

WORKSHOP 6

Current methods in historical semantics

Organizers: Kathryn **Allan**, University of Salford (UK) / Justyna **Robinson**, University of Sheffield (UK)

Although semantics is taken much more seriously than it has been during some earlier periods, it is often still seen as the difficult and problematic 'poor relation' of other areas of linguistic study. The overall aim of this workshop is to focus on how historical semantics has changed and developed as a discipline, and to examine current perspectives on the changing lexicon of English. We would envisage a full-day session if possible.

More specifically, we would like to provide an opportunity to review research techniques that are currently used in diachronic semantics. Discussions of fundamental methodological aspects have been seriously neglected in historical meaning studies and we feel there is a scope for revisiting and reviving this issue in the proposed session. For that reason, this workshop will aim to gather papers which use innovative, interdisciplinary, and data driven methods that provide more rigorous and systematic evidence for description and explanation of diachronic semantic processes.

This session will present and explore a range of current methods in historical semantics, considering issues such as the following:

- Evidence in historical semantics
- Constraints and possibilities of use of dictionaries and new corpora in exploring lexical-semantic change
- The role of experimental data in diachronic linguistics
- Dialect evidence in semantic change
- Interdisciplinary methods in diachronic semantics
- The sociolinguistic context of meaning variation and change
- How cognitive perspectives can inform theories of semantic change
- New perspectives on meaning
- Semasiological vs onomasiological approaches to the lexicon
- The interface between meaning and other levels of language

Papers presented during the workshop will consider the extent to which historical semantics can learn from a range of perspectives in both

synchronic and diachronic language study, and what past and present work in semantics can offer to other areas of linguistics. Participants will explore the potential of new theoretical models and new technology as valuable tools in current and future enquiries into lexical-semantic change. The session should also raise questions about future directions in semantics and lexicology.

CONTRIBUTIONS

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Using OED data as evidence

The *OED* is integral to research in Historical Linguistics, and has been used for a huge range of purposes in a number of subdisciplines of language study including lexical semantics. Some of the ways in which the *OED* has been used by scholars in the past century could not have been anticipated by the editors of the first and second editions, and this raises interesting questions about the extent to which *OED* data alone can underpin and inform current research. Several scholars have pointed out that *OED* data is not designed to be used uncritically, and needs to be treated with caution because of the nature of the material: for example, Durkin (2002) discusses the difficulties of basing arguments on the dating of quotations, particularly given the high number of ante- and post-datings in the 3rd edition, and Hoffmann (2004) examines the theoretical validity of using *OED* quotations as a corpus for historical research. In this session, some of the issues around using *OED* data specifically as the basis for study into lexical-semantic change will be explored. The session will particularly focus on the questions raised by using *OED* definitions as the basis for statements about the meanings of individual lexemes and the way in which these change through time.

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Kennings: Riddles of metonymy or metaphor?

The famous figures of speech permeating *Beowulf* are well known to all scholars of English Historical Linguistics, but they are certainly not receiving their due attention. Kennings have been considered as idiosyncratic metaphors of Old Germanic poetry (Marquardt 1938, Gardner 1969) that are very difficult to understand because of a rather enigmatic way of making reference to people or things (Brodeur 1960, Wehlau 1997). How exactly can we work out the meaning of the compounds *seġl-rād* 'sail-road' and *hwæl-weġ* 'whale-way' both denoting the noun 'sea' without relying on glossaries or footnotes of Old English textbooks?

Now that semantics has come into the spotlight due to the success of Cognitive Linguistics, it may be an interesting idea to take a look at how kennings could be deciphered using the tools and the theoretical framework of the most propulsive movement in linguistics today. Cognitive Linguistics all too often stresses that metaphors and metonymies are

ubiquitous in everyday use of language and not merely figures of poetic language (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:3-6)

The semantic underlying processes that determine our categorization of the world are reflected in language, so metaphorical expressions should not be treated in isolation, but as linguistic realisations of conceptual metaphors. This paper will show how different the conceptual metaphors identifiable in the kennings of *Beowulf* are from those that we use today. For example, the fixed poetic formulas such as *bāncofa* ‘bone-chamber’, *bānfæt* ‘bone-container’ or *bānhūs* ‘bone-house’ all mean ‘body’. Several cognitive mechanisms are at work here: containment image schema which gives rise to conceptual metaphors such as BODY IS CONTAINER (Lakoff 1987) , which is combined with the PART FOR WHOLE metonymy (a.k.a. synecdoche), bone being the essential part of the whole, i.e. body.

The paper will also raise questions how reliable such an analysis is, if we take into account the fact that Old English is a dead language and that the world of Anglo-Saxons and their culture is not so readily accessible to us. It will also be a good test to see whether the cognitive theory metaphor can be applied in a diachronic perspective.

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How 'anger' rose

Based on the corpus collected and analyzed in Gevaert (2007), we review the different factors that may have influenced the increased use of *anger* in the 15th century.

Ruling out, as an initial step, the stylistic factors of rhyme and alliteration, the study focuses on register and semantic factors. In comparison with *ire* and *wra/oth*, we find that *anger* is used more often in non-Romance and non-religious texts and that it more frequently refers to non-high experiencers, non-violent reactions and private offended values (with some of these characteristics typically co-occurring). These semantic characteristics basically confirm the semantic analyses put forward by Diller (1994). (The results for the feature “private offended value” should be treated with some caution, however, because it is very much a matter of interpretation and because there is considerable overlap between Diller’s data and those used in our own research.)

In contrast, what the analyses do not bear out is Diller’s hypothesis that *anger* was used precisely because it exhibited those semantic features. In line with the methodological position defended in Geeraerts (2002), we conduct an onomasiological analysis next to the initial semasiological analysis. The onomasiological analyses, starting from the semantic factors rather than from the expressions, show that there was no increased need for expressing those features. Also, they were adequately expressed in the 14th century by *ire* and *wra/oth*.

In methodological terms, the study rests on a statistical analysis of the corpus data, with a specific emphasis on a multivariate analysis (in the form of a multiple regression) of the various factors at work in the rise of *anger*.

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Gábor **Györi** / Irén **Hegedüs**, University of Pécs (Hungary)

A cognitive investigation of the historical semantic development of cognate groups

In our paper we will look at some cognate groups in English and related languages, and offer an explanation of the semantic connections within them in terms of image schemata. We intend to show that the historical semantic developments can be explained as the proliferation of one image schema which is manifest/lexicalized in the original root. This image schema based approach also explains the peculiar phenomenon of lexemes with opposite meanings occurring in these groups. As we argued in an earlier paper (Györi & Hegedüs 1999), basic perceptual oppositions can only be conceptualized as *gestalts*, i.e., as two inseparable poles of a unity, which should be the basis for their parallel lexicalization. One of the outcomes of our research is that the examination of a cognate group along these lines could even lead to the postulation of a new image schema.

In the paper we will also show that metaphorical and metonymical projections from an image schema may influence the direction of particular semantic extensions, which could provide a basis for a cognitive explanation of universals of semantic change. Furthermore, an account in terms of image schemata may not only provide a reasonable explanation for the occurrence of universal tendencies, but may also have more practical applications in historical-comparative linguistics by facilitating semantic reconstruction and the identification of cognate relationships.

Reference

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Anna **Hebda** / Małgorzata **Fabiszak**, University of Poznań (Poland)

'Hope' in Old English

The aim of this paper is to expand the research presented in Tissari (2004 and 2007), which shows that *hope* in PDE down to Early Modern English is a non-prototypical emotion term. Our goal is to move deeper in time to see how OE verb *hopian* and its synonyms: *hycgan*, *(ge)truwian*, *gehogian*, *gewenan*, *(ge)hyhtan* and OE noun *hopa* and its synonyms *hyht*, *wen*, *wena*, *wenung*, *tohopung*, *tohopa*, *tohyht* behaved in context. The collocational analysis is hoped to indicate what lexico-grammatical patterns can be identified and how they influence the meaning of the lexemes in question. It is also expected that at least the generic conceptual metaphors will be detected as motivating the use of *hope* and the related words. The design of the study will follow that of Fabiszak – Hebda (2007a and b).

The data for the study will come from the Helsinki Corpus. The preliminary searches have rendered 31 occurrences of *hop** in the OE part of the corpus. The results for the synonyms amount to 125 hits.

In the analysis we will combine the cognitive perspective on the motivation of abstract concepts with the analysis of the sociolinguistic context understood here as genre specificity and general historical background for the formation of meaning.

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Finding fear in evil minds? Searching for metaphors of containment

Our research on metaphors of emotion as against reason led us to discussions concerning the identification of conceptual metaphors (Koivisto-Alanko & Tissari 2006). Although we are aware of the fact that we are not the first to wonder about the reliability of metaphor identification (see e.g. Steen 1999, Pragglejaz Group 2007), we thought that it is a central issue as regards the development of cognitive semantic methods, and decided to consider it in terms of historical (Early Modern English) and recent (Present-Day English) data. In this paper, we decided to focus on metaphors of containment and see to what extent we agree in our linguistic intuitions and what our potential disagreements might reveal about the conceptual metaphor theory as presented, for example, by Lakoff & Johnson (1980, 1999) and Kövecses (2002).

We suggest we carry out and report on the following procedure:

1. Each of us will check four corpora for examples of a word occurring in close proximity to the preposition *in*. Marianna's word will be *evil*, Päivi's *mind* and *wit*, and Heli's *fear*, as these words are familiar to us from our previous work (some new word or words may be added to these in the procedure). The corpora consulted will be: *The Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler*, (the Early Modern English period of) *The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts*, *The Freiburg-LOB Corpus*, and *The Freiburg-Brown Corpus*.
2. Each of us will then compile a list of relevant occurrences and mark down which conceptual metaphors, if any, she thinks the sentences represent, and any further comments she thinks may be relevant.
3. We will then exchange lists with each other so that every list will be read and annotated in a similar manner by a different person.
4. Finally, we will compare our notes and see to what extent our analyses agree and disagree with each other, and in the latter case, why. We will also compare our notes with Tyler and Evans's discussion of prepositions in English (2003).

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The Historical Thesaurus of English (HTE) as a research tool

The Historical Thesaurus of English (HTE) contains the contents of the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, supplemented by Old English vocabulary not included in the *OED*, arranged in hierarchically structured conceptual fields containing lists of synonyms with their dates of use under brief explanatory headings.

It was completed in 2007 and will be published in book form by Oxford University Press in September 2008 as *The Thesaurus of the OED*. From 2009, on present plans, it will be linked to the online *OED* and revised in conjunction with *OED3*. The current version of the database, using MySQL as the database server and PHP (Hypertext Preprocessor) for server-side scripting, is online at <http://libra.englant.arts.gla.ac.uk/historicalthesaurus/>

and will be used for research and development purposes. The main thrust of the research will be (a) to make the standalone thesaurus

maximally responsive as a computational tool, and (b) to develop it as part of a suite of tools for tackling two key problems in computational lexicology, multiple meaning and variable spelling. Both of these have particular implications for people working with historical data.

Although the project was started in 1964, long before the cognitive semantics paradigm became dominant, that paradigm has retrospectively proved sympathetic to the problems involved in categorizing large quantities of lexical data. In addition to discussing the issues above, the paper will demonstrate the principles of classification used in HTE, with particular reference to what we can learn about semantic change, lexical innovation, and the role of cultural context from analysing an abstract field of meaning, such as Truth / Error.

For further information on the project, see
<http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/sesll/englang/thesaur/homepage.htm>

Eyal **Sagi** / Stefan **Kaufmann** / Brady **Clark**, Northwestern University
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Tracing semantic change with latent semantic analysis

Research in historical semantics relies on the careful examination, selection, and interpretation of texts from various corpora.

Changes in meaning are tracked through the collection of examples that span decades and centuries from those corpora, a process that is based on the researcher's expertise in the field and familiarity with the corpus itself. While this process serves to provide the researcher with a refined set of data that she can then carefully interpret and analyze, the nature of the analysis means that information about other changes that occurred, as well as other information about the context of the changes that the researcher is focusing on, is discarded. This information, while abundant in the original corpus is necessarily put aside by the researcher in order to focus on the specific elements being tracked. In this paper we present a method that uses Latent Semantic Analysis (Landauer, Foltz & Laham,

1998) to automatically track and identify semantic changes across a corpus. This method can take the entire corpus into account when comparing changes in the use of words and phrases, and might therefore allow researchers to better account for the context in which these utterances

were produced while at the same time reducing the amount of work required.

Moreover, because this measure relies on statistics, it affords the study of semantic change a measure of objectivity that was previously difficult to attain. In this presentation we will demonstrate our method by applying it to the analysis of the rise of periphrastic "do".

Juan Gabriel **Vázquez González**, University of Huelva (Spain)

Telling the Anglo-Saxon heathens how 'to offer': On the diachronic prototype blended semantics of OE (ge)'offrian'

In this paper, we will study the role played by blending processes as mechanisms conducive to semantic change (Grygiel 2004) from a prototypical domain perspective (Geeraerts 1997). We have selected OE verbs of OFFERING because of the cultural linguistics (Palmer 1997) dynamics that the clash between heathenism and Christianity implies. It is a long-established assumption that after the coming of Christianity, the old practices and with them, their terms, were finally superseded by the new ones. In this respect, the rise of OE (ge)*offrian* (Roberts et alia 1995) comes as no surprise. What is less clear is 1) the unit's semantic scope, which ranges from *offering* generically to particular sacrificial types, 2) the term or terms it substitutes, and 3) the readjustment produced by the unit's introduction within the related lexical set (16.02.04.12. *To offer, sacrifice: bebeodan, blotan, gioldan, onsendan, onsecgan, etc.*), if there was ever any. We believe that the Theory of Blended Spaces (Fauconnier & Turner 1998 & 2002) may cast –at least some– light on these issues, the more so when we treat our unit as blending. This implies the existence of an Input Space 1, the domain of Catholic liturgy, where the notion is supposed to arise from, an Input Space 2, the domain of heathen religion, with those differing rituals, practices and the related terms to be gradually targeted, and the resulting Blended Space, partaking of both Input Spaces but departing from them as a temporary and most convenient compromise solution during the conversion period. As with some of my previous works (Vázquez González 2006), I will be making use of a refined version of the corpus linguistics notion of *collocate* (Sinclair 1991 & 2004) in order to reconstruct the conceptual overlappings of the units involved (Healey et al. 2000).

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