**Week 8: semantic and lexical change**

[form] = ‘meaning’; FUNCTION

different [form] → sound change

different ‘meaning’ → semantic change

**Semantic change**: a word’s meaning changes independently of its form

**Evidence for semantic change:**

Comparison of cognates in related languages

*e.g. deer-Tier, timber-zimmer, tide-zeit, starve-sterben*

Written records
Kinds of change:

Broadening: word’s conceptual space grows

- *dog, bird, pilot*
- *salary* (Lat. *salārium*) ‘payment’ ← ‘salt allotment’
- *armoire* ‘wardrobe ← ‘armory’
- *cupboard*
- Sp. *caballero* ‘gentleman’ ← ‘horse rider’
- Sp. *pájaro* ‘bird ← *passer* ‘sparrow’
- *estar* ‘to be’ *stare* ‘to stand’

Narrowing: word’s conceptual space shrinks

- *hound, meat, flesh, wife, deer* (cf G *Tier* ‘animal’)
- *girl* ← ‘child’
- OE *fugol* ‘bird’ → fowl (cf G *Vogel* ‘bird’)
- OE *steorban* ‘die’ → starve (cf G *sterben* ‘die’)
- Fr *soldat* ‘paid person’ → ‘soldier’
- Fr *drapeau* ‘piece of cloth fastened to staff’ → ‘flag’
- Sp *rezar* ‘pray’ ← ‘to recite, say aloud’

Bifurcation: word acquires second meaning, possibly related to first

- *pitch* ‘tar’ as in *pitch black* → ‘very’

Shift: old meaning is lost, replaced by a new meaning

- Finnish *raha* ‘pelt’ → ‘money’
- *silly* ← ‘blessed’
Processes in bifurcation & shift

metaphor: experiencing or framing one thing in terms of another

*insult*: ‘insult’ ← ‘jump on’

*bead* ← *bede* ‘prayer’ (compare G Gebet)


*dispose of, do someone in, liquidate, terminate, take care of, eliminate*

*blasted, blitzed, bombed, hammered, obliterated, ripped, shredded, smashed, tattered, wasted; pissed, sauced, sloshed, soaked*

Eng *root* ‘of plant’ → ‘of plant/word/algebra’

Eng *stud* ‘attractive man’ from ‘male horse used for breeding’

Sp *sierra* ‘saw’ → ‘mountain range’

Sp *pierna* ‘leg’ ← Lat *perna* ‘ham’

Fr *entendre* ‘to hear’ ← ‘understand (cf Sp *entender* ‘understand’)

Fr *fermer* ‘close’; Sp *firmar* ‘to sign’ from ‘to fix, make firm, make fast’

Fr *chapeau* ‘hat’ from ‘bonnet’

metonymy: a word develops a second (non-metaphorical) sense related to the first

*tea* ‘afternoon meal’ ← ‘(brewed) tea’

*ceace* ‘jaw’ → *cheek*

Sp *cadera* ‘hips’ ← ‘butt’ ← Lat. *cathedra* ‘chair’

Sp *mejilla* ‘cheek’ from Lat maxilla ‘jaw’

Sp *plata* ‘silver’ → ‘money’

Sp *acera* ‘sidewalk’ from *facera* ‘façade of buildings’

Fr *jument* ‘mare’ from ‘pack horse’

Fr *sevrer* ‘to wean’ from Lat ‘separare’ (cf *sever*)
Sp., Fr. *timbre*:
‘drum’ → ‘bell’ → ‘helmet shaped’ → ‘(heraldic) crest’ → ‘(wax) stamp’ → ‘postage stamp’

**Synecdoche**: a part is used to refer to a whole

Parts of phrases (displacement: phrasal synecdoche)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{success} & \leftarrow \text{succes favorable} \\
\text{luck} & \leftarrow \text{good luck} \\
\text{contacts} & \leftarrow \text{contact lenses} \\
\text{capital} & \leftarrow \text{capital city} \\
\text{hand} & \leftarrow \text{hired hand} \\
\text{private} & \leftarrow \text{private soldier} \\
\text{tribal} & \leftarrow \text{tribal council} \\
\text{daily} & \leftarrow \text{daily paper} \\
\text{Fr journal} & \leftarrow \text{papier journal} \\
\text{Sp hermano} & \leftarrow \text{frater germanus} \text{ ‘brother of the same parent’} \\
\text{foie, higado} & \leftarrow \text{Lat. iecurficatum} \text{ ‘fig-stuffed liver’} \\
\text{Finnish yska} & \leftarrow \text{yska tauti} \text{ ‘breast/lap sickness’}
\end{align*}
\]

Parts of referent:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{head ‘unit of cattle’} \\
\text{Sp. boda ‘wedding’} & \leftarrow \text{Lat. vota ‘vows’} \\
\text{G. Bein ‘leg’} & \leftarrow \text{‘bone’}
\end{align*}
\]

tongue for language, moon for month, sun for day
Degeneration / pejoration

knave ← cnafa ‘child’ (cf G Knaba) → ‘servant’

spinster, madam, mistress

putta/puta ‘whore’ ← ‘girl’

ramera ‘prostitute’ → ‘innkeeper’s wife’

churl ← ceorl ‘man without rank’ → ‘peasant’ → ‘rude’

villain ← Fr. villein ‘farm worker’ → ‘rustic, ignorant’ → ‘bad guy’

silly ← selig ‘happy’ ← sælig ‘blessed’

disease ‘illness’ ← ‘discomfort’

Elevation / amelioration

fond ← fonnen ‘to be foolish’

pretty ← prættig ‘crafty, sly’

knight ← cniht ‘boy, servant’ → ‘servant of royalty’ (cf G Knecht ‘servant’)

calle ‘street’ ← ‘cattle path’

casa ‘house’ ← ‘hut’

Sp. villa ‘country house’; Fr. ville ‘city’ ← villa ‘farm’
court, corte from cohort ‘farmyard, enclosure’ → ‘army division’ ‘imperial guard’ ‘palace’

dude

Euphemism: new word to replace taboo word

bear, behr, bruin, medved, oso, ourson

huevo ‘egg’ → ‘testicle’; thus blanquillo

pajaro ‘bird’ → ‘penis’; thus pajarito ‘bird’

Kiche Mayan:

ts’ikin ‘bird’ → ‘penis’; thus cikop ‘small animal’ → ‘bird’
Hyperbole: loss of strength of meaning

    terribly, awfully, horribly, lame
    awesome, fantastic
    G sehr ‘very’ ← ‘sorely’
    Fr. extonare ‘strike thunder’ → etonner ‘surprise’

Litotes (understatement)

    kill ← ‘strike, hit’
    bereft ← ‘robbed’
    poison ← ‘potion, draught’
    Fr. meurtre ‘murder’ ← ‘bruise’
Possible causes of / reasons for semantic change

- Certain kinds of changes are typical
- Other kinds are motivated
- Polysemy is a necessary stage

Semantic plausibility:

see → know, understand
hear → understand, obey
physical action → mental state

hold → understand grasp, get a hold of, get

pensar ‘weigh’ → ‘think’
feel → ‘have pity for’
touch → taste ‘sharp, crisp, bitter’
taste → emotion ‘bitter, sour, sweet’

obligation → probability
animal names → inanimate objects
concrete → abstract
**Motivated change**

interference & taboo avoidance

*cock/rooster, ass/donkey*

*pajaro/pajarito*

invention, technological advancement

*pilot, write*

sociological change

*knight*

cultural contact & conceptual borrowing

Paamese *aman* ‘bird’ → ‘airplane’

Fijian *wagavuka* ‘airplane’ ← *waga* ‘canoe’ + *vuka* ‘fly’

Woleaian *waayal* ‘airplane’ ← *waa* ‘canoe’ + *yal* ‘fly’

Kosraean *fik* ‘tattoo’ → ‘write’

Kiche *kjex* ‘deer’ → ‘horse’

Miwok *ko.no* ‘bow’ → ‘gun’

**Polysemy:** same form, several meanings

A necessary stage in semantic change (core, periphery trade places)

*timber, zimmer*

*tim-ram* ‘building’ (domus, ‘house’)

→ ‘building, material for building’ in English; then just ‘material’

→ ‘building, room of building’ in German, then just ‘room’

*write:* ‘scratch, score’ → ‘inscribed writing’ → ‘writing’

*penne* ‘feather’ → ‘pen’
Lexical change
(note the different usage of the word *etymology*)

copying/borrowing/loaning words
source language, target language

fitting the sound pattern of receiving language

Tongan  *aisikilimi*
Hawaiian *kalikimaki*
Japanese *besuboru, herikoputa, suketu borudu*
Cantonese  *ʧi si si te ka*

Motu  *botolo*
Maori  *hikareta*
Tongan  *motuka*
Paamese  *tagio, veva*
Wallis, Futuna  *lalene*

cultural rather than core vocabulary

‘cry, walk, sleep, eat, water, stone, sky, wind, father, die’

vs

‘frost, snow, taro, kava, earthquake, muezzin, hajj, prophet, trinity, book, smoke, cigarette, beer, car, airplane, …’

filling gaps

migration (thus new natural phenomena), technological innovation, sociological change
replacement of existing words
possibly because of cultural value/esteem of source language

doublets

Eng. paternal, pedal vs fatherly, foot
kind, kind, gender, genre

Rotuman foʔa ‘come ashore’ vs toka ‘settle’

Borrowings and detection of them

borrowing language may construe a complex word as a single morpheme

vinegar, aardvark
alligator ← Sp. el lagarto

Sp. ← Arabic

alcoba ‘alcove’ ← al qobbah ‘the vault’
alcalde ‘mayor’ ← al qadʔi ‘the judge’
algodon ‘cotton’ ← al qutʔn ‘the cotton’

Finnish týtär ‘daughter’: no cognates in F-U; many in I-E

Sp. ganso ‘goose’: G. Gans, Eng. goose

Lat anser, It oca, Fr oie
New words

from scratch: paraffin, gas, blurb

from people: sandwich, volt, guillotine

from places:

currant ← Corinth

denim ← Nimes

jeans ← genoa

sherry ← jerez

Folk etymology: word (mis)analyzed as (a) complex and (b) having some meaningful component

   chou croute

   crayfish