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1.1 Aims of this book

In this book we show that there are predictable paths for semantic change across different conceptual structures and domains of language function.¹ Most especially we will show that, despite century-old taxonomies that suggest that meaning changes are bidirectional, e.g. generalization and narrowing, metaphor and metonymy, when we trace the histories of lexemes cross-linguistically we in fact repeatedly find evidence for unidirectional changes. These changes are of a different sort from those cited in the taxonomies. The taxonomies focus on mechanisms, the kinds of cognitive and communicative processes speakers and hearers bring to the task of learning and using a language. The regularities are, however, shifts from one linguistically coded meaning to another, for example, from obligation to do something to conclusion that something is the case. Such regularities are prototypical types of changes that are replicated across times and languages. They are possible, indeed probable, tendencies, not changes that are replicated across every possible meaningful item at a specific point in time in a specific language, such as the Neogrammarians postulated for sound change. That they recur so often and across totally unrelated languages is, we argue, intrinsically bound up with the cognitive and communicative processes by which pragmatic meanings come to be conventionalized and reanalyzed as semantic polysemies. In particular, they are bound up with the mechanisms that we call “invited inferencing” and “subjectification.” This book, therefore, is a contribution to historical pragmatics as well as semantics. We pay special attention to conceptual structures that can broadly be construed as either modal or deictic, or both.

As an example of issues regarding regularity of change affecting semantic code in the sense to be discussed in this book, consider the well-known fact that in Modern English *must* can in some uses be ambiguous. A much-used example is:

- (1) They *must* be married.

¹ Parts of this chapter, especially 1.3.2, build on Traugott (1995a, 1996/97, 1999a, 1999b).

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In this form (1) is ambiguous – out of context, therefore devoid of possible contextual clues; and written, therefore devoid of possible intonational clues. There is an obligation sense as in:

- (2) They *must* be/get married, I demand it.

and a conclusion/high certainty sense, as in:

- (3) They *must* be married, I am sure of it.

Must in (2) is known as the “deontic” modal, in (3) as the “epistemic” modal. Similarly, throughout the recorded history of the Japanese language, we find that the verb suffix *-beki* (*-besi*) expresses obligation in some contexts and probability in others. It has often been pointed out that when an item has the meanings of both obligation and epistemic possibility, the obligation sense precedes the epistemic one in the history of the language in question (for English see e.g. Shepherd 1981, Traugott 1989; for Chinese, Sun 1996, Peyraube 1999). What can we make of such similarities among language histories? Are they the result of mere happenstance, or can they be construed as outcomes of similar cognitive and communicative processes?

As is the case with *must*, many forms that express obligation and epistemic possibility are not full lexical verbs, but grammatical forms restricted both syntactically and morphologically in terms of position, cooccurrence, and form. On first pass one might ask whether perhaps the meaning change from obligation to conclusion has something to do with the grammatical status of the forms in question. However, evidence from full-fledged lexical verbs suggests that any link between susceptibility to semantic change and grammatical status of the form is only coincidental. For example:

- (4) I *promise* to do my best.

a directive imposing obligation on oneself as speaker, historically antedates:

- (5) She *promises* to be an outstanding teacher.

a statement expressing the speaker’s high degree of certainty. Similarly in Japanese the verb *tikau* appears in the earliest stages of the language with the meaning “swear an oath (of allegiance or obligation)” and only much later comes to be used in the meaning “swear (that something is true).” Somewhat akin is the shift from “command” (imposing obligation on the addressee) > “say” (stating that something is true) as exemplified by Japanese *ossyaru* “(respected subject referent) say(s).”

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This originates in *ooseraru*, a formulaic derivation of *o(h)osu* “command.”² The similarities in the semantic changes, and the fact that they occur in different and unrelated languages, English, Chinese, and Japanese, suggest that there must be some overarching principles of language use that account for the replication of meaning changes across languages and categories.

It has long been recognized that phonological change is regular in the sense that certain changes can probabilistically be expected to recur across languages, depending on the phonetic properties in question, e.g. “In chain shifts, peripheral vowels become more open and nonperipheral vowels become less open” (Labov 1994: 601). Work on grammaticalization over the last two decades has shown that morphosyntactic change is regular in a somewhat similar sense, e.g. adpositions may give rise to case morphology, but usually not vice versa (see e.g. Lehmann 1995 [1982]). In the semantic domain, evidence has also been accumulating that there are predictable patterns of change undergone by individual lexemes cross-linguistically. At every level, language use is constrained by the structural properties of the form in question, and the cognitive and communicative purposes for which language is used.

The greatest degree of semantic regularity has so far been found in conceptual structures the lexemes of which are typically associated with grammaticalization, e.g. spatial deixis (*come, go*), temporal deixis (*now, then*), aspect (*have, finish*), modality (*want, will*), and case relations (*belly, head*). However, on closer inspection, members of a far larger range of conceptual domains, especially lexemes that are verbal and (in relevant languages) adjectival or adverbial, also exhibit regular patterns of semantic change. Our purpose is to show that semantic change recurs over a wide range of conceptual structures, whatever the grammatical status of the lexeme in question.

In all cases of linguistic change, the regularities are not absolute.³ Changes fail to occur, and exceptions can be found. This is particularly true in the semantic domain, given the nature of the lexicon, which is far from immune to reference and therefore to changing life-styles and ideologies. It turns out, however, that irregular meaning changes seem to occur primarily in the nominal domain, which

² The formula is passive-causative, lit. “(can) be allowed to command.” This construction was relatively productive in Middle Japanese as a formula that marked respectful honorification on non-honorific verbs; in this function, the formula did not necessarily express passive-causative meaning.

³ “Formal” generative theories of language structure have tended to find little of interest in tendencies rather than universally defined, deterministic rules (e.g. Newmeyer 1998). However, functionally oriented theories have always recognized that constraints are violable. The enormous success of Optimality Theory in recent years stems in part from the difficulty in constructing exceptionless universals (Archangeli 1997).

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is particularly susceptible to extralinguistic factors such as change in the nature or the social construction of the referent. For example, the referents of towns, armor, rockets, vehicles, pens, communication devices, etc., have changed considerably over time, as have concepts of disease, hence the meanings attached to the words referring to them have changed in ways not subject to linguistic generalization. Likewise the meaning of a word can change due to institutional fiat, such as the redefinition in the USA of *harassment* “annoyance” by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Or it may change due to the decision by certain communities to reclaim for positive purposes of group identification or pride a word that has been used in pejorative ways against them. For example, *Yankee* (possibly derived from Dutch *Jane*, a nickname for “John”) was a term used derisively by the British for New England settlers; after the Battle of Lexington (1775), however, New Englanders claimed the name for themselves;⁴ similarly, the term *queer* was claimed roughly two centuries later, for example in contexts such as *Queer Theory*. A word being reclaimed at the time of writing by some African Americans is *nappy* (of hair); this term, referring to naturally kinky hair, has become derogatory and highly politicized, but there is a movement to give it a positive, or at least neutral meaning.

At the micro-level each instance of semantic change has its own peculiar characteristics. These may derive from the specific properties of the lexeme undergoing change. Or they may derive from the broader synchronic lexical and grammatical system in the language for expressing the conceptual structure in question (e.g. obligation). Or yet again, these peculiar characteristics may derive from the circumstances surrounding the actuation of the change in a speech community at a particular time. In other words, each lexeme considered on its own, has its own individual history. At the macro-level, however, the direction of semantic change is often highly predictable, not only within a language but also cross-linguistically. This book attempts to account for individual micro-changes within the framework of macro-processes.

Several major studies of semantic change since the end of the nineteenth century, such as Bréal (1964 [1900], 1991 [1882]), Stern (1968 [1931]), and Ullmann (1957, 1964), have proposed taxonomies of semantic changes in terms of opposing pairs of mechanisms like amelioration–pejoration, broadening–narrowing, metaphor–metonymy. These provided ways of classifying changes, but, because each pair was conceived as an opposition, no framework was offered in which to consider overarching types of semantic change, or to imagine unidirectionality of change. Hence no systemic relationship between pairs was or could be posited. Such taxonomies are often still considered to be the current state of knowledge in the field of semantic change. However, interest in the possibility of discovering replicated

⁴ *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1992: *Yankee*, Word History).

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unidirectionality in semantic change goes back at least to Stern (1968 [1931]), who showed that terms for “rapidly” came to mean “immediately” in Middle English (ME). His was a study of a particular phenomenon in a particular language at a particular time, and therefore did not catch much attention. Cross-linguistic studies of replicable sequences of change in lexemes came into being with work on color terms (e.g. Berlin and Kay 1969), and on “synaesthetic” adjectives of sensation and perception (e.g. Williams 1976). These were studies of changes within lexical domains, with emphasis on physiological motivations for the changes. More recently the emphasis has been on unidirectionality from one lexical or conceptual structure to another and its motivation in metaphor (an iconic strategy) and implicatures (a metonymic, associative, and indexical strategy), and on evidence for subjectification (e.g. Traugott 1982, 1989, 1995a, Brinton 1988, 1996, Sweetser 1990, Heine, Claudi, and Hünemeyer 1991). A history of work on semantic change is sketched in chapter 2.

We will argue for an Invited Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change (IITSC) (Traugott 1999a). Being concerned with both cognitive and functional issues, we draw on several strands of research, including: (i) cognitive studies of the structuring of semantic domains (e.g. Talmy 1985, 1988, Langacker 1987/91, Sweetser 1990, Geeraerts 1997), (ii) pragmatics, especially the pragmatics of the conventionalizing of implicatures (we will call them “invited inferences”) that arise in language use (e.g. Geis and Zwicky 1971, Grice 1989 [1975], Brown and Levinson 1987 [1978], Faltz 1989, Horn 1984, Levinson 1995, 2000, Clark 1996), and (iii) discourse analysis conceived as the interaction of grammar and use (Hopper and Thompson 1980), but adapted to the study of written texts because these are the prime data for studies of change with a long time-depth (see e.g. Fleischman 1982, 1992). The term “invited inference” is borrowed from Geis and Zwicky (1971). However, as will emerge below, we have a broader interpretation of invited inferences than they, and do not restrict the term to generalized implicatures. In the present context it is meant to elide the complexities of communication in which the speaker/writer (SP/W) evokes implicatures and invites the addressee/reader (AD/R) to infer them. We prefer this term over, e.g. “context-induced inferences” (Heine, Claudi, and Hünemeyer 1991), since the latter term suggests a focus on AD/Rs as interpreters and appears to downplay the active role of SP/Ws in rhetorical strategizing, indeed indexing and choreographing the communicative act.⁵ To the extent possible, semantic change will be contextualized within larger discourse structures, typically across sentence boundaries. The book therefore engages with historical discourse analysis and historical pragmatics (see Fleischman 1992, Jucker 1995).

⁵ Note, however, that, despite the term, Heine, Claudi, and Hünemeyer view SP/W as central forces in innovation.

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With data taken from various semantic domains and various languages, we find several unifying threads in recurring patterns of semantic change. One is the overarching tendency for meanings to undergo subjectification (they come to express grounding in the SP/W's perspective explicitly), and ultimately intersubjectification (they come to express grounding in the relationship between speaker/writer and addressee/reader explicitly). A further commonality is that meanings expressing proposition-internal concepts may come to have scope over the whole proposition, as in the case of epistemic modals; or over the whole utterance, as in the case of discourse markers that show connectivity between what precedes and what follows; or they may come to have scope over whole chunks of discourse, as in the case of episode markers. Items with such scope serve to anchor the proposition explicitly in one or more of the conditions that hold in a particular speech event, such as the relative spatial, temporal, or social arrangement of the interlocutors, the speaker's attitude toward or assessment of the likelihood of the described event⁶ as conceptualized at the time of speaking, or the function of the given utterance in the ongoing construction of the discourse. For example, until recently the Japanese verb *ageru* "give" was a humiliating honorific that indexed the subject (the giver) as lower in social status than the indirect object (the recipient). In present day usage, however, *ageru* in many instances marks the speaker's politeness toward the addressee without indexing the social status of its subject and indirect object. In this addressee honorific use, *ageru* may be used with animals or other social inferiors as its indirect object. As an "addressee honorific," the word anchors the expression of the entire proposition in the speaker–addressee social relationship.

1.2 The theory of grammar and of language use

Since our topic is change and most especially the discourse processes involved in change, we need not only a theory of grammar but also a theory of language use and of the mutual relationship between use and grammar. No one model of grammar is espoused here, but our approach is in principle consistent with the variety of theories associated more or less directly with Construction Grammar and Cognitive Linguistics (see e.g. Fillmore 1982, 1985, Lakoff 1987, Langacker 1987–91, Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor 1988, Talmy 1988, Sweetser 1990, Jackendoff 1997, Kay 1997, and Goldberg 1995). Our assumption is that structural and communicative aspects of language shape the form of grammar (see e.g. Vallduví 1992, Lambrecht 1994).

If we assume that "grammar" is "linguistic system" and "code" (mostly language-specific, with very little provided by a putative Universal Grammar), the link between

⁶ We use the term "described event" as a cover term to refer to the actions, states of affairs, and the participants in them that are at the core of clause structure.

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“grammar” and “use” is the SP/W – AD/R dyad,⁷ who negotiate meaning in interactive ways, both responding to context and creating context (see e.g. Silverstein 1976a, Schiffrin 1987, and various papers in Duranti and Goodwin 1992). Although this dyad may appear symmetric (and indeed has been memorialized as such by models like Saussure’s “talking heads”), in fact it is not: SP/Ws have mental states and produce meanings that may or may not be understood by AD/Rs in the way intended. Although both members of the dyad are “ground” in the sense of participants assumed in the context of a particular speech or reading event (for the interactive nature of reading events, see 1.2.3 below), SP/W, when exercising his or her turn, has the central role in the context. As we will discuss below, SP/W’s central role calls for a production-oriented view of language change, and accounts for why the major type of semantic change is subjectification. Here it must suffice to say that SP/W is the prime negotiator (with AD/R) of reference and of meaning in general, using indexicals and deictic shifters that permit the assigning of variables for speaker, hearer, time, place, communicative relevance, and social status.

1.2.1 Meaning and grammar

We regard the basic function of language to be to convey meaning. We also take as fundamental the notion that meaning is both cognitive and communicative. Our focus is on the lexicon and the usage patterns of lexical items in constructions. In our view lexemes (Ls) are particular language-specific representations of macro-level conceptual structures (Cs). Cs are highly abstract structures such as MOTION, LOCATION, CONDITION, DEGREE, HUMAN BEING, EPISTEMIC ATTITUDE, and may include non-linguistic meanings, such as those construed by vision. They are more or less stable and consistent across the human species, though they are inevitably somewhat influenced by culture (Györi 1996: 180–181). They are linked to more particular, and more culturally dependent, but still highly abstract linguistic meanings (Ms), subject to constraints on how Ms are combined. For example, the macro-level C of LOCATION is linked to Ms such as IN, OUT, AROUND; the C of HUMAN BEING is linked to MALE, FEMALE, PARENT OF; and the C of EPISTEMIC ATTITUDE is linked to HIGH PROBABILITY, POSSIBILITY, LOW PROBABILITY, etc.⁸

Ms are abstract linguistic representations of, among other things, situation types (processes, activities, and states), the participants in them (functioning in roles

⁷ The dyad is of course a simplification. In many situations it is expanded to include multiple addressees, and “other participants,” e.g. bystanders and eavesdroppers (see Clark 1996: 14, Verschueren 1999: 85).

⁸ Cs and Ms are represented in capitals, by convention, to distinguish them from individual lexemes of the same form.

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such as agent, experiencer, instrument, location), belief types (modalities), and communicative situations (speech acts). The types are not rigid categories but prototypes – family resemblance structures, members of which are more or less representative of the category (Rosch 1975, Coleman and Kay 1981, Wierzbicka 1985a, Taylor, 1997 [1989]). Being prototype in character in that they are relatively discrete but not categorically so, distinctions between Ms are gradient rather than fully determined. This means that what is at the core of a prototype can also change over time and differ across languages (see Blank 1997, Geeraerts 1997). Such possible differences in frame structure or prototype must be considered in any analysis of diachronic or cross-linguistic data in regard to semantics or semantic change.

Linguistic elements of conceptual structure (Ms and rules of combination) are, by hypothesis, universally available, and are linked to morphosyntactic and phonological structure in ways approximately as modeled in Jackendoff (1997). However, Cs may not be used in all cultures or communities within the same culture with equal saliency: at a detailed level the frame structures and the links between conceptual structure, morphosyntactic structure, and phonological structure may differ across languages and across time. For example, Pederson et al. (1998) show that cross-linguistically there may be different frames of spatial reference: not exclusively the relative space based on projections from the human body that are common in English (*front–back, left–right*), but also absolute reference based on fixed bearings such as north and south.

An individual lexeme L is a language-specific combination of elements from each component: a meaningful element M, a morphosyntactic one (S), and a phonological one (P):

$$(6) \quad L \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} M \\ S \\ P \end{bmatrix}$$

The M and S elements are thought of not as collections of individual properties (such as a feature analysis might suggest), but rather as members of frames (see e.g. Fillmore 1985, Levin 1993, Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995, and papers in Lehrer and Kittay 1992). For example, *run* conceptually involves (pre-theoretically) an Agent (the mover) and a Path (the trajectory along which the mover moves). Such conceptual frames can have significant syntactic consequences. In the instance of *run*, the syntactic consequences include intransitivity and the possibility of overt expressions of temporal and locational relations (*ran yesterday to the store*). They also have more fine-grained consequences in terms of local constructions. On an abstract level, *run* and *jog* are equivalent, but at a more fine-grained one, they are different; thus running can be competitive whereas jogging is usually not: *Mary*

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ran against Jane, but ?*Mary jogged against Jane*, or *Mary ran a race*, but **Mary jogged a race* (Taylor 1996). As a working hypothesis we assume that differences in syntactic frame reflect differences in constructional meaning.

Differences in conceptual frame are of course also found between corresponding words in different languages, and there may be differences in the frame structure of a C or M as realized by corresponding families of lexemes in two languages. For example, *run* and its Japanese (Jp.) counterpart *hasiru* are essentially intransitive, but they can appear with direct objects that express the traversal of a path. While this pattern in English (Eng.) appears restricted to the completion of a finite path or distance, e.g. *run a race*, *run a mile*, in Jp. it may be used for partial as well as complete traversal: *miti o hasiru* “run (down/along) the street.” Such use is characteristic of other motion verbs in Jp. as well, e.g. *tobu* “fly” (*sora o tobu*, literally “fly (through/in) the sky”).⁹ This class of “quasi-transitive” motion verbs (see Martin 1975: 186–188) provides evidence that the C of MOTION is realized with a somewhat different frame structure in Eng. and in Jp. (see also Fong 1997 on differences between Eng. and Finnish). As another working hypothesis, we assume that differences in syntax reflect differences in conceptual frame.

Despite evident similarities to research in frameworks consistent with Construction Grammar and Cognitive Linguistics, our approach is considerably different in focus. Some differences are directly related to the fact that our topic is language change from a discourse perspective. Specifically, our data are necessarily written texts, not constructed data (except occasionally to highlight a point). Therefore our data are instances of language in use, not of linguistic competence abstracted from context. As we have indicated, our theory thus pertains not only to cognition (mental representations) but also to SP/W and AD/R as dynamic participants. Central to our view of the dynamic nature of language change are the processes SP/Ws and AD/Rs bring “on-line” to the act of language use. Though speakers and hearers draw from paradigmatically organized sets of constructions, lexical items, and other resources, on-line production and processing make use of essentially syntagmatic relations and associations. Therefore, invited inferences and metonymic relationships predominate. We will argue that metaphorical, analogical relationships often provide the background contexts for and often appear as the resulting products of change, but that they are less important in the process of change than are associative, metonymic ones. Furthermore, image-schemata such as are central to Cognitive Linguistic thinking are shown to be only one (relatively small) component of the conceptual structures on which language-users draw.

⁹ This class of “quasi-transitive” motion verbs differs from other transitive verbs in Jp. For example, unlike true transitives, these motion verbs in their transitive uses do not appear in the passive (**sora ga tobareru* “the sky is flown” is not possible).

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Although we do not espouse many of the particular theoretical claims and assumptions of Relevance Theory, most particularly not the emphasis on monosemy and on decoding by addressees, we nevertheless share several of their assumptions. One is that conceptual meanings (Ms in our sense) have to do with entities, activities, attitudes, etc. and, when combined into propositions, may be subject to truth-conditional interpretation; they are, however, not to be identified with truth-conditional meaning (Wilson and Sperber 1993, Sperber and Wilson 1995 [1986]). For example, in (7):

- (7) On the record, I'm happily married; off the record, I'm about to divorce.
 (Wilson and Sperber 1993: 19)

on the record and *off the record*, as “illocutionary” or “stance” adverbials, do not contribute to the truth-conditions of the sentence, but they do contribute conceptual meaning. Otherwise, as Wilson and Sperber point out, the sentence would be contradictory.

Like Relevance Theorists, we also assume that there is a division of labor among Ms: some are primarily contentful, others primarily procedural (Blakemore 1987).¹⁰ Meanings expressed by nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, and adverbs in some of their uses are usually of the contentful type. By contrast, procedural meanings are primarily indexical of SP/W's attitudes to the discourse and the participants in it; they index metatextual relations between propositions or between propositions and the non-linguistic context. They include discourse markers (*well, in fact, so* in some of their meanings), various connectives (*and, but*), and express SP/W's view of the way these propositions should be understood to be connected. For example, *so* in:

- (8) a. *So*, what's for lunch?
 b. *So*, our speaker tonight is Bella Johnson.

cannot be analyzed in terms of its contribution to the propositions *X is for lunch*, *Our speaker tonight is Bella Johnson*, but rather encodes the SP/W's evocation of some connectivity (in the first case to prior expectations that the interlocutor will have planned a menu, in the second to prior expectations that the speaker will be introduced). Further, some forms have both contentful and procedural meaning (Nicolle 1998). They are what Silverstein called “duplex signs” that are

¹⁰ Blakemore and, following her, other Relevance Theorists use the term “conceptual” rather than “contentful”; however, we use the latter term (see Sweetser 1990) because both procedural and non-procedural language-specific meanings are representations of more abstract Conceptual Structures (Cs).