

Review: The Lexical Typology of Semantic Shifts.

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PRESENTATION

Review of *The Lexical Typology of Semantic Shifts*, Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Päivi Juvonen (eds.), Berlin / New-York: De Gruyter. 2016.
Olivier Bondéelle

This volume considers the lexical typology of semantic shifts, which can be defined roughly speaking as relations between multiple meanings for a single lexical item, either diachronically or synchronically. The edited volume is dedicated to Peter Koch (author of chapter 2) who passed away in 2014.

SUMMARY

In chapter 1 (“Introduction”), Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm situates the volume in the research field of lexical typology. She starts by recalling the main notions used in the volume, namely semantic shift or semantic extension, motivation which offers a different perspective on semantic shift, and semantic parallelisms which are recurrent cross-linguistic semantic shifts. She then situates the chapters in three linguistic traditions, i.e. cognitive semantics, lexical typology, and areal and historical linguistics. Finally, she presents each paper after having specified that the volume is organized in 3 parts. Part 1 (chapters 1 to 6) is devoted to theoretical and methodological approaches in lexical typology. Part 2 (chapters 7 to 12) covers cross-linguistic studies on semantic shifts in different conceptual domains, with a universal perspective, while part 3 (chapters 13 to 17) focuses on motivation strategies.

In chapter two (“Meaning Change and semantic shifts”) Peter Koch draws a many-faceted portrait of semantic shifts from a diachronic perspective, in the cognitive semantics tradition. He introduces various aspects of semantic shifts. Among linguistic facts on semantic meaning change, the author distinguishes meaning innovation and meaning change, speaker-induced change and hearer-induced change. Among types of change, he discusses meaning specialization *vs* meaning generalization, co-hyponomic transfer of meaning, metonymic change *vs* metaphoric change, and contrast-based change. He finally situates meaning change among other diachronic lexical processes such as word-formation and borrowing, suggesting further research avenues to model meaning change in its various aspects.

In chapter three (“Semantic shifts as sources of enantiosemy”), Alexei Shmelev focuses on semantic shifts closely related to enantiosemy (opposite meanings within a single item). He argues that enantiosemy is rare in a strict sense, but frequent in a broader sense. In a typological perspective, he takes into account not only word pairs, but also grammatical morphemes and pairs of phrases, in a single language or in a few languages from the same family. An examination of Slavic language data reveals some regularities: meaning opposition occurs in various “converse” pairs which refer to the same situation (opposite participants, reverse processes, opposite results). This leads Shmelev to conclude that regular semantic shifts are caused by pragmatic (conventionalization) or discourse effects (irony) as well as cognitive motivations (metaphor and metonymy).

In chapter 4 (“A Frame-based methodology for lexical typology”), Ekaterina Rakhilina and Tatiana Reznikova argue for a methodology especially designed for lexical typology. The general principle comes from the Moscow semantic school (Apresjan 2000) which claims that it is by comparing the lexico-grammar of semantically linked words that the organization of lexical domains emerges. Throughout the different steps described by the authors, words

which have similar profiles and which refer to the same situations are grouped in “Frames” (different from Fillmore’s frame semantics) which structure lexical domains. Cross-linguistic comparisons of lexical domains are represented on semantic maps, where a Frame is represented by a node. Semantic shifts are visualized by arrows between Frames in the same lexical domain (metonymy) and between Frames in different domains (metaphor). This methodology has been tested for AQUA MOTION, PAIN, QUALITY, and SOUND in languages from different families.

In chapter five (“Corpus methods for the investigation of antonyms across languages”), Caritas Paradis proposes a series of corpus-based techniques to identify and analyze antonyms cross-linguistically. She reports a set of experiments and tests for Swedish, Dutch, English, Japanese, and Russian which can be repeated for other languages. The basic hypothesis is that there are recurrent antonyms in languages for semantic domains such as SPEED or SIZE that are central to human experience, and also other, less canonical antonyms, but which are also essential to understand binary oppositions in language and cognition. The proposed techniques capture co-occurrence patterns of antonyms in continuous and discontinuous constructions. For discontinuous constructions, results show that there are conceptual oppositions between antonyms, and not only lexical associations. For continuous constructions, results show that there are various types of antonyms. This diversity serves as a basis for a cross-linguistic analysis. These techniques provide evidence that similar patterns exist between languages and that constructions have different distributions across them.

In chapter 6 (“Studying colexification through massively parallel corpora”), Robert Östling uses large annotated and aligned corpora to extract colexification patterns in languages (distinct meanings for the same lexical item, cf. François 2008). His work is based on 1142 New Testament translations in 1001 languages. He tests three colexification patterns, i.e. STONE / MOUNTAIN, ARM / HAND, and TREE / FIRE. Even after taking the errors of automatic translations into account, results show that it is possible to extract colexification patterns from large corpora and to rapidly identify areal patterns. He illustrates this with the TREE / FIRE colexification, which is widespread in Australian and Papuan and New-Guinean languages.

In chapter 7 (“Polysemy in action: The Swedish verb slå ‘hit, strike, beat’ in a crosslinguistic perspective”) Åke Viberg proposes a cross-linguistic pattern of semantic shift, based on prototypical meanings of the Swedish verb slå ‘hit, strike, beat’. He uses parallel corpora to (i) provide evidence for sense extension of the Swedish verb and its parallels in other languages; (ii) study contextual variations; (iii) take into account the diachronic dimension. Results are compared to other verbs of contact in a few languages from different families and areas in a typological perspective. He extracts a network of sense extensions from a prototypical meaning as an action by manual contact, which he explicates by a folk model of human biology.

In chapter 8 (“Making do with minimal lexica. Light verb constructions with MAKE / DO in pidgin lexica”), Päivi Juvonen examines semantic shifts of MAKE / DO in thirty pidgins in various areas. These languages have the particularity of having a highly reduced lexicon (around 150 lexical items), and speakers recycle available meanings by the massive use of light verb constructions. The author describes the colexification patterns of these verbs, and then shows that these patterns can be explicated by grammaticalization or by conventionalization of usage in idioms.

In chapter 9 (“Extended uses of body-related temperature expressions”) Susanne Vejdemo and Sigi Vandewinkel present the results of their cross-linguistic study of temperature expressions based on body parts in seven languages from diverse families and areas. They analyze conceptual metaphors from temperature as source to targets, mostly emotions. It turns out that all the languages examined have body-temperature expressions and that two conceptual metaphor pairs determine them, namely CONTROL IS COLD / LACK OF CONTROL IS HOT, and EMPATHY IS HOT / LACK OF EMPATHY IS COLD. Temperature scales are mapped onto emotions. The hypothesis that claims that climatic factors determine body-temperature expressions is not confirmed.

In chapter 10 (“The semantic domain of emotion in Eskimo and neighbouring languages”) Michael Fortescue focuses on a characteristic of Eskimo languages that may be unique. In these languages, some roots referring to emotions constitute a distinct morphological category. He shows that neighbouring Chukotian languages but not other neighbouring families also share this category. He examines this areal pattern and suggests that diachronic and comparative data tend to acknowledge regular metonymical semantic shifts from physical / visceral emotions to more abstract emotions, that are culturally determined.

In chapter 11 (“Motivational scenarios and semantic frames for social relations in Slavic, Romance and Germanic languages – friends, enemies, and others”) Galina Yavorska and Galyna Zymovets combine etymological reconstructions and synchronic cross-linguistic comparisons to examine patterns of semantic shifts in the SOCIAL RELATIONS domain in Slavic, Germanic and Romance languages. Synchronic polysemy is interpreted as a semantic shift from a source concept to a target concept. It turns out that semantic shift patterns are variable. Some are widespread such as ENEMY → NOT-FRIEND whereas some others such as ENEMY → DEVIL are restricted to a small group of languages.

In chapter 12 (“Tree, firewood and fire in the languages of Sahul”) Antoinette Schapper, Lila San Roque and Rachel Hende examine the colexification of TREE, FIREWOOD and FIRE in 300 Papuan, New-Guinean and Australian languages. They analyse relations between simple and complex terms that refer to these concepts, thus helping to elucidate the geographic distribution among families of this colexification pattern. Results show that (i) the most common colexification pattern in this area is FIRE-FIREWOOD and that it is present elsewhere only in South America; (ii) areality is reinforced since this pattern occurs in Austronesia languages in this area, but not elsewhere, (iii) this areal pattern has various developments in the different families. It can be inherited, or be diffused in multiple ways at multiple times.

In chapter 13 (“Investigating lexical motivation in French and Italian”) Daniela Maarzo and Birgit Umbreit tackle the question of motivation (polysemy and word-formation) in French and Italian, from the perspective of native-speaker judgments. They test four cognitive hypotheses on speaker preferences. Results show that the recognition of motivated pairs depends on four interacting factors, namely (1) stimulus frequency, (2) meaning salience, (3) conceptual relations distribution in the language, and (4) conceptual relation types. They show that the order of the factors varies. Meaning salience (2) can overtake stimulus frequency (1) and both can be supplanted by conceptual relations.

In chapter 14 (“Types of motivation in folk plant taxonomies”) Wiltrud Mihatsch analyzes semantic motivation patterns for polysemy and morphological patterns for word-formation processes in plant taxonomies in Romance languages. He distinguishes very different

motivation patterns either below or above the basic level, and considers that this fact reveals a folk model of taxonomy. Relations between the basic level and its subordinate level are correlated to the degree of prototypicality of the subordinate. And relations between the basic level and its superordinate level show restrictions indicating that the basic level is prominent.

In chapter 15 (“Differences and Interactions between scientific and folk biological taxonomy”), Maksim Russo deals with semantic shifts of animal and plant names. Recurrent motivational patterns for these shifts are used to understand regular cross-linguistic relationships between scientific and folk taxonomies. The author further examines traces of scientific biology in folk biology, through examples of scientific terminology in common language and the associated semantic shifts. Results show that folk classifications tend to use massively external features and utilitarian properties of entities, whereas scientific classifications favour the genesis of organisms. He suggests that scientific biological terms which have become popular in common language develop semantic features coming from folk biological terms.

In chapter 16 (“Holistic motivation: systematization and application to the COOKING domain”), Markus Ising discusses “holistic” motivation, i.e. the target concept is associated to the source concept and to its expression. He examines holistic motivation for the COOKING domain in 75 languages from 31 families. It covers contiguity and similarity relations, taxonomy and some mixed relations between TO COOK / THE COOK and source concepts. There are two general results. Qualitatively, holistic shifts are not only based on contiguity and similarity, but also on taxonomy. Quantitatively, taxonomy and especially the subordination relation are by far the most frequent holistic motivations.

In chapter 17 (“Motivation by formally analyzable terms in a typological perspective: an assessment of the variation and steps towards explanation”), Matthias Urban inquires into the degree of morphological motivation for lexical items in languages of the world. Drawing on a sample of 160 prominent nominal meanings in 78 languages, he shows that there are correlations between the relative prevalence of analyzability in a language with the size of its consonant inventory, the complexity of its syllable structure and the length of its nominal roots. This suggests that languages with a simple phonological structure have a high lexical analyzability. Recalling the incidence of short lexical roots on homophony, the author argues that ambiguity avoidance and communicative efficacy could explain the relative importance of analyzable items in languages.

EVALUATION

This volume is highly welcome since few reference books on semantic shifts have been published to date: Traugott and Dasher (2005) was diachronically oriented, while Vanhove (ed. 2008) connected diachronic semantic change and synchronic polysemy. This volume is the first one to be clearly typologically oriented. It covers many languages from various families and areas. However, Africa, South America and Asia are only dealt with in passing in the chapters, doubtless due to the sociological / geographical context of the chosen authors, many of whom are specialists of European and Australian / Papuan New Guinean languages, but not of other areas.

The volume is remarkably well balanced: each part contains 5 or 6 chapters, though it would have been helpful if these 3 main parts indicated in the introduction had been typographically signalled in the table of contents, and separated in the book.

Some of the chapters resonate with others, even if the theoretical and methodological choices are not the same.

In the first, theoretically oriented part, chapters 2, 3, and 5 enrich the reader's understanding of opposition as a conceptual relation between two meanings. Chapters 2 and 3 assume that semantic shifts by enantiosemy are rare, and that the regular cases of opposite meanings in the same linguistic form have to be analyzed as the asymmetry of lexical meanings (p. 51-52, 86-87), or as discourse effects and pragmatic conventionalization (p. 69 *passim*). Chapter 5 extends opposite meanings to encompass lexical antonymy and distinguishes canonical antonymy reduced to a few basic human domains (SIZE, SPEED, etc.) from non-canonical antonymy, which is less conventionalized and more diversified. Enantiosemy is considered here as a particular case of antonymy.

In the second, descriptively oriented part, the diversity of semantic shifts in the emotion domain is highlighted by chapters 9 and 10. Chapter 9 tests some cognitive hypotheses on conceptual metaphors of temperature expressions whereas chapter 10 tests some areal and cultural hypotheses on metonymies of lexical roots in Eskimo languages. The results of the two chapters, while approaching the issue on the same level of generalization, are quite different. Chapter 9 suggests that conceptual metaphors from temperature expressions to emotions are cross-linguistically well attested, and proposes two general patterns for languages. Chapter 10 shows that metonymic change from physical emotions to visceral ones for lexical roots is an areal pattern for Eskimo languages.

In the third part on motivation, “vertical” conceptual relations of subordination-superordination in taxonomies are examined firstly from an internal point of view (chapter 14), secondly from an external one (chapter 15), resulting in a rich structural view of biological taxonomies (scientific and folk).

The results are also significant, whether they be descriptive, theoretical or methodological. Among the descriptive results, the most visible ones are areal. Two areal patterns are highlighted for “Sahul”—a name for a previous continent extending from Australia to Papua New Guinea- and Eskimo languages. In an onomasiological perspective (from concept to lexical item, cf. Koch 2001, via the notion of colexification), chapters 6 and 12 underline the TREE-FIRE colexification pattern and even more convincingly the FIRE-FIREWOOD colexification pattern in chapter 12. From a semasiological perspective (from lexical item to concept), the areal pattern of metonymical semantic shifts from physical / visceral emotions to more abstract and cultural ones from emotional roots in Eskimo languages (chapter 10), is striking. Some of the empirical results are not only areal, however, but also near-universal. Chapter 7 proposes a cognitive model to understand the prototypical meaning of verbs of hitting, and chapter 17 shows the correlation between lexicon analyzability in a language and its phonological inventory.

As for the methodological results, the most concrete ones show that semantic shifts have to be analyzed from various perspectives to produce innovative results. At this stage, the widely used notion of colexification (chapters 5, 6, 8, 12) seems adequate to identify recurrent cross-linguistic patterns of semantic shifts. It remains insufficient, however, to analyze these patterns. In chapter 5, constructions are taken into account to analyze recurrent cross-linguistic patterns of binary oppositions. In chapter 8, diachrony is also involved to analyze the development of colexification patterns through grammaticalization. And in chapter 12, it is the morphological analyzability of lexical items that is required to understand the distribution of colexification among language families and their spoken areas.

Furthermore, the notion of construction (Goldberg 1995) is quasi-systematically called upon to analyze the different types of semantic shifts (chapters 2, 3, 4, 7, 16, 17). Chapter 2 theorizes this question by proposing a construction-based approach to model its

multidimensional diachronic analysis of semantic change, word-formation and borrowing. Chapter 3 distinguishes different cases of enantiosemby by the different constructions that they display. Analyzing different constructions, chapter 4 argues for a better generalization of recurrent cross-linguistic semantic shifts. Taking roots as the basis of morphological constructions, chapters 10 and 17 assume the central role of constructions in the analysis of semantic shifts.

This volume, which considers semantic shifts from various perspectives (semasiological as well as onomasiological, synchronic as well as diachronic) and aspects (universal and areal, cognition- and culture-based), provides an in-depth, multi-faceted view of semantic shifts. This is undoubtedly the most important theoretical result. Chapter 2 is emblematic in this respect. It theorizes a multidimensional approach to semantic shifts (p.59). It combines both onomasiology and semasiology, examining semantic change at different historical periods, taking into account the speaker-induced vs hearer-induced meaning change distinction, with fine-grained distinctions between different types of semantic change (generalization vs specialization of meaning, co-hyponymous transfer, metonymic and metaphoric change, contrast-based change, pejorization vs meliorization of meaning, intensification vs weakening of meaning) in order to understand the interactions between semantic change and other diachronic lexical processes (word-formation, borrowing). This results in multi-faceted semantic shifts, which are considered as the sums of meaning-form correlations, with conceptual relationships between two concepts, and motivated dynamic processes. While Peter Koch is the only one to theorize such a multi-faceted view of semantic shifts, most of the other authors combine different facets in their analyses.

Many further avenues for research are proposed in the book. Several papers suggest that more advances in recurrent cross-linguistic semantic shifts have to be made, especially in areal and genetic diversity. Some of them hope to give more comprehensive explanations of the principles that motivate these recurrent cross-linguistic semantic shifts.

Obviously, this volume cannot cover all the approaches available which deal with semantic shifts (see e.g. lexical network techniques in Gaume, Duvignaud and Vanhove 2008). Nonetheless, it covers many aspects and perspectives on semantic shifts. Its lexico-typological scope provides deep insight into various facts about semantic shifts. This volume should become a reference book on this topic in the future. Since each chapter is carefully argued, this volume will interest researchers in lexicology, typology, as well as in cognitive and cultural linguistics.

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The volume is full of important references. Here are just the ones I have cited.

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