



All Theses and Dissertations

2013-10-01

Borrowing the Essentials: A Diachronic Study of the Semantic Primes of Modern English

Karen Esther Swan

Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Linguistics Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Swan, Karen Esther, "Borrowing the Essentials: A Diachronic Study of the Semantic Primes of Modern English" (2013). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 4249.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/4249>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu.

Borrowing the Essentials: A Diachronic Study
of the Semantic Primes of Modern English

Karen Swan

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

William Eggington, Chair
Don Chapman
Deryle Lonsdale

Department of Linguistics and English Language
Brigham Young University

October 2013

Copyright © 2013 Karen Swan

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Borrowing the Essentials: A Diachronic Study of the Semantic Primes of Modern English

Karen Swan

Department of Linguistics and English Language, BYU
Master of Arts

In order for communication to take place, there must be a set of core concepts that are universal to all speakers. Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) has proposed an inventory of these concepts, called semantic primes, and uses them as universal concepts in the explication and exploration of cultural values. The English semantic primes, while the majority are Anglo-Saxon, contain words that have been borrowed from Latin, Old Norse, and French. Borrowing lexical items into core vocabulary has many implications. First, the primes are not entirely stable or immune to foreign influence, even the Anglo-Saxon primes have been susceptible to the processes of language change. Second, the primes do not reflect the trends of borrowing in English as a whole. And finally, because the primes are core vocabulary, this study opens up a new aspect of English as a mixed language.

Keywords: English, core vocabulary, Natural Semantic Metalanguage, language change, semantics, universal concepts, Old English

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A thesis is beyond the ability of one person without the support and aid of many others. Although this is my own work, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge a few of those who have helped along this path of academic effort. First, without the constant support of my parents since my first day of kindergarten, I may never have reached for an advanced degree. Second are the many friends and classmates with whom I have studied and worked and spent time with during my coursework here. Third, the encouragement and love of my wonderful husband has certainly kept me going. Without his support and love, I never would have gotten through to this last stage of education and life. Finally, appreciation and thanks must be extended to my committee, as well as the other members of faculty I have been lucky enough to have as instructors and examples in this department.

Table of Contents

Borrowing the Essentials: A Diachronic Study of the Semantic Primes of Modern English	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables.....	v
1. Introduction	1
2. Review of literature	3
2.1. Building blocks for communication and meaning.....	3
2.2. Definition of lexical and semantic fields.....	5
2.3. Interpreting culturally-specific values and meanings	6
2.4. Ubiquity across both time and space.....	8
2.5. Criticisms of NSM.....	10
3. Methodology	14
3.1 Problems inherent to examining a dead language.....	16
4. How stable are the semantic primes over time?.....	19
4.1. Anglo-Saxon origins	19
4.2. Introductions from the Middle and Modern English periods.....	20
4.3. Language change.....	21
5. How do the semantic primes indicate the extent of borrowing in English?.....	28
5.1. Contributions from other languages in the primes	28
5.2. An Unequal reflection of English	36
5.3. Primes are more stable than language as a whole	43
6. How does borrowing at a basic level add to the discussion of English as a mixed language?.....	45
6.1. Influence of foreign ideas on English semantic fields.....	46
6.2. Conformity of foreign words to English structure	47
6.3. English as a mixed language.....	49
7. Conclusion	52
8. References and Consulted Works	54
Appendix.....	62

List of Tables

1. Semantic primes in Modern English	5
2. Native primes attested in Old English	20
3. Native primes attested in Middle and Modern English.....	211
4. Primes of uncertain origin	299
5. Foreign primes borrowed from Latin	311
6. Foreign primes borrowed from Old Norse.....	333
7. Foreign primes borrowed from Anglo-Norman, Old and Middle French.....	355
8. French vocabulary borrowed into English according to categories.....	377
9. Foreign contributions to English.....	388
10. Contributing languages (reorganized without regard to temporal era) compared to the inventory of semantic primes.....	399
11. Primes native to the English language	622
12. Foreign primes borrowed into English.....	633

Chapter 1. Introduction

Language is a universal human characteristic. It allows man to communicate creatively with his peers, but in order to do so, there must first be a base of understanding framed in concepts which are inherently known and understood. Recently, theories have surfaced which make an effort to reconcile these apparently universal concepts with the hundreds of possible linguistic expressions of the same concepts across cultures. One such approach, Natural Semantic Metalanguage, was developed by Anna Wierzbicka.

Over the last twenty years, Wierzbicka and Cliff Goddard have developed an inventory of core vocabulary, called semantic primes, which are essential to communication and make up the core vocabulary of a language. As a set of core vocabulary, semantic primes can be used in short frameworks called 'cultural scripts,' which then are used to discuss, compare, and explicate cultural values without the subjective influence of semantic and lexical variations cross-linguistically. As building blocks, semantic primes can be rearranged and combined in order to define the world of a speaker and, more specifically, of a language. Each language of the world contains these concepts, although different languages use their own labels for them. Semantic primes then are culturally-specific and culturally-relevant to each individual language because they are an extension of that language's cultural values. Based upon corpus data and the intuitions of native speakers, a list of more than seventy individual words and phrases has been developed for use in English. This inventory is then utilized to explicate and further investigate cultural ideas and values in a way that can then be translated between languages for further comparative study.

Thus far, the primes have been investigated in a number of languages, both major and minor, but English remains unexplored to a certain extent. English is a good candidate for a study through the lens of semantic primes since “English itself remains virgin territory. This may have more to do with the ... desire to avoid inconsistencies in describing the English language by means of an English-based metalanguage than with ideological concerns” (Martín Arista, 2006, p. 26).

Moreover, a diachronic study of core vocabulary in English has the possibility of further investigating the stability of semantic primes due to its long and varied history of incorporating many languages and cultural groups. English is in a unique position to offer new insight into language change and the strategies attributing to language change.

This study will use Wierzbicka’s theory to answer the following questions about English: (1) How stable are the semantic primes over time with regard to language change? (2) How do the semantic primes indicate the extent of borrowing in English? (3) How does borrowing at the level of core vocabulary add to the discussion of English as a mixed language? In order to answer these questions, this study will trace the origins of the semantic primes to demonstrate the changes made over the history of English. It will also examine the make-up of the English lexicon in order to ascertain whether the primes reflect a similar composition. And finally, this work will address concerns about the implications of changes to core vocabulary and how those changes impact English as a whole.

Chapter 2. Review of literature

Anna Wierzbicka and Cliff Goddard's theory of Natural Semantic Metalanguage necessitates a lexical inventory, which then assists in the defining of all lexical items and cultural values. As such, semantic primes can be considered building blocks for both general communication and individual meanings. Despite the fact that the semantic primes are universal concepts, their glosses will be specific to each language, based upon lexical and semantic variations. Because they are essential to the creation of meaning, semantic primes can be used to interpret cultural beliefs and values.

2.1. Building blocks for communication and meaning.

Natural Semantic Metalanguage originated as an exercise in paraphrase with "the idea that meaning of any semantically complex word can be explicated by means of an exact paraphrase composed of simpler, more intelligible words than the original" (Goddard, 2002, p. 5). The purpose of reductive paraphrase is to eliminate circularity and obscurity when trying to define a concept. Over time, the primes have been built up through a process of "trial and error attempts to explicate meanings of diverse types, aiming always to reduce the terms of the explications to the smallest and most versatile set" (Ibid., p. 6). Semantic primes are utilized by NSM in order to make assumptions about language and meaning testable "because explications couched in natural language can be directly or indirectly substituted in place of the expressions they are intended to represent" and thus can be subject to substitution tests (Ibid.). The natural intuitions of native speakers can then be tested as to which explications are intelligible and which can be simplified further.

According to the NSM approach, “every language has an irreducible core in terms of which the speakers can understand all complex thoughts and utterances” (Wierzbicka, 2006, p. 17). Semantic primes, according to Wierzbicka and Goddard’s theory, are linguistic building blocks, which can be used to describe semantic meaning in a simplified form. Effectively, they can be used as lexical semantic shorthand in explaining all communication by reducing complex words and phrases to a self-contained minilexicon (see Table 1 below). While many primes have been proposed, not all have withstood the test of both time and research. Some of the accepted primes are single words whereas several phrases are also included in the inventory. In Table 1 are some primes that seem to have alternatives (MUCH/MANY, LITTLE/FEW, etc): these alternations are dictated by the grammar of the language—English in this case—and can be considered as interchangeable as any allophone or allomorph whose articulation or form is dictated by the surrounding environment.

Table 1. Semantic primes in Modern English (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007, p. 107)

Substantives	I, YOU, SOMEONE, PEOPLE, SOMETHING/THING, BODY
Relational substantives	KIND, PART
Determiners	THIS, THE SAME, OTHER/ELSE
Quantifiers	ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH/MANY, LITTLE/FEW
Evaluators	GOOD, BAD
Descriptors	BIG, SMALL
Mental predicates	THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
Speech	SAY, WORDS, TRUE
Actions, events, movement, contact	DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH
Location, existence, possession, specification	BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, HAVE, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)
Life and death	LIVE, DIE
Time	WHEN/TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT
Space	WHERE/PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE
Logical concepts	NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
Intensifier, augments	VERY, MORE
Similarity	LIKE/AS/WAY

2.2. Definition of lexical and semantic fields.

Since semantic primes are used to define the lexicon, they must be universal cross-linguistically. Semantic primes, as they are called, constitute this core vocabulary in any language by defining “the set of concepts which are maximally useful and versatile for understanding and explaining other words” (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007, p. 110). Most importantly, because the irreducible core is the most basic level of human communication, “all languages have lexical exponents for each of the sixty or so conceptual primes (words, bound morphemes, or fixed expressions),” and these “[reflect] in turn the irreducible core of human thought” (Wierzbicka, 2006, p. 17). If semantic primes mirror the way man thinks about language, the primes, as building blocks, must designate and delineate lexical and semantic fields. It is through the combinations of primes that meaning is created, thus they must serve as borders between semantic fields generally, since it is through the variation of semantic primes that variations between synonyms are realized. The lexicon itself is

separated into semantic fields, a realization of a subsection of the lexicon consisting of related words. These fields are then further divided into smaller portions until a single word can be defined as holding that semantic territory. The primes are what define this territory and help to clarify the boundaries between synonyms.

2.3. Interpreting culturally-specific values and meanings

NSM also affirms the primes to be core vocabulary on the strength that the primes are universal and describe meaning in a given language. Wierzbicka and Goddard have used the primes in the capacity of core vocabulary to interpret cultural norms, which has repercussions both culturally as well as psycho-semantically. Cultural scripts, for NSM, are an explanation of cultural values, using semantic primes, for the purpose of interpreting and translating culturally-basic ideas and values into terms that can be readily understood by outsiders. Semantically, if cultural scripts use primes to define values of a given society, the primes in turn define the way speakers think, talk, or interact in their lives and with their society.

Cultural significance. Cultural scripts make assumptions about cultural values that can then be tested according to the intuitions of native speakers. For example, the following is a cultural script for the Anglo idea of ‘accuracy’:

[people think like this]

when I want to say something about some things

it will be good if I think about it like this:

“I will say some words now

I want to say something with these words

I don’t want these words to say more” (Wierzbicka, 2006, p. 30)

These 'cultural scripts' often provide the rationale for culturally determined behaviors. In effect, cultural scripts act as basic units of cultural meaning within a society. The actual scripts are revealed through linguistic evidence, such as in "common sayings and proverbs, frequent collocations, conversational routines and varieties of formulaic or semi-formulaic speech, discourse particles and interjections, and terms of address and reference" (Wierzbicka, 2006, p. 112). Such scripts are limited to the irreducible semantic values of primes in order to be maximally clear in their explanations of values. Because of their straightforward and unadorned language, scripts serve as formulas for translation: the primes are substituted by their equivalents in another language, much like variables in a mathematical equation, then arranged so as to be grammatically correct for that language while preserving the original signification.

Wierzbicka uses NSM primes to reduce complicated ideas, values, and beliefs about life and the world that vary from culture to culture. For example, although politeness exists in many societies, fulfillment of this ideal is very different between linguistic groups, such as the difference between English and Japanese cultures. Even between English-speaking societies, politeness is realized in various ways. Cultural scripts are able to document the disparities through the use of a simplified vocabulary. By simplifying the method of defining cultural values, the contrasts are made both clearer and recognizable. Semantic primes allow this clarification as the mode of removing complicated language and emotionally-charged connotations from the equation.

Cultural scripts are one method of measuring the impact of significant changes in society. Although these scripts are vital and necessary to cultural interpretations as a

whole, this thesis is concerned with the conceptual level of the lexicon as the wider implications of changes to cultural scripts is beyond the scope of this work.

Semantic significance. As already discussed, semantic primes provide the boundaries between semantic fields of a language, which implies that primes define the lexicon of that language. While the primes are universal concepts and define the lexicon, they are required to operate within the morphosyntactic structure of each language. It is important to note that “the word order and the morphosyntactic trappings may be different from language to language” (Wierzbicka, 2006, p. 17). Because the primes must work hand-in-hand with the grammar of a language, it can be assumed the morphosyntactic norms work with the primes to create a unified system that allows meaning to be created. This system then is the way man expresses himself and understands the world around him. The lens of language colors the way we speak and think, as well as the process by which we build shared experiences and beliefs. Language and man together shape and create society, culture, civilization, and its necessary trappings. Primes, as the borders between lexical items, are then an integral part in defining how speakers think about their language and culture.

2.4. Ubiquity across both time and space.

Since its creation, NSM has inspired work in many different areas. While Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka have been the main proponents and investigators of semantic primes, their research on NSM has been expanded to numerous languages: Amharic (Amberber, 2007), Ewe (Ameka, 1994), Japanese (Asano, 2003; Hasada, 2006; Onishi, 1994), Spanish (Aznárez Mauleón, 2005; Curnow, 1993; Travis, 2002a), Modern Greek (Bardzokas, 2004), Australian Aboriginal languages (Baumgartner, 2001), Polish (Besemares, 2007; Wierzbicka, 1997), Mbula (Bugenhagen, 2001), Mandarin Chinese

(Chappell, 1994; Tien, 2005), Thai (Diller, 1994), Danish (Dineen, 1990), Biblical Hebrew (Durst, 1999), Lao (Enfield, 2002), Russian (Gladkova, 2010; Mostovaja, 1997; Wierzbicka, 1997), Cree (Junker & Blacksmith, 2006), Korean (Lee, 2005; Yoon, 2008), Italian (Maher, 2000), French (Peeters, 1994), and Berber (Trnavac, 2008). Furthermore there have been attempts to catalogue and investigate dialectal variations within languages, including Hawaiian Creole English (Stanwood, 1999), Australian English (Peeters, 2004, 2007; Stollznow, 2002, 2004), and Singaporean English (Besemeres & Wierzbicka, 2003; Wong, 2000, 2004). Spanish has also undergone the same treatment in an investigation of Colombian Spanish (Travis, 2002b, 2004, 2005).

In addition to the above body of work in diverse languages, NSM has been used to look at more focused areas of language. Wierzbicka (2006) examined English causatives and epistemic phrases and adverbs, as well as their integral part in Anglo culture. Travis (1999) used NSM as a lens to examine the subjunctive and its uses in Spanish. Tien (1999) examined temporal and spatial primitives of Cantonese child language in Hong Kong. In addition, there have been many studies focused on the use of expletives in Australian English (Kidmen, 1993; Stollznow, 2004) as well as Chinese (Kornacki, 2001).

In diachronic studies, primes can perform a different function. Due to the recurring existence of semantic primes in various languages, they can be posited to exist across the expanse of time in addition to space. As a common inventory of universal concepts, semantic primes must have been available in eras of human existence in order to communicate basic ideas, leading then to the combination of basic concepts into more complex ones. If they have been available during all periods of language, semantic primes

can then assist in defining the changes which have occurred in both the lexicon and the related semantic fields.

English has changed radically over its history, including vast changes that have been made to both the grammar and vocabulary since speakers came to the British Isles in the 5th century AD. Thus far, there has been little historical or diachronic study of semantic primes. Only Martín Arista (2006) has examined Modern English primes in an effort to find their etymologic origins or their historic counterparts.

2.5. Criticisms of NSM

Criticisms of semantic primes have arisen in past literature. Some of the major criticisms are as follows: first, as part of a foundation of meaning, primes must be translatable across all languages; second, due to synonymy, definitions can be endlessly circular and semantic primes do nothing to stop the cycle of substitution; and finally, although the concepts introduced by Wierzbicka and Goddard are universal, the labels used in NSM are not the most basic lexical items that could be used to express that concept. However these negative assessments can be refuted due to a few basic assumptions about language.

Availability cross-linguistically. There have consistently been arguments against semantic primes based upon the idea “primitive X is not found in language Y’ (Goddard, 1998, p. 138). Harré and Krausz (1996), for example, take issue with the prime “I,” saying that it “indexes ‘the bodily location of the speaker,’” but is also indexes other location variables simultaneously: spatial, temporal, moral, and social (qtd in Goddard, 1998, p. 136). Because the first person pronoun encodes all of these variables, it is impossible to translate into other languages, and thus frustrates the idea of primes as universal and

irreducible vocabulary. Citing from an example from Wintu, Harré and Krausz claim *-da* is a “first person singular indexical” (Ibid; p. 137). In that context, “*lime-da* is rendered as ‘I am ill’ but *tuhutum-lim-tca-da*, which we perforce must render as ‘My mother is ill’, should run more like ‘The compound body of mummy and me is where illness resides’” (Ibid.). According to Goddard (1998), Harré and Krausz interpret *-da* as a distributive suffix, but the original research (see Lee, 1950, p. 540) maintains a more accurate translation of the sentence in question would be “My mother got sick on me” (qtd in Goddard, 1998, p. 138). Additionally, the Wintu pronouns *ni* ‘I’ and *mi* ‘you’ are ignored in Harré and Krausz’s refutation of semantic primes. “As a matter of fact, many meanings which might strike one on pre-theoretical ground as plausible candidates as lexical universals can be shown not to have equivalents in some languages—words like ‘sun’, ‘hand’, and ‘break,’ for instance” (p. 139). As Goddard points out, candidates that could not be translated between languages have been removed from the proposed inventory for that single fault, leaving behind the current set which so far have proved to be cross-linguistic.

Circular definitions. In addition to supposedly not being universal, NSM primes come under attack for relying upon definitions and terms, which “are in turn substitutes for longer descriptions” (Harris, 1981, p. 140 qtd in Goddard, 1998, p. 139). Harris goes on to assert “behind the definition of a single word there thus appears to lie a regress of further definitions, which has no clearly discernible end point” (Ibid.). Essentially, this argument can be boiled down to the existence of synonyms in language and the ability to constantly talk around a given idea, creating an endless and interminable stream of definitions. As reassurance against such a succession, Goddard points to the philosophical works of Arnauld, Descartes, Pascal, and Leibniz, all of whom “enunciated the obvious conclusion

that interverbal definition presupposed the existence of some primitive words” (Ibid., p. 139). In order to keep language from being infinitely circular, there must be some logical beginning, which for these thinkers are “primitive terms which are undefined” (Arnauld and Nicole, 1996, p. 64 qtd in Goddard, 1998, p. 139). NSM primes fulfill that role as a starting point for all linguistic meaning.

Primes are not the most basic. Finally, another criticism of NSM is the argument that labels of universal concepts may not be the most basic labels available. Although the concepts may be universal, each language then has unique terms, which express them individually. For example, PEOPLE as a prime must be considered to mean the plural of person. Since it is a borrowed word, could there possibly be a native alternative? For instance, *men* or *folk* would be able to express the same concept “2+ persons.” However, *men*, beyond having an equivalent meaning to PEOPLE, has the added distinction of being a gendered noun: it can refer to a group of more than one person of the masculine gender, or a group of more than one person of either gender. Because the additional gendered reading, *men* would be ambiguous in an explication since the reader may not be able to understand the distinction between male persons only, or either male or female persons. On the other hand, *folk* is much more general in its meaning than *men*. It can mean any group of human beings, regardless of gender or other characteristics. However, according to the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), *folk* only appears 8,457 times out of 450 million words (Davies, 2008). While it may be equally just as general semantically, it can be considered somewhat archaic by the evidence of its appearances in contemporary usage. By contrast, *people* appears in COCA 787,802 times (Ibid.). In the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA), *folk* appears 7,472 times, *people* 368,083 times.

Frequency, in this case, can lend a hand in deciding what is more 'basic' or 'universal' by giving examples as to what is more frequent in usage. While commonality may not always be equated to universality, this ubiquity points toward words that are more easily understood by speakers.

Chapter 3. Methodology

At first glance, Wierzbicka's English semantic primes appear to be of Anglo-Saxon origin. The simplicity of the vocabulary lends itself to this assumption, since words dating back to Anglo-Saxon in English are generally believed to be simpler than their Latinate equivalents. However, upon closer investigation, only fifty-five of the seventy-one primes or prime components are natively English, by which it can be understood they originally come from Anglo-Saxon rather than being borrowed from another language. Only three non-Anglo-Saxon languages have contributed to the English primes: Latin, Old and Middle French (through the medium of Anglo-Norman), and Old Norse.

Attestation information was gathered from the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* and then compared against dictionaries on the various languages and periods, such as the Bosworth & Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online, the Middle English Dictionary Online maintained by the University of Michigan, the Dictionary of the Royal Academy of Spain (*Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*), Slocum & Krause's Old Norse Dictionary Online, and the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA). The collected data was then compared to studies on the English lexicon as a whole to determine how similar the inventory of semantic primes is etymologically to the English lexicon.

Ethnographic and etymological investigation in this work was forced to be cursory in order to survey such a large subset of English and maintain a reasonably pointed investigation of the impact of borrowing in core vocabulary. Longer investigations of etymologies are contained in the body of this work in order to demonstrate unique or particularly interesting examples; however, all these investigations remain cursory in order to allow the focus of this study to remain upon the research questions outlined

above. To dig deeper into the history of the primes themselves would be outside the scope of a master's thesis. Additionally, this paper makes claims about the origins of the semantic primes used and posited for Modern English only. Because of the influence of language change, it is possible to assume the primes have changed and adapted over the history of English. Javier Martín Arista (2006) did a study on what the semantic primes of Old English might have been, but otherwise, no work has been done on historical semantic primes.

All dates mentioned as the etymological origins of the primes, whether native or foreign, are given based upon their date of first attestation (FA), which reports the first appearance of the word in the written record as far as the document can be dated. As such, some documents cannot be dated with a specific year so much as an era. Where this is the case, approximate eras will be given (i.e. early Old English or eOE, Old English or OE, and late Old English or lOE). Almost a quarter of the primes cannot be dated with a specific year, making this approximation of era necessary. Of the remaining components, all but seven can only be dated approximately. Dates marked by *ante* (a) indicate that the document was written before that date while *circa* (c) indicates the document was written around the date indicated. A few dates are marked as occurring in ?c1200. The question mark reports the inability to date the documents with any surety and represent a best guess as to when they were written based upon linguistic evidence. All dates of first attestation will note the relative language in which the etymological form occurs.

For the purposes of this paper, primes first attested before 1099 will be considered to be Old English, whereas those with an FA after 1100 will be considered to be in Middle English. The last primes attested before 1099 are reported before or around 1000 and the

first prime attested after 1100 appears circa 1135, which allows for a clean break to be drawn at 1100, just after the Norman Invasion of the British Isles.

3.1 Problems inherent to examining a dead language

Old English, as a dead language, presents a problem in the study of semantic primes; however, these can be overcome. Dead languages, presumably, cannot be trusted to provide an accurate description of what the language was like. And, if it can provide some representation of the state of the language, a dead language would be assumed to be skewed based upon the limited access to literacy and literature at the time. Literacy was not a common skill in the Old English world. This difficulty is moderated by the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon peoples to Christianity by the middle of the seventh century established a tradition of literacy. When the British Isles were converted to Catholicism, literacy was able to take root in the originally oral culture, but mostly through the medium of Latin. Because religious worship “required books and the literate tools to use them,” only those speakers with time and means could participate, supposedly providing a written record that describes part of society rather than all of it (Hanna, 2001, p.172).

Nonetheless, the speech of the non-literate segments of society was able to contribute directly to contemporary manuscripts and documents. Gabriel Knappe (1999) dismisses the influence of Latin literature upon Anglo-Saxon texts, specifically heroic poems, as doubtful, maintaining they “belong to the native tradition of oral epic” (p. 13). “Much of the diction of Old English writing, including religious verse and the prose, shows a formulaic character and certain themes which can be attributed to the oral tradition” (Ibid., p.11). This understanding speaks to the development of a dual literary tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: a prestige tradition reserved for texts in Latin and the Anglo-Saxon

tradition applied liberally elsewhere. Furthermore, Knappe points to the appearance of stylistic devices, such as alliteration, which were pervasive in Anglo-Saxon texts and then found their way into Anglo-Latin texts as well. If any linguistic pressure was being exerted, it was in the form of native expressions and devices upon the Latinate literary standard. This notion is reinforced by the knowledge that the scribes and authors of the time were native Anglo-Saxons who had mastered their first language long before they began their education in Latin. The oral tradition was so pervasive in Britain during this time that Bede records examples of socially unsophisticated men in the seventh century committing vernacular poetry to memory and professional minstrels singing heroic poetry in the king's court (Ibid. p. 15). The communal oral consciousness would have been a powerful influencing force when composing new material or even in the act of translating. Consequently, much of the extant written record can be assumed to be a thorough and accurate portrait of Anglo-Saxon linguistic norms.

Finally, the problematic impact of literacy on Anglo-Saxon texts can be disregarded when considering the backgrounds of educated men of the time. Even with a classical education, these men and women had learned their first language not from books, but from experience, meaning they were unaffected speakers of English. No one had yet conceived of prescriptivism or notions of "correct" and "incorrect" English. This lack of prescriptivism allowed native speakers to be innovative, but always within the limits imposed by communicative competence. This emphasis upon intelligibility would have reined in the extreme innovations that could be made, forcing the English of the time to stay in the middle of the linguistic road. These same bilingual speakers also had daily interaction with monolinguals, exposing them to the unadulterated creativity of the uneducated. For

religious clergy, homilies and sermons were intended not just to be simply written and passed on to later generations, but rather delivered, often to a monolingual and uneducated audience. Such an audience would be unable to comprehend texts that were 'over their heads.' This suggests argument and story structure, stylistic devices meant to provide contrast or emphasis, and even vocabulary choices would need to follow familiar patterns. If not, communication would be frustrated, rendering the text useless. The requirement of comprehensibility held non-native pressure on innovations in check until such a time that foreign influence had been felt so liberally that it entered the public consciousness, becoming an innate facet of society.

Despite the potential difficulties arising from the nature of Old English as a language without a society of speakers and the widespread influence of Latin on the literate and educated subset of society, the requirement of comprehensibility maintained the linguistic momentum of Anglo-Saxon in the British Isles. Old English, then, is suitable for a study using NSM and the semantic primes.

Chapter 4. How stable are the semantic primes over time?

Since semantic primes can be posited from the beginning of human existence, how stable or consistent have the primes been? If the only constant in life is change, would it be reasonable to say that the inventory of primes has remained in their current form over the course of English history? Theories of language change would certainly argue with stability over such a vast time period. In fact, borrowing has penetrated the inventory of semantic primes over the last millennium to the extent that 16 out of the 71 primes are borrowed from other languages. The remaining 55 primes, while etymologically Anglo-Saxon show a surprising amount of variation in their origins. For a complete list of native primes, see Table 11 in the appendix.

4.1. Anglo-Saxon origins

English, over a thousand year period, has undergone much change, displaying a unique ability to adapt and change when faced with new challenges. Forty-nine of the semantic primes are etymologically English with Proto-Germanic origins (see Table 2 for primes attested in the Old English period. For a complete list of all native primes, please see Table 11 in the appendix.) Very few of these native primes appear in the same incarnation as they do in Modern English, mostly due to the standardization of spelling and the removal of non-Latin letters from the alphabet. Phonetic and phonological change since Old English has also altered their forms, especially concerning the loss of phonetic material or the softening of segments.

Table 2. Native primes attested in Old English

Prime/ Component	FA Date	Etymological Form(s)	Prime/ Component	FA Date	Etymological Form(s)
i	eOE	ich	this	c825	þes, þeos, þis
thing	eOE	þing	few	c825	feáwa
body	eOE	bodig	see	c825	séon
other	eOE	oþar, oþor, oþer	do	c825	dón, dóan, dóa, doe
one	eOE	aan, æn, ann	where	c825	hwær, hwor
many	eOE	manig	here	c825	hér
think	eOE	þencan	far	c825	feor(r)
word	eOE	word	after	a855	æfter
be	eOE	béon, sindan, wessan	some	c875	sum
live	eOE	liban, libban, lybban	two	c882	twegen
now	eOE	nu	kind	c888	gecynd
near	eOE	neah	say	c888	secgan
more	eOE	mara, mare	long	c888	lang
before	OE	bi-foran	short	c888	sceort, scort
know	OE	cnawan	little	c893	lýtel
true	OE	tréowe	feel	c893	félan
for	OE	for(e)	hear	c893	hýran
above	IOE	abufan	time	c893	tíma
all	a700	eal	you	c897	eow
small	c725	smæl	when	c900	hwanne, hwonne
side	c725	side	else	971	elles
way	c725	weg	as	a1000	eal-swa
have	a800	habban, haban	something	c1000	sum þing(c), ðing
if	805	if, yf	can	c1000	cunnan
good	805-831	gód, good			

4.2. Introductions from the Middle and Modern English periods

Even though as concepts, Old English must have employed a gloss for each of the semantic primes, a handful of modern primes are not attested until later periods of English. Unlike the above examples, SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE, INSIDE, MUCH, LIKE, and NOT are the result of late changes in the lexicon (see Table 3). They stand as evidence that the semantic primes

are themselves subject to the natural process of language change inherent to all linguistic systems. The later additions include compounds, a former bound morpheme, and words which have undergone changes such that their original forms are radically different. All of the components of the compounds were attested in Old English; however, they were joined until much later. The late attestation dates for modern *like*, *much*, and *not* is clarified if these dates are assumed to be the earliest attestation of their modern orthographic forms.

Table 3. Native primes attested in Middle and Modern English

Prime/ Component	FA Date	Etymological Form(s)
much	a1154	much(e), meth, mych(e)
somewhere	?c1200	summhwær, sumwhare
like	?c1200	liche, lyche, lich
not	1299	not, nut, notte(e)
someone	c1305	sum on, some one, someone
inside	1504	inside

4.3. Language change

The primes listed in Table 3 have been affected by predictable processes, or in other words, the primes reflect the general changes English has undergone. These processes include standardization of spelling, compounding, phonological and morphological modifications, as well as semantic shift.

Spelling conventions and compounding. For example, according to the textual evidence, compounds with SOME as their first element had the option of appearing as two separate words rather than their joined modern spellings. The exception seems to be SOMEWHERE, which never appeared as two words. (References of quoted material are listed in footnotes. Emphasis added in quotations below.)

To a womman he com..þat heo scholde him to *sum on* teche.¹

'I have set my heart on Rawdon running away with *some one*.' 'A rich *some one*, or a poor *some one*?'²

þus were..þe saxons *Some tyme* aboute & *some (tyme)* bineþe.³

Somtime nay, *somtime* yee, *Somtime* he cam, *somtime* nocht.⁴

Forr þatt he wass forrdredd tatt teʒʒ. himm sholldenn *summwhaer* hidenn.⁵

Spelling conventions and the need for semantic clarification would later force the compounding of *someone* and *sometime* in order to differentiate between them and their homophonic equivalents *some one* and *some time*. This change was made possible by the already-innate practice of compounding. Furthermore, INSIDE was created from the same practice of splicing together two morphemes in order to create a new meaning. First introduced in 1504, it is a late addition to the primes inventory. Earlier primes also show compounding, such as BEFORE (*bi-foran*), ABOVE (*abufan*), AS (*eal-swa*), and KIND (*gecynd*).

Phonological and morphological changes. Pronunciation and the structure of English sounds have also been the victims of thorough change. MUCH, LIKE, NOT are phonetically-reduced versions of older native words. Rather than being late additions to English, their forms have been so radically altered as to create almost unrecognizable forms when compared to their etymological ancestors (*OED*, "like, adj., adv., prep., conj., and n.2," "much, adj., adv., prom., and n.," "not, adv., n., and int.").

gelíc > *lic > liche > like

¹ *Early English Poems and Lives of Saints (1862)*, c1305 (Inset quotations provided by the Oxford English Dictionary Online, to be referenced hereafter as *OED*. All translations and glosses included are my own and dictionaries consulted are referenced where appropriate.)

² Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 1847

³ Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle, 1297

⁴ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis* II, 1390

⁵ *Ormulum*, ?c1200

micel > mech > mucche > much

ná-wiht > noht > nought > not

The processes at play in the reduction of these words are innately English, meaning that they are reflective of the changes the lexicon goes through continuously, including vowel reduction, loss of phonetic content, shortening or reduction of syllables, and even processes such as devoicing and simplification of segments. Additionally, these processes are also attested in the remaining native primes attested in Old English, including the forms of BE (from a combination of *beon*, *sindan*, and *wessan*), TRUE (*treowe*), HEAR (*hyran*), and ELSE (*elles*).

Structurally, the primes have also been morphologically altered. Particularly of note is the transformation of LIKE from a bound morpheme whose first syllable was lost due to vowel reduction and shortening (*ge-líc*, “likeness or similitude”) to an independent word (Bosworth, s.v. “*ge-líc*”). (Emphasis added in the quotations below.)

Heo wæron englum *gelice*, þa wæs <Eve>, Adames bryd. [*She was in likeness to angels, that was Eve, Adam’s wife.*]⁶

Neorxnawong stod god and *gastlic* [*Paradise stood good and guest-like (ready for guests).*]⁷

This suffix has survived in contemporary English, but due to vowel reduction, the full form entered Middle English as *liche* meaning “an equal, peer; somebody or something similar; appearance, form, or shape” (*MED*, s.v. “*liche* (n.)”).

Nis on eorðe non oðer his *liche*. [*There is not on earth another of his kind.*]⁸

⁶ *Genesis A,B* [0061 (185)]

⁷ *Genesis A,B* [0071 (208)]; Hereafter the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* to be referred to as *DOEWC*.

⁸ *Homilies in Cambridge*, a1225

So that he was of children riche, As therof was noman his *liche*. [*Because he was rich in children, therefore no man was his equal.*]⁹

As he caste his lok Into the welle..He sih the *like* of his visage. [*As he cast his offering into the well .. He saw the appearance of his face.*]¹⁰

From a noun, *like* was converted into an adjective denoting similarity in appearance, form, or shape.

Pe wille of God mut nedis be good, *licke* to þe Fadir of hevene. [*The will of God must needs be good, like to the Father of heaven.*]¹¹

Eventually a semantic link was forged between the adjective and the following prepositional phrase until a preposition was no longer needed and it became used synonymously with *as* in contemporary English.

Morphologically, *LIKE* is unique in the inventory of semantic primes, but other primes have been subject to similar alterations. *AN* is a reversed version of *LIKE*. It began in Old English as the number *one*, but was last reduced to the indefinite article (*a/an*) and can no longer appear by itself. Moreover the system of grammatical case used in Old English slowly died out during the Middle English period, the last vestiges of which can be seen in English pronouns (*I/me/my, he/him/his, she/her, they/them/their*), but even these are limited as to how the pronouns are affected and the number of cases they can accommodate.

Semantic changes. Finally, semantic fields have also been disrupted within the native primes. As discussed above, *INSIDE* was a late addition to English, which can be

⁹ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, a1393

¹⁰ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, a1393

¹¹ *English Wycliffite Sermon in Sel. Wks.* II. 245, c1380

explained by the redrawing of semantic boundaries. Originally, *wiþinnan* ('within') or *innan* ('in') and *wiþútan* ('without') or *utan* ('out') were used adverbially to illustrate spatial position. *Inside* and *outside* then derive from 'the side in/within' and 'the side out/without,' establishing them as physical locations rather than descriptors of position.

From þe *outside*..of þe said gate ynward toward þe wherf. ¹²

A tabell yn *the syde* of the halle..a bynch yn the *ynsyde* of the tabell.¹³

Temporally speaking, *outside* (1457) is the first to enter the written record, meaning that *inside* (1504) was analogically derived to match its opposite just as its precursors are morphologically and semantically matched opposites. (Emphasis added in the quotations below.)

[The] *out-side* beauty [of the durian is] no way equall to the *inside* goodnesse and vertues.¹⁴

Any Freeboard, Screed, or Parcel of Land left *outside* the fences.¹⁵

The coachman put me *inside* the carriage.¹⁶

They could..see every thing that took place *outside*.¹⁷

This Island is bold, too, *inside* or out.¹⁸

Only later were the new locative descriptors extended to the capacities of adjectives, prepositions, and then adverbs respectively. Although the majority of the earlier native

¹² *Plea & Mem. Rolls London Guildhall*, 1457

¹³ *English Gilds 327*, 1504

¹⁴ Herbert, *A relation of some yeares tauaile, begunne anno 1626. into Afrique and the greater Asia*, 1634

¹⁵ Enclosure Act, 1795

¹⁶ Lackington, *Memoirs of the first forty-five years of the life of James Lackington. In forty-six letters to a friend*, 1791

¹⁷ Broughton, *Letters Mahratta Camp*, 1813

¹⁸ Nelson, *Dispatches & Letters*, 1803

primes have experienced such extreme semantic change, FEEL (*felan*) originally covered both the field of what we now recognize as TOUCH in addition to its own modern field.

Constant state of change. Semantic primes, even though they are core vocabulary, have sustained many changes as well as many different types of changes. As the above examples show, the primes which are native to English, either attested throughout its history or created later from native lexical items, have been affected by compounding, morphophonemic alterations, and semantic shift, all of which are natural processes in language change. While the semantic primes are still overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon (76% are native), even this majority has succumbed to pressures inherent to the lexicon and grammar without reckoning in the foreign influence that has been exerted upon the language.

According to the examples explored here, it would be unreasonable to think the primes had never changed in either form or function within the lexicon of English. In the above section, I have outlined the attestations of the semantic primes from Old English as well as latecomers to the inventory, which would only be possible if there were consistent change within the semantic primes to reflect language. Because the semantic primes can be considered core vocabulary, the evidence suggests that while the concepts might be universal, core vocabulary is in a consistent state of flux in order to reflect the lexical needs and semantic fields of a language. Stability over time in the case of semantic primes or core vocabulary would be impossible since language change is constant and ongoing.

Just as the individual semantic primes reveal insight about language and culture by providing a language-specific core vocabulary based upon universal concepts to make

linguistic comparisons, the changes in one language's inventory can provide insight into the nature of language change as a whole.

Chapter 5. How do the semantic primes indicate the extent of borrowing in English?

Because “languages and dialects normally do not exist in a vacuum,” speakers come into contact with new languages through regular personal interaction (Hock, 1996, p.253). Through these interactions, the worldview of a speaker widens in order to accommodate foreign ideas, including cultural values, unique concepts, or even new technologies. This widening frequently includes a linguistic element as well. As Hans Heinrich Hock points out, “anything can be borrowed: lexical items, roots and affixes, sounds, collocations, and grammatical processes” (Ibid, p. 257). Nouns are the most easily loaned from one language to another, but even words belonging to closed classes such as prepositions can be borrowed occasionally, as is the case of the Spanish preposition *hasta*, which was borrowed from Arabic (Real Academia Española, n.d., s.v. “hasta”) . When speakers are unable to communicate a foreign concept in their own language, they will borrow a lexical item into their own language, thus incorporating it also into their culture. English is representative of this process through the rampant borrowing that has occurred from three languages which are also represented into the semantic primes.

5.1. Contributions from other languages in the primes

In order to accommodate all of the foreign influence concealed in the simplicity of the primes, this work will continue in the following order: first, it will discuss the two primes with uncertain origins, after which will be a discussion of primes borrowed from Latin, which will be followed by primes borrowed from Old Norse and French. For a complete list of borrowed primes, see Table 12 in the appendix. This work will go into

some depth on primes with more interesting history as examples of changes that are possible, but will remain more cursory in order to confront the larger question of how representative the semantic primes and their foreign influence is of English as a whole.

Uncertain or obscure origins. Words of unknown origins are common in every language. Because language is a creative process, one that is often undocumented, it is not always possible to trace the origins of every word in a lexicon. For example, the name of a prominent British political party, the Whigs, has an obscure origin, which remains guessed at, but without a sure etymon. Similarly, two semantic primes represent this category of lexical items without a clear beginning.

BAD and BIG appear a century apart: 1203 and c1300 respectively (see Table 4; for a complete list of borrowed primes, see Table 12 in the appendix).

Table 4. Primes of uncertain origin (OED, see respective sections on etymology)

Prime/ Component	FA Date	Language of Origin	Etymological Form(s)	Word in Language of Origin
bad	1203	uncertain	badd(e)	unknown
big	c1300	uncertain	big, beg(ge)	unknown

BAD is believed to be of Anglo-Saxon origin, possibly as a shortening of *bæddel* meaning “a hermaphrodite, effeminate, or homosexual man” or derived from *bædan* meaning “to force, compel, or impel” (OED, s.v. “bad, adj., n.2, and adv.”), although the example *bædan* meaning “to defile” is also mentioned (Ibid.). BIG on the other hand might be an adaption of the Norse *bugge* meaning “a mighty man” (OED, s.v. “big, adj. and adv.”). Both first appear in surnames and place names: William Badde (1222), Petri Badde (1264), Badda (personal name), etc.; Ægelric Bicga (also *Bigga*, *Bygga*) (a1050), Osbern Bigga (also *Bigge*) (1087), Walter Bigge (1177), Alan Bigge (1273), etc. (See above references.) In the

case of *BAD*, it is not known whether it is the same word that is attested as a name nor when the pejorative meaning was derived, either before or after its use in nomenclature.

Furthermore, the placement of the earliest names in the south of England is at odds with the idea that *BIG* is of Nordic origin since most Norse influence was concentrated in the north. In addition to this, it is also possible for *BIG* to have evolved from Anglo-Saxon (compare *bug*, “pompous; big; proud, conceited, fine”) (see references above). Based upon their use as surnames, these words passed into adjectives through grammaticalization and extension to refer to the characteristics of a person with that name.

Latin. Latin, as the least accessible language, appeared during the Old English period (950-1100). It came to the British Isles through the medium of Catholicism at the end of the sixth century. Catholic monasteries became centers of learning and Latin served as the language of contemporary scholarship. Early borrowing occurred between Latin and Anglo-Saxon within highly literate, semi-bilingual contexts. It was in these monasteries that most Old English texts originate: abundant Latin/Old English glossaries, which are no more than lists of ‘hard words’ in Latin compiled for use by those translating and copying texts. Another common source is Latin texts that have been glossed into Anglo-Saxon, providing dual lines of texts: the main line in Latin and a smaller script above it providing the native equivalents in the Anglicized Latin alphabet. These Latin words did not make their way into the common language, but rather remained restricted to mostly ecclesiastical terminology. (The situation is described here as semi-bilingual due to the death of Classical Latin almost four hundred years before its second arrival in England, thus restricting its use to official written communication rather than everyday speech.) Surprisingly, the Latin loanwords

have remained embedded in English despite being introduced well before any other borrowings.

The primes PART and PLACE are of special interest in this diachronic study. Both make their first appearance in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, unlike other foreign primes, and outdate the remaining borrowings by roughly four hundred years (see Table 5).

Table 5. Foreign primes borrowed from Latin

Prime/ Component	FA Date	Language of Origin	Etymological Form(s)	Word in Language of Origin
part	OE	Latin	part	part-, pars
place	OE	Post-classical Latin	plæce	platea

Even though they were probably borrowed through interactions between English clergy and the Catholic religion, these primes' linguistic survival is due to the Norman Invasion. Because of the early date of borrowing, these two Latin primes would most likely have fallen victim to phonetic reduction and grammaticalization processes; however, this inevitable assimilation into Old English was delayed by the arrival of Anglo-Norman, which reinforced the original forms. Thus *part-* and *platea* remained close to their phonologically nativized forms of *part* and *plæce*. This reinforcement process can be seen in the semantic shift of *plæce* over time. In Anglo-Saxon dictionaries, the word is listed as "an open space, a street" (Bosworth, 2010), which parallels the Spanish cognate *plaza*, meaning "a wide and spacious location in a town, to which various streets lead" (Real Academia Española, n.d., s.v. "plaza"). On the other hand, in Anglo-Norman, *platea* had been bleached from the original Latin *street* to "space, locality (c1100)" (OED, s.v. "place, n.1," see section on etymology), which is the main use of *place* in Modern English. *Place* has maintained the first sense in names and proper nouns, but has broadened in the case of unmarked nouns:

compare Park Place, 'all over the place' (spatial location), and 'to know one's place' (social space). While reintroducing the Latinate words, Anglo-Norman ensured PART and PLACE would remain in English, but left an imprint on their modern descendants.

Old Norse. Old Norse had been a constant presence in the north of England since the middle of the eighth century, making it available for common speakers to adopt (1135-c1400). Spoken by the tribes in the modern states of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, Old Norse was permanently imported to England in 865 (Robinson, 1992, p.71). "By 876 or 877 the kingdom of Northumbria and most of eastern Mercia was under Danish control, areas that were later to belong to the 'Danelaw'" (Ibid.). Ten years later, a treaty would "[cede] most of the northwest to the Danes," creating the Danelaw and turning a mostly Anglo-Saxon population over to Danish rule (Ibid, p. 71-72). However, both languages are Germanic descended from different branches: Norse from Northern Germanic and English from Western. A wide variety of phonological and grammatical features are shared between the North and West branches of Germanic, "[affecting] a large part of the lexicon, and [attesting] to a long period of contact between speakers of the languages" (Ibid, p. 255). During this time of extensive contact between the Norse and Anglo-Saxon peoples, both languages would have contained many similar features, and may even have been mutually intelligible. Because of their common origins and similar phonological, morphological, and sometimes lexical elements, words could pass between these two cousin languages easily, as attested through a high number of borrowings from Old Norse into what became Modern English.

Although Nordic primes are indicative of the large subset of borrowed Norse terms into English, the timing of the borrowings represented in the semantic primes is less

comprehensible. Although consistent linguistic contact between Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse began late in the ninth century, the first Nordic prime does not appear in English until the middle of the twelfth century (see Table 6).

Table 6. Foreign primes borrowed from Old Norse

Prime/ Component	FA Date	Language of Origin	Etymological Form(s)	Word in Language of Origin
die	c1135	Old Norse	dien, day-e, degne, deyn	deyja
same	?c1200	Old Norse	same	same
want	?c1200	Old Norse	wanten	vanta
happen	1390	Old Norse	happene(n), hapnen, hepene	happ-en
below	c1400	Old Norse	biloghe	bi-lag-r

The three hundred year stretch without an impact on English primes is difficult to explain, especially considering that it was not until after the Norman invasion that they were adopted. Loanwords from Norse would have entered Anglo-Saxon through a bottom-up process, taking root among the common people before making their way up into the more cultured or educated part of society. In the north of England, the Danelaw was an independent nation with its own rulers and political system. The south was still securely under Anglo-Saxon rule until 1015 when Canute, son of the Norse king on the continent, briefly became king of England (Dawson, 2008, p. 43). West Saxon, the standard dialect of both written and spoken Anglo-Saxon, was centered in the southernmost part of England far from Norse influence. Without significant contact between the north and south, there were limited possibilities of borrowing Old Norse words into English. Extra time would be necessary for Norse words to be assimilated and then make their way to the south. On the other hand, constant Viking invasions during the tenth and eleventh centuries also would have forced the assimilation of the settled Viking peoples in England since they felt the

threat of invading peoples equally as much as the Anglo-Saxon part of society (Ibid., p. 42). In the face of such a threat, the multilingual society living in northern England would have been highly motivated to band together in order to resist conquest by other invading peoples. This need for solidarity and the reality of a hybrid Norse and Anglo-Saxon society then expedited the borrowing process in Middle English, allowing a rapid acquisition of Norse loanwords after Canute became king in 1015.

French. French borrowings, similar to Latin, had to pass through a restricted subset of society, the French-speaking aristocracy, before it could enter the collective linguistic consciousness of Germanic speakers in order to be included in English texts, implying a semi- to wholly bilingual situation.

According to C.M. Millward's *Biography of the English Language*, French had a more restricted impact on the grammatical structure of English than Norse (Millward, 1988, p. 173). Whereas Scandinavian influence has been felt in the closed classes of English, most borrowed French lexical items "came into English as nouns or verbs" (Ibid.) Furthermore although the most frequent one hundred English words are native to English, a huge proportion of the remaining English words are of French origin. "By 1500, English had absorbed so many French loans that its vocabulary looked more like that of a Romance language" (Ibid, p. 14). Although the Norman invaders of 1066 and after were of Danish Viking descent, they had been immersed in French culture long enough to have adopted the Latinate language and brought it with them to their newly conquered territory. French was installed as the prestige language in the British Isles since much of the native aristocracy was supplanted by the imported Norman nobles (Barber, 1993, p. 134). However, "French never became the language of the populace; indications are that it was employed mostly by

the higher [classes],” allowing Anglo-Saxon and the emerging Middle English to remain common along the base of the social pyramid (Menger, 1904, p.1).

The influence of French has been felt in a similar way within the inventory of semantic primes (see Table 7). All these borrowings belong to the open classes indicative of most French borrowings and the most common way they entered the English language, according to Menger.

Table 7. Foreign primes borrowed from Anglo-Norman, Old and Middle French

Prime/ Component	FA Date	Language of Origin	Etymological Form(s)	Word in Language of Origin
very	c1250	Anglo-Norman	verrei, vari	verrai, verrey, veray
move	c1275	Anglo-Norman	meef(e), meove	mover
touch	1297	Old French	touchen	tochier, tuchier
people	a1300	Old French	pople	pople, pueple
because	c1305	Old French	because, bycause, by cause	<i>be-cause</i>
moment	a1382	Middle French	mohent, moment, moment(e)	moment
maybe	a1400	Old French	may be, maybe, maybe	it may be (puet estre, put cel estre)

This pattern of acquisition reveals the top-down acquisition of loanwords from French. Anglo-Norman, the version of Old French spoken in the British Isles, arose in the thirteenth century and continued to be the language of the aristocracy and official language of record until the fifteenth century, serving as a conduit for French words to enter Middle English. Indeed, the existence of this stratified, diglossic, dual language social situation is perhaps the reason no more than a handful of French primes entered English: Middle English developed from Anglo-Saxon along the base of the social pyramid, whereas the Anglo-Norman influence was restricted to the top tiers of society consisting mostly of an

imported aristocracy of native French speakers. The lower-strata social base consisted of a significant majority of the population who were able to maintain their linguistic identity based upon numerical strength. On the other hand, the social pinnacle controlled the permanent legacy of the language(s) through written communication, which eventually became the educational standard. Because of these parallel inheritances, French vocabulary resulted in doublets of synonyms instead of wholesale substitution of the native terms. Just as Latin had been a prestigious language in the Anglo-Saxon community, French became the new restricted prestige language while Anglo-Saxon remained the spoken and written language of the people.

5.2. An Unequal reflection of English

While the semantic primes are indicative of three primary influences on English, the primes did not react to foreign influence in the same manner as did the whole of the English lexicon. First, borrowed words have been restricted to very clear subsections of English as a whole, whereas the entrance of borrowed words into core vocabulary argues that these foreign languages have left a more permanent legacy in the fabric of the language. Second, the borrowings contained in the inventory do not contain the same ratios that English has maintained overall, especially in the relationship between Romance and Germanic languages.

Domains or a blended lexicon? Borrowed words in English are considered to remain in very clear domains, whereas the existence of borrowed words in the semantics primes argues these foreign languages have left a much more permanent mark on the language. Scholars have divided the borrowings from French into categories such as the following ones from Geoffrey Hughes' *A History of English Words* (2000): power, war, religion, 'chase'

(sport), art, fashion, architecture, and food (pp. 115, 117). (See Table 8 for a recreation of Hughes' examples.) Mary S. Serjeantson (1935) makes even further divisions, such as words for people or rank, finance, law and social relationships, religion, military, nature, clothes and textiles, morals and intellect, physical action and appearance, household objects, etc (pp.107-112).

Table 8. French vocabulary borrowed into English according to categories (Hughes, 2000, p. 115)

<i>Power</i>	<i>War</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Chase</i>	<i>Art</i>	<i>Fashion</i>	<i>Architecture</i>
court	battle	service	sport	image	garment	tower
crown	arms	saint	falcon	design	apparel	vault
authority	assault	miracle	quarry	beauty	dress	column
parliament	enemy	clergy	quest	figure	train	transept
government	armour	sacrifice	retrieve	romance	robe	cloister
justice	castle	grace	track	paint	mantle	chamber
state	lance	mercy	scent	music	gown	pillar
office	siege	faith	lure	verse	cloak	aisle

These categories imply that because French loanwords can be grouped into neat divisions, the lexical items themselves remain somehow detached from the English lexicon, separated from what is considered “English.” As core vocabulary, borrowed primes have somehow made themselves essential to the expression of meaning and defied the interpretation that borrowed words are only part of certain aspects of English. As discussed above, semantic primes are building blocks for meaning in a lexicon. Foreign elements integrated into this inventory implies a more blended lexicon than the category-based approach does. While etymological doublets of Norse/English (skirt/shirt, nay/no, scrub/shrub, loan/lend, raise/rear) and Latin/English (ounce/inch) origins do exist, the French examples have edged their Anglo-Saxon equivalents out of English altogether (Denning & Kessler & Leben, 2007, p. 28; Hughes, 2000, p. 76). In a discussion of legal

terms, Hughes points out the Anglo-Saxon terminology which was replaced by Norman terms: “thus *bærnenne* ‘burning’ was displaced by *arson*, *geþeoft* ‘theft’ by *larceny*, *firen* by *crime*, *sacu* by *suit*, *scyldig* by *guilty*, and *bigamy* by the amusingly direct *twiewifing* (‘two-wifing’)” (Hughes, 2000, p. 113). Furthermore, “it should not be assumed, on the basis of this lexical evidence, that Saxon England had lacked these legal procedures, for the Germanic peoples had a highly developed sense of law” (Hughes, 2000, p. 113). Similarly, Anglo-Saxon would have contained its own version of the 16 borrowed primes, which were then replaced as the loanwords crept into the core vocabulary through contemporary usage patterns.

Primes as a reflection of English as a whole. In their analysis *Ordered Profusion: Studies in Dictionaries and the English Lexicon* (1973), Thomas Finkenstaedt and Dieter Wolff attempted to analyze the English language according to the contributing languages (see Table 9 for a reproduction of their data).

Table 9. Foreign contributions to English (Finkenstaedt & Wolff, 1973, p. 119)

Language	Total Words Contributed	Percentage of Computerized Dictionary
Latin	22,633	28.25%
Germanic [Anglo-Saxon]	16,130	20.13%
French	11,837	14.77%
Old French	9,351	11.66%
Greek	4,262	5.32%
‘Zero-Etymology’	3,235	4.03%
‘Proper Names	2,632	3.28%
Anglo-French	1,511	1.88%
Old Norse	1,471	1.83%
Middle English	1,228	1.53%
Dutch	860	1.07%
TOTAL	75,150	93.82%

The above table shows “only four of the 89 languages or language groups contribute more than 10% of the vocabulary of each. This holds true for all three dictionaries

analyzed[, which includes *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary* and *A General Service List of English Words*]” (Finkenstaedt & Wolff, 1973, p. 119). Thus just over half of English vocabulary (56.56% in fact) can be accounted for by borrowings from Latin and French alone. Table 10 below is a reorganization of the above table according to the language without regard to era.

Table 10. Contributing languages (reorganized without regard to temporal era) compared to the inventory of semantic primes

Language	Total Words Contributed	Percentage of Computerized Dictionary	Percentage in semantic primes
French (Old French, French, Anglo-French)	22,699	28.31%	9.8%
Latin	22,633	28.25%	2.8%
English (Germanic, Middle English)	17,358	21.66%	77.5%
Greek	4,262	5.32%	----
'Zero-Etymology'	3,235	4.03%	2.8%
'Proper Names	2,632	3.28%	----
Old Norse	1,471	1.83%	7%
Dutch	860	1.07%	----
TOTAL	75,150	93.82%	100%

Once the data has been reorganized, Table 10 clearly shows that English has contributed a significantly smaller amount of vocabulary (21.66%) to its own language, according to Finkenstaedt and Wolff, than either French (28.31%) or Latin (28.25%). Furthermore, 'zero-etymology' additions (those with "obscure" or "unknown origins") are more numerous (4.03%) than contributions from Old Norse (1.83%) (Finkenstaedt & Wolff, 1973, p. 130). Rampant borrowing into English has ensured that one in two words have a Latinate origin, whether through Latin or French (56.56%), while not even one in four words is English. If this is indeed the reality of Modern English, Wierzbicka's Natural Semantic Metalanguages and its semantic primes should reflect this general trend, but English's core vocabulary has remained resilient to pressures of foreign influence. Only

22.5% of the primes (16 of 71) are borrowed. And though Finkenstaedt and Wolff indicate several possible contributing languages or other source, only three of these are manifested in the inventory of primes. Thus NSM and the semantic primes provide a unique insight into linguistic change by revealing a pattern of foreign influence in English previously unexamined.

Adaptation of the lexicon to allow borrowings. Due to the loanwords allowed into the English language, there would be new pressures and gaps, allowing semantic shift to occur. The following sections are examples of how borrowings shifted from their original meanings and into those used in the semantic primes and Contemporary English. In addition to their own shift away from the Norse and French originals, the two words examined would have interacted with the English lexicon as well, forcing some kind of adaptation in the semantics of similar words.

Norse ‘want.’ WANT comes from the Old Norse adjective *vanta*, meaning “lacking, wanting” (Slocum & Krause, s.v. “vanr”).

Teflðo í túni, teitir vóro, / var þeim vættergis *vant* ór gulli [*They played the tables on the stead, were merry / they had no lack of anything golden*]¹⁹

It first appears in Middle English as the verb *wanten*, using the original sense of the word from its native language.

To trust vnto hys promysse, yt were a mynde of madnesse; He wavers as the wynde ...

Now better, now wursse, now plesure, then payne; Now to *want*, then to haue, now love, then dysdayne. [*To trust unto his promise, it were a mind of madness; He wavers*

¹⁹ *Völuspá*, tenth century, emphasis added

*as the wind ... Now better, now worse, now pleasure, then pain; Now to want, then to have, now to love, then disdain.]*²⁰

This definition and its associated phrases have become archaic and occur rarely since the seventeenth century (*OED*, s.v. “want, v.”). Beginning around the same time, *want* came to have the meaning “to feel the loss of, to miss” (*Ibid.*).

I must needs say, I lost an Officer of him, a good Bayliffe, And I shall *want* [miss, suffer without] him; but all peace be with him.²¹

It is from this definition that the contemporary meaning of “to desire to do or have something” arises. Suffering from the absence of something or someone turned into the desire for that absence to be filled. Accepting the new definition into English took sufficient time that the Oxford English Dictionary records examples of the etymological meaning into the nineteenth century.

He was happy and *wanted* for nothing.²²

However, this example is intransitive, contrasting sharply with its transitive contemporary. The original meaning *lacking* chiefly remains in set phrases (i.e. to want for nothing, in want of manners) or as a gerund (i.e. he is wanting in manners, her collection is wanting a new addition), but is mostly reduced to requiring a preposition in order for the original definition to be made clear.

French ‘very’ and English ‘true.’ Borrowed from French *verrai*, *VERY* is the descendant of *verrei* in Middle English. In its various adjective forms, *verrei* indicates accuracy or characteristics that adhere to reality or correlate to an original (*Middle English Dictionary*

²⁰ *Whane that phebus beemes*, ?a1450, emphasis added

²¹ B. Jonson, *Staple of Newes*, I. vi. 21 in *Wks.* II, 1631, emphasis added

²² ‘Ouida’, *Rainy June*, 1901, emphasis added

Online, s.v. “verrei (adj.). Hereafter the Middle English Dictionary Online will be referred to as *MED*). As a noun, it denotes truth, derived from its adjectival form (*MED*, s.v. “verrei (n.)”).

In the laste dayes Men ... schul be ... proude ... denyngre verey truth. [In the last days men shall be proud and deny the true truth.]²³

[S]o that the cruel enemys of helle ... haue no power to fere me by vertue of the verraie of god. [So that the cruel enemies of hell have no power to make me afraid by virtue of the truth of God.]²⁴

In the adverbial form, verrei begins to shift into the contemporary meaning of the word as an intensifier, taking on the meanings of “extremely, wholly” (*MED*, s.v. “verrei (adv.)”)

Hath so verray hys lyknesse That spak the word, that thou wilt gesse That it the same body be. [The one that spoke the word has his likeness so fully, that thou wilt guess that it be the same body.]²⁵

The [courte] was trobelyd very sore. [The court was troubled very sore.]²⁶

It is the intensive form of *VERY* that acts as a modern semantic prime. *Very* as a truth marker still remains in English, though it is not as common as the adverbial form.

When *VERY* morphed into an intensifier, a vacuum was left in the field of semantic senses “indicating accordance to reality.” This vacuum would be filled by *TRUE*. As an adjective, the Anglo-Saxon *tréowe* meant “faithful, trustworthy” (Bosworth, s.v. “tréowe”).

²³ *Speculum Christiani* (2), c1450

²⁴ *Prayer in Laudate* (1935), a1500

²⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, *House of Fame*, c1450

²⁶ *Generides* (2), a1500

This meaning was then expanded in Middle English, adding the connotations of steadfast, loyal, and honorable or honest to treue.

Búton hé habbe twégra trýwra manna gewitnesse [But he has the witness of two true men.]²⁷

Knigt so trewe..Pu neure me ne forsoke. [Knight so true .. Thou never forsook me.]²⁸

Phelipp..fforsake thy frowardnes and..Be trew of promesse. [Phelipp .. forsake thy contrariness and .. be true of promise.]²⁹

However these meanings became more archaic as TRUE began to shift into the void left by VERY. As honesty became equated with the ability to provide absolute truth, trueness could be linked to the idea of reality and the world as it is. Natural languages rarely have two words with the exact same meaning. The shift of TRUE from a description of character allowed VERY to become an intensifier and leave behind the original purpose of marking correlation with reality.

5.3. Primes are more stable than language as a whole

Although there is no clear-cut answer as to how much borrowing can or should be expected in the semantic primes, the ratio of borrowing in the primes compared to that in English overall does indicate that while semantic primes are not perfectly stable, they are not easily penetrated by foreign influence. Even though a quarter of the primes are borrowed, this ratio is almost the opposite of English as a whole, whose lexicon is roughly one-fifth Anglo-Saxon (Finkenstaedt & Wolff, 1973). The languages represented in the inventory of primes also share different ratios to the primes than to English: Latin 2.8%,

²⁷ Bosworth, s.v. “tréowe,” emphasis added

²⁸ *King Horn*, c1300, emphasis added

²⁹ *Duke of Burgundy*, c1436, emphasis added

Norse 7%, French 9.8% in the primes; 28.25%, 1.83%, 28.31% respectively in English as a whole. Only those words with unknown or obscure origins ('zero-etymology' in Finkenstaedt and Wolff) reflect a similar percentage in both the semantic primes (2.8%) and English (4.03%).

The distinction between lexical borrowing in a language and the integration of those borrowings into core vocabulary suggests that NSM and the semantic primes provide a rare opportunity to view linguistic change. That interpretation, analyzed through its own categories, supplies an insightful framework when considering the state of a language as mixed.

Chapter 6. How does borrowing at a basic level add to the discussion of English as a mixed language?

The extent of borrowing in English semantic primes carries greater significance than as a mere linguistic curiosity. English, similar to Latin, has long been held as some kind of standard against which other languages are compared. In recent years the discussion of pidgin and creole languages, as well as their growth into full-fledged languages has become widely popular and acknowledged. Thus far, English has managed to escape most scrutiny as a mixed language despite its history. The previous discussion of borrowing in semantic primes can further illuminate this discussion of English.

Interaction between native and borrowed lexical items, as well as adaptation within the English lexicon itself, has left behind an English mixed at the level of core vocabulary. As discussed above, most scholarship has taken the approach that borrowings in English can be categorized into clear semantic fields and have not truly blended with the lexicon as a whole (see section 5.2.1 above for a discussion of Hughes, 2000; Serjeantson, 1935). Semantic primes defy this conclusion by demonstrating that foreign words have not only made their way into the core vocabulary, but are essential to the clarification and explication of the English lexicon and related cultural values. The following sections will discuss the effect of foreign influence upon semantic fields and the structure of English itself.

6.1. Influence of foreign ideas on English semantic fields

As discussed in the review of literature, semantic primes are core vocabulary, defining culture and lexicon of the language belonging to the inventory. Foreign words in this inventory imply English is defining itself, its beliefs, ideas, and culture, through the lens of non-native concepts. Not only has the language and the lexicon become blended, but originally Anglo-Saxon concepts and lexical items are now interpreted based upon concepts which were not originally part of the language. As Hughes' argument concerning Anglo-Saxon legal terms replaced by Norman ones, the concepts behind the semantic primes did exist, but the loanwords have altered the lexicon by their very presence, flavoring the connotations and eventually the denotations of lexical items through the introduction of semantic features not previously available in Anglo-Saxon. This introduction of additional semantic features changes the way speakers think about their lexicon because now they must juggle additional differences which had not existed before. In the case of semantic primes, semantic fields in a lexicon would shift in order to coincide with these new features.

As a lexicon itself changed, culture adapts to match it. For example, our way of thinking about truth and imagination is framed by the connotation of *TRUE*, already demonstrated in this paper to have shifted far from its original meaning in Old English by the entrance of French *very*. *MAYBE*, another French loan, has implications that contrast with English *it could be*, especially in the realm of real versus possible accomplishments. Such semantic shifts have far-reaching ramifications on the minds of speakers and a language society over time (see section 5.1.4 and 5.2.3.2 on French borrowings and their semantic impact respectively).

Semantic shift is a regular process within language. Once coined, “words usually do not retain meanings unaltered for any length of time” (Sihler, 2000, p.94). As demonstrated above, the semantic primes, both native and borrowed, have experienced some amount of change over the thousand years between Anglo-Saxon English and today’s English. These changes demonstrate a fracturing and softening of English semantic fields at all levels of the language. The above sections have outlined how very much English has changed through the introduction of over half a lexicon of new borrowings. Besides the shift of semantic fields, new ones have been added to include completely foreign ideas, such as alligators or kayaks. An English understanding of fish and aquatic animals or boats and other transportation methods must then accommodate these additions, drawing new boundaries between semantic fields in order to differentiate between alligators and crocodiles or kayaks and canoes.

6.2. Conformity of foreign words to English structure

Morphologically, English has also adapted to new lexical items and morphemes. Among the semantic primes are a number of compounds or ‘nativized’ words. As a rule, functional components of primes (such as *by*, *in*, *for*, and infinitival markers) are native to English, but these are then able to attach to borrowings (*OED*, s.vv. “because, adv., conj., and n.,” “below, adv. and prep.,” “happen, v.,” “want, v.,” “touch, v.,” and “die, v.1,” see respective sections on etymology).

by (AS)+ cause (F) → *because*

by (AS) + lag-r (N) → *bilooche* → *below*

happ (N) + -en (AS) → *happen*

vanta (N) + -en (AS) → *wanten*

touch(i)er (F) + -en (AS) → *touchen*

deyja (N) +-en (AS) → *deyn*

Borrowings must first pass through the native phonetic requirements, rendering them pronounceable both in sound and structure – a “nativization” process (Hock, 1996, p. 259). For example, *ice cream* was taken into Japanese as *aisu kurii-mu* [aisũ kũrimũ], and *hacienda* [asjenda] (‘ranch’) was taken from Spanish into English as [hasijendə]. In the case of *vanta*, the initial fricative was phonetically altered to become a glide since [v] was restricted to word-internal environments in Anglo-Saxon. The same is true for morphological requirements. Because *happ* did not adhere to the morphological verb pattern in Middle English, *-en* was added as a suffix to ensure that it would conform to the structural expectations of verbs. The infinitive marker was also added word-finally to *vanta*, either assimilating the original *a*, or replacing it completely with *e*, thus producing *wanten* and modern *want*.

The most radical example of nativization is *MAYBE*. Stemming from the phrase ‘it may be,’ *MAYBE* is likely the translation of the Old French phrase *puet estre/put cel estre* ‘it could be’. Instead of the original French being borrowed and then phonetically altered, the meaning alone was copied into Middle English. This indicates the entrance of the French phrase into a level of society that was bilingual to some degree, but one which made an effort to communicate the same idea to a less bilingual social level. Based upon an understanding of the interaction of the Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Saxon linguistic societies, we can track a possible pathway of *MAYBE*’s arrival into English : originating in the Anglo-Norman society, it filtered through the monolingual, possibly bilingual, French-speakers to the bilingual Anglo-Saxon upper classes, who then translated it into their native language in order for it to be utilized among their Anglo-Saxon monolingual compatriots before the phrase filtered down once more to general use by the population.

The examples examined in this section demonstrate the acceptance of foreign words into English to the point that they are participating in native processes of language change, including the laws of English word formation, pronunciation, and morphological conformity. English's structural unity, in addition to its semantic unity, is affected and influenced by the addition of borrowed primes.

6.3. English as a mixed language

Because English has been affected both structurally and semantically by borrowings at the level of core vocabulary, a new analysis of English as a possible creole is necessary. Old English, Old Norse, French/Anglo-Norman, and Latin could be considered contributing languages to Contemporary English. Rather than learning a new language, the entrenched inhabitants incorporated new lexical items, allowing semantic fields to shift based upon the pressure of everyday usage and specialization of vocabulary. With each new invasion, the grammar would have also generalized slightly in order to accommodate new additions to the lexicon, whether that meant the generalization of a possessive marker ('s) or the loss of case marking due to the inability of the system to adapt to the sheer number of borrowings that could not be made to fit native patterns.

The first true creolization could have taken place with the addition of the Viking peoples and Old Norse to the British Isles. Though Latin was the first to arrive, it had the least impact because it was limited in the reach of its influence to religious situations and the highly educated strata of society. Old Norse spoken by the invading Viking tribes had the first real influence upon the English of the time. Their grammatical systems were very similar due to their common ancestry and even their everyday vocabulary would have contained many shared or similar items, allowing communication between the two

linguistic populations. Communication between the Viking and Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of the Danelaw would have been necessary on a regular basis. It is impossible to say now which language was substrate and which was superstrate, because of their close relationship. Their shared origins would also have made transfer of Norse lexical items into Anglo-Saxon more probable because the morphology was similar.

Effectively, the borrowing of French words can be viewed as a relexification of the English-Norse hybrid. The results of this relexification are still apparent today. For example, the animals in the field (sheep, cow, pig, rabbit, etc.) are named very differently from the cooked-and-served variety (mutton, beef, pork, lapin, etc.). Furthermore, the very existence of literary English is evidence of the replacement of Anglo-Saxon lexicon with borrowings. French and Latinate borrowings (due to a high number of borrowings during the 18th century) are essential to “educated” speech and writing. With wholesale borrowing on the rise, French lexical items then leveled the remaining vestiges of the case system by simply overwhelming the ability of the language to cope with the sheer number of new additions to the lexicon, which is just one instance of the grammatical generalization that is common to all pidgins (as described Hall, 1966; Todd, 1990; Faraclas, 1996; and Holm, 1988).

English contains much French vocabulary, but the labeling of English as a creole descendant is often rejected upon the strength of preconceived notions. In linguistics and the social sciences, there has been a prejudice against “the uncultivated speech of the masses,” which was inherited from our ancestors who had held the belief that Latin was a perfect language and the vernacular languages were not worth serious attention (Holm, 1998, p. 2). “Most linguists continued to consider pidgins and creoles freakish exceptions

that were irrelevant to any theory of ‘normal’ language” (p. 3). Slowly, this outlook has been shifting in the last century, beginning with John E. Reinecke who stated that by observing pidgins and creoles, “languages can be observed taking form within a man’s lifetime” (1937, qtd in Holm, p. 3). Suddenly, pidgins and creoles had value, but there is some vestige of earlier prejudice remaining in the common consciousness of rank-and-file English speakers and in academia, which resists the idea of English as anything but a “pure” language, even though no such ideal exists in the natural world.

Settings aside these biases, NSM provides a new method for analyzing English as a mixed language, including the stability of English regarding its core vocabulary, as represented by the semantic primes, and its contrast to the foreign influence on the English lexicon overall.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

This study attempted to discuss the following issues: the stability of semantic primes over time, whether the borrowing contained in the primes indicate the extent of borrowing in English, and what borrowing at the level of core vocabulary can add to a discussion of English as a mixed language. As a whole, the semantic primes are not entirely English in that there are many primes borrowed from other languages, whose impact on the language has been significant.

Even though the semantic primes represent universal concepts, their glosses have been adapted by processes of language change throughout the history of English. A huge proportion of the semantic primes are first attested in the Old English era, but the inventory itself contains additions from later eras of English. These Middle and Modern English primes have undergone significant changes due to language processes. Changes to spelling conventions have altered the shape and appearance of many native primes, including those which have become compounds or lost archaic letters in favor of standardization. Phonological and morphological alterations have occurred in the last thousand years, many of which are demonstrated in the primes. Semantic shifts have likewise taken place, forcing many of the primes to adapt and changing the boundaries of semantic fields. Because of these processes, the native primes have been in a state of constant and consistent change despite remaining part of English's core vocabulary.

Semantic primes, like the rest of English, include many borrowings from major sources of foreign influence. While Latin, Norse, and French are prevalent in both the semantic primes and English as a whole, the trends are different. The proportions of borrowing in English have shown to inverse to the proportions in the primes. Only those

words of obscure or uncertain origins have remained close to consistent. Additionally, inclusion of loanwords in core vocabulary contradicts previous theories that borrowings have remained in clear vocabulary domains, suggesting that these languages have left a more permanent mark on English than previously recognized. These borrowed elements have adapted and interacted with native primes over time to create a blended lexicon semantically.

Finally, the borrowings included in the semantic primes are indicative of a much more fragmented and blended lexicon at the conceptual level than previously understood, creating the need for a new analysis of English as a mixed language. If core vocabulary defines both language and culture, then English has the sticky problem of defining itself and the related trappings of culture, ideas, and beliefs through the lens of non-native concepts. Interaction within the lexicon has blended English at the most basic level. The semantic fields of the lexicon have been redefined by additions to the language, drawing new boundaries based upon semantic features which had been previously unavailable to the language. Morphologically, English has also innovated with the new lexical items as they have passed through the structural laws of word formation and morphological conformity. If the semantics and structure of English have been altered so thoroughly, a new analysis of the composition of English is necessary.

8. References and Consulted Works

- Amberber, M. (2007). Remember, remind, and forget in Amharic. In A. Mengistu, (Ed.), *The Language of Memory in a crosslinguistic perspective* (pp. 263-277). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ameka, F. (1994). Ewe. In C. Goddard and A. Wierzbicka, (Eds.), *Semantic and lexical universals: Theory and empirical findings* (pp. 57-86). Amsterdam: John Benjamin.
- Asano, Yuko. 2003. A Semantic Study of Epistemic Modality in Japanese. PhD thesis. Australian National University.
- Aznárez Mauleón, M. (2005). Aproximación desde el Metalenguaje Semántico Natural a la semántica y la pragmática de algunas expresiones de sinceridad del español actual. In Manuel Casado Velarde, Ramón González Ruiz, and Óscar Loureda Lamas (Eds.), *Estudios sobre lo metalingüístico* (en español). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 233-256.
- Bardzokas, C. (2004). Contrastive semantics of English "anger" and Modern Greek "thymos". *LAUD Working Papers: Series A, General and Theoretical Papers*. Paper No, A582.
- Baumgartner, J. (2001). Key cultural concepts in Australian Aboriginal languages as used in biblical translation. Paper presented at the Association of Pacific Rim universities 2nd Doctoral Students Conference held at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Published by the University of Southern California.
- Besemeres, M. (2007). Between *żal* and emotional blackmail: Ways of being in Polish and English. In M. Besemeres & A. Wierzbicka (Eds.), *Translating Lives: Living with Two Languages and Cultures* (pp. 128-138). St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.

- Besemeres, M & Wierzbicka, A. (2003). The meaning of the particle 'lah' in Singapore English. *Pragmatics and Cognition* 11(1), 3-38.
- Bosworth, J. (2010, March 21). An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online (T. N. Toller & Others, Eds.) Retrieved from <http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/>
- Bugenhagen, R. D. (2001). Emotions and the nature of persons in Mbula. In J. Harkins & A. Wierzbicka (Eds.), *Emotions in Crosslinguistic Perspective* (pp. 73-118). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 73-118.
- Chappell, H. (1994). Mandarin Semantic Primitives. In C. Goddard and A. Wierzbicka, (Eds.), *Semantic and Lexical Universals: Theory and Empirical Findings* (pp. 109-147). Amsterdam/Philadelphia. John Benjamins.
- Crowley, T. (1997). *An Introduction to historical linguistics*. New Zealand: Oxford University Press.
- Cruse, A. (2004). *Meaning in language: An Introduction to semantics and pragmatics*. Great Britain: Oxford University Press.
- Curnow, T. J. (1993). Semantics of Spanish causatives involving 'hacer'. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 13(2), 165-184.
- Davies, M. (2008-) The Corpus of Contemporary American English: 450 million words, 1990-present. Retrieved from <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>.
- . (2010-). The Corpus of Historical American English (COHA): 400+ million words, 1810-2009. Retrieved from <http://corpus.byu.edu/coha>
- Dawson, H. (2003). Defining the outcome of language contact: Old English and Old Norse. *OSUWPL* 57, Summer 2003, 40-57.

- Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, s.v. "gastlic," accessed March 7, 2011,
<http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca.erl.lib.byu.edu/doecorpus/>.
- Diller, A. (1994). Thai. In C. Goddard and A. Wierzbicka, (Eds.), *Semantic and Lexical Universals: Theory and Empirical Findings* (pp. 149-170). Amsterdam/Philadelphia. John Benjamins.
- Dineen, A. (1990). Shame/embarrassment in English and Danish. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 10(2), 217-229.
- Durst, U. (1999). BAD as a semantic primitive: Evidence from Biblical Hebrew. *Pragmatics & Cognition* 7(2), 375-403.
- Enfield, N. J. (2002). Combinatoric properties of natural semantic metalanguage expressions in Lao. In C. Goddard and A. Wierzbicka, (Eds.), *Meaning and Universal Grammar – Theory and Empirical Findings* (pp. 145-256). Vol. II. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Faraclas, N. A. (1996). Nigerian Pidgin. Great Britain: Routledge.
- Finkenstaedt, T., & Wolff, D. (1973). *Ordered profusion: Studies in dictionaries and the English lexicon*. Heidelberg: C. Winter.
- Gladkova, A. (2010). 'Sympathy', 'compassion', and 'empathy' in English and Russian: A linguistic and cultural analysis. *Culture & Psychology*.
- Goddard, C. (1998). Bad arguments against semantic primes. *Theoretical Linguistics*, 24 (2-3), 129-156.
- . (2002). The search for shared semantic core of all languages. In C. Goddard & A. Wierzbicka (Eds.), *Meaning and universal grammar: Theory and empirical findings* (Vol. 1) (pp. 5-40). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

- . (2011, January 24). NSM semantics in brief. Retrieved from <http://www.une.edu.au/bcss/linguistics/nsm/semantics-in-brief.php>
- Goddard, C., & Wierzbicka, A. (2007). Semantic primes and cultural scripts in language learning and intercultural communication. In F. Sharifian & G.B. Palmer (Eds.), *Applied cultural linguistics* (pp. 105-124). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Hasada, R. (2006). Cultural scripts: Glimpses into the Japanese emotion world. In C. Goddard (Ed.), *Ethnopragmatics: Understanding Discourse in Cultural Context* (pp. 171-198). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Hall, R. A. (1966). *Pidgin and creole languages*. United States of America: Cornell University Press.
- Hanna, R. (2011). Literacy, schooling, universities. In A. Galloway (Ed.), *Medieval English Culture* (pp. 172-194). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hock, H. H. (1996). *Language history, language change, and language relationship an introduction to historical and comparative linguistics*. Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Holm, J. A. (1988). *Pidgins and creoles*. (Vol. 1) Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.
- Hughes, G. (2000). *A History of English words*. Great Britain: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.
- Junker, M. & Blacksmith, L. (2006). Are there emotional universals? Evidence from the Native American language East Cree. *Culture & Psychology* 12(3), 275-303.
- Kidman A. (1993). *How to do things with four-letter words: A study of the semantics of swearing in Australia*. BA Hons thesis. University of New England.

- Kornacki, Pawel. (2001). Concepts of anger in Chinese. In J. Harkins & A. Wierzbicka (Eds.), *Emotions in crosslinguistic perspective* (pp. 259-292). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Knappe, G. (1999). The Rhetorical aspect of grammar teaching in Anglo-Saxon England. *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 17, Winter 1999, 1-34.
- Lee, J. (2005). A study of Natural Semantic Metalanguage in Korean – focused on the Korean verbs *kkay-da*, *ccogay-da* and *nanwu-da*. *Discourse and Cognition* 13(1), 221-242 [in Korean]
- Maher, B. (2000). *Le Gabbiette or The Caged Concepts of Human Thought*. An Italian version of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage. BA(Hons) thesis. The Australian National University.
- Martín Arista, J. (2006). Old English semantic primes: Substantives, determiners and quantifiers. *Atlantis* (0210-6124), 28 (2), 9-28.
- Matthews, P.H. (1991). *Morphology* (2nd ed.). Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.
- Menger, L. E. (1904). *The Anglo-Norman dialect: A Manual of its phonology and morphology*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Middle English dictionary online. (2001, December 18). Retrieved from <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>
- Mostovaja, A. D. (1997). Social roles as containers in Russian. *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics* XLI, 119-141.
- Onishi, M. (1994). Semantic primitives in Japanese. In C. Goddard and A. Wierzbicka, (Eds.), *Semantic and Lexical Universals: Theory and Empirical Findings* (pp. 361-386). Amsterdam/Philadelphia. John Benjamins.

Oxford English dictionary online (3rd ed.). (March 2011). Retrieved from

<http://www.oed.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/>

Peeters, B. (1994). Semantic and Lexical Universals in French. In C. Goddard & A.

Wierzbicka (Eds.), *Semantic and Lexical Universals: Theory and Empirical Findings* (pp. 423-444). Amsterdam/Philadelphia. John Benjamins.

---. (2004). Tall poppies and egalitarianism in Australian discourse: From key word to cultural value. *English World Wide* 25, pp. 1-25.

---. (2007). Australian perceptions of the weekend. Evidence from collocations and elsewhere. In P. Skandera (Ed.), *Phraseology and Culture in English* (pp.79-108). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Peters, R.A. (1968). *A Linguistic history of English*. USA: Houghton Mifflin.

Real Academia Española (23rd ed.). (n.d.) "plaza". Diccionario de la lengua española.

Retrieved from

http://buscon.rae.es/draeI/SrvltConsulta?TIPO_BUS=3&LEMA=plaza

Robinson, O. W. (1992). *Old English and its closest relatives a survey of the earliest Germanic languages*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Serjeantson, M.S. (1935). *A History of foreign words in English*. Great Britain: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd.

Sihler, A. L. (2000). *Language history an introduction*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: J. Benjamins.

Slocum, J. & Krause, T.B. (2009, March 18). Old Norse online: Base form dictionary.

Retrieved from <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/eieol/norol-BF-X.html>

- Stanwood, R. E. (1999). On the Adequacy of Hawai'i Creole English. PhD dissertation. University of Hawai'i.
- Stollznow, K. (2004). Whinger! Wowser! Wanker! Aussie English: Deprecatory language and the Australian ethos. In *Proceedings of the 2003 Conference of the Australian Linguistic Society*. Christo Moskovsky (Ed.)
- Tien, A. (2005). The Semantics of Children's Mandarin Chinese: The First Four Years. PhD thesis. University of New England.
- Todd, L. (1990). *Pidgins and creoles* (2nd ed.). Great Britain: Routledge.
- Travis, C. (1999). On the translatability of the subjunctive: Its use in the natural semantic metalanguage of Spanish. *Melbourne Papers in Linguistics* 18, pp. 81-96.
- . (2002a). La Metalengua Semántica Natural: The Natural Semantic Metalanguage of Spanish. In C. Goddard & A. Wierzbicka, (Eds.), *Meaning and Universal Grammar – Theory and Empirical Findings* (pp. 183-242). Vol. I. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- . (2002b). A semantic analysis of discourse markers in Colombian Spanish. PhD Thesis. LaTrobe University.
- . (2005). *Discourse Markers in Colombian Spanish: A Study in Polysemy*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- . (2006). The communicative realization of confianza and calor humano in Colombian Spanish. In C. Goddard (Ed.) *Ethnopragmatics: Understanding Discourse in Cultural Context* (pp.199-230). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 199-230.

- Trnavac, R. (2008). Identification and syntax of semantic prime MOMENT in Tarifyt Berber. In C. Goddard (Ed.), *Cross-Linguistic Semantics* (pp. 241-258). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Wei, L. (2009). In B. E. Bullock & A. J. Toribio (Eds.), *Linguistic code-switching* (pp. 270-288). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1997). *Understanding Cultures Through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, Japanese*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . (2006). *English: Meaning and culture*. United States of America: Oxford University Press.
- Wong, J. (2000). The Semantics of Singapore English. *Centre for Advanced Studies Research Papers Series 27*. Singapore: National University of Singapore.
- . (2004). Cultural scripts, ways of speaking and perceptions of personal autonomy: Anglo English vs. Singapore English. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 1(2), 231-248.
- Yoon, K. (2008). The Natural Semantic Metalanguage of Korean. In C. Goddard (Ed.), *Cross-Linguistic Semantics* (pp. 121-162). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Appendix

Table 11. Primes native to the English language (OED; see respective dictionary entries and their sections on etymology)

PRIME/ COMPONENT	FA DATE	ETYMOLOGICAL FORM(S)	PRIME/ COMPONENT	FA DATE	ETYMOLOGICAL FORM(S)
I	eOE	ich	DO	c825	dón, dóan, dóa, doe
THING	eOE	þing	WHERE	c825	hwær, hwor
BODY	eOE	bodig	HERE	c825	hér
OTHER	eOE	oþar, oþor, oþer	FAR	c825	feor(r)
ONE	eOE	aan, æn, ann	AFTER	a855	æfter
MANY	eOE	manig	SOME	c875	sum
THINK	eOE	þencan	TWO	c882	twegen
WORD	eOE	word	KIND	c888	gecynd
BE	eOE	béon, sindan, wessan	SAY	c888	secgan
LIVE	eOE	liban, libban, lybban	LONG	c888	lang
NOW	eOE	nu	SHORT	c888	sceort, scort
NEAR	eOE	neah	LITTLE	c893	lýtel
MORE	eOE	mara, mare	FEEL	c893	félan
BEFORE	OE	bi-foran	HEAR	c893	hýran
KNOW	OE	cnawan	TIME	c893	tíma
TRUE	OE	tréowe	YOU	c897	eow
FOR	OE	for(e)	WHEN	c900	hwanne, hwonne
ABOVE	IOE	abufan	ELSE	971	elles
ALL	a700	eal	AS	a1000	eal-swa
SMALL	c725	smæl	SOMETHING	c1000	sum þing(c), ðing
SIDE	c725	side	CAN	c1000	cunnan
WAY	c725	weg	MUCH	a1154	much(e), meth, mych(e)
HAVE	a800	habban, haban	SOMEWHERE	?c1200	sumhwær, sumwhare
IF	805	if, yf	LIKE	?c1200	liche, lyche, lich
GOOD	805- 831	gód, good	NOT	1299	not, nut, notte(e)
THIS	c825	þes, þeos, þis	SOMEONE	c1305	sum on, some one, someone
FEW	c825	feáwa	INSIDE	1504	inside
SEE	c825	séon			

Table 12. Foreign primes borrowed into English (OED, MED, Bosworth. See respective entries. Italics denote elements that are Anglo-Saxon in origin, rather than foreign.)

PRIME/ COMPONENT	FA DATE	LANGUAGE OF ORIGIN	ETYMOLOGICAL FORM(S)	WORD IN LANG OF ORIGIN
PART	OE	Latin	part	part-, pars
PLACE	OE	Post-classical Latin	plæce	platea
DIE	c1135	Old Norse	dien, day-e, degne, deyn	deyja
SAME	?c1200	Old Norse	same	same
WANT	?c1200	Old Norse	wanten	vanta
BAD	1203	uncertain	badd(e)	
VERY	c1250	Anglo- Norman	verrei, vari	verrai, verrey, veray
MOVE	c1275	Anglo- Norman	meef(e), meove	mover
TOUCH	1297	Old French	touchen	tochier, tuchier
PEOPLE	a1300	Old French	pople	pople, pueple
BIG	c1300	uncertain	big, beg(ge)	
BECAUSE	c1305	Old French	because, bycause, by cause	<i>be-cause</i>
MOMENT	a1382	Middle French	mohent, moment, moment(e)	moment
HAPPEN	1390	Old Norse	happene(n), hapnen, hepene	happ- <i>en</i>
MAYBE	a1400	Old French	may be, maybee, maybe	it may be (puet estre, put cel estre)
BELOW	c1400	Old Norse	bilooche	<i>bi-lag-r</i>