Universität Potsdam
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MM3 Cross-Linguistic Semantics
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1 – Lexicon & Presuppositions

1. Universals in the lexicon = lexical units (form-meaning correspondences)

- Semantic Primes (Wierzbicka 1996): see HANDOUT

- Goddard's remaining cases (see vF & M 2008)

(1) a. *lexical items = content words*

man, woman, child, mother, head, eye, ear, nose, hand, day, kill, make, people, good, bad, big, small, think, know, want, see, hear, say, do, happen, live, die, here, above, below, inside, a long time

b. *functional items*

I, you, someone, something/thing, this, the same, one, two, all, much/many, there is, when/time, now, before, after, not, maybe, because, if, like, very

2. Indefinites, Quantifiers & other Logical Items (*and, or*)

- indefinites & [+/- plural marking]: Are there unspecified indefinite forms referring to both singular and plural individuals or things alike?

(2) a. *mutûm$_{SG}$* 'a man, somebody', *wani mutûm$_{SG}$* 'somebody' vs. *mutàanee$_{PL}$* 'people'

(Hausa)

b. *einer/ jemand*   vs.   *welche* ('Ich habe welche gesehen')

(3) a.. wh-expressions: *was, wen,* etc.   → lexically unspecified for number

- *other*-interpretations:

"In some languages (e.g., Arrernte, Samoan, Yankunytjatjara), the word for 'someone' is identical in form with the word for 'other', but because the syntactic properties of 'someone' and 'other' are so different ('someone' being a substantive and 'other' a specifier) it is usually straightforward to establish polysemy on language-internal grounds." (Goddard 2001: 10)

but: Many languages have two indefinite forms referring to *person/thing* etc.: (i.) a bare property-denoting NP-form; and a morphologically marked form with a specific interpretation (Farkas 2002), which is typically used to (re)introduce new discourse referents as topics (Zimmermann 2008):

(4) a. [ìdan **wani mùtûm** yaa   yi aikìi mài kyâu] sai   yà   ci   laadaa.
       if   some man   3.SG.M.PERF do work POSS good then 3SG.SUBJ eat reward
       'If a certain man does good work then he gets a reward.'

b. [ìdan **mùtûm** yaa   yi aikìi mài kyâu] sai   yà   ci   laadaa.
   if   man   3.SG.M.PERF do work POSS good then 3SG.SUBJ eat reward
   'If a man does good work then he gets a reward.'

→ Given the topic-introducing function, *other*-interpretations of general indefinite Nps fall out without the assumption of polysemy:

(5) **wani** yaa   yi gabàs, **wani** kuma yaa   yi yâmma
     one   3SG.M.PERF do east   one   also 3SG.M.PERF do west
     'One went east, and one/ the other went west.'

- quantifiers: *all*, numbers   → these could be adnominal modifying elements

→ but what about distributive quantifiers & *most* ?

(6)   *yawanci-n*   dàalìbai   sun   ci   jar̃ràbâawaa   (Zimmermann 2008)
     majority-LINK   students   3pl.PERF eat   exam
     'Most(of the) students passed the exams.'

(7)   ti 'ogi -'áaga -ó 'ítii'isi 'ogi-ó 'i kohoai-baaí,   (Pirnaha; Everett 2005, nevins et al 2007)
     I big -be (permanence) -direction fish big-direction sh**e** eat -intensive

     koga hói hi hi -i kohoi -hiaba
     nevertheless small amount intensive intensive -be eat -not

     "We ate most of the fish." (lit. 'My bigness ate [at] a bigness of fish, nevertheless there
     was a smallness we did not eat.')"

→ The *most*-interpretation in Pirnaha may indeed arise as an implicature from the presence
     of *bigness*, which is made explicit by the afterclause.

- *and* (Gil 2001, Maricopa)

3.   Methodological Issues & Problems

- *Problems in establishing universals*

i.   Polysemy:

    a. 1 form – 1 meaning   (unmarked 1:1-case)

                  meaning 1

    b. 1 form ◁   (polysemy)

                  meaning 2

(8)   *ngunytju*   (Yankunytjatjara)

     2 meanings (biological mother, mother + extended female relations) or:

     just a single general reading referring to a wider set that includes the biological mother
     as a specific instance ?

ii.   *level of fine-grainedness / specification*

(9)   *mizu* 'cold water' & *yu* 'hot water   (Japanese)

→ possible analyses:

     2 forms with 2 incompatible meanings   (Goddard 2001) or:

     2 forms with 2 compatible meanings (one general & one specific), with the meaning
     difference partly due to an implicature.   (vF & M 2008)

iii.   *simple vs. complex forms*

(10) a. kill   vs.   b. dood maken   (Dutch, Low German)

                        öl-dür-   (Turkish)

                        cause to die   (Levinson 2000)

→ certain meaning differences between lexical forms within and across languages may arise as implicatures and are due to the fact that there is an alternative form with a more specific content that the speaker could have used but did not (Q-implicature), or that there is a simpler form with identical meaning that the speaker could have used, but did not (M-implicature)

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iv. sample discussion: Engl. *go* vs. Dt. *gehen / fahren*

(11) a. to go by car, to go by foot

 b. zu Fuß gehen, #mit dem Auto gehen

(12) Q: Gehst du zu dem Empfang?

 A: ??Ja, ich fahre mit dem Auto rüber.

• Semantic primes as building blocks of larger lexical units ?

→ Dowty's and Jackendoff's abstract primitive operators: GO, AT, TO, DO, CAUSE, BECOME

Q: How about the encoding of change-of-state BECOME and causative CAUSE ?

→ is the level of lexical unit the appropriate level for making comparisons, or do we rather need to look at the sub-lexical level (at least in the case of verbs) ?

(13) a. ⟦offen⟧ = **open**(x) = Merkmalsliste

 b. ⟦sich öffnen⟧ = BECOME (**open**(x))

 c. ⟦öffnen$_{TRA}$⟧ = CAUSE (y, BECOME (**open**(x))

4. Cross-Linguistic variation: Presupposition triggers without presuppositions

(14) A: The mathematician who proved Goldbach's Conjecture is a woman.
 B: Hey, wait a minute. I had no idea that someone proved Goldbach's Conjecture.
 B': #Hey, wait a minute. I had no idea that that was a woman.

5. Potential Tasks:

- Check the semantic primes for Hausa, Marghi

- check presence or absence of presuppositions with determiners and other elements that trigger presuppositions in English or German