part term. The present three-year project will result in preparing the first volume of the series which will analyze the term *head* and its equivalents in other languages. The work starts with this lexeme in accordance with the cognitive natural order "from top to bottom" which, interestingly, is reflected in some languages by the fact that 'head' can mean 'beginning'.