



NSM-Con2022

Global Meanings

28 & 29 April 2022

NSM studies from around the world:
presentations, speed talks,
feature presentations, updates and more

Hosted online by Griffith University,
Brisbane, Australia

NSM-Con2022: Global meanings

28th – 29th April 2022

Program

Day 1 – Thursday April 28th

Brisbane/ Canberra	Seattle	Copenhagen	Day 1 - Thursday April 28
10:00	17:00	02:00	Welcome
10:15	17:15	02:15	Lauren Sadow & Cliff Goddard – ‘Building Blocks of Meaning’ (BBoM) ARC Discovery Project Update
11:00	18:00	03:00	Cliff Goddard – Rethinking the semantic molecules ‘long’, ‘flat’, and ‘round’
11:30	18:30	03:30	Break
12:00	19:00	04:00	Speed talks: session 1 Dave Bullock – Molecule dependency reports Alena Kazmaly – Personality adjectives in English and Russian: <i>Moody person</i> and <i>kapriznij čelovek</i> Michael Turner – “Can there be a ‘good me’?”: A progress report on the L0 Project
12:30	19:30	04:30	Hiromichi Sakaba – <i>Mottainai</i> as a Japanese cultural keyword: How it is different from English ‘waste(ful)’
13:00	20:00	05:00	Jayson Petras – Locating <i>kapwa</i> in Filipino emotions
13:30	20:30	05:30	Break
14:00	21:00	06:00	Presentation by Bert Peeters Prize winner Kay Yeo – Understanding an ‘ <i>atas</i> Singaporean’: The cultural semantics of the Singlish keyword <i>atas</i>
14:30	21:30	06:30	Helen Bromhead – Clearer, more accessible disaster messaging using a minimal languages approach
15:00	22:00	07:00	Metalanguage update (Cliff Goddard)
15:30	22:30	07:30	
16:00	23:00	08:00	General discussion + GatherTown
16:30	23:30	08:30	
17:00	0:00	09:00	End

Day 2 — Friday April 29th

Brisbane/ Canberra	Seattle	Copenhagen	Day 2 - Friday April 29
15:00	22:00	07:00	Welcome
15:15	22:30	07:30	Anna Wierzbicka – “People can think like this” and similar frames: Their place in NSM semantics
16:00	23:00	08:00	Sandy Habib – The Jish Arabic counterparts of the English perfect simple constructions: A morphological, syntactic, and semantic analysis
16:30	23:30	08:30	Break
17:00	00:00	09:00	Marie Pavlásková – Distrust that protects us: On the Czech counterpart of common sense
17:30	00:30	09:30	Stephanie Mašková – Nature in the Nuuk-Danish universe of meaning
18:00	01:00	10:00	Speed talks: session 2 Zuzanna Bułat-Silva – A global value of ‘peace’ Susana Silvia Fernández & Ana Paula Braga Mattos – “Un vendaval de esperanza para América Latina”: The concept of esperanza/esperança (hope) as a cultural keyword in Latin America Anna Gladkova – Semantic molecules and minimal language: Translating ‘The Story of God and People’
18:30	01:30	10:30	Break
19:00	02:00	11:00	Ida Stevia Diget – Standard Translatable English and public messaging: Creating public health posters
19:30	02:30	11:30	Gian Marco Farese – Swear words vs. racial slurs in English: Their interactional semantics compared
20:00	03:00	12:00	Carsten Levisen - Cultural metapragmatics: A Nordic view on “speaking” and “speakers”
20:30	03:30	12:30	General discussion + GatherTown
21:00	04:00	13:00	
21:30	04:30	13:30	End

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Abstracts

Abstracts listed in alphabetical order by presenter's surname.

Molecule dependency reports

Speed talk

Dave Bullock, University of Washington

A software tool generates dependency reports for the NSM explications in the Building Blocks of Meaning wiki. The tool looks at chains of dependencies for all semantic molecules used in the explications. Molecules are organized by "level" (the length of the longest dependency chains). The tool also flags missing and circular dependencies. The reports are useful for checking quality and understanding the structure of the collection of explications.

A global value of 'peace'

Speed talk

Zuzanna Bułat-Silva, University of Wrocław

The aim of my talk is to look at 'peace', a concept which (together with its opposite, 'war') may be a valid candidate for a universal, panhuman value molecule (anti-value molecule in case of 'war'). I want to examine the English word peace, and based on its dictionary definitions and Barack Obama's (Nobel Peace Prize for 2009) Cairo speech (2009), describe it in terms of natural semantic metalanguage. I will also take a look at Pope Francis' message for the 55th World Day of Peace (1 Jan 2022), and the teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh, Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist.

Clearer, more accessible disaster messaging using a minimal languages approach

Full talk

Helen Bromhead, Griffith University

Research finds disaster information is often written at levels higher than recommended (So et al. 2020). In addition, many messages prove difficult to translate into community languages (Ogie & Perez 2020). Studies have also shown that simpler texts are more easily understood by high literacy populations (DuBay 2007). One solution to the problem of lack of clarity and accessibility in disaster messaging is application of minimal languages approach (Goddard 2021).

This presentation takes a sample of disaster texts, which are rephrased using minimal languages. Texts are tested using methods, such as, an automated checking tool, and translator evaluation. It finds that the rephrased versions are easier to read, and simpler to translate, than the originals. Some considerations of this process are outlined.

References:

- DuBay, W. H. (2007). *Smart Language: Readers, Readability, and the Grading of Text*. ERIC.
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- Ogie, R. I., & Perez, P. (2020). Collaborative translation of emergency messages (Co-TEM): An Australian case study. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 50, 101920.
- So, M. et al. (2020). An evaluation of the literacy demands of online natural disaster preparedness materials for families. *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, 14(4), 449-458.

Standard Translatable English and public messaging: Creating public health posters

Full talk

Ida Stevia Diget, Griffith University

This paper explores the theoretical and practical journey of designing three public health posters on the principles of minimal language (Goddard, 2021) (here referred to as “Standard Translatable English” (STE) after (Sadow, 2019)) designed for a general Australian audience. The posters were created on the backdrop of theory from the minimal language approach, cognitive semiotics and translation studies, and empirical input from “consumer preferences”, collated from the results of interviews and a survey where current Australian public health posters were evaluated. Practically, the poster creation process included identifying what to communicate, pictorial considerations, and creating the STE texts. The STE texts went through several iterations before being finalised and were adjusted based on translatability testing into 11 languages. Once considerations were finalised, a graphic designer was enlisted to create three STE-based posters: one centred on flu, one on COVID-19, and one on handwashing. The posters were completed in November 2021 and are currently being evaluated by consumers in a second round of interviews and survey.

References:

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Swear words vs. racial slurs in English: their interactional semantics compared

Full talk

Gian Marco Farese, University of Milan

This paper presents an NSM-based contrastive analysis between the meaning of swear words and that of racial/discriminatory slurs used in English. It is argued that although these categories of expressions are comparable in terms of illocutionary force (the combination of speaker's intention to offend and interlocutor's perception of the offence), racial/discriminatory slurs include additional semantic components which are not part of the meaning of swear words and insulting remarks. The higher level of complexity of the meaning of racial/discriminatory slurs derives from two main elements: (i) the speaker's intention to categorise and ostracise the interlocutor; (ii) the cultural values and assumptions inherent in the expressed meaning. The latter also have implications for the social psychology and the translatability of these racial slurs in other languages. The semantic differences between these two categories of expressions can be appreciated comparing the templates of their explications. First, the interactional semantics of swear words is discussed drawing on the analysis made by Goddard (2015). Then, the semantics of the racial slur *dago* as used in early 20th century Australian English discourse will be examined. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that the NSM framework is optimal to raise not only metalexical awareness, but also cultural awareness of words and their discursive functions.

References:

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“Un vendaval de esperanza para América Latina”: The concept of esperanza/esperança (hope) as a cultural keyword in Latin America

Speed talk

Susana Silvia Fernández & Ana Paulla Braga Mattos, Aarhus University

The phrase “A gale of hope for Latin America”, which opens the title of our intended presentation, reproduces a statement by former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa on the inauguration of the new president of Argentina in December 2019. This statement is an example of the frequent use of the terms *esperanza* (Spanish) and *esperança* (Portuguese) (hope) in the political and social discourse of Latin America. In this vast region, plagued by recurrent political and economic crisis and other social challenges, the feeling of hope, but also its counterpart, lack of hope/hopelessness, appear frequently in mass media, social media, the discourse of politicians and other public figures, as well as in the urban landscape, and represent the spirit of people, who are not ready to give up on a brighter future.

We propose that the terms *esperanza/esperança* are cultural keywords in Latin America. To analyze these terms, we have chosen two countries, Argentina and Brazil, to carry out a corpus study. We focus mainly on Twitter data, but we include other written media to identify the most salient semantic features of these words and their importance in these Latin American countries. As part of the analysis, we aim to unravel possible differences between Spanish and Portuguese, i.e., differences in use in the two selected countries.

Semantic molecules and Minimal Language: Translating ‘The Story of God and People’

Speed talk

Anna Gladkova, Australian National University/Monash University/Higher School of Economics

In this talk I will reflect on the experience of translating Anna Wierzbicka’s *The Story of God and People* from English into Russian (Wierzbicka 2019, Vežbickaja 2021). This book is an attempt to represent the key ideas and events of the Gospels using Minimal Language, that is empirically identified universal language (Goddard 2018, 2021). The talk focuses on two major issues arising in this translation – the translatability of semantic molecules and the representation of the text written in Minimal Language in its two versions – English and Russian. While a high level of accuracy of translation is expected in such a text, the issues of adequacy and differences are discussed.

References:

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Semantic molecules 'long', 'round', 'flat'

Full talk

Cliff Goddard, Griffith University

'Long', 'flat', and 'round' have been posited as important semantic molecules for 15+ years (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2007, cf. Wierzbicka 2006, 2007). This paper reports on an ongoing overhaul of previously published explications. The revision process was initially impelled by the need to eliminate non-allowable uses of the semantic prime HAVE PARTS (cf. Goddard and Wierzbicka 2021a, 2021b; Wierzbicka 2021), but various other improvements have been made along the way, some in response to new developments in the underlying metalanguage of semantic primes. The revised explications are simpler and more versatile than previous versions. The paper touches on the relationship between NSM and other approaches to cognitive semantics, on the issue of meaning extension, and on the question of how much commonality of meaning can be expected in the basic semantic molecules of different languages.

The Jish Arabic counterparts of the English perfect simple constructions: a morphological, syntactic, and semantic analysis

Full talk

Sandy Habib, Tel-Hai College, Israel

The idea that English has more tenses than Arabic seems to be widespread among EFL students, EFL teachers, and even researchers (Ridha 2012; Albalawi 2016). Sabbah (2015, 277), for example, claims that Arab learners of English cannot produce certain English tense-aspect forms, such as the past perfect simple or the present perfect progressive, because Arabic lacks equivalents of these forms. This, as I would argue, is a misconception, at least when it comes to some non-standard Arabic varieties. In this paper, I demonstrate that Jish Arabic has tense-aspect constructions that are comparable to the English perfect simple constructions; I present three tense-aspect forms (the Jish Arabic equivalents of the past perfect simple, present perfect simple, and future perfect simple), and I explicate them using the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (Goddard and Wierzbicka 1994; 2002; Goddard 2015).

The paper's contribution is twofold. First, it contributes to the field of theoretical linguistics (especially morphology, syntax, and semantics) as it uncovers a number of tense-aspect forms in a language whose tenses and aspects have not been studied before. Second, it contributes to TEFL, as it compares these forms to their English counterparts. The results show that the two sets share many similarities, which has important consequences for pedagogy (Ringbom and Jarvis 2009, 114).

If the EFL teacher in Jish is aware of these similarities and resorts to them while teaching his or her students, the latter are likely to benefit from them.

References:

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Personality adjectives in English and Russian: *moody person* and *kapriznij čelovek*

Speed talk

Alena Kazmaly, Griffith University

The talk presents two Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) explications from the field of "personality" words: English word *moody* and its Russian counterpart *kapriznyj*.

English adjective *moody* is commonly used in personality questionnaires and research. Its closest one-word translations across different languages are usually assumed to be conceptually equivalent. The talk addresses this assumption by methods of semantic analysis.

The talk shows that *moody* has a complex semantic structure, which is likely to be specific to English. For instance, Russian does not appear to have its full semantic equivalent. A number of words are commonly used to translate *moody* into Russian: *ugryumyj*, *khmuryj*, and *kapriznyj*. Among them, *kapriznyj* is chosen for the present contrastive showcase as one of the most common Russian "personality" descriptors. The semantic differences between English *moody* and Russian *kapriznyj*

are highlighted. The importance of the “global meanings” to the field of personality research and the potential applications of NSM are discussed.

Cultural Metapragmatics: A Nordic view on “Speaking” and “Speakers”

Full talk

Carsten Levisen, Roskilde University

In international metalinguistic discourse, the universal relevance of English words such as speaking and speakers is often taken for granted. But speaking and related terms are not value-neutral concepts; rather they are cultural constructs that afford specific ideas and values. In this paper, I will reflect on the vocabulary of metapragmatics, as seen from the perspective of two Danish verbs *tale* and *snakke*. These verbs are rough translational counterparts of English *speak*, but they have different semantic profiles, and they model different “ways of saying things”. The empirical frames for the exploration are based on prominent examples from Danish metapragmatic discourse, including examples from satirical discourse. Corpus evidence is employed to further broaden the analysis, and for this purpose, the TenTen Corpus Family will be utilized. The goal is not only to account for the meaning of Nordic speaking-related verbs, but also to critically examine the meaning and the status of the English words *speaking*, *speakers*, etc. The NSM method of paraphrase will be used, in order to bring these aims and perspectives together.

Nature in the Nuuk-Danish Universe of Meaning

Full talk

Stephanie Mašková, Roskilde University

The starting point of my study is the changing climate in Greenland, where the Arctic ecosystem and therefore the Inuit culture is threatened. Based on a postcolonial eco-semantic approach, I examine how nature is conceptualized in Nuuk-Danish. More specifically, by proposing NSM semantic explications, the study unfolds the emic knowledge embedded in the Nuuk-Danish words *hav* ‘sea’, *himmel* ‘sky’, *nordlys* ‘northern lights’, *midnatssol* ‘the sun that one can see in the sky at night’, *vintermørke* ‘winter darkness’, and *fjeldgænger* ‘a creature living in the fell’. The semantic explications are based on evidence from text examples and semantic consultations with young people in Nuuk, Greenland. Lastly, based on fieldwork, I analyze the language attitudes towards Kalaallisut (Greenlandic), Danish, and Nuuk-Danish. My research shows that the use of Kalaallisut is considered an indicator of decolonization and an integral part of the Greenlandic identity. Danish is seen as the privileged (post)colonial language giving access to education and job opportunities, and the use of Nuuk-Danish is perceived as marking both Danish and Greenlandic solidarity. Furthermore, Nuuk-Danish is thought of as an effective means of communication in a bilingual community.

References:

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Distrust that protects us: On the Czech counterpart of common sense

Full talk

Marie Pavlaskova

Zdravý rozum (lit. healthy reason) is the closest Czech equivalent of English common sense and is sometimes treated as its unproblematic counterpart with identical meaning. However, even a brief look at the semantic structure of both concepts shows that they do not mean the same. In my presentation, based on data from the Czech language corpora, Anna Wierzbicka’s analytical work on common sense (2010), and the broader tradition of European ethnolinguistics (Bartmiński 2016; Vaňková et al. 2005), I will use the Natural Semantic Metalanguage to show and highlight how *zdravý rozum* differs from common sense and what these differences tell us about the two respective conceptual and cultural universes of Czech and Anglo English. Where common sense reveals a rather optimistic attitude about our capacity to know the world and act accordingly, *zdravý rozum* tells a different and more sombre story: a story of a small European country, often at the mercy of others, where people use their “healthy reason” to protect themselves and keep sane under unfavourable circumstances.

References:

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Locating *kapwa* in Filipino emotions

Full talk

Jayson Petras, University of the Philippines

Filipino-English dictionaries usually define the word *kapwa* as “both,” “fellow being,” and “others.” However, in the context of Filipino psychology, *kapwa* refers to the recognition of shared identity, an inner self shared with others. It is the basis of Filipinos’ sense of interpersonalism or *pakikipagkapwa*, which refers to accepting and dealing with the other person as an equal (Enriquez, 1992).

Taking this as a starting point, this study aims to locate the concept of *kapwa* in the Filipinos’ understanding of emotions. Using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), participating students and professionals discussed their understanding of Filipino emotion words pertaining to *saya* [happiness], *lungkot* [sadness], *galit* [anger], and *takot* [fear]. The information generated from the FGDs was matched to the meanings provided by several monolingual and bilingual dictionaries and textual examples from the SEALang Library Tagalog Corpus. This became the basis for developing explications of the emotion words. Through NSM, it is highlighted in the explications how Filipino emotion words can be understood not only at the personal level, but also at the *kapwa* or interpersonal level.

Mottainai as a Japanese cultural keyword: How it is different from English ‘waste(ful)’

Full talk

Hiromichi Sakaba, Ritsumeikan University

This study aims to unpack the meaning of the Japanese term *mottainai* (roughly, ‘waste(ful)’), which can be regarded as a Japanese cultural keyword (Wierzbicka 1997). It is commonly used in daily life. For instance, parents encourage their children not to leave a single grain of rice in their bowls, saying that *gohan ga mottainai* (roughly, ‘you are wasting rice’). Based on the analysis of the daily life of Japanese consumers, Sirola et al., (2019: 8) observe that the concept of *mottainai* “guided the participants to buy only necessary food products, consume all the leftovers, and plan so that nothing goes to waste”.

It has also attracted attention outside of Japan. Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan environmentalist who won the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, introduced the Japanese term *mottainai* as a slogan to promote

environmental protection at a session of the United Nations. This term, she believes, perfectly encapsulates the spirit of the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle).

Employing Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014), this study attempted to clarify the meaning of *mottainai* in a way that is accessible to cultural outsiders. Especially by comparing it with the English word waste(ful), this study shows that the difference in meaning between them is the motivation behind the adoption of *mottainai* in environmental protection campaigns.

References:

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"Can there be a 'good me'?" — a progress report on the L0 Project

Speed talk

Michael Turner

The goal of the L0 Project is to put computational NSM on a language-neutral foundation by enabling users to express all word typology and grammatical relations in NSM. The sentence parsing algorithm is inspired by Applicative Universal Grammar (AUG) as an acceptably simple, flexible and efficient approach, while at the suprasentential level, at least some of Grice's Maxims, expressed in NSM, can serve as a "minimal cultural script" for the task of reductive paraphrase; the combination of the two, it turns out, offers surprising benefits for sensible parsing of reductive-paraphrase sentences in context. For cross-linguistic grammar engineering, it appears that Radical Construction Grammar (RCG) will be key to the virtual elimination of conventional grammatical nomenclature, which is so often semantically problematic.

"People can think like this" and related frames

Feature talk

Anna Wierzbicka, Australian National University

My main point is this: as people, we live very largely in a world of people, words and signs. Often, it is very important for us (as people) to be able to know how other people are thinking about something. We can find out a great deal about it if we know what the words and other signs used by people in a given country, or a community, mean. Semantics – as I understand it – can help with these crucial human tasks and needs.

When we (as semanticists) look more closely at words and signs, we discover that their very meanings often reflect people's concern with how other people are thinking -or have thought -about some things. In particular, when we look at words from an NSM perspective, we find that the meaning of many words includes components framed with phrases like "people can think about it like this", "many people think about it like this", "we can think about it like this"; or perhaps "these people think about it like this", "some people think about it like this" and "we think about it like this".

In this talk, I will illustrate the use of such components in a number of NSM explications. In particular, I want to look at the relevant sections of NSM explications of the English words *long* and *red*; *animals* and *kangaroos*; *miracle*; and *manna*; and also of some faith-related words, including the English word *Christ*, the Russian word *Xristos* and the Polish word *Chryste* (vocative); the Polish word *Maryja*; and the English word *Eucharist* and its equivalents in other European languages

I will also argue that components framed with phrases like "people can think about it like this" are needed for the explications not only of the meanings expressed by words but also of the meanings of signs other than words (or combinations of words). As an example, I want to discuss the meaning of a green light in a sequence of traffic light; and also, of a handshake (as used in countries like Australia).

To conclude, I will invite discussion about the status and range of frames like "people can think like this" in NSM semantics.

Understanding an 'atas Singaporean': The cultural semantics of the Singlish keyword *atas*

Winner of the 2022 Bert Peeters Prize for Best Student Essay in NSM Semantics

Kay Yeo, National University of Singapore

While Singlish, the colloquial language of Singapore, is known to be a well-established variety of English, it is also influenced by the ever-evolving Singapore culture (Wierzbicka, 2003). This is reflected in the rise and fall in use of various Singlish cultural keywords over time. A current cultural keyword of Singlish is *atas*, which very roughly means 'high-class'. Originating from the Malay word 'above' (Mathew, 2018), *atas* is polysemous and can refer to a person or an object (Singlish Dictionary, 2017). This paper aims to study the meaning of the Singlish keyword *atas* (referring to a person) and offer a cultural perspective as reflected in its use. To analyse the meaning of *atas*, data is collected from several online sources, including text messages, websites, forums, and social media posts where *atas* is used in authentic contexts. An online survey is also conducted with 30 Singaporeans, mainly students from the National University of Singapore. This paper presents a minimally ethnocentric and precise explication of the Singlish keyword *atas* via NSM. A subsequent cultural interpretation of the keyword demonstrates its multifaceted significance; while *atas* reflects the aspirations of Singaporeans, it also signifies a form of cultural tension between the older and younger generations as well as between typical Singaporeans and *atas* people.