*Dr Mariana Funes*

# How Do You Decide What's Important?

## Relevance decisions are metaphor dependent

*Introduction*

This paper reviews some ideas on how human beings make decisions about what is relevant in a given interaction. The area of Knowledge Acquisition in Expert Systems provides an ideal medium for exploring human communication. The system designer, known as the knowledge engineer, and an expert communicate to develop a model of what the expert knows. This model is then implemented by the knowledge engineer in a computer system which, at some level, models the expert's domain.

I have developed a conceptual tool which supports the knowledge engineer in finding structuring metaphors through targeting specific linguistic expressions. It provides a model to begin to answer the question of how the knowledge engineer can decide what is important in a new domain.

This is an application of NLP in a non-therapeutic context for I have used NLP to provide specific linguistic targets to access structuring metaphors. It also, I hope, expands the knowledge currently available on metaphor within the NLP community.

From a study on knowledge engineers carried out in the early stages of my research, I argued that the ability to define what is relevant is a key skill in domain definition and, as such, requires a conceptual tool to enable knowledge engineers to be more effective in the early stages of system development. We needed an explicit method for making relevance decisions.

The discipline of Knowledge Acquisition assumes that knowledge "exists" as if in a vacuum; this has led to the creation of meta-

phors like "mining knowledge", "expertise transfer" and "getting out the knowledge". The discipline's very name carries this assumption within it. *Acquisition* does not easily coexist with a constructivist approach to development. The critical stage of initial domain definition, where relevance is identified in the initial data elicited, often goes unreported.