

POLYSEMY AND SEMANTIC CHANGE IN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

course

Contents sheet for readings

EVANS, Nick & WILKINS, David. Course precis, syllabus and bibliography.

BENVENISTE, Emile(?). 'Semantic Problems in Reconstruction.' (chapter 24)

DIXON, R.M.W. (1980) pgs 116-121.

EVANS, Nick. 'Multiple semiotic systems, hyperpolysemy, and the reconstruction of semantic change in Australian languages.' (article)

GEERAERTS, Dirk. 'Cognitive restrictions on the structure of semantic change.' (article)

HAUGEN, Einer. 'The Semantics of Icelandic Orientation'. (article)

HEINE, B., CLAUDI, C. and HUNNEMEYER, F. 'From cognition to Grammar - Evidence from African Languages.' (Chapter)

LEHRER, Adrienne. 'The influence of semantic fields on semantic change.' (article)

O'GRADY, Geoffrey N. 'Preliminaries to Proto Nuclear Pama Nyungan Stem list.' (article)

TRAUGOTT, Elizabeth. "On Regularity in Semantic Change." (article)

WILKINS, David P. 'Natural Tendencies of Semantic Change and the Search for Cognates.' (article)

WILLIAMS, Joseph M. 'Synthetic Adjectives: A Possible Law of Semantic Change.' (article)

acs

Polysemy and semantic change in Australian languages.

Course précis, syllabus and bibliography.

Taught by Nick Evans & David Wilkins

First Australian Linguistics Institute, Sydney Uni, June-July '92.

Nick Evans: nick_evans@muwayf.unimelb.edu.au
Linguistics, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3052
Australia
David Wilkins: LINDAVID@ubvms.cc.buffalo.edu
Linguistics, SUNY Buffalo, 685 Baldy Hall, North Campus,
Buffalo, New York 14260.

Provisional Syllabus:

8 hours in four two-hour sessions, plus one or two hours to be taught as part of Pat McConvell's 'Linguistics & Prehistory' Course. One or two workshops in which participants address specific problems of polysemy and semantic change within two or three structure domains using on-line lexical data bases will be fitted into this syllabus.

1. Need for a method of reconstructing semantic change. Preliminary overview of some issues - regularity; culture specificity; context; paths & atlases. Polysemy method.
2. Cognitive semantic theory and semantic change. Category theory, prototype theory, frame semantics.
3. From utterance meaning to lexical meaning: the contribution of context. Discourse and 'bridging contexts' (e.g. some of Benveniste's case). Extralinguistic context (e.g. Haugen's work on Icelandic directionals). Multiple senses as an unsolved problem.
4. Semantic change and semantic system. [structure of semantic field; push-chain/pull-chain effects; limits on denotational range; reorganization of taxonomies (e.g. MacLaury article)]
5. Paths and networks. Multiple semiotic systems; (grammaticization and other) paths; the semantic atlas project. (Matisoff & Evans/Wilkins versions). Reprise: regularity in polysemy and semantic change.
- [6. Cultural specificity of semantic change. How we study this using the Atlas 2; isopolysemes. Inferences about linguistic prehistory - some examples. In 'Linguistics and Prehistory' Course.]
7. Overview: reconstruction methods and a program for research.

Readings list, rung 1. (Readings package).

These should be read by all intending workshop participants. Readings are arranged in alphabetical order of author, rather than the order in which they will be presented.

- Benveniste, Émile. 'Semantic problems in reconstruction.' Ch. 24 of *Problems in General Linguistics*.
- Dixon, Robert M.W. (1980). 'Semantic shift'. Pp 116-120 of *The Languages of Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Evans, Nicholas. (in press). 'Multiple semiotic systems, hyperpolysemy, and the reconstruction of semantic change in Australian languages'. In M. Morrissey, ed., *Diachrony within synchrony*. Bern: Peter Lang Verlag.
- Geeraerts, Dirk. (1985). 'Cognitive restrictions on the structure of semantic change'. In Jacek Fisiak, ed., *Historical semantics and Historical Word-Formation*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Haugen, Einar. (1957). 'The semantics of Icelandic Orientation'. *Word* 13:447-460.
- Heine, Bernd, Claudi, Ulrike & Hünnemeyer, Friederike. 'From cognition to grammar: evidence from African languages.' In Elizabeth Closs Traugott & Bernd Heine, eds., *Approaches to Grammaticalization*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Lehrer, Adrienne. (1985). 'The influence of semantic fields on semantic change'. In Jacek Fisiak, ed., *Historical Semantics and Historical Word-formation*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- O'Grady, William. 'Preliminaries to a proto-Nuclear-Pama-Nyungan stem list'. In S. Wurm, ed., *Australian Linguistic Studies*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, C-54.
- Traugott, Elizabeth. (1985). 'On regularity in semantic change.' *Journal of Literary Semantics* 14.3:155-173.
- Wilkins, David. 'Natural tendencies of semantic change and the search for cognates'. In Mark Durie, ed., *The comparative method reviewed*.
- Williams, Joseph. (1976). 'Synaesthetic adjectives: a possible law of semantic change.' *Language* 52:461-477.

A second rung of readings for those wishing more depth will be available at the time of the conference. Those interested in purchasing this second package should notify Nick Evans by Easter. It will include:

- Apresjan, Juri D. (1974). 'словообразование и многозначность'. Ch Three of *Лексическая Семантика*. Moscow: Nauka.
- Blust, Robert. (1989). 'A note on semantic cycles in historical change.' *Diachronica* 6.2: 297-300.
- Bréal, J. Semantics. (Extract).
- Bonhomme, Marc. (1987?). *Linguistique de la Métonymie*. Berne: Peter Lang.
- Fillmore, Charles. (sthg on frame semantics)
- Geeraerts, Dirk. (1988). 'Cognitive grammar and the history of lexical semantics.' In Brygyda Rudzka-Ostyn, ed., *Topics in cognitive linguistics*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Heine, Bernd, Claudi, Ulrike & Hünnemeyer, Friederike. (1991) 'Introduction.' to *Grammaticalization: a conceptual framework*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Kay, Paul. (1975). 'Synchronic variability and diachronic change in basic colour terms'. *Language in Society* 4, 257-70.
- Lakoff, George. (sthg on radial categories and prototype theory)
- Lehrer, A. 'Structure of the lexicon and transfer of meaning.' *Lingua* 45:
- MacLaury, Robert E. 'Social and cognitive motivations of change: measuring variability in color semantics'. *Language* 67.1:34-62.
- Matisoff, James. *Variational semantics in Sino-Tibetan*. (Extract). Philadelphia: Wolfenden Press.

- Nikiforidou & Sweetser, (1989). *Diachronic regularity and irregularity: structural parallels between semantic and phonological change*. Berkeley Cognitive Science Report No. 60.
- Schebeck. (1978). 'Names of body-parts in north-east Arnhem Land.' In Les Hiatt, ed., *Australian Aboriginal Concepts*. Canberra: AIAS.
- Sommer, Bruce (1978). "'Eye" and "no-good" in semantic extension.' In Les Hiatt, ed., *Australian Aboriginal Concepts*. Canberra: AIAS.
- Stem, . Meaning and change of meaning. (Extract)
- Traugott, Elizabeth. (1986). 'From polysemy to internal semantic reconstruction.' BLS 12.
- Ullmann, Stephen. (1963). 'Semantic universals.'

Suggested essay topics (about 2,000 words)

1. Discuss the similarities and differences between phonological change and semantic change. Make sure to use rich exemplification.
2. Identify a word or morpheme in a particular language (or language family) which has a particularly rich range of uses, or is known to have a "curious" or lengthy etymology, and, using the terms and concepts learned in this course, discuss the semantic changes that have taken place with respect to this form. Discuss evidence for metonymy, metaphor, etc. and the social and structural conditions that may be posited as contributing to the changes that have taken place. [In the end what the student should come out with is a detailed semantic etymology of the word, couched largely within the terms of cognitive semantics, and the semantic change framework we are developing.]
3. In this course, polysemy has been argued for as a useful tool in semantic reconstruction. Discuss the premises of this position. Also discuss the problems that arise in distinguishing polysemy from abstractions or monosemy. Use specific examples to support your discuss.
4. Identify a number of proposed pathways of semantic change and discuss the kind of evidence that is used to support these pathways. How can these pathways of semantic change be used in comparative reconstruction.
5. Using the available database for Australian Aboriginal languages, identify a semantic domain to explore and, using some of the methods introduced in the course, attempt to identify specific examples of semantic change. Discuss the problems you face in using the data base, and in using the methods, as well as providing the results (if any) of the data you worked with.

6. Discuss how semantic change and semantic reconstruction may be able to help prehistorians in reconstructing the past culture and movement patterns of a social group.

7. From available sources, identify a number of semantic changes that are attested as having taken place within Aboriginal languages. For each

change, discuss whether it is likely to have taken place because of universal factors about language and cognition, or because of specific factors concerning the culture and location of Australian Aboriginal groups, or a mixture of these, or is the particular change and idiosyncratic response to local social and linguistic pressures.

8. Discuss the special problems that arise in reconstructing semantic change within lexical systems, e.g. terms for kinship. Can our knowledge of synchronically attested systems, and semantic oppositions, help us determine the semantic range of reconstructed terms. And, also relevant to this, you should discuss the problem of how one can determine whether a set of reconstructed pairings of meaning with form were really contemporary? Feel free to use analogies with, or point out differences from, the procedures for phonological reconstruction.