

## CHAPTER ONE

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### Introduction



ACROSS THE PENINSULA of mainland Southeast Asia, languages again and again display a complex grammatical pattern involving a word which we may label 'ACQUIRE'. Here are the features of the pattern, in schematic terms: a verb meaning 'come to have' (as in (1)) is used as a postverbal modal element (as in (2)), a marker introducing a postverbal adverbial phrase (as in (3)), and a preverbal aspectual marker of 'attainment' (4):

- (1) *He ACQUIRE fish.* 'He got fish.'
- (2) *He fry fish ACQUIRE.* 'He can fry the fish.'; 'He managed to fry the fish.'
- (3) *He fry fish ACQUIRE fast.* 'He fried the fish fast.'
- (4) *He ACQUIRE-fry fish.* 'He did fry the fish.'; 'He got to fry the fish.'

This book presents a detailed survey and analysis of the semantics and grammar of this pattern in five languages of mainland Southeast Asia—Lao, Khmer, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Kmhmu Cwang—along with supplementary data from over a dozen more languages of the area. The study concentrates on semantic, pragmatic, and grammatical structure, showing the extensive and detailed parallels in grammatical organisation in these many (often unrelated) languages. Phenomena of this kind are familiar from studies in areal linguistics in other regions of the world, and when the degree of 'genetic' relatedness between the languages is uncertain, a fundamental question that arises is whether parallels between the languages are due to a genetic relationship between them, to a historical relationship of contact between speakers of the languages, or to inde-

pendent yet parallel innovation. The structural parallelisms investigated in this book have emerged over many centuries by a combination of structural diffusion and parallel development.

Two major thematic conclusions emerge. First, the puzzles which ‘linguistic area’ phenomena present—in particular, the most general question of how it is that complex patterns actually come to be shared by languages in geographic proximity—must be approached adopting a non-metaphorical view of the true processes of linguistic change and ‘language contact’. Second, in comparing semantic and grammatical patterns cross-linguistically, and in considering how they change over time, it is necessary to insist on special care in semantic description, and to pay close attention to the distinction between semantics and pragmatics, and how these two aspects of linguistic meaning interact.

This introductory chapter begins by outlining a theoretical view of language (including linguistic structure, ‘languages’, and language contact) which serves as a background for the mostly descriptive content of later chapters. Section 2 treats theoretical and descriptive issues in the study of semantics and pragmatics, followed in Section 3 by a brief discussion of ‘grammaticalisation’. Section 4 then turns to some conceptual preliminaries in anticipation of specific semantic problems which arise in Chapters 3-7, and Section 5 raises two methodological issues. The chapter finishes with a preview of the book’s overall structure.

## 1. LINGUISTIC EPIDEMIOLOGY: A NON-METAPHORICAL VIEW OF LANGUAGE

My aim in this first section is to establish a non-metaphorical theoretical position on the nature of language, to serve as a framework for the more traditional grammatical study presented in the body of the book.

### 1.1 The ontology of linguistic signs and ‘systems’

Humans make order of the world by abstracting conceptual categories from real instances (e.g. of words). What we normally refer to as ‘words’ and ‘grammatical patterns’ (or ‘rules’) are conceived entities based on patterns of thought (accessed by introspection) or behaviour (observed). Our only evidence beyond introspection for what we call words and grammatical categories is behavioural, in speakers’ production of linguistic signifiers with consistent communicative intentions, and in listeners’ consistent responses. We never actually encounter ‘words’ and ‘grammatical patterns’—they are *inferred* (by speakers and linguists alike) from empirically observable effects of people’s behaviour (Fraser 1992, 1996). This is entailed by the ‘no telepathy assumption’ (Hutchins and Hazlehurst 1995)—that as person and as researcher one can only *theorise* about what is in the heads of one’s social associates. People are isolated from one another by the physical skin, and to ‘bridge’ individual minds we rely on semiotics—i.e. any of the many means to get others to think or know things by exposing them to some kind of artefactual signal. Let us consider how, as separate and mobile individuals, we can coordinate collective social practice on such a massive scale and to such a fine degree of detail as we do with language.

### 1.1.1 Methodological individualism, and the one-to-many problem

An individual speaker has the ability to produce and interpret highly complex patterns of linguistic behaviour, consistent with his being identifiable (by others and by himself) as a 'speaker of' some language L. Whatever is required for that ability is transported with him wherever he goes. One may conclude from this that whatever is fundamental for an individual's linguistic ability at a given moment is contained 'within his skin' at that moment.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of methodological individualism states that the fundamental unit or locus of any social process is the individual, and thus all explanations must be phrased in such terms (cf. Lukes 1968, Nettle 1997, Hedström and Swedberg 1998). There is no magic scaffolding of 'social structure' into which individuals are placed. While this view locates meaning essentially in the individual, this does not entail that meaning is merely idiosyncratic (Strauss and Quinn 1997:16). Clearly, the linguistic habits of people in the same community are highly convergent, and there is robust social commonality to patterns of meaning (e.g. of words). Individuals in social association fall into patterns of convention and consensus in their use of linguistic categories, by a natural tendency to conform, in the interests of solving recurrent 'coordination problems' as efficiently as possible (Schelling 1960, Lewis 1969, Schiffer 1972, Clark 1996). Thereby, large bodies of linguistic signs cohere and show system properties (i.e. become *grammars*) in people's minds, and the grammars of individuals share a lot. The individual linguistic signs (i.e. meanings associated with phonological sequences and associated combinatorial properties) making up these grammars are best understood as *theories*, constructed by individual speakers over time by a process of trial and error (cf. Keller 1994:150, Hutchins and Hazlehurst 1995). It is *sets* of signs or 'linguistic items' which we regard as 'languages' (Nettle 1999:8), and the high degree of convergence of individuals' theories of sign meanings is what leads us to imagine that signs exist independently of people.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It has been noted from a viewpoint promoting the 'social distribution of knowledge' that in interaction we also constantly draw on what is 'out there', including what is 'within the skins' of our social associates (Schutz 1946, 1970, Salomon 1993, Hutchins 1995). Hutchins and Hazlehurst (1995:53) stress that 'we can treat symbolic phenomena that are outside the individual as real components of the cognitive unit of analysis'. But while important properties of language emerge only in the 'community of minds', it is also necessary for individuals to transport with them what they need for linguistic practice, even if they draw on 'other minds' when they actually engage. In any case, they do not directly access these other minds, but elicit signals by which the content of those minds may be inferred. The view of linguistic agreement as 'idiolect convergence' put forward here owes much to Hutchins and Hazlehurst (1995) and other papers in Goody (1995), and is discussed in more detail in Enfield (2000); cf. also Hockett (1987:106-7, 157-8), Lee (1996:227-8).

<sup>2</sup> The identity of linguistic items rather than languages as the 'atomic elements' of the 'human linguistic pool' has recently been asserted by Nettle (1999), following Hudson (1980). See also Croft (2000) on 'linguemes' and the 'lingueme pool'.

The sheer volume of linguistic material (e.g. speech sounds) we introduce into each other's environment presses us into a collective holding pattern with regard to our respective hypotheses of linguistic sign meaning. We collectively orbit a single 'mass' of conceptual categories, the gravity of social association continually drawing our idiolects towards convergence. One of the strongest centripetal forces is the significant commitment of time required to maintain the large set of linguistic items which identifies one as part of a social group (Dunbar 1992, 1996, 1999, Nettle 1999:8). While there are many similarities between speakers' idiolects, the non-metaphorical view is that linguistic 'systems' remain ultimately housed in individuals (not implying the simple-minded view of 'idiolect' attacked by Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1968). As Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985:4) remark, 'groups or communities and the linguistic attributes of such groups have no existential locus other than in the minds of individuals'. 'A language' (e.g. 'English') in the everyday sense is primarily an *idea*, the idea of 'the language' in the minds of speakers of a specific group of people who speak in an identifiable way.

#### 1.1.2 Historical continuity

Consider the paradox of the following statement: 'The villagers at Na Meo say they have been living in their present location for 286 years' (Chamberlain 2000:100). Like the 50-year old axe which has had three new blades and four new handles, an *idea* has endured, transcending physical facts of continuity. Similarly, no single empirically definable linguistic system literally endures across generations—there is only successive and overlapping embodiment by individuals of highly convergent and often effectively identical complex systems of linguistic signs. The standardly implied historical continuity of 'a language' over centuries assumes that 'transmission' of the system from generation to generation is essentially faithful. We turn, then, to the notion of 'transmission'.

#### 1.1.3 Transmission, 'normal' and otherwise

While some of the cognitive wherewithal for language acquisition is no doubt pre-wired, structural attributes of specific languages are not simply transmitted to children by parents in an ovular/seminal bundle. Specific ideas for ways of saying things in a given language must be learned by the child, painstakingly, constructed and maintained through ceaseless practice. The passage of this transmission is *through air*, over days, weeks, months, years, with great interference and noise. It is not 'the language' that is inherited—rather, its *parts* are inherited, one by one. Thus, while the long standard genetic metaphor in models of language change may be applicable to individual signs (Nettle 1999:6), it does not apply to 'languages' as wholes.

Thomason and Kaufman (1988) define 'normal transmission' as applying when 'what is transmitted is an entire language—that is, a complex set of interrelated lexical, phonological, morphosyntactic, and semantic structures' (Thomason and Kaufman 1988:11). This notion of 'normal transmission' risks conveying the

impression that language learners are normally not exposed to linguistic habits of people other than their parents and other members of their own group, implying that linguistic communities, like cultural groups, are normally separated from other groups in an effectively undisturbed equilibrium. But this is a view that anthropology has long since discarded (cf. Leach 1964[1954], 1982, Layton 1997), and it is the rule rather than the exception for human groups to be in structured interaction with groups not their own.

## 1.2 The locus of change in linguistic systems

The true airborne process of linguistic transmission, taking place scene by scene and sign by sign, creates many opportunities for ‘mutation’ of the larger system along the way, and this is increased by the added factor of structured contact with speakers of neighbouring languages (contributing to the kinds of convergence described in this book). There are two perspectives on change in a system from generation to generation—first, changes which are ‘internal’ to a linguistic system, and second, those which involve an ‘external’ force.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.2.1 A ‘system-internal’ factor in innovation and change—typological poise

The grammatical features described in Chapters 3-7 of this book may be regarded to some extent as the result of processes internal to the linguistic systems they are, or have been, a part of. Studies in grammaticalisation are almost exclusively concerned with such ‘system-internal’ change (Hopper and Traugott 1993:209), driven by processes such as metaphor and reanalysis (cf. e.g. Sweetser 1990, Heine, Claudi, and Hünemeyer 1991). These processes are conceptually grounded and motivated, taking place in the minds of individual speakers.

One complex and important ‘system-internal’ factor is the overall structural profile of a linguistic system, which can serve to inhibit or promote a given course of evolution—I refer to this as *typological poise*. Innovations are intelligible when they appear in familiar contexts, and the whole existing linguistic system is part of the context in which a novel sign makes its successful debut. The new must be couched in the familiar, and indeed the familiar (including ‘brute facts’ such as word order; Matisoff 1991:444, Ansaldo 1999:23) can help to determine what developments are likely to occur. This book shows that more subtle features of grammar are also relevant.

Typological structure causes a grammar to be ‘poised’ for particular developments (and not for others), determining the readiness or susceptibility of speakers to make or adopt a given extension. Typological poise is less a determinant of how likely a language is to *borrow* a given structure than of how likely it is to develop it independently. The idea of typological poise can provide an account for why or how a particular innovation occurs in one case, but not in another, especially with respect to the novel use of existing lexical items in more grammatical ways. For example, one finding of this study is that postverbal func-

<sup>3</sup> See Romaine (1995) for criticism of this distinction; cf. Woods (2001).

tions of the 'ACQUIRE' morpheme in the sample languages (cf. (2), above) relate closely to, and indeed stem from, general properties of resultative and other serial verb constructions, general properties of tense/aspect/modality marking, and general properties of constituent structure in these languages. These factors cause the grammar to be poised for the attested changes in these languages. (This issue is explored further in Chapters 3 and 5.)

What I call typological poise is distinct from 'drift', the idea that some linguistic changes occur in order to preserve or promote the structural balance of grammatical systems (Sapir 1921: Chapter 7). According to Sapir, patterns in the grammatical system may 'weaken' in some respect, making some part of the grammar less grammatically balanced, and thus 'psychologically shaky' (Sapir 1921:158). For individual speakers, this is 'psychologically registered as a slight hesitation' (Sapir 1921:161), leading to the eventual demise of the ragged edge or imbalance in the grammar causing the discomfort. By contrast, typological poise appeals to a quite different mechanism and is rather more positively framed. It is explicitly related to the semantic-pragmatic process of linguistic change made explicit in §2.3.4, below. The 'poise' of a grammar is not its imbalances and/or weaknesses, but its potential springboards, the ways in which its structure constitutes input for processes of pragmatic implicature and subsequent meaning extension.

### 1.2.2 A 'system-external' process of innovation and change—calquing

A standard position in grammaticalisation studies has been that 'system-internal' explanations for linguistic developments are preferred, and should be relied upon as far as possible, while 'system-external' explanations—such as socially conducted diffusion of structure from a neighbouring language—should only be adopted as a last resort (Durie and Ross 1996). While no-one denies that cross-linguistic structural diffusion occurs, there are normally assumed to be strict linguistic constraints on what can be borrowed between languages (cf. Thomason and Kaufman 1988:14-5 for discussion). Recently, however, the putative strictness of such constraints has been widely challenged (Thomason and Kaufman 1988:58-60, Harris and Campbell 1995:123-4).

One important socially conducted process of system-external influence is calquing (or 'loan translation'), a process in which an idea for a way of saying something is directly copied from one language into another. Calquing involves borrowing not words but ideas for using words in certain ways. It fits Thomason and Kaufman's (1988:37) definition of borrowing as 'incorporation of foreign elements into a group's native language by speakers of that language', but in this case the relevant 'elements' do not include phonological form. An example is Thai *sên taaj* [line die] 'deadline', directly calqued from English, showing the relevant semantic combination, but no formal similarity (neither in phonological form, nor in relative order of head and modifier). More systematically advanced calquing (or *metatypy*; cf. Ross 1997) pervades syntactic and morphological organisation, resulting ultimately in neighbouring languages having separate vocabularies but closely parallel grammatical organisation (cf. Gumperz and Wilson

1971, Huffman 1973). Calquing is likely to have played a major role in leading to the close structural commonalities among neighbouring languages documented in this book.

One interesting aspect of the process of calquing is that it entails some degree of speaker awareness of semantic structures in the language next door.<sup>4</sup> Speakers of one language become aware of a meaning 'extension' or some other principle of organisation in their neighbour's language, and this can form the motivation for an active extension or innovation in their own language (see §1.3.4.1, below, and Chapter 9, for further discussion).

### 1.2.3 The importance of social factors

Thomason and Kaufman have recently stressed that 'social factors can and very often do overcome structural resistance to interference at all levels' (1988:15). The importance of the social dimension (long recognised by sociolinguists such as Labov 1965, 1972, Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1968, and many others) is, however, backgrounded in much research on grammatical and semantic change. It may not have seemed especially important given that 'most researchers in grammaticalisation...have privileged transmission in relatively homogeneous [social] contexts' (Hopper and Traugott 1993:209), i.e. contexts in which social life does not entail structured interaction among people of different languages and cultures (not to mention dialects and sub-cultures).<sup>5</sup>

This book concentrates more on linguistic than social data, but I emphasise that all linguistic processes are social processes. The kind of situation we should regard as 'normal' involves social complexity and heterogeneity, multilingualism, and contact among speakers of different languages. 'Social homogeneity', if it exists at all, is exceptional. The environment of a linguistic sign can trigger or inhibit conceivable developments which that sign may undergo, and this includes

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<sup>4</sup> I do not mean that all speakers must be consciously aware that a particular innovation has its source in another language, or that if they do they must know which language it is, but that ultimately there must be a chain of awareness to the outside source. There are cases, for example, in which speakers of many languages have adopted an impersonal passive from formal varieties of their own language used on the radio and on television, without knowing that it has its origin in English or some other European language. In such a case, I would say that the speaker does not adopt the form *from English*, but rather from a variety of their own language. Nevertheless, they are aware that the innovation is from a variety of speech not their own. They are aware of at least its most *proximal* origin (e.g. a more formal variety of their own 'language'). The speakers responsible for the initial innovation into *that* variety are presumably aware of its origin in 'another language'.

<sup>5</sup> More likely, social heterogeneity has simply gone unacknowledged (or unnoticed). Interest in linguistic change outside of such 'relatively homogeneous' contexts has included important areal studies such as Emeneau (1956), Gumperz and Wilson (1971), Heath (1978), as well as work on the more dramatic social situations which are the subject of pidgin and creole studies (cf. Thomason and Kaufman 1988 and copious references therein).

the social environment of the individual who carries the sign. The social dimension is necessary in a comprehensive linguistic epidemiology.

Let us now consider the genuine mechanisms of linguistic diffusion and change, focussing on the interplay between signs, individuals, and the social world.

### 1.3 Linguistic signs as ‘contagious’—networks, thresholds, social fabric

While mechanisms of linguistic maintenance, transmission, and change are fundamentally rooted in the experiences and actions of individuals, we cannot study these aspects of language merely by studying individuals. Individuals each make a contribution to the public conventions which spontaneously arise from their actions in combination with the individual actions of everyone else. Emergent public convention has an impact on the individual in return. In this section, I outline the way in which linguistic signs, like other social ideas,<sup>6</sup> are propagated in a highly complex and textured ground-level person-to-person process.

#### 1.3.1 Some aspects of psychology fundamental to language and linguistic change

At the centre of language as a social phenomenon are the individuals who interact and collectively create linguistic conventions. The psychology of individuals plays an important role in how socially-embedded processes of linguistic maintenance and change are played out. Of obvious importance is our aptitude for semiotic organisation of complex conceptual structure, our ability to construct and maintain complex conceptual categories for manipulation in linguistic and other semiotic structure. The limitations (or at least ‘economising’ tendencies) of our semiotic-conceptual structuring abilities have been said to play a significant role in linguistic diffusion mediated by language contact and the ‘bilingual mind’ (Weinreich 1953, Silva-Corvalán 1994, Ameka and Wilkins 1996; see §1.3.4.1, below). Most of this book is concerned with the organisation of semantic and pragmatic information as well as the interaction of such organisation across different linguistic systems, and we return to this in §2, below. There are, however, at least seven other specific psychological factors, with both theoretical and methodological significance, which play a part in the processes of language change.

First, our intelligence is *subjective*. What we unquestioningly regard as reality is not reality in fact but reality as we have presented it to ourselves, not mere environmental input but environmental input with the structure we have actively imposed upon it (Jackendoff 1983:24). Second, our intelligence is *emotional* (Goleman 1995, LeDoux 1998). Emotional experience is simply not separable from more general cognition. Emotional responses can affect, if not deter-

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<sup>6</sup> Let me reiterate that ‘signs’ in the full sense (i.e. not just signifiers) necessarily contain ‘ideas’, in that they exist purely by virtue of there being mentally stored categories in people’s minds of (a) particular signifiers, (b) particular signified meanings, and (c) particular structured relations between signifieds and signifiers.

mine, one's appraisal of a situation, one's memory of an experience (especially in which one is a participant), and one's very motivation to act. Third, we can, and continually do, make *unconscious appraisals* of the situations we find ourselves in (LeDoux 1998:64-5). Judgements and decisions in linguistic interaction can be made beyond our awareness, and thus may be beyond the reach of introspection. Fourth, we are prone to make *social identifications* of many forms. In different contexts, for different purposes, we identify ourselves as being 'one of' or 'not one of' those with whom we interact, and this co-membership or lack of it may be asserted by various semiotic means (such as clothing or fashions of speech). These first four psychological aspects—subjectivity, emotional intelligence, subconscious appraisal, and social identification—affect our performance in every linguistic encounter, whether within our in-group or across social levels, and including our encounters with people speaking other languages. The fifth psychological factor is the fact that signs are created by individuals and housed in individual minds. The basic Saussurean sign structure of signifier, signified, and the link between the two is two-thirds housed in the individual: only the signifier is beyond the human skin, and a signifier alone is not a sign. In any case, it is only a signifier when recognised by someone as such. The sign as a whole cannot be referred to, and indeed cannot exist, without a living individual beholding it. Sixth, individuals use language *in social association*. The individual transports what is needed for a sign to be enacted whenever required, but language remains 'essentially social' (Klein 1996). Given a 'no telepathy assumption' (Hutchins and Hazlehurst 1995), semiotic material is necessary to pave the way for traffic of ideas throughout the community of minds. Seventh, tying together the social and the individual, at all times we operate using our *social intelligence* (Goody 1995). We are predisposed to hypothesise as to the mental states of our social associates, attributing intentions behind their deeds, and modelling not only their mental states but also their models of our mental states, their models of our models of their mental states, if not to even further levels of recursion (Clark 1996, Enfield 2000). The many tasks individuals achieve in collaboration with their social associates, from simple conversation to navigating battleships, rely on the *distribution* of knowledge and cognition (Hutchins 1995, Hutchins and Hazlehurst 1995).

Space restrictions prevent more detailed attention to the phenomena listed in the previous paragraph, and I have mentioned them in brief so as to put these points on record. The psychology of individuals, being inherently subjective, emotional, unconscious, semiotic, and social in nature, plays a crucial role in mediating the micro- and macro- levels of maintenance and change in linguistic convention. Let us now consider what is really involved in the propagation of linguistic ideas.

### 1.3.2 Linguistic epidemiology

The view that linguistic phenomena are primarily manifest in the creative and interpretative behaviour of individuals in essentially self-structuring social systems challenges an essentialist view of language and 'languages' (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985). Dissatisfied with essentialism in anthropology, Sperber

(1985, 1996) was inspired to follow scholars like Dawkins (1976) and Lumsden and Wilson (1981), who had applied ideas from the biological sciences (especially the theory of evolution) to the description of culture. Sperber suggests that cultural ideas are ‘distributed’ through populations as if they were contagious, ‘propagating’ and ‘durably invading whole populations’. He concludes that the task of anthropology is to provide an ‘epidemiology of representations’ (Sperber 1985; cf. Cavalli-Sforza 1971, Durham 1991, Keller 1994:147, Dennett 1995). The idea is clearly applicable to language—as Nettle puts it, ‘linguistic items are potential *replicators*; that is, they could independently pass from one speaker, via the arena of language use, to another’ (Nettle 1999:5). When speakers speak, they ‘infect’ their listeners with ideas.<sup>7</sup>

While depicted by grammarians as fixed and ideal systems for speakers to access, ‘languages’ are idealisations, drawn from observations of fashions in linguistic behaviour (cf. §1.1, above). I deliberately use the word ‘fashion’ here to draw attention to the fact that people speak the way they do because those who they identify with also speak that way (Keller 1994:100).<sup>8</sup> ‘Fashion’ is an appropriate term even for long-term, well entrenched, and seldom questioned social trends (such as eating rice as a staple food or women covering their upper bodies in some societies). Such trends do not come and go within a human lifetime, and so individuals fail to perceive their transience.

Linguistic signs are reproduced in considerably greater quantity and frequency than any other kind of cultural sign. To refer to them as ‘fashions’ is a reminder that we are not merely subject to the rules of ‘languages’. Rather, as with trends in clothing, we play a creative role—within limits—in making the individual statements we want to make (while of course we may often, as also with clothing fashion, unreflectingly accept linguistic practices of our own people as given and not to be challenged).

Mere exposure to a new sign (e.g. in speech) is not enough for it to take hold in the mind of the listener. Circumstances such as the nature of the sign, the ‘attitude’ of the potential host, and the environmental conditions have an effect. Attention may be heightened or distracted, for example, by one’s emotional state (Strauss and Quinn 1997:92-4), determined by factors such as the relationships between people involved in the interaction, the topic of discussion, aspects of the situational context, and which side of the bed the speaker got up on in the morning. These are not trivial factors, but are critical to the true process.

Linguistic innovations begin, according to Harris and Campbell, in ‘isolated creative, exploratory expressions’ arising from ‘emphasis, for stylistic or pragmatic reasons [or] from production errors’ (1995:54). The ‘vast majority of such expressions are never repeated, but a few “catch on”’ (ibid.; cf. Sperber 1996:25). Such reference to the process of an innovation ‘catching on’ and ‘be-

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<sup>7</sup> Note, however, that the listener does not literally ‘catch’ the idea, but actively constructs it on the basis of inference from the external signal (Reddy 1979).

<sup>8</sup> This is distinct from the term ‘fashions of speaking’ used by Whorf to refer to ‘integrated’ means of expression forming a ‘large systematic outline’ or theme in a linguistic system (Whorf 1956:156-159).

coming a stable feature in the speech of a group of speakers' smuggles in a large explanatory 'black box' (Hedström and Swedberg 1998) concealing a full analysis of events linking the innovative expression of a single individual with the establishment of a new community-wide convention. Let us consider what this black box might contain.

For a linguistic innovation to 'catch on', members right across the community must:

- (a) be exposed to signifying material by which they may infer the associated meaning;
- (b) be motivated to attend to the signifying material, and to actually create a representation of the associated meaning;
- (c) identify as individuals who would use the signifying material to communicate the associated meaning;
- (d) put the idea into practice, exposing others ( $\rightarrow$  (a)).

Linguistic signs reproduce not by themselves but by means of their *carriers'* behaviour, which in turn exposes further (potential) carriers. Once one is 'infected' with a sign—i.e. has not only heard it but has attended to it and internalised it—this is not yet enough for the sign to be contagious. One must then *reproduce* the behaviour that exposes further individuals to the same sign (e.g. articulate a word), an act which deepens the entrenchment of the sign in the innovator as well as increasing its social currency, setting an example to others and thus 'giving permission' for more people to reproduce the same pattern of behaviour (Rogers 1995, Gladwell 2000:223; cf. Phillips 1974, 1979).

The general assertions of this section refer ultimately to the two-step process of social transmission of linguistic practice, whether it is 'within' a language (i.e. from generation to generation) or between languages (i.e. in diffusion via language contact): first, people are *exposed* to signs in linguistic behaviour, and second, people may subsequently *reproduce* the same behaviour in the company of others. We now consider patterns of exposure.

### 1.3.3 Patterns of exposure: social networks

The approach most likely to allow description of the true ground-level dynamics of linguistic transmission and maintenance is Milroy's (1980) 'social network model', which 'treats speakers as nodes in a social network, such that each speaker is connected with other speakers by social (and therefore communication) links' (Ross 1997:213; cf. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985). Let us consider two important properties of social networks, first their 'density', and second the non-homogeneous nature of their 'nodes'—i.e. of individual speakers.

#### 1.3.3.1 Network density

Social networks can be of relatively high or low density. In a low density network, for example, *a* is in regular contact with *b*, *c*, and *d*, but *b*, *c*, and *d* are not in

contact with each other (Figure 1.1), while in a high density network, *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d* are all in mutual contact (Figure 1.2; cf. Luce 1950, Miller 1951: Chapter 12).<sup>9</sup>

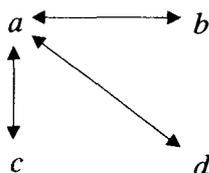


Figure 1.1 Low density network ( $a \leftrightarrow b$ ,  $a \leftrightarrow c$ ,  $a \leftrightarrow d$ )

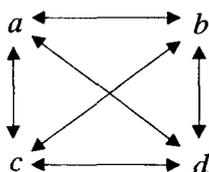


Figure 1.2 High density network ( $a \leftrightarrow b$ ,  $a \leftrightarrow c$ ,  $a \leftrightarrow d$ ,  $b \leftrightarrow c$ ,  $b \leftrightarrow d$ ,  $c \leftrightarrow d$ )

Modelling an individual's network of contacts is (theoretically) an empirical endeavour which makes explicit the individual's potential sources of new ideas for linguistic practice and the people with whom those individuals work most intensively on 'centralising' their speech (Bakhtin 1981) or 'intercalibrating' their ever-convergent idiolects (Hockett 1987:157-158). A more inclusive social network would depict not just direct interactive informal contact among people, but *all* modes of semiotic exposure, including non-interactive sources such as advertising, written materials, television, radio, strangers' interaction within ear-shot, and so on. For example, the effect of adding a television set to the network in Figure 1.2 would be significant:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The simplicity of the diagrams is merely for expository convenience. The usual network of personal contacts for a single individual is enormously complex, involving dozens if not many dozens of people. And when each of these individuals is at the centre of their own respective social network of many dozens, the kind of representation required is mind-boggling (but nonetheless theoretically possible).

<sup>10</sup> Of course, the television set represents input to the network from a large number of different individual speakers.

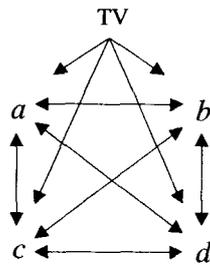


Figure 1.3 High density network with television:  
 $(a \leftrightarrow b, a \leftrightarrow c, a \leftrightarrow d, b \leftrightarrow c, b \leftrightarrow d, c \leftrightarrow d, TV \rightarrow a, TV \rightarrow b, TV \rightarrow c, TV \rightarrow d)$

The people and the television are alike in being sources of semiotic input to people's conceptual inventories, and are thus possible sources of (cross) linguistic transmission. They are means by which linguistic (and other cultural) signs can be 'advertised', and they must be taken into account in a comprehensive and realistic description of linguistic transmission and diffusion.

Social networks are not isolated or self-contained, and people in different identified groups may maintain ongoing social association. For example, Leach (1964[1954]) has studied social relations between speakers of Jinghpaw (Tibeto-Burman) and speakers of Shan (Tai) in the hills of Northeast Burma, concluding that 'there is implicit in [relations between human beings in adjacent areas of the map] a social structure' (Leach 1964[1954]:17). The social network model represents 'transmission' across social boundaries in such situations:

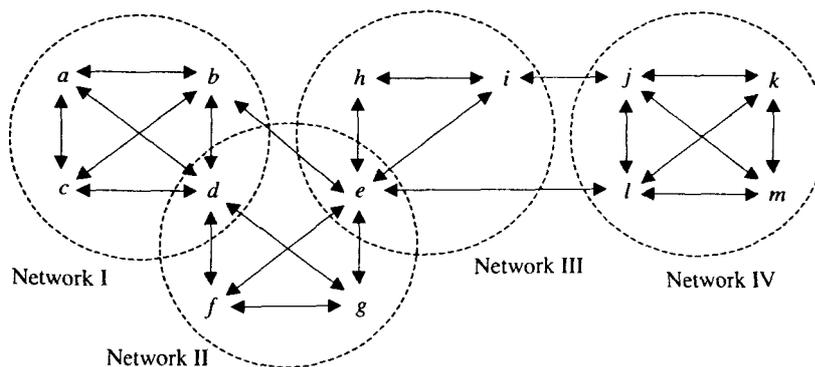


Figure 1.4 Four high-density networks, with shared 'node' individuals

Thus, it becomes theoretically possible to track the path of an idea's spread, allowing us to model linguistic diffusion *on the ground and in real time*. This can be difficult for linguists to acknowledge, however, since it implies that to truly solve the puzzles of language change, one must do the work of sociologist and anthropologist on top of the already vast job of documenting and analysing the linguistic data.

### 1.3.3.2 Individual personality

A property of network systems of often underestimated importance concerns the diversity of individual personalities. Different people have different social styles and habits, and play quite different roles in the flow and transmission of ideas in society. Compare the two individuals *d* and *e* in Figure 1.4, and imagine what kind of people they are. These two have social lives of similar intensity (i.e. 5-6 contacts), but while *d* is confined to two dense networks, *e* is at the hub of the whole broader inter-social network depicted, with a direct social connection to each of Networks I-IV, and with the potential to be a direct carrier of ideas into any or all of them. At another extreme, *a* is socially isolated, and is clearly unlikely to be a broader social trend setter (at least not directly).

The positions of these people in the social network are associated directly (though not exclusively) with their personalities, with the kinds of people they are. 'Nodes' such as *a-m* in Figure 1.4 are qualitatively indistinct on the diagram, but they represent unique individuals with unique biographies, unique personalities, and unique social standing.

Research in sociology and marketing has shown that the social diffusion of trends such as clothing fashion, drug use, and linguistic idiom is regulated by the texture of society, which includes personality differences among its individual members (Rogers 1995). For 'S-curve' diffusion to take place—i.e. for an innovation to suddenly 'tip' and become a widespread social trend—different types of people play different roles in the process.<sup>11</sup> For example, there is quantitative variation in people's threshold for changing their ways, correlating with a complex range of social and personal factors (Rogers 1995: Chapter 7). 'Innovators' are those with the lowest threshold for change, those who are not afraid to be seen as different. Innovators are ready to be first with a new hairstyle, first to adopt a new agricultural technique, first to use a new turn of phrase or speech sound in talking with their in-group. They are more socially adventurous and more ready to risk face by reproducing new and emerging trends. These are followed by early adopters, the early majority, the late majority, and finally laggards, in ascending order of threshold for innovation adoption (Rogers 1995:263ff).

Personality differences defined by differences in threshold for innovation are cross-cut by qualitative distinctions in the roles that individuals play in mechanisms which expose the larger population to innovations and encourage

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<sup>11</sup> In linguistics, the notion of 'tip' is perhaps best known in research on language attrition and death (Dorian 1986, 1989, Grenoble and Whaley 1998). The term originates in sociology (cf. Schelling 1971, 1978, Granovetter 1978, Granovetter and Soong 1983, Crane 1989, Rogers 1995, Gladwell 2000).

others to adopt and reproduce those innovations. Three categories are ‘salesmen’, ‘mavens’ and ‘connectors’ (Gladwell 2000:30ff; cf. Rogers’ 1995:325ff ‘change agents’).

The ‘salesman’ is the charismatic and persuasive individual who sets an example for others in whatever he does. Certain individuals are influential, they have the ability to heighten people’s susceptibility or receptivity to ideas for linguistic practices, and their likelihood of reproducing them. You have to be a certain kind of person for your innovations to ‘stick’. The term ‘salesman’ is not meant to imply that when this person ‘sells’ an innovation, he necessarily does it intentionally. Nor does the charismatic and influential nature of this person mean that he is a political leader at any level. The mathematics of S-curve contagion do not rely on all members of the community being directly influenced by a single agent (e.g. a great leader), but rather by any one of a set of critically well-connected and influential contacts (Granovetter 1978). A charismatic ‘salesman’ need not be high up to have a critical effect. If his charm convinces those around him to identify with him and adopt the innovations he adopts, his ‘salesmanship’ can have more than merely local effect, as long as there is a continuity of such influences across crucial network ties.

The ‘maven’ is informed and interested in a certain domain of social activity (e.g. automobiles, sport, wine, Buddhism), and wants to share his knowledge with others. In the market place, this would be the person who closely follows and compares prices and quality of goods, keeping track of good deals and bad deals and advising others accordingly. In diffusion of linguistic innovations, the maven is the one who pays conscious attention to features of dialects and language which he comes into contact with, offering explicit judgements on the social quality and meaning of such features (e.g. ‘People who say *gotten* are uneducated’), thereby affecting others’ views about the possibility of adopting a certain innovation.

‘Connectors’ are those with many ‘weak ties’ (Granovetter 1973), bridging a wide range of social spheres—‘by having a foot in so many worlds, they have the effect of bringing them together’ (Gladwell 2000:51). Why is *e* the only one connected directly with *all* the other networks in Figure 1.4? Certain people in a speech community put in the time to maintain social connections with a very large number of individuals, and these people are high-profile agents of transmission and exposure of innovations (e.g. new ways of saying things) across the social network, regardless of whether they come up with the innovations themselves or adopt them from any of their many connections. These are the people who are more likely to get into conversations with people from other speech communities. They are not necessarily identified by social role or social ‘function’ in more traditional terms. The ‘connector’ is a certain type of personality, and while being a connector in itself already guarantees a certain degree of social influence, the connector need not have an ‘office’ of power in society.

Another property of individuals important in the process of linguistic diffusion is of course that of being bi- or multi-lingual. The bilingual individual is more likely than the monolingual to have a ‘bridging’ role in the social fabric (at least by virtue of having more network ties), and as such is more likely to expose

others to innovations. And being bilingual, he accesses ideas in the second language which are new to his monolingual peers.

#### 1.3.4 Motivations for reproduction of linguistic innovation

We now consider the *motivation* for speakers, once exposed to a new idea for a given linguistic practice, to then reproduce that practice in real discourse. What are the perceived potential benefits and costs for speakers considering using a new way of speaking on a particular occasion? While Durie and Ross (1996b:21) say that ‘there need not be particularly strong or specific motivation for an innovation’, I argue that the motivation to *reproduce* an innovation is a different matter. We have seen that different kinds of individuals play different roles in the successful diffusion of innovations, but there are properties of the innovations themselves which give potential adopters more or less motivation to adopt. Both cognitive and sociocultural factors can affect the motivation to adopt a linguistic innovation.

##### 1.3.4.1 Cognitive factors affecting motivation to reproduce linguistic innovation

The precise form and function of a new linguistic item can affect speakers’ cognitive motivations to reproduce the innovation. (Some of the relevant psychological factors are listed in §1.3.1, above.) When one is first exposed to a linguistic innovation, before one is in a position to reproduce it, one must ‘construct’ one’s own version of it. Exposure to a new linguistic item is really only exposure to a new *signifier*, and for it to acquire the status of a *sign*, one must infer what is being *signified* by the new item, build a model of the new item in one’s mind, and associate the new item with the freshly created signifier. This requires some cognitive effort, and it is standard to assume that such effort will be kept as low as possible (Zipf 1949). The effects of this become clearest when we consider the role of ‘the bilingual mind’ in linguistic diffusion via language contact (Ameka and Wilkins 1996).

Silva-Corvalán (1994:207) writes that ‘in language contact situations bilinguals develop strategies aimed at lightening the cognitive load of having to remember and use two different linguistic systems’ (cf. also Weinreich 1953:8). If the signifier of a new linguistic item—such as one from another language encountered in a contact situation—can be readily paired with a signified concept which already exists in the mind (i.e. which is already in one’s own language), then such a pairing is likely to be made. ‘Interlingual identifications’ of this kind (Weinreich 1953:7ff) facilitate ‘transfer’, namely, the process which takes place ‘when a bilingual (unconsciously) identifies a lexical or syntactic structure of the secondary system with one in the primary system and, in reproducing it, subjects it to the semantic-pragmatic rules of the primary language’ (Silva-Corvalán 1994:164-5). When the concept conventionally signified by the new item is merely very similar to (rather than exactly the same as) an existing structure, this often leads to the ‘editing out’ of minor differences, shifting what is signified towards one’s existing semantic structures. This applies to form patterns as well as to ‘semantic-pragmatic rules’.

When a new structural pattern is formally analogous to one already existing, it is more easily and thus more readily adapted and conceptually manipulated. The degree of cognitive load implied by processing a new linguistic item is one factor affecting the motivation speakers have to adopt and reproduce it.

#### 1.3.4.2 *Social factors affecting motivation to reproduce linguistic innovation*

Socially, reproduction of an innovation involves saying something in a new way in the company of one's peers. The high 'risk to face' (Brown and Levinson 1987) arising from this in the context of our social identifying tendency and our emotional intelligence can constitute a negative motivation to innovate. Just as sociolinguistic factors can be 'amplifiers' of variation (Nettle 1999:30), they can also (perhaps more importantly) be *inhibitors*. It is possible that the major role played by the association of linguistic form with social identity is the maintenance of conformity, the *inhibition* of variation within a given socially focused group, helping to ongoingly maintain convergence of sign use and meaning in that group.<sup>12</sup>

People's willingness to risk publicly reproducing an innovation is closely tied to social considerations of social identity—namely who the speaker 'speaks like one of' (cf. Le Page 1968, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985 for pioneering work on this point). 'All linguistic tokens', as Le Page and Tabouret-Keller put it, must be viewed as 'socially marked—that is, as being used by an individual because they are felt to have social as well as semantic meaning' (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985:247). It is well established in ethological and anthropological research (Lorenz 1963:66, 141ff, Boyden 1987:48ff) that at a fundamental biological level, people value being 'one of the group', an important part of which is being *seen* to be one of the group. This is achieved by semiotic means, often by adornments of the body (neckties, ritual scars, certain hair styles), rituals of habit and lifestyle (politeness routines, drug use, the what and how of eating), and, perhaps most pervasively, our patterns of speech. When we say something, we also communicate 'who we are', or rather 'who we are one of' (Humboldt 1988:50, Le Page 1968:192, Keller 1994:98ff).

In literature on social aspects of language contact and change, the usual locus of 'identity' associated with speech is often that of 'the language' as an emblematic whole. Weinreich defines the notion of 'language loyalty' as something which, 'like nationalism, would designate the state of mind in which the language (like the nationality), as an intact entity, and in contrast to other languages, assumes a high position in a scale of values, a position in need of being "defended"' (Weinreich 1953:99). Silva-Corvalán found in her study of Spanish speakers in Los Angeles that while speakers spontaneously express 'positive attitudes' towards their language, as well as 'willingness to maintain it and pass it on to their descendants', none were found to 'consciously or explicitly resist transfer from English or shift to English' (Silva-Corvalán 1994:168). This perceived discrepancy between talk and action is due to the perception of loyalty as being with 'the

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<sup>12</sup> This might help to solve Sperber's problem of why we do not see a greater incidence of 'transformation' in the transmission of 'cultural representations' (Sperber 1996:58-9).

language' in its hypostasised entirety, which, as we have discussed above, is a metacategory, an idealisation in itself. Discussion of social values affecting speakers' linguistic loyalties is too often centred on 'the language' as the focus of the feeling of identity. The kind of loyalty that matters is often not at the level of 'the language', and indeed may be quite unconscious. Identifications at less abstract levels are more likely, namely associations of speech innovations with individuals who are personally encountered using them. We are more likely to think 'I want to be like John' and adopt John's speech mannerisms rather than think 'I identify with speakers of Linguistic Variety X (of which John happens to be one)'. Such loyalties are less abstract, more personal, and more unconscious than the loyalty to 'languages' often appealed to.

A final point to note here is that the significance of identifying in a certain way can change dramatically depending on context and perspective. A single variety can be considered 'high' or 'low', a symbol of solidarity or of difference, depending on one's perspective at a given moment (Enfield 2001a:267-8). Both the socially 'high' and the socially 'low' acquire stability for speakers from 'covert ideologies of solidarity and reciprocity' (Milroy 1980:180).

### 1.3.5 Summary: linguistic epidemiology—exposure, reproduction, contagion

In the real-time spread of linguistic items across large geographical areas, both social structure and individual psychology play important roles. They are at the macro- and micro- ends of diabolically complex processes which, in analyses of linguistic diffusion and change mostly concerned with technical linguistic issues often remain unaccounted for, concealed in closed 'black boxes' in the analysis. Individuals contribute to the process of linguistic maintenance and diffusion with their aptitude for conceptual-semantic organisation, their subjectivity, their emotional involvement, and their general tendency to keep the cognitive workload down. Borrowed signs can get altered without speakers being aware of it. More socially oriented aspects of psychology such as interactional intelligence and our constant habit of making social identifications also play a critical role.

Saying something communicates a certain meaning in a certain context, but it also advertises an *idea* not only for a way of saying something, but also 'something to say', as well as an association as to 'who to speak like one of'. As Dennett (1995:348) puts it, '[a] wagon with spoked wheels carries not only grain or freight from place to place; it carries the brilliant idea of a wagon with spoked wheels from mind to mind'. The success of innovations—whether or not they 'catch on'—depends on many factors in combination. Semantic and grammatical structure and the cognitive propensities of speakers play roles. An innovation has to be appealing, it must allow one to express something one has not been able to express, or to identify in a way one has not identified. The social value of a linguistic sign applies selective pressure on whether it gains (or maintains) currency, and all of this can make just opening one's mouth a face-threatening act, and thus an experience in which one's emotions can play an important role. One always has something personally invested in a linguistic encounter. The social signifi-

cance of speech practices is thus a guiding and not always invisible hand in linguistic diffusion.

#### 1.4 'Language contact' defined

We are now in a position to define the widely used but vaguely applied term 'language contact'.<sup>13</sup> Lass notes that some 'condemn the idea that languages contact each other' and prefer the notion that it is 'speakers of language who engage' (Lass 1997:185). As Lass points out, however, the case of 'speakers in contact' merely characterises a typical situation. One can just as well borrow linguistic forms from another language without encountering speakers of that language (for example, through written materials). But Lass's position—that 'languages' do come into contact—is also unsatisfactory, since it remains a metaphor. The only non-metaphorical sense of 'contact' is the meeting of a listener/addressee's perceptual apparatus (usually ears and eyes) and an artefactual signifying form (sound and/or light waves). 'Language contact' is thus not 'a language in contact with another language', nor is it 'a speaker of a language in contact with a speaker of another language'. Language contact is the situation in which speakers physically encounter linguistic signifiers which are identified by those speakers as being of 'different languages' *and* construct signs on the basis of those signifiers' use in the context of the 'language' those signifiers are understood to belong to. I assume that speakers everywhere can articulate the essential notion of 'different languages' (in an identificational rather than technical linguistic sense).

Consider some possible relationships between a person and a linguistic signifier, illustrated in Figure 1.5. First, the signifier may or may not ever be introduced into the person's environment. If it does impose upon the person's senses, he may or may not attend to it and infer a meaning to associate with it in constructing a sign. If he does attend to the signifier and construct such a sign, he may identify that sign as belonging to one language (e.g. 'my language') or to 'another language'.<sup>14</sup> Note that while the idea of being a 'native speaker' of just one language is a robust one, there is no entailment that a speaker of more than one language will regard all but one as 'not my language'. Many bi- or multilinguals may feel full 'membership' in distinct sociolinguistic contexts. If our speaker identifies the sign as being of 'another language', this is a case of language contact. If he identifies the sign as being 'my language', he may differentiate between items which are or are not 'something people like me would say'. Let me stress that what is meant by 'people like me' can change from moment to moment and from situation to situation—'in-group talk' with one's family over breakfast becomes 'out-group talk' with one's peers over lunch. This is the level at which sub-social identifications (whether they are purely personal, sub-cultural, political, regional, or whatever) affect diffusion of innovations within 'languages', regardless of the ultimate source of those innovations.

<sup>13</sup> I thank Felix Ameka for helping me to improve an earlier version of this section.

<sup>14</sup> A speaker may also identify utterances he does not constructively attend to as being 'of another language'.

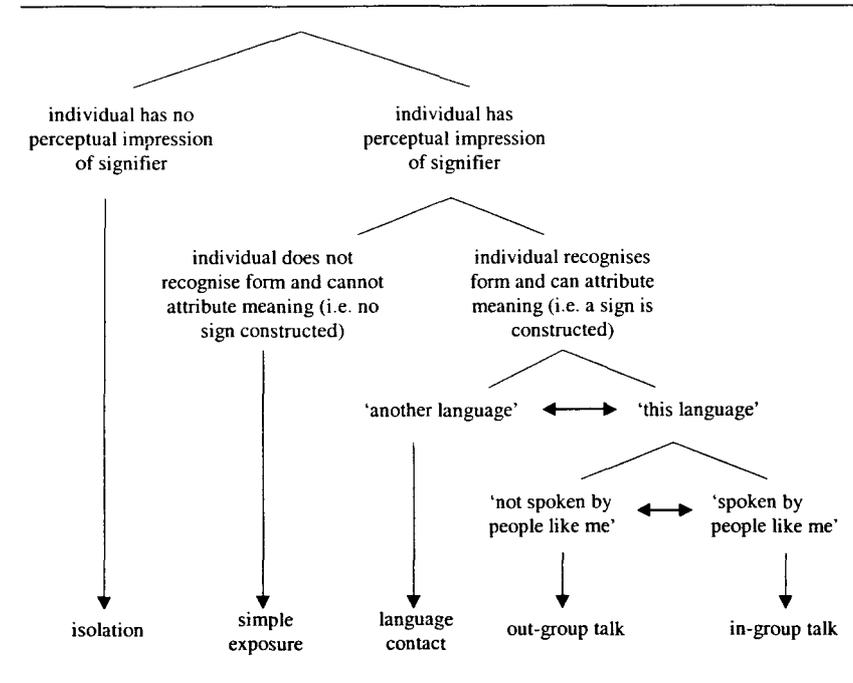


Figure 1.5 Some possible contact relationships between a person and a linguistic signifier (Horizontal arrows represent possible points of structural influence)

When it is acknowledged that the basic units of linguistic exchange are the individual person and the linguistic item, all situations of linguistic communication are in essence 'contact' situations. Linguistic systems are housed in individuals and the signifiers they use to 'bridge' from one to another, and so all linguistic interaction beyond an individual's skin can be regarded as 'system-external'.

### 1.5 Summary and comment

My primary aim in this book is semantic and pragmatic description, with respect to a set of grammatical patterns found across a geographic area in which a great many distinct languages are spoken. The description reveals patterns of linguistic function that have evolved and gained currency, surviving while others apparently have not. Has something in their 'design' helped them survive and reproduce? By what mechanisms have complex patterns of semantic and grammatical organisation come to be shared by these neighbouring but non mutually intelligible linguistic systems? I have tried to show in this section that answers to such questions must take into account social, cultural, cognitive, and biological factors, and I have suggested some ways in which these factors need to be approached. But the first priority is well-supported empirical linguistic description. Only with an intel-

ligible and tangible description may we ask what, among various additional factors (especially among sociocultural phenomena), may have helped to 'select for' the attested developments. This book is mostly concerned with the logical, semantic, and pragmatic factors which may inhibit or promote the evolution and propagation of particular linguistic signs (and associated patterns of linguistic behaviour). But no matter what the 'system-internal' motivations for an innovation are, the innovation must still pass from being one individual's innovation to being a public social convention. The consequences of this view, with its basis in biology, ethology, and sociology, are potentially far-reaching in modern linguistics. It is essential that fresh and challenging insights on language be addressed and adopted by descriptive linguists, and incorporated into our thinking. Conversely, descriptive linguists, having the closest and most detailed acquaintance with the forms and functions of linguistic signs, have a crucial contribution to make to broader interdisciplinary discussions on the nature of language and its role in human life. I therefore offer this study as a field linguist's contribution to these promising intellectual developments.

## 2. DESCRIPTION OF POLYFUNCTIONALITY: SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

We now turn to problems in linguistic description. In describing the pattern of lexical polyfunctionality which is the focus of this book, one task is to provide sound description of meaning, with definitions phrased in the simplest and least obscure terms possible. The second, and complementary descriptive task is to examine the interaction between fixed meanings and additional conceptual material shared by speakers. This distinction corresponds to an important traditional division between *sentence-meaning*, or what is *entailed* by a given linguistic expression independent of its context, and *utterance-meaning*, or the full understanding derived from a given sentence-meaning in a given context (Grice 1975, Lyons 1977:592ff, Levinson 1983: Chapter 3, Comrie 1985:23ff). I adopt the following basic terminological distinction (following Schultze-Berndt 2000:34) for keeping semantics and pragmatics apart throughout this book. *Meaning* refers to 'sentence-meaning', i.e. what is 'encoded in the sign'. *Interpretation* refers to 'utterance-meaning', i.e. what is derived, in addition to *meaning*, in context. *Reading* refers to the communicative effect of a linguistic utterance, when I do not wish to specify either 'meaning' or 'interpretation'. I define *context* as everything conceptually accompanying the expression of the given meaning, including information that has been made explicit in speech (or imported by frames, schemas, and the like; Holland and Quinn 1987), as well as what is present in mutually active interpersonal and/or cultural assumptions (Clark 1996, Enfield 2000).

We now concentrate on elucidating the distinction between semantics and pragmatics, first discussing the terms of semantic description to be used in later chapters, then considering the domain of pragmatics and its interaction with semantics, and the problem of multiple meaning.

## 2.1 Terms of semantic description

A linguistic sign such as a word is made up of a *signifier* (typically a phonetic/phonological form) a *signified*, or meaning, and *combinatoric* specifications, possibilities for combination with other linguistic signs in the system (cf. Mel'čuk 1976, 1988, Pollard and Sag 1994:15ff). Linguistic semantics is concerned with what is invariably *signified* by linguistic expressions, what they convey regardless of variation in context.

Terms of semantic analysis must be clear and simple. In particular, they must be more clear and more simple than what they are being used to define. They must provide for explicit and therefore falsifiable definitions. Since semantic description usually involves translation from one language to another (or across a number of languages, as in this study), the terms of semantic description must also be as stable and as cross-linguistically comparable as possible (Wierzbicka 1996). I therefore draw from a restricted set of simple semantic elements (the 'Natural Semantic Metalanguage') in phrasing the definitions offered in Chapters 3-7. The set of elements used—including 'something', 'happen', 'because', 'do', 'before', 'can', 'other', 'know', and 'want'—are good candidates for morpho-lexical universals, and as such provide a promising standard for calibration of cross-linguistic semantics (Goddard 2001).

Interlinear morphemic glosses always pose a challenge when dealing with morphemes which do not have ready one-word translations into English. Over-general glossing can obfuscate important and relevant information for the reader (cf. e.g. Bisang 1991 for the liberal use of 'TAM'). I have thus tried to aim for semantic accuracy wherever relevant, and this has resulted sometimes in unwieldy glosses. Only where detail is less relevant does it go unspecified. (For example, the gloss 'pcl' is used for any of a large set of sentence-final illocutionary particles which make many subtle semantic distinctions, but whose great semantic richness is not directly relevant to the topic of this work.) In these cases, the free translation conveys the relevant import.

More detailed discussion of semantics, and especially polysemy, arises in below sections. First, we consider pragmatics.

## 2.2 Pragmatics

The term 'pragmatics' is applied to a wide and heterogenous range of phenomena, and can be interpreted in a great variety of ways (cf. Leech 1983, Levinson 1983, Mey 1993, for introductory discussions). My position is that a distinct boundary between semantics and pragmatics can be drawn, and should be drawn in the right place. 'Semantics' refers to what is 'encoded' in a linguistic sign and invariably imported whenever that sign is used.<sup>15</sup> 'Pragmatics' refers to the conveyance of

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<sup>15</sup> It is acknowledged here that to say that something is 'encoded in' a linguistic sign is to use a *metaphor*. But it is not a badly misleading one. The sheer intensity and frequency of linguistic usage creates enough convergence in linguistic categories—something extrapol-

additional information 'online', arising via inference from the combination of semantics, contextual factors, and the common ground of speaker and addressee.

It has long been recognised that fixed semantic meanings interact with aspects of context and background to produce specific and enriched interpretations (e.g. Grice 1957, 1975, Schiffer 1972, Lyons 1977, Gazdar 1979, Searle 1979, Levinson 1983, 2000, *inter alia*). A point of contention among scholars has been the issue of exactly where the line is to be drawn. Those advocating 'radical pragmatics' argue that little is encoded in linguistic signs, and that a great deal is calculated 'on-line' by speakers, on the basis of general principles of inference (cf. Cole 1981, Ruhl 1989, Levinson 1995a, b, Hanks 1996). Others promote 'radical semantics', arguing that much of what has been regarded in the literature as 'computed' by speakers is actually encoded in the semantics of specific constructions and productive idiomatic expressions (Wierzbicka 1991). Both extremes recognise and insist upon the need to define what is constant (semantic), and what is contingent (pragmatic). Disagreement as to where the line should be drawn stems mostly 'from disagreement about the criteria for stating and testing semantic meaning' (Goddard 1998:15).

The approach to pragmatics adopted here is essentially a 'Neo-Gricean' one (see Levinson 2000, and many references therein). Insights of the Gricean tradition have been backgrounded in much of the more prominent and influential work on semantic and pragmatic problems, especially in the field of cognitive linguistics.<sup>16</sup> Some scholars such as Langacker (1987:154) and Lakoff (1987:139, 171) reject the pragmatics/semantics distinction altogether, while others, such as Sweetser, work with the distinction and yet claim there is no clear borderline (Sweetser 1990:156-7). Lakoff includes the pragmatics/semantics distinction in his attack on a vaguely defined 'objectivist philosophy of language', spuriously implying that those who adhere to a pragmatics/semantics distinction find semantics 'much more philosophically important than pragmatics' and even denigrate 'matters of human psychology' (Lakoff 1987:171). But there are many dimensions to human psychology, and the 'image-schematic' capacities for abstraction and categorisation which obsess writers such as Lakoff are far from the only aspects of human cognition relevant to language.

The model of a distinct working complementarity between linguistic semantics and pragmatics is compatible with a biologically grounded model of fundamental human psychological propensities for inter-recursively modelling the mental states of others. When we encounter some event, or someone else's action, we assume there is some cause or motivation or intention behind it, and we work back to the *premises* which 'must have' led to those, from a likely existing set (Brown and Levinson 1987:8, 64, Levinson 1995a; cf. Sweetser 1990:123, 129).

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ated by both linguists and native speakers from usage events—for there to be *effectively* fixed meanings, constant across contexts.

<sup>16</sup> While I am critical in this chapter about some principal tenets of prototypical work in cognitive linguistics (e.g. Lakoff 1987, Langacker 1987, Taylor 1989, Newman 1996), I do not want to downplay the important contribution these have made to the study of linguistic semantics, and the influence they have had on the perspective taken here.

And when the premises are found in the catalogue of ‘communal common ground’ (Clark 1996), this inferential process is one of ‘cultural logic’ (Enfield 2000). That the human intellect is profoundly oriented toward the task of figuring out the intentions and motivations of our social associates has been established by long traditions of research in human phylogeny and ontogeny (e.g. Lorenz 1970, Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1975, Cranach et al 1979, Hinde 1982, Byrne and Whiten 1988, Whiten and Byrne 1997, Tomasello 1999), sociology (e.g. Schelling 1960, Garfinkel 1967), philosophy (Lewis 1969, Schiffer 1972) and psychology (Clark 1996), among many others. Interactional aspects of human psychology, fundamental to a Gricean semantic-pragmatic model of language, cannot be overlooked by anyone serious about the relationship between language and cognition.

### 2.3 Interaction of semantics and pragmatics—types of ‘extension’

There are at least four ways in which the term ‘extension’ is applied in the literature to processes in the recognition or attribution of meaning relatedness, and/or the creation of new linguistic meanings or interpretations.<sup>17</sup> These four distinct phenomena are often confused with each other in work on semantics and on semantic change. However, they exist in quite different dimensions.

<b>TYPE I</b> <b>Ontogenetic extension</b>	<b>TYPE II</b> <b>Online extension, active (synchronic)</b>	<b>TYPE III</b> <b>Attributed ‘extension’, perceived (synchronic)</b>	<b>TYPE IV</b> <b>Diachronic extension</b>
<i>Development by an individual of new linguistic concepts on the basis of existing linguistic concepts; part of the conceptual and linguistic development of the individual, especially in early childhood.</i>	<i>A pragmatic process relying on inference (via metaphor or metonymy); involves use of a linguistic expression for novel purposes, intended to produce an interpretation not entailed by the semantics of the expression alone.</i>	<i>A judgement about language by speakers that two established meanings of a word are related; metalinguistic, not a process of production; a perceived or conceivable conceptual relationship, not the result of a creative act of ‘extending’ meaning, and not always or necessarily consciously recognised.</i>	<i>An observable ‘motivated’ change in sign meaning which has occurred over a period spanning more than one speaker’s lifetime. This is an outcome of Type II extension, and may often be reflected in Type III ‘extension’.</i>

Figure 1.6 Types of ‘extension’

Throughout this work, I distinguish between these different types, paying special attention to the distinction between Type II online extension and Type III attributed ‘extension’.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> It should be clear that I do not mean ‘extension’ in Carnap’s (1947) sense.

<sup>18</sup> I continue to use scare quotes when referring to Type III ‘extension’, since it does not involve actual creative ‘extending’ of meaning.

### 2.3.1 In the ontogenetic dimension: Type I extension

Type I extension concerns conceptual and associated linguistic development, especially in early childhood. It is often assumed that such development is from ‘concrete’ to ‘abstract’, through ‘preconceptual schemas’ derived from embodiment of ‘experiential reality’ (Johnson 1987, Lakoff 1987; cf. Vico 1984[1725], Whorf 1956). Some even claim that childhood semantic development leaves ‘memory traces’ in adult semantics (Ziegeler 1997:232). With respect to the meanings examined in this study, one might want to suggest, for example, that the concept ‘come to have’ should be especially basic to a child, and should appear prior to the development of more semantically and grammatically complex ‘extensions’ from this.<sup>19</sup> This implies a path from child to adult semantics, which may be probed, for example, by examining systematic differences between the semantic organisation of child and adult language (e.g. Bowerman and Choi 2001:500).

It is sometimes supposed that diachronic and ontogenetic processes are related or alike. Research on historical semantics (especially grammaticalisation studies; cf. §3, below) occasionally conflates or confuses ontogenetic processes and diachronic processes, for example when claiming or implying that at a former stage of the language, only a ‘concrete’ or ‘central’ meaning existed, and that today’s more abstract meanings have emerged as extensions, in accordance with natural paths of semantic change. Heine, Claudi, and Hünemeyer (1991), for example, state that ‘chains’ of semantic development in the history of a language (i.e. over time spans far exceeding the biography of any individual speaker) ‘reflect linguistically what has happened on the way from more concrete to abstract contents’ (Heine, Claudi, and Hünemeyer 1991:171; cf. pp150-152, 171ff).

Ziegeler (1997:229) identifies ‘source concepts’ for grammaticalisation in the diachronic dimension with the ‘starting semantic space’ for children’s semantic and grammatical development, in the ontogenetic dimension (Bowerman 1985). Ziegeler’s use of the term ‘retention’ in this context, following Bybee and Pagliuca (1987), is problematic in a number of ways. There is a general failure to distinguish between cognitive/conceptual processes which take place in the individual mind and are confined to single lifetimes, and processes which take place over the historical trajectory of ‘a language’, which as ‘a system’ is an entirely different kind of entity (§1.1, above). The two simply cannot be regarded as analogous. Ziegeler claims to have found in children’s use of grammaticalising items ‘evidence of the presence of archaic sources which are no longer used in the present-day adult language, and therefore cannot be part of the child’s input’ (Ziegeler 1997:224). But it simply makes no sense to claim that speakers ‘access diachronic information’ in morphemes without the information being in the input (Ziegeler 1997:214). Where would this information reside? The child only has her linguistic input and the conceptual tools she is born with (i.e. Bowerman’s 1985 ‘starting semantic space’). When we learn a word as a native learner, we learn its

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<sup>19</sup> I am referring to the *meaning* ‘come to have’—as for example expressed by English *get* in one of its senses—and not to the expression *come to have*.

subtle semantics, and naturally there is a relationship with the semantics of an ‘ancestor’ morpheme. There is ‘diachronic information’ in morphemes only in that their semantics are related to the semantics of past forms. But they are learned and maintained in a synchronic system which is essentially blind to the universe beyond a mortal’s lifetime. The idea of ‘semantic residue’ being ‘retained’ by morphemes from earlier historical stages of the language (Ziegeler 1997:232) is a metaphor. Morphemes themselves *do not literally have historical continuity* (cf. §1.1.2, above). No ‘diachronic information’ is secretly passed on when a morpheme is transmitted. Children do not literally ‘receive’ language-specific semantics, they have to construct them, and if they are advantaged by structures not included in the input, these structures would have to be innate—as such, they would certainly not provide information from a particular historical period of a particular language (such as ‘Beijing Mandarin’).

Ontogenetic extensions take place entirely in the dimension of the life span processes of individuals, and while such extensions are directly relevant to the formation of an idiolect system, they are not directly applicable to historical change ‘in a language’. As Slobin puts it, ‘it is an illusion that child language development and grammaticization are due to the same sorts of processes’ (Slobin 2001:433). Although it is likely that ontogenetic processes make some contribution to the patterns investigated in this book, I concentrate on mechanisms which take place in other dimensions. I do not further address ‘extension’ in the ontogenetic dimension.

### 2.3.2 In the synchronic dimension: Type II and Type III ‘extension’

The distinction between synchronic ‘extension’ of Types II and III is a significant and qualitative one, yet it is often not observed. Langacker, for example, in one case uses the term ‘extension’ to refer to Type II online extension—his example is calling a man an *ostrich* ‘because of his peculiar figure and the funny way he walks’ (Langacker 1987:70). He rightly refers to this extension as ‘linguistic creativity’ and ‘problem-solving activity on the part of the speaker’ (Langacker 1987:73). Elsewhere, however, he uses the term ‘extension’ to refer to a *non-active* ‘extension’ of Type III, namely the conventionalised polysemy of the phrase *let the cat out of the bag* (Langacker 1987:93-96). While we may recognise conceptual ‘mapping’ here between the idea of revealing a secret and of releasing a feline from a cloth receptacle, such a mapping is not necessarily active in any one instance of usage. That is, a true extension is *actually made* by the speaker when he refers to someone as an *ostrich*, while to say that someone has *let the cat out of the bag* is simply to access the lexicon directly.<sup>20</sup>

Type II online extension is something that people *do* when they speak. Zgusta (1971:51) calls this ‘occasional application’, for example when ordering ‘steak, with about two printer’s reams of French fried potatoes on the promenade

<sup>20</sup> The same lack of distinction is found in all prominent cognitive linguistics work, including Lakoff (1987), Langacker (1987), Taylor (1989), Kronenfeld (1996; cf. Enfield 1997:461) and Newman (1996). Cf. Keysar and Bly (1999), Enfield (2001b).

deck'. He comments that 'it would be wrong to assume, on the strength of this application, that the lexical unit *promenade deck* has, as a part of the system of English, a meaning like, say "upper part of a steak when served"' (Zgusta 1971:51). Type III 'extension', on the other hand, does not *create* a new usage. Type III 'extensions' are *apparent* relationships between now conventionalised meanings, and these may or may not reflect erstwhile extensions of Type II. Sometimes formerly active Type II extensions are lost, sometimes they are changed, embellished, or retained. And sometimes apparent Type III 'extensions' have no relation to the historical source of the polysemy (see next section). Type III 'extensions' are often not recognised at all—do you think about a body part when you say *It's in the back of the cupboard*, or about 'keeping' anything when you say *He kept annoying me*? In contrast, you certainly do think of a very large bird when you hear someone say *That guy is an ostrich*. More will be said about Type III 'extension' in discussion of polysemy, §2.4, below.

### 2.3.3 The relation between 'extension' in synchronic and diachronic dimensions

Extension of Type IV—diachronic extension—is observed *post hoc*. It spans the lifetimes of individuals, and does not occur in any genuine single coherent/contained linguistic system, but in the hypostasised 'language' which we only imagine to have historical continuity. Type IV extension may be gleaned from historical records, or inferred from comparison of related languages.

It is now widely assumed that there is a relationship between semantic/pragmatic variation in synchrony and semantic change in diachrony. Sweetser, for example, claims that '[b]y studying the historical development of groups of related words, it should be possible to see what sorts of systematic structure our cognitive system tends to give the relevant domains' (Sweetser 1990:9). I argue that this is true only with relevance to the relationship between Type II (online) and Type IV (diachronic) extension shown in Figure 1.6, above. One problem with Sweetser's account is that Type III attributed 'extensions' are not distinguished from these. Similarly, Newman says in his cross-linguistic study of 'give' verbs that 'detailed historical research' is 'necessary in order to fully substantiate claims and hypotheses concerning the [synchronic] interrelatedness of the extensions [of 'give']' (Newman 1996:270). However, I question the assumption that diachronic explanations for the emergence of multiple meanings will relate directly to perceived synchronic relationships between meanings of polysemous expressions.

Polysemes are associated with each other in the minds of speakers due to the formal synchronic property of homophony *in combination with* a subjective judgement of semantic relatedness. The fact that they are historically related is not *necessarily* of any relevance. Once two meanings split, their relationship to each other may become completely unhinged. Words assumed to be etymologically related may in fact not be (e.g. the two meanings of English *ear*, 'organ of hearing' versus 'part of such cereal plants as wheat and barley'; Lyons 1977:550). They display imposed 'extension' of Type III *only*. The Lao word *pii*<sup>3</sup> has the meanings 'year' and 'banana flower'. Some speakers fancy a conceptual connec-

tion between their meanings, but they are etymologically unrelated (cf. Thai *pii* 'year' versus *plii* 'banana flower'). Another example is the Lao word *saaw*<sup>2</sup>, which may mean 'person' (in certain compounds) or the numeral '20'. In many languages, these two meanings are related (i.e. since a person has 20 digits), but in Lao they are related neither historically nor in the minds of speakers.

Rumsey (1983) discusses some fascinating examples of perceived semantic connection between words which have phonologically converged in North-western Australian Kriol. The 'imposition' of a semantic connection is particularly clear here. For example 'secret' and 'sacred' converge as *jigrid*, where the two meanings are closely related culturally; 'steep' and 'deep' converge as *dip*, where the two meanings are related metonymically in the common environmental feature of steep-sided gullies plunging into deep waterways. A native linguist without historical information may well conclude that there had been a process of 'extension' from one of these meanings to the other at some past time.

The converse of these cases of Type III extension being attributed where no such extension historically took place are cases in which a genuine Type II extension historically leads to a meaning split, but where the semantic divergence becomes so great that speakers no longer recognise a connection. A stock example is *sole* ('bottom of foot' versus 'kind of fish'), another may be *nut* ('hard fruit' versus 'small metal thing designed for a bolt').<sup>21</sup>

#### 2.3.4 The 'bridging context' model of semantic change

It has been pointed out that a word cannot change in meaning without 'an intervening stage of polysemy' (Sweetser 1990:9). Speakers do not just 'wake up and switch meanings' on a given date. But a word cannot become polysemous overnight either. The process of semantic change over generations crucially involves Gricean implicature. While the role of pragmatics in meaning change has been recognised by many (cf. e.g. Hopper and Traugott 1993: Chapter 4), it has seldom been explicitly formulated. The following diagram formally represents the process:<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For a different kind of problem, see Lyons' (1977:551) discussion of *port* ('harbour' versus 'kind of fortified wine').

<sup>22</sup> This formulation follows recent work by Evans and Wilkins (2000; cf. Evans 1990:137, 1992:476, 1997:134, Wilkins 1996:269-70). A comparable diagram in Hopper and Traugott (1993:36) lacks the crucial Stage 2.

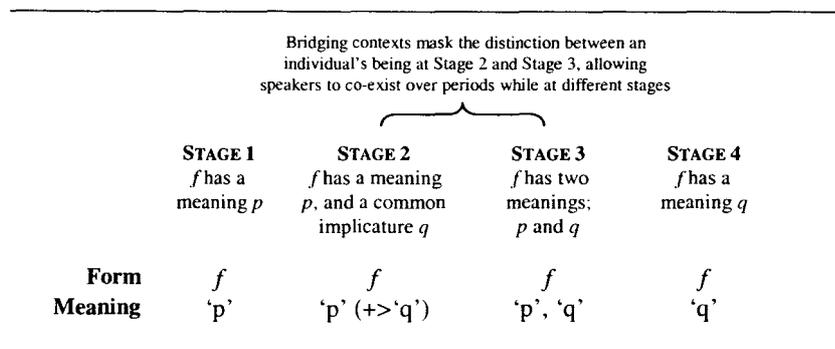


Figure 1.7 Stages in semantic change, where 'bridging contexts' mask the transition from online pragmatic implicature to genuine polysemy

Figure 1.7 illustrates explicitly how a word can change from having a meaning 'p' to having two meanings 'p' and 'q', while keeping the account non-metaphorical (i.e. without contradicting the assumptions of methodological individualism and 'no telepathy'; cf. §1.1, above). Recall that linguistic items are abstracted from signifier-signified relations which are separately constructed and maintained by each individual in the community. The process of change in community-wide conventions must ultimately be explained in terms of the individuals involved. Change in community-wide convention is an outcome of change in the behaviour of individuals. How does the transition work?

Crucial to the transition between Stages 2 and 3 in Figure 1.7 is the existence of 'bridging contexts'—these are contexts in which an interpretation of *f* as merely implicating 'q' (on the basis of 'p') or as actually *meaning* 'q' (as distinct from 'p') become functionally equivalent, neutralising any communicative consequences of two speakers' differing in their interpretation of the respective contribution of encoded semantic content and contingent pragmatic enrichment (Evans and Wilkins 2000:550). The implicature, usually defeasible, happens to be true in the bridging context, and so *in that context* is non-defeasible. The bridging context puts the two interpretations of *f*—as implying 'q' on the basis of a meaning 'p' and as *meaning* 'q' *as distinct from* and *in addition to* 'p'—into alignment. In this way, the bridging context 'masks' the difference between a pragmatic interpretation and a semantic interpretation, allowing individuals, one by one over a period of time, to shift from regarding 'q' as an implicature to regarding it as a distinct meaning. Eventually, when enough speakers have come to regard the erstwhile enriched interpretation as a fixed and context-independent *meaning*, *f* becomes conventionally polysemous, and may be used with distinct meanings 'p' and 'q'. In other words, the former implicature +>'q' becomes no longer defeasible in any context. Then the earlier meaning 'p' is free, over time, to fade away or to persist in its own right, independent of the new meaning 'q'.

Pragmatic implicature is a crucial aspect of this model (in Stage 2), but once Stage 3 has been reached—i.e. when one signifier has come to signify two

separate *meanings*—the ‘extension’ is no longer a real-time *process*, actively made by speakers.<sup>23</sup> In Stage 3, an online extension becomes an ‘attributed’ one, and may become completely separated from its source, becoming an interpretation (or reinterpretation) in the mind of the speaker about his language. This is what makes synchronic *semantics* potentially misleading in the study of meaning change. It is not synchronic polysemy but *synchronic implicature* that is directly relevant to processes of semantic change. Historical semantics hinges on synchronic pragmatics, in the specific sense illustrated in Figure 1.7, and one aim of the present study is to demonstrate this.

## 2.4 Polysemy and its description

It is common for a single phonetic/phonological string to signify more than one meaning. When these meanings are not considered to be related, the two phonologically identical signs are said to be in a relationship of *homonymy*. When the two meanings *are* considered to be related, this is called *polysemy*.<sup>24</sup> The following examples are from Lao:

- |     |           |                      |                       |
|-----|-----------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| (5) | Homonymy: | /saaj <sup>2</sup> / | 1. <i>n.</i> ‘man’    |
|     |           |                      | 2. <i>n.</i> ‘sand’   |
|     | Polysemy: | /lòð <sup>4</sup> /  | 1. <i>n.</i> ‘wheel’  |
|     |           |                      | 2. <i>n.</i> ‘barrow’ |

Diagnosis of polysemy depends on a judgement that homophones with demonstrably distinct meanings are related (i.e. a Type III ‘extension’ must hold). In some cases, this is clear-cut, but in others it is less obvious. For example, the idea that a giant lifting-device called a *crane*<sub>1</sub> is like a kind of bird called a *crane*<sub>2</sub> may seldom come to mind when speakers use either of these words. Polysemy relations are usually ‘weakly iconic’ (Lyons 1977:103), in that while the connection is ‘obvious’ once the two meanings are known, we would not have been able to deduce the meanings in advance. It is only in hindsight, once the two meanings are already known, that the ‘extension’ makes the sense that it does, and I believe that attributed ‘extensions’ between polysemes are primarily mnemonic rather than generative. While extension of a word meaning ‘wheel’ to apply to some saliently ‘wheeled’ vehicle would seem a straightforward and natural case of metonymy, a specific conventional application cannot be guessed in advance. Differ-

<sup>23</sup> Type I ontogenetic extension may also be involved, but occurs on a dimension not illustrated in Figure 1.7.

<sup>24</sup> In addition to this distinction, it may also be useful to recognise *heterosemy* (Persson 1988, Lichtenberk 1991, Bowden 1992), in which related meanings of a single word correspond non-coincidentally to different grammatical functions. For example, in verbalising languages, a set of basic verbs, including directional verbs like *enter*, *descend*, *cross*, as well as other basic action verbs like *give* or *take*, can become preposition-like in their function (i.e. as ‘into’, ‘down’, ‘across’, ‘for’, or ‘with’), depending on their position in the structure of the clause (cf. e.g. Durie 1988, 1997).

ent languages may conventionalise the erstwhile active extension in different ways—cf. Lao *lò̌*<sup>4</sup> ‘wheel’/‘barrow’ vs. Khmer *kò̃ng* ‘wheel’/‘bicycle’.

Polysemy is not a kind of semantic relation, but is defined on the basis of some semantic relation between two signifieds *in combination with* phonological identity of the two signifiers. Exactly the same *semantic* relation may hold between two separate words in one language as does between two senses of a polysemous word in another language. For example, the same semantic/conceptual relationship (metonymy) holds between English *wheel* and *bicycle*, as holds between Khmer *kò̃ng*<sub>1</sub> ‘wheel’ and *kò̃ng*<sub>2</sub> ‘bicycle’.

#### 2.4.1 Semantic networks

Judgements of semantic relatedness between synchronically distinct meanings can be personal and impressionistic, on the part of both speakers and linguists. Nevertheless, such relationships have been treated by some as the central problem of semantics. Recent tradition (especially in cognitive linguistics) has developed the ‘semantic network’ as a method of describing synchronic phenomena of polysemy (cf. Matisoff 1978, 1991, Lakoff 1987, Norvig and Lakoff 1987, Langacker 1987, 1991, Taylor 1989, Sweetser 1990, Jurafsky 1996, Newman 1996, Evans and Wilkins 2000, 2001, *inter alia*). A semantic network is a diagram of multiple meanings whose ‘connections’ (usually according to hypotheses of directional ‘extension’) are typically represented by graphic lines of varying style and thickness, which have some non-arbitrary relationship to the putative nature of the connections. Although semantic networks can be convenient in representing multiple meanings and intuitions about putative relationships between them, as analytical tools they can be problematic. Often no distinction is made between the fundamentally different Type II online pragmatic extensions and Type III attributed ‘extensions’.

A ‘network’ of meanings for one polysemous item must provide answers to the following questions:

- (6) (a) Are the meanings related in any significant way?
- (b) What kinds of relationships exist between these meanings?
- (c) Exactly how many separate meanings are there?
- (d) Does one meaning have privileged status with respect to the others?

We have already discussed (6a) and (6b) at length. In ‘network’ treatments, putative relatedness often comes under a cover-all heading ‘extension’, and mostly these are attributed ‘extensions’ only (of Type III). A network representing ‘extensions’ of this kind thus depicts speakers’ ideas *about* language, and not necessarily first-order properties of linguistic signs. Network-style description of polysemy tends to assign priority to the description of putative *relatedness* between meanings, and this can detract from the importance of establishing well-founded descriptions of the individual meanings themselves. But good description of individual meanings should be the priority—we must know exactly what meanings we have before we can discuss their conceivable relatedness. Many

scholars derive aesthetic pleasure from the presentation of polysemy analysis in diagrammatic form, especially when all the meanings can be linked together at once in a visually impressive manner (cf. e.g. Lakoff 1987:436). But despite important contributions to semantic description made by those who have explored the idea of 'networks', the method itself does little to assist in the primary task of enumerating and describing individual meanings. Rather, it runs the danger of encouraging the *assumption* of links between meanings rather than questioning whether such links exist at all, and if so how they can be properly established.

Let us now consider two aspects of multiple meaning which 'semantic networks' often seek to portray, namely the number of meanings a morpheme has (6c, above), and whether or not any one meaning can be regarded as 'central' (6d, above).

#### 2.4.2 How many meanings?

In stating the exact number of meanings a polysemous item has, some argue for as few as possible, while others are willing to posit many. Despite theoretical arguments in support of either position, however, this question can only be resolved by positive specification of invariant semantic content of the signs in question (as distinct from additional interpretation imported by linguistic and situational context), and this is seldom forthcoming.

Lakoff argues for a proliferation of meanings of English *over* (Lakoff 1987:416-61 *passim*), positing 24 different senses in the spatial domain alone. Here are five 'meanings' of spatial *over* with Lakoff's suggested contrasting semantic components:<sup>25</sup>

	LM extended?	LM vertical?	LM/TR in contact?
a. <i>The bird flew over<sub>1</sub> the yard</i>	+	-	-
b. <i>The bird flew over<sub>2</sub> the wall</i>	-	+	-
c. <i>The plane flew over<sub>3</sub> the hill</i>	+	+	-
d. <i>Sam walked over<sub>4</sub> the hill</i>	+	+	+
e. <i>Sam drove over<sub>5</sub> the bridge</i>	+	-	+

Figure 1.8 Five 'meanings' for *over*, as suggested by Lakoff (1987:421-2)

The five senses supposedly contrast as to whether the landmark (i.e. the object of the preposition) is horizontally 'extended' or not (*the wall* is not); whether the landmark is vertical or not (*the yard* and *the bridge* are not); and whether there is contact between trajector and landmark (not the case when the

<sup>25</sup> The abbreviations 'TR' and 'LM' in Figure 1.8 refer to *trajector* and *landmark*, standard terms in cognitive linguistics. The former often corresponds in practice to grammatical subject, the latter to object or some oblique nominal function. Langacker defines *trajector* in 'cognitive' terms as 'figure' (with reference to 'ground'). *Landmarks* are 'other salient entities' which provide 'points of reference for locating the trajector' (Langacker 1987:217).

main verb is *flew*). It seems obvious, however, that these contrasts are due to the contribution of other words in the sentences given. The contrasts emerge from properties of complements like ‘the wall’ or ‘the yard’, or of verbs like ‘fly’ versus ‘walk’ or ‘drive’, and are not related to any ‘multiple meanings’ of *over*. Lakoff’s position would lead us to say that *tea* in the following two sentences had two distinct meanings:

- (7) (a) *Your tea<sub>1</sub> is on the bench.*  
 (b) *Your tea<sub>2</sub> is all over the floor.*

Are we to conclude that ‘*tea<sub>2</sub>*’ in (7b) means ‘hot beverage; +horizontal; +extended; +in contact with LM’, and that this conclusion would have nothing to do with any contribution by the complex preposition *all over*, or the complement *the floor*? Surely not.

Lakoff rejects a ‘minimal specification interpretation’ of *over*—whereby, for example, a parameter of ‘contact’ (i.e. with the ground) could be attributed to the different specifications of verbs *walk* versus *fly*—arguing that metaphorical and other extensions of *over* ‘branch’ directly from the ‘fully specified senses’ he suggests. For example, Lakoff says that *John is over the hill* ‘makes use of schema [(d) in Figure 1.8] and a metaphor for understanding a career in terms of a journey over a vertical extended landmark like a hill’ (Lakoff 1987:439). But this is merely a restatement of the metaphor, and it does not even factor out the contribution of a ‘vertical extended landmark’ by the overt nominal *hill* in both cases. Nor does it recognise that *John is over the hill* is an ‘idiom chunk’ in which the contribution of *over* is not separable anyway. It is not demonstrated that distinct meanings of *over* itself account directly for perceived conceptual relationships in metaphors which include the word *over*, particularly given that nowhere does Lakoff provide a testable/falsifiable *definition* of the word concerned. His approach dramatically over-specifies the semantic distinctions attributable to single lexical items.

At another extreme, lexical semantics can be viewed as highly *underdetermined*, where variations in communicative contribution of a linguistic expression are almost wholly attributed to pragmatic effects such as conversational implicatures. Ruhl’s (1989) austere ‘monosemy’ assumes that ‘words contribute much less to meaning than usually supposed’ (Ruhl 1989:vii), and that ‘[semantic] diversity is provided by context’ (Ruhl 1989:xii). Ruhl claims, contra Lakoff, ‘that *in*, *out*, *over*, and all prepositions have highly abstract meanings, of which the concrete are simply a pragmatically modulated subspecies’ (Ruhl 1989:xiii). The tradition of minimising analytic complexity wherever possible is a well-established one, but a meaning is a meaning, and if a meaning is claimed, however abstract or specific, the claim should be explicitly statable and thus falsifiable. Ruhl, like Lakoff, fails to provide definitions for his hypothesised meanings, and so his arguments go unsupported.

Description of polysemy can and must insist on consistent and well-motivated criteria for establishing the number of meanings in a network (despite the pessimism of some; cf. Geeraerts 1993). Semantic tests can be employed to diag-

nose polysemy.<sup>26</sup> For example, it is generally true that if a word can be felicitously asserted and negated in the same proposition, it has two different meanings in that proposition. Thus, it can be shown that a word like *crane* has (at least) two meanings, by the fact that the following sentence can be used to express the proposition that the subject saw a tall lifting device, not a large wading bird:

(8) *He saw a CRANE (for lifting things), not a CRANE (with feathers).*

The assertion/negation test shows that there is no distinction in meaning between the two instances of *tea* in (7). If John wanted to say that the tea on the bench was not in a cup, but all over the bench (i.e. '+horizontal; +extended; +in contact with LM'), he could not do this by exploiting different entailments of '*tea*<sub>1</sub>' and '*tea*<sub>2</sub>':

(9) *\*Your TEA (spilt) is on the bench, not your TEA (in a cup).*

Indeed, Lakoff's claim that the five '*over*'s in Figure 1.8 have distinct meanings does not hold up to this test. The presentation of *over* in Figure 1.8 does not allow for the claim to be falsified, since the contribution of the various main verbs (*fly/walk/drive*), and the various complements of *over* (*yard/wall/hill/bridge*), is never factored out. This can be dealt with by neutralising the parameter of 'contact' in the manner of locomotion (use *go* as the main verb) and the specific topographic parameters of 'verticality' and 'extension' of the 'landmark' complement (use *it* as the complement of *over*). The hypothesis thus becomes testable, and the claim illustrated in Figure 1.8 is in fact falsified. If John wanted to say that the bird didn't go '*over*<sub>1</sub>' the yard (i.e. didn't fly), but went '*over*<sub>3</sub>' it (i.e. walked), or that the car didn't drive '*over*<sub>5</sub>' something (e.g. a bridge), but drove '*over*<sub>4</sub>' something (e.g. a hill), he could not convey these by exploiting underlying entailments of *over* in the 'different senses' he suggests, as follows:

(10) *\*He didn't go over it, he went OVER it.*

If separate 'meanings' of *over* itself entailed contrasts in the parameters of 'verticality' and 'contact', then (10) would be felicitous with the meanings intended.<sup>27</sup>

Tests like this, which are sensitive to the semantic entailments of linguistic signs, are employed throughout this book in diagnosing polysemy and in distinguishing real meanings from pragmatically derived interpretations. Further, those inferred interpretations can also be positively stated as outcomes of combining entailments of the word with definable aspects of the linguistic and situational

<sup>26</sup> Strictly speaking, the tests I discuss here are sensitive to *ambiguity*, thus distinguishing between polysemy and monosemy, but not between polysemy and homonymy.

<sup>27</sup> At the same time, this test confirms that *over* (or *go over*) is polysemous in another sense—(10) could express the idea that John didn't review ('go over') his homework, but shredded it by 'going over it' with a lawnmower.

context (see §2.2, above). For instance, a default culturally-specified inference arising from (7a)—that according to a normal scenario of informing someone of the location of their tea, the tea is understood to be a beverage contained *in a cup*, ready to drink—may be stated as follows (cf. Levinson 1983: Chapter 3):

- (11) *Your tea is on the bench* +> *Your hot liquid beverage is in a cup, upright, on the bench*

This interpretation is, however, not entailed. *Tea* in (7a) could also refer to tea leaves in a box, tea spilt on the benchtop, among other things.

#### 2.4.3 ‘Centrality’ of meaning

It is often assumed that a polysemy network has a ‘central’ member, and that this most ‘central’ member has the most ‘concrete’ meaning (implying that other senses are derived or ‘extended’ from this sense). Indeed, some meanings seem intuitively more ‘central’, but there is no reason to assume that only *one* meaning shows such importance. There are many criteria for selecting a ‘central’ meaning of a word: it may be the one logically (definitionally) prior, definitionally simpler, etymologically prior, prior in acquisition, most cognitively ‘salient’ or ‘accessible’, textually most frequent, or judged to be central by speakers. More than one of these criteria of ‘centrality’ may compete or conspire with the others. Just this list indicates that a general notion of ‘centrality among multiple meanings’ could be a ‘cluster’ concept, reminiscent of notions of ‘subject’ (Keenan 1976) and clausal ‘head’ (Zwicky 1985, Croft 1996, Andrews and Manning 1999), both of which are sometimes assumed to be unitary concepts. Different criteria of ‘centrality’ have different values for different descriptive purposes, and indeed in the present work it is not clear that the idea of ‘centrality’ is useful.

## 2.5 Summary

This section has gone to some length to characterise a view of linguistic meaning and change, with the following major points. Semantics and pragmatics are distinct and can be kept distinct in linguistic analysis. There are a number of ways in which meaning can be ‘extended’, including active online extension via pragmatic implicature, and mere attribution of relatedness between distinct meanings of words. Pragmatic implicature plays a critical role in the process of polysemisation (as a necessary step in semantic change), enabled by ‘bridging contexts’ which mask individuals’ transitions from interpreting ‘extended’ meanings as online extensions to interpreting them as fixed distinct meanings. Description of this process demands special care in description of semantics and pragmatics. In particular, it requires that questions of polysemy and meaning extension be dealt with by explicitly stating proposed meanings.

### 3. GRAMMATICALISATION

Grammaticalisation is a process which centrally concerns semantic change of the kind described in Figure 1.7, above (involving Type II ‘online’ extension by pragmatic implicature), where a morpheme enters a more restricted class (i.e. fits into a syntactic slot which a smaller number of morphemes may fit into).<sup>28</sup> Morphemes which undergo this process also often undergo associated phonological change (usually weakening).

Works on grammaticalisation in the mainland Southeast Asia area include recent studies on Sinitic (e.g. Sun 1996, Ansaldo 1999, Chappell 2001), and other language families (notably Clark 1989, Li 1991, Matisoff 1991, Bisang 1991, 1996, Haiman 1999, Diller 2001). The specific item I examine here—the ‘ACQUIRE’ word; cf. §5.2, below—has been mentioned a number of times in the context of broader discussions (Clark 1989, Bisang 1991, Matisoff 1991), but no cross-linguistic study has examined in close detail the semantics and pragmatics of the problem focussed on in this book.<sup>29</sup> I have only encountered one work dealing exclusively with the ‘ACQUIRE’ word in a non-Sinitic language, namely Haiman (1999) on *baan* in Khmer (cf. Enfield 2001b for discussion).

We now briefly consider three descriptive and methodological problems in grammaticalisation research, of relevance to this study.

#### 3.1 ‘Grammatical’ versus ‘lexical’ meaning

Despite the standard methodological assumption of a distinction between ‘grammatical’ and ‘lexical’ meaning, there is no evidence of such a distinction being a *qualitative* one, at least not in semantic terms (Langacker 1987, Goddard 1997). Wierzbicka (1988:561) argues that ‘grammar—just like the lexicon—encodes meaning’, and that ‘[t]he meanings encoded in the grammatical constructions of a language are of the same kind as those encoded in lexical items’ (cf. Langacker 1987:18, Goldberg 1997:171, Goddard 1997:2). I similarly hold the view that lexicon and grammar do not contain different *kinds* of meaning.<sup>30</sup> While research in grammaticalisation usually stresses the ‘grammatical’/‘lexical’ distinction, I argue that a view of lexical and grammatical semantics as qualitatively *alike* allows a straightforward and genuine account of grammaticalisation phenomena within a single set of descriptive terms.

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<sup>28</sup> See Hopper and Traugott (1993) for a standard introduction to the field; cf. Heine and Reh (1984), Heine, Claudi, and Hünnemeyer (1991), Traugott and Heine (1991) for representative works.

<sup>29</sup> Simpson (1998a, b, 2001) discusses synchronic data from a formal syntax (and Sinocentric) perspective.

<sup>30</sup> This is indexed throughout the present work by the practice of glossing ‘grammatical morphemes’ with the same typeface as ‘lexical morphemes’.

### 3.2 'Semantic loss'

A common concept in grammaticalisation theory is described by a number of terms including 'bleaching', 'desemanticisation', 'semantic loss', and 'weakening' (Heine and Reh 1984:15, Sweetser 1988, Heine, Claudi and Hünnemeyer 1991:155ff, Hopper and Traugott 1993:68, 84ff, *inter alia*). The general claim behind such terms is that in certain semantic changes something is 'lost'. However, in typical cases of grammaticalisation, there is often 'a redistribution or shift, *not a loss, of meaning*' (Hopper and Traugott, 1993:84; emphasis added—cf. also Traugott 1988, Traugott and König 1991:190-1). To determine whether a semantic change has involved 'loss', one must measure the differences between positive specifications of the putative 'before' and 'after' meanings, thus making the claim of 'semantic loss' a falsifiable one. The necessary explicit formulations of meanings involved are seldom forthcoming in existing literature.

An example of a spurious claim of 'semantic loss' in grammaticalisation is Haiman's (1999:159) contention that a putative development of Khmer *baan*—from 'can' (postverbally) to a semantically complex preverbal aspect-modality function—involves 'desemanticisation'. However (as demonstrated in Chapters 5 and 7), the meaning of the putative source morpheme is considerably *simpler* than the meaning of the putative target morpheme. Without the aid of explicit definitions for the meanings being considered, it is not possible to falsify hypotheses of 'semantic loss'.

### 3.3 Directionality and paths of change

A preoccupation of some works on grammaticalisation has been to identify *paths* or sequences of semantic change, closely associated with the issue of *directionality* of change (Hopper and Traugott 1993:94ff).<sup>31</sup> Given related meanings *a* and *b*, it has been standard to assume that development of one from the other will only be likely in one direction (e.g. we find  $a > b$ , but not  $b > a$ ). And where scholars are dealing with more than two related meanings, there is a tendency to assume a transitive linear relation in grammatical development. Given three functions *a*, *b*, and *c*, it could be considered preferable to propose a two-step unidirectional process such as  $a > b > c$ , rather than two independent single-step processes such as  $a > b$  and  $a > c$ . It should go without saying that such hypotheses must be justified given the data on a case-by-case basis, but there is a danger—in similar manner to problems in 'network' treatments of polysemy discussed above—that an *anticipated* or *aesthetically preferred* or more 'interesting' model can lead researchers to make unwarranted assumptions. Examples from the data in this study are discussed in Chapter 9 (cf. Enfield 2001b).

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<sup>31</sup> Some have been at pains to point out that claims about directionality of grammaticalisation are not exceptionless (Campbell 1991, Harris and Campbell 1995).

#### 4. THREE CONCEPTUAL PRELIMINARIES

I now pre-empt some semantic distinctions of relevance in Chapters 3-7 with a few general comments on three conceptual issues, namely, the notion 'come to have', the notion 'can', and the distinction between 'success' and 'attainment'.

##### 4.1 'Come to have'

The idea 'come to have' is not conceptually simple. However, it may be conceptually 'molecular', associated with a basic or 'primal' kind of event, one which all humans encounter and embody from very early in life, in this case from the beginning of their ability to manually grasp objects. Primally, 'come to have' presupposes manual possession. Once a child understands that it can hold onto things and thus possess them (and thereby be able to do what it wants with them), it may understand that events take place which lead to such possession. From before we can even crawl, walk, or talk, we are familiar with the experience of 'coming to have' things. This experience is mundane and endlessly repeated, and one may suppose that its ontogenetically primal nature accounts, in part at least, for the perceived 'basicness' or prototypicality of the physical 'coming to have' meaning of the polysemous lexical items examined in this study.

This, however, does not help to explain why the 'come to have' word is exclusively *non-agentive* in the languages of mainland Southeast Asia, while its closest semantic equivalents in a language such as English—*acquire*, *receive*—are not everyday words of the same basic status. In English, the obvious basic verb for coming to have something is *get*, but this word has an agentive/controlled sense which the mainland Southeast Asian languages of this study conspicuously lack (see Chapters 3 and 4).<sup>32</sup> The primal scenario of a thing coming into one's sphere of control is obviously associated with the idea of 'taking' something with one's hand (indeed the possibility of grabbing is presumably what defines this sphere for an infant). The 'come to have' words in the sample languages of this study do not specify *action* on the part of he who 'comes to have'. A relevant factor may be the existence of other everyday words in these languages which refer to this basic action (i.e. there is a basic 'take in hand' verb across these languages, which English lacks).

The predication made by the expression 'come to have' involves two important components, namely an *event* of something coming into one's sphere of possession, and a subsequent and consequent *state* of possessing that thing. The following diagram is an abstract depiction of an expression 'x comes to have y', where 'x' is a possessor, 'y' is a thing, '↔' is an event involving two things com-

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<sup>32</sup> A great deal could be said about English *get*, but that would go beyond the scope of this discussion.

ing into contact, ‘;’ separates this event from a resultant state which follows it, and ‘{ }’ is *x*’s sphere of possession, in which *y* ends up.<sup>33</sup>

$$(12) \quad \begin{array}{l} \{ \} \leftrightarrow y; \\ \{y\}_x \end{array}$$

‘Come to have’ treats the recipient (*x*) as the ‘primary figure’ in the event (i.e. it is encoded as grammatical subject), and there is no necessary reference to the *source* of transfer, nor is it specified whether the thing moves to the recipient or the recipient moves to the thing. The diagram (12) will be helpful in Parts II and III, in illustrating suggested metaphorical and metonymic relations (‘extensions’ of Type III) between meanings.

#### 4.2 ‘Can’

There are conceivable points of association between the concepts ‘come to have’ and ‘can’. First, for example, there is a metonymic relationship, in that ‘getting’ something is often a result of one’s own *ability* (e.g. in hunting, searching, digging). Second, once one acquires something, one ‘can’ do things with it. Third, a possible way of expressing an ‘ability’ is as a thing one ‘possesses’ (e.g. *I have experience in hotel reception and silver service, but I don’t have Japanese, so I probably won’t get the job*). These ‘possessions’ are ‘acquired’ and ‘lost’ at various times in one’s life.

A point which arises repeatedly in this book (especially in Chapters 3 and 5) is that the modality expressed by simple ‘can’ is open to interpretation (depending on context) as referring to ‘permission’, ‘possibility’, ‘ability’, and so on. It is vague with respect to these distinctions. *John cannot swim*, for example, could mean in different contexts that he has never learned to swim and is incapable of swimming, or that he knows how to swim but is ill in this case and physically cannot manage it, or that he is not allowed (e.g. by his mother) to swim. Other more complex and/or specific modals may distinguish explicitly between these.

‘Can’ is a modal with scope over a predicate. Assuming *can*<*q*<*x*>> means ‘*x* can *q*’, negation may scope over either ‘can’, ‘*q*’, or both:

$$(13) \quad \sim \text{can} \langle q \langle x \rangle \rangle \quad \text{‘}x \text{ cannot } q\text{’}$$

$$(14) \quad \text{can} \langle \sim q \langle x \rangle \rangle \quad \text{‘}x \text{ can not-}q\text{’ (‘}x \text{ is able to not } q\text{’; ‘}x \text{ doesn’t have to } q\text{’)}$$

$$(15) \quad \sim \text{can} \langle \sim q \langle x \rangle \rangle \quad \text{‘}x \text{ cannot not-}q\text{’ (‘}x \text{ must } q\text{’)}$$

In cases like (14), where negation combines with the *complement* of ‘can’, and the resultant combination remains under the scope of ‘can’ itself, I use the convention of hyphenating the negation-plus-predicate combination, so that the

<sup>33</sup> This scenario is subsumed by the more complex concept ‘give’ (which includes in addition a ‘giver’, the source of *y*), but with a different perspective; i.e. the recipient is subject of ‘come to have’, but not subject of ‘give’ (cf. Newman 1996).

distinction between *I cannot go* and *I can not-go* (i.e. *I don't have to go*) represents the distinction between  $\sim\text{can}\langle\text{go}\langle I \rangle\rangle$  and  $\text{can}\langle\sim\text{go}\langle I \rangle\rangle$ , respectively. The paraphrases provided in brackets for (14) and (15) greatly increase intelligibility of discussion of the interaction of 'can' with negation (see Chapters 3 and 5).

An important aspect of 'possibility' is its logical and pragmatic relationship with 'attainment', i.e. the realisation in fact of a predication. The ideas '*q* can happen' and '*q* happens' are naturally close. For example, to have done something is to have proven that it *can* be done. That is, *doing it* entails *being able to do it*:

- (16) *I smoke whole cigarettes without coughing*  
 → *I can smoke whole cigarettes without coughing.*

According to a converse entailment, if you *can't do it*, then you *don't do it* (or *don't manage to do it*):

- (17) *I can't smoke whole cigarettes without coughing*  
 → *I don't smoke whole cigarettes without coughing.*

Now, the possibility of *q* does not entail the attainment of *q* (i.e. 'can V' does not entail 'do V'), but there is often an *implication* of attainment. A default expectation of the statement *I can smoke whole cigarettes without coughing* (the apodosis in (16)) is that the speaker actually *does* smoke whole cigarettes without coughing, an interpretation which is defeasible:

- (18) *I've never smoked in my life, but according to my doctor, I can smoke whole cigarettes without coughing.*

Despite this defeasibility, the implication of attainment arising out of assertion of possibility remains strong, particularly when that possibility is predicated in a realis context (e.g. the past):

- (19) *Last year, I could smoke whole cigarettes without coughing.*

This implies that the speaker is not merely asserting her *ability* in a previous time, but is saying that she *actually* smoked whole cigarettes without coughing (thereby demonstrating her ability). Again, however, the attainment implication does remain defeasible.

Similarly, '*q* doesn't happen' does not entail '*q* can't happen' (i.e. the reverse of the entailment in (17), above), but it can imply it. It is often assumed that things which are 'not done' are not done *for a reason*—and a typical reason for not doing something is the belief that it *can't* be done. An example concerns things which are not *eaten*; those who discard pineapple cores or Kiwi fruit skins often assume that they *cannot* be eaten. But in fact, these things are edible, and

those who discard them mostly do so according to an example set by role-models—since it is ‘not done’, then people assume it ‘can’t be done’ (Enfield 2000).

These observations on the semantics and pragmatics of ‘can’ are especially relevant to the discussion in Chapters 3 and 5.

### 4.3 ‘Success’ and ‘attainment’

I rely heavily in this book on a distinction between ‘success’ and ‘attainment’. ‘Success’ is the idea of realising a result which a previous and separate action or event was intended to produce. For example, a successful result of ‘looking for’ something is ‘finding’ it. The notion of ‘success’ is complex, involving at least two components—a result-directed action/event, and a subsequent result. By contrast, ‘attainment’ refers to actualisation in reality of some predication, whether complex or simple. ‘Success’ and ‘attainment’, as I use the terms in this work, are distinct and independent of each other. This may be illustrated as follows, where the contrast between the verbs *look for* and *find* is one of ‘success’, and the contrast between future and present perfect verb forms is one of ‘attainment’:

		±‘success’	
		–	+
±‘attainment’	–	<i>He will look for the money.</i>	<i>He will find the money.</i>
	+	<i>He has looked for the money.</i>	<i>He has found the money.</i>

Figure 1.9 Cross-cutting distinctions of ‘success’ and ‘attainment’

I rely on the logical and semantic distinctions of this section throughout the descriptive parts of this book.

## 5. TWO METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

### 5.1 Text versus elicitation

The demands entailed by working with natural spontaneous texts have made it possible within the scope of this study to use texts as the primary data source only for Lao and Khmer. In each case, I have recorded a range of texts myself, and I have collaborated with native speakers in making transcriptions and translations. Most of the Lao and Khmer examples discussed in this book are from these texts.<sup>34</sup> In the case of Kmhmu Cwang, I have had some access to texts (although

<sup>34</sup> Lao material was recorded in Vientiane, Laos, between December 1996 and February 1997. The corpus includes 20 recordings, from a few minutes to nearly an hour in length, with a range of genres (conversation, procedural descriptions, anecdotes and personal

limited and non-systematic), and occasionally I have been able to include text-based examples. Otherwise, data from Kmhmu Cwang, Hmong, Vietnamese, and other languages have been collected almost entirely by direct elicitation and bilingual consultation with native speaker informants.

Direct elicitation is not an ideal method for establishing patterns of grammatical polyfunctionality, in particular because while good informants help you with what you ask for, facts of great interest may never arise, since you may not think to ask for them, and the informant may not think to mention them. (This problem also exists when working with texts, but lessens as the size of the sample increases.) My procedure in elicitation has been closely guided by analysis of the extensive Lao corpus, using an ‘interactive check list’. The procedure was to start with a preliminary analysis of a large set of examples of *daj*<sup>4</sup> ‘ACQUIRE’ from the Lao corpus, and make a list of points to check for in the other sample languages. Then, investigation into the other languages would turn up further points which had not been found in Lao (e.g. due to sampling error), and which could then be added to the check list for further examination across the languages. Data from *all* the languages would have ideally come from texts, but this ideal was beyond the practical limitations of this study.

## 5.2 Identifying the ‘ACQUIRE’ word

When this study began, I had been aware that a number of languages of mainland Southeast Asia featured a single verb meaning ‘acquire, come to have’ with a specific range of ‘extended’ grammatical properties and semantic functions, including main verb ‘come to have’ (among other meanings), and aspect-modality functions in both pre- and post-verbal position (Clark 1989, Matisoff 1991). The functions of this verb in complex postverbal complement constructions (as described in Chapter 6 of this book) had not in general been remarked upon in the literature, other than with respect to Sinitic languages.

I expected to find a singular exponent of this polyfunctional verb across the languages of mainland Southeast Asia, and this has indeed been borne out by the data. Everywhere I have looked among the strongly head-initial languages of Tai, Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Mien, and Sinitic families, there is almost always one and only one lexical item with the following properties:

- (20) (a) means ‘come to have’ (among other meanings) as a main verb  
 (b) has a modal function (notably ‘can’) as a postverb  
 (c) marks postverbal complementation or clause coordinating structures  
 (d) has an aspectual function (‘finite’, ‘attained’) as a preverb

The word in question is easily identified through the use of an intermediary language (which in the fieldwork reported on here was usually Lao or Vietnam-

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narratives, folk tales, jokes), and a range of speaker backgrounds (both men and women, educated and uneducated, of a wide age range—from 8 to 79). The Khmer data-base has a similar range of topics and speakers, recorded in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, August 1999.

ese), where four sample sentences (e.g. *I went fishing and 'got' three fish; I 'can't' eat meat; He's been here 'for' three years; He 'got to' eat deer meat*) straightforwardly identify the polyfunctional 'ACQUIRE' word.

For descriptive convenience, I use 'ACQUIRE' to refer throughout this work to the exponent in a language of a polyfunctional verb which has the properties listed in (20). I stress that this is for convenience only, and is not meant to imply that the exponents in the languages are 'the same word', or have exactly the same meanings, or give rise to exactly the same inferences, or show exactly the same range of grammatical functions. Nor is the fact that I have chosen the English word *acquire* for this label meant to imply that the verb in any of the languages means the same as *acquire*, nor is it necessarily the primary verb for the lexical meaning 'acquire', nor is it meant to imply that 'acquire' is the primary meaning for that lexical item. In these languages, ACQUIRE is a high-frequency everyday word, and unfortunately the English word *acquire* does not convey this. *Get* is closer to this status, but to use *get* as a regular gloss in this study would be misleading, primarily because *get* has a salient agentive/controlled sense (as in *He got the parcel out of the car*) which the exponents of ACQUIRE in the languages of this study never have. In none of these languages is ACQUIRE (as a main verb meaning 'come to have') accessible to agentive/controlled grammatical behaviour (e.g. imperative constructions, adverbs of control like 'carefully'; cf. Chapters 3-4).

## 6. SUMMARY AND COMMENT

This book examines an areal pattern in semantics, pragmatics, and grammatical structure. The specific descriptive and analytical outcomes are presented in parts II and III, but at this point two major themes may be stated.

First, semantic and pragmatic content must be kept separate and must be well defined. Synchronic description of grammar, comparative and otherwise, requires careful and explicit characterisation of the *meanings* and the *interpretations* of linguistic signs, using methods which are clear, empirically founded, and open to falsification. Furthermore, to describe semantic *change*, the 'bridging context' model requires a sharp understanding of both the pragmatics and semantics of lexical items and grammatical constructions, and the contexts in which they can occur.

A second major theme of the book is that research into linguistic change, areal linguistics, language contact, and linguistic diffusion must work with a non-metaphorical view of the processes involved. Linguistic change and diffusion are only partly driven by natural properties of logical and semantic 'space' and the human conceptual propensities which may constrain or motivate specific courses of pragmatic extension and semantic evolution. These are mediated by, and may compete with, other aspects of human psychology and personality, in combination with the textured organisation of society and its role in the actuation of social (including linguistic) contagion. New linguistic signs come into 'the language' not because 'the language' has changed, but because the new linguistic items have out-competed other linguistic items for currency in their host speech community.

Even when descriptive studies are restricted to semantic, pragmatic and/or structural phenomena—as indeed is the study presented in this book—the analysis should still be conducted with non-metaphorical assumptions about the nature of linguistic diffusion and change.

To describe linguistic signs in synchrony is to document the linguistic fashions of the day, to state just which ideas for ways of saying things—among all the possibilities—are distributed throughout the minds of a community, and have come to underlie collective habit. When the description is cross-linguistic, it becomes especially clear that individual linguistic items, including grammatical constructions and other features of idiomatic speech, show unique patterns of *distribution* within populations and across geographic areas. It is in this sense that linguistic description is likened to epidemiology.

### Outline of the book

Chapter 2 completes Part I, providing background on the mainland Southeast Asia area and the languages to be examined in later chapters. Some features common to the languages are outlined, and genetic affiliations among the languages are discussed.

Part II, consisting of Chapter 3 alone, deals exclusively with Lao, concentrating on *daj*<sup>4</sup> ACQUIRE and its major functions, forming the core of the study. The four main sections of Chapter 3 correspond to the first four chapters of Part III (Chapters 4-7).

Part III compares the findings on Lao *daj*<sup>4</sup> with the exponents of ACQUIRE in Khmer, Kmhmu Cwang, Hmong, and Vietnamese, as well a number of other languages (notably MSC). Chapter 4 treats ACQUIRE in its main verb functions ('come to have' and 'succeed', among others). Chapter 5 examines functions of ACQUIRE in postverbal position, either as a modal or a genuine resultative verb. Chapter 6 concentrates on postverbal descriptive complementation and other interclausal functions of ACQUIRE, an area of the grammaticalisation of ACQUIRE which is apparently more advanced in Sinitic languages. In Chapter 7, preverbal aspectual/modal functions of ACQUIRE are described. Chapter 8 completes Part III with a look at the etymology of the various ACQUIRE forms across these languages, and establishment of the pattern of polyfunctionality in over a dozen further languages.

Chapter 9 discusses possible scenarios for historical development of the patterns described in Part III, and summarises findings of the study.