ISSUES IN LEARNING DEVELOPMENT:
SOME LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES

Do languages have characteristics that support language and learning and the expression of diverse concepts?

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Diversity and shared concepts

17th century philosophers proposed undefinable and universal concepts alongside our diversity:

Arnauld (1662/1964),
Pascal (1667/1954),
Descartes (1701/1931)
Leibniz (1903/1961): ‘alphabet of human thoughts’

But what are these primitives?
20th-21st century Polish, Australian, Belgian, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Ghanaian (Ewe), German, Russian, Danish, Israeli, Arabic and American linguists investigating primes and meanings in their own and other languages:

Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara, Roper Kriol (Australian),
Koromu (Papuan), Mbula (Austronesian), Tok Pisin, Bislama,
East Cree (N. American), Amharic, Finnish, Spanish, French, Italian, Malay, Lao, Singapore English...

Natural semantic metalanguage:
65 semantic primes – English exponents

Examples:
SOMEONE, SOMETHING, PEOPLE, I, YOU...
THIS, OTHER~ELSE, THE SAME, SOME,
ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH~MANY; ...
GOOD, BAD; KIND, THING
THINK, KNOW, WANT, NOT WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR; SAY; DO, HAPPEN, MOVE; LIVE
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING), BE SOMEONE’S.
WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER...
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF; VERY; MORE; LIKE.

(Other languages in NSM Homepage Resources, Priestley 2013, 2014)
Syntactic frames – cross-linguistic properties

For SAY:

I SAY:--- [performative frame]
someone SAYS: “---“ [direct speech frame]
someone SAYS something [minimal frame]
someone SAYS something to someone [addressee frame]
someone SAYS something about something/someone else [locutionary topic]
someone SAYS (some) words to someone else [directed words]
Semantic molecules:

• “complex, ...decomposable into combinations of semantic primes”

• “units within the structure of other, more complex concepts”

  hands (Eng), ręce (Polish) in explications for body-parts, shapes, objects, activities (Goddard 2010. p. 125-126)

• E.g., child, ground, water, round, grow (in the ground)

  (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014, p. 18)
Minimal English: English version of primes and near universal molecules

• Concepts in students’ languages

• Easier to access than culture and language dependent terms

• Work from the known to the unknown
POTENTIAL LEARNING APPLICATIONS

• Improve on *ad hoc* explanatory metalanguage of lecturers and consultants

• increase understanding and awareness of culture specific meanings

• understand assessment tasks and key words

• use of evidence, paraphrase

• use of cohesive devices

• construction of clear sentences with *lexico-grammatical accuracy*
Identify two important socialisation outcomes from your childhood. For each outcome, describe the agents of socialisation and the methods of socialisation. Discuss how these socialisation outcomes continue to influence you in the present day.

(Reflection, Social context & socialisation, HAS121, UOW Spring 2015)
Using primes and molecule ‘child’

• socialisation outcomes from your childhood
  → ‘some things happened when you were a child’

• cause effect
  → ‘because of this, something happened’

• agents of socialisation
  → ‘someone (else) did/said something’

• methods of socialisation
  → ‘someone did something like this....’

• evaluative components
  → ‘people think this is good’ / ‘people think this is bad’
[A] Paraphrase with primes, molecules, instruction terms: *give, answer, example, question...*

• Often when you are with other people you do some things because when you were a child some people said some things to you about things like this. They said about some things: “it is good if you do this when you are with other people”. They said about some other things: “it is bad if you do this when you are with other people”. Give two examples of this and answer the questions: Who were these people? What did they say to you? What did they do? After that say something about what happens to you now because of this.

• **Student response:** clarity and ability to analyse the question
KEY WORDS – In English and other languages

“the hidden cultural legacy of English” (Wierzbicka 2010)

*evidence, empirical, experience, sense* (ibid)

*science, humanities* (Wierzbicka 2011)

Cf. NSM Homepage for discussion, University/academic word lists... for other suggested terms (Nation 1986, Coxhead 1998, 2000)
[B] *Evidence*: current meaning includes factual statements require support-

Explication focuses on **what can be seen**:

... ‘people can know something...well, like they can know some things about something well when they see this something’

(Wierzbicka 2010, p. 116)
EXPRESSING EVIDENCE

• **Directives and quasi-directives:**
  
  ...ask, tell, suggest, recommend...

  English expresses “wants...without appearing to impose, pressure, intrude, violate someone’s autonomy”... (Wierzbicka, 2012, p. 441).

• “**Saying things about what one knows**
  
  ...tell, state, assert, maintain, inform, point out, claim...

  (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014, p. 183)

• **Responses:**
  
  ...agree, concede, admit, disagree, reject, deny...

someone X said something to someone else Y at that time
this someone said something like this:
‘it can be good if you do this (A), it can be good if you think about it’
this someone said it like someone can say something like this to someone else
when this someone thinks like this:
‘I know that if this someone wants not to do it, this someone can not do it’
[D] Core of ‘X *recommended* to Y that Y do A’

- position of a knowledgeable person (Ibid, p. 165)
- ‘it will be good for you if you do this (A)
- I know many things about things like this’

**PARAPHRASE**

Use primes to focus on what or who is being talked about etc. before rebuilding more complex sentences
COHESION

Primes:
• Logical concepts → NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
• Temporals → BEFORE, AFTER
  (cf. after that, consequently, hence, as a result, after that)
• Pronouns, demonstratives, comparatives (cf. Halliday 1985):
  → I, YOU, THIS, THE SAME, OTHER(~ELSE), LIKE
• Quantifiers → ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW

Not primes or molecules → and, but, yet, or, for, so
LEXICO-GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY

Valency options for
KNOW, THINK, WANT, DON’T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR; SAY; DO, HAPPEN, MOVE

someone did something
someone did something to someone else
someone did something to something
someone did something to something with something else

(Goddard 2011, p. 69)

Subject Verb Agreement:
someone does something
someone extricates something

some people do something
some people extricate something
References
Coxhead, AJ 1998, An academic word list (English Language Institute Occasional publication No. 18), Wellington, New Zealand. Victoria University of Wellington.
Goddard, C & Wierzbicka, A 2014, Words and Meanings, Oxford: OUP.