

# Historical Semantics and Cognition



# Historical Semantics and Cognition



Mouton de Gruyter (formerly Mouton, The Hague)  
is a Division of Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin

© Printed on acid-free paper  
which falls within  
the guidelines of the ANSI  
to ensure permanence and durability.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Historical semantics and cognition / edited by Andreas Blank,  
Peter Koch

p. cm. — (Cognitive linguistics research ; 13)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 3-11-016614-3 (cloth ; alk. paper)

1. Semantics, Historical — Psychological aspects. 2.  
Cognition. I. Blank, Andreas. II. Koch, Peter, 1951 — .  
III. Series.

P325.5.H57H48 1999

401'.43—dc21

99-32695

CIP

*Die Deutsche Bibliothek — Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

**Historical semantics and cognition** / ed. by Andreas Blank ; Pe-  
ter Koch. — Berlin ; New York : Mouton de Gruyter, 1999

(Cognitive linguistics research ; 13)

ISBN 3-11-016614-3

© Copyright 1999 by Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, D-10785 Berlin

All rights reserved, including those of translation into foreign languages. No part of this book  
may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical,  
including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without  
permission in writing from the publisher.

Printing: Werner Hildebrand, Berlin

Binding: Lüderitz & Bauer, Berlin

Printed in Germany

# Cognitive Linguistics Research

## 13

*Editors*

René Dirven

Ronald W. Langacker

John R. Taylor

Mouton de Gruyter  
Berlin · New York

# Historical Semantics and Cognition

*Edited by*  
Andreas Blank  
Peter Koch



Mouton de Gruyter  
Berlin · New York 1999

matic framework better than the papers originally presented in Berlin. A lot of work by Cinzia Cazzaro, Mary Copple, Angela Dorn, Cristina Fossaluzza, Keith Myrick, Eberhard Matt and Alexandra Twardy went into elaborating the decisive version of the book.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to all of the contributors for their comprehensive cooperation, to the editors of the *Cognitive Linguistics Research* series and to Anke Beck of Mouton de Gruyter.

Marburg / Tübingen

Andreas Blank / Peter Koch

# Contents

Introduction: historical semantics and cognition <i>Andreas Blank and Peter Koch</i>	1
---	---

## Section I: Theories and Models

Cognitive semantics and structural semantics <i>John R. Taylor</i>	17
---	----

Diachronic semantics: towards a unified theory of language change? <i>Helmut Lüdtke</i>	49
---	----

Why do new meanings occur? A cognitive typology of the motivations for lexical semantic change <i>Andreas Blank</i>	61
---	----

Diachronic prototype semantics. A digest <i>Dirk Geeraerts</i>	91
---	----

Cognitive semantics and diachronic semantics: the values and evolution of classes <i>François Rastier</i>	109
---	-----

## Section II: Descriptive categories

Losing control: grammaticization, subjectification, and transparency <i>Ronald W. Langacker</i>	147
---	-----

The rhetoric of counter-expectation in semantic change: a study in subjectification <i>Elizabeth Closs Traugott</i>	177
Synecdoche as a cognitive and communicative strategy <i>Brigitte Nerlich and David D. Clarke</i>	197
Laws of thought, knowledge and lexical change <i>Beatrice Warren</i>	215
 <b>Section III: Case studies</b>	
Intensifiers as targets and sources of semantic change <i>Ekkehard König and Peter Siemund</i>	237
Cognitive ease and lexical borrowing: the recategorization of body parts in Romance <i>Thomas Krefeld</i>	259
Cognitive aspects of semantic change and polysemy: the semantic space HAVE/BE <i>Peter Koch</i>	279
 List of contributors	 307
Index	309



# **Introduction: historical semantics and cognition**

**Andreas Blank and Peter Koch**

## **1. General survey**

Cognitive linguistics has had considerable influence on the development of theories and methods of description in semantics (cf. Lakoff 1987; Langacker 1987/90; Taylor [1989] 1995; Kleiber 1990; Ungerer/Schmid 1996). Nowadays, even manuals of historical linguistics refer to issues in cognitive research relevant to problems of diachrony.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, some of the favourite subjects of cognitive semantics (metaphor, metonymy, polysemy etc.) deal precisely with the synchrony/diachrony-interface. In our opinion, investigation of diachronic problems can, in turn, sharpen our view for fundamental semantic processes and should therefore be able to advance theorizing in cognitive linguistics. In this sense, historical semantics is an ideal testing ground for semantic models and theories, as cognition and our basic human conceptual system are highly involved in lexical and grammatical change. The authors of this volume approach the synchrony/diachrony-interface from various theoretical points of views and apply or develop different conceptions of cognitive linguistics.

**1.1.** The first group of articles deals with fundamental theoretical issues in synchronic and especially diachronic linguistic description.

**John Taylor** discusses the foundations and basic issues of cognitive semantics in contrast with European structural semantics, as it is paradigmatically represented by the work of Eugenio Coseriu. The central point of this controversy is the question of whether it is useful and efficient to distinguish encyclopedic semantic structures from internal, language-specific semantic structures.

On the ground of his more general model of linguistic change (cf. Lüdtke 1980; 1986), **Helmut Lüdtke** studies a number of cases of semantic change in lexicon and grammar, in order to demonstrate the cognitive linkage of the different levels of language on which change can occur.

**Andreas Blank** discusses traditional classifications of the motivations for lexical semantic change and develops a comprehensive typology of these motivations on the basis of recent issues in cognitive as well as in modern diachronic linguistics.

**Dirk Geeraerts** focuses on two major topics in his "diachronic prototype semantics" (cf. Geeraerts 1997): i) the mapping of diachronic semantic processes for several aspects of the prototypical structure of categories (e.g. typicality, family resemblance, blurred edges, importance of encyclopedical knowledge), and ii) the typology of motives for lexical change based on speaker-oriented or hearer-oriented strategies aimed at increasing either communicative efficiency or expressivity.

**François Rastier** reflects upon the epistemological status of the definition of a prototype as the "best" representative of a category – especially with regard to the valorization of the prototype by the speakers. He interprets certain types of semantic change as a displacement of "evaluative thresholds" dependent upon social values and practices.

1.2. The second group of contributions develops categories for the linguistic description of diachronic processes.

By analyzing examples taken from different word classes, **Ronald Langacker** describes several semantic processes whose common denominator is the gradual change from physical movement to a merely virtual movement in the speaker's mind (e.g. Engl. *The mailbox is across the street; I'm going to sing*). The resulting attenuation of the semantic aspect [control] in the meaning of linguistic entities is what Langacker calls "subjectification".

The same term is defined in quite a different way by **Elizabeth Traugott** in her study of the semantic development of Engl. *in fact*:

“subjectification” in her understanding is the rise of a new sense from pragmatic inferences in typical discourses (“pragmatic strengthening”). In contrast with the older sense, the new one focuses on the subject of a discourse because either subjective valuations are emphasized or because the new sense has acquired a pragmatic function at the speech-act level itself.

**Brigitte Nerlich** and **David Clarke** elaborate a number of criteria to distinguish the traditional, but usually not well defined trope “synecdoque” from “metonymy” and “metaphor”. They further explore the cognitive background of synecdoque, as they have defined it, as well as its rhetoric, pragmatic and semantic potential in synchrony and diachrony.

**Beatrice Warren** introduces a model for the contextualization of word-meanings based on semantic and encyclopedic knowledge. On the ground of this model, she develops three major types of semantic innovation called “novel hyponymic senses”, “non-literal senses” and “appended senses”.

**1.3.** In the third group, theoretical options and categories related to cognitive approaches are applied to describe selected diachronic phenomena.

**Ekkehard König** and **Peter Siemund** explore the main cognitive strategies for conceptualizing and verbalizing “intensifiers” in a great number of languages as well as the semantic development of intensifiers into genuine reflexive pronouns.

Analyzing the changes in conceptualization of the human body and the limbs of the body from Latin to Romance, **Thomas Krefeld** retraces the passage from the Latin model with “overlapping” denominations to a clear-cut torso-extremities-model in the Romance languages. The latter seems more natural from a point of view of Gestalt theory.

Starting from basic conceptual distinctions in the “semantic space” HAVE/BE, **Peter Koch** detects typical paths of change in this area. Certain patterns of metonymy, metaphor and semantic extension seem to occur polygenetically in different languages and thus

reveal modes of how we can conceptualize fundamental relations like POSSESSION, EXISTENCE, and LOCATION.

In each of the contributions to this volume, fundamental topics of cognitive linguistics (cf. section 2) are in some way connected to recent issues in diachronic linguistics or pragmatics (cf. section 3).

## 2. Cognitive models and approaches

2.1. European structural semantics has pleaded for a strict theoretical separation of *encyclopedic knowledge* from *language-specific semantic features* and has determined the latter to be the only object of linguistic semantics. In contrast to this, cognitive linguistics has strongly emphasized the importance of encyclopedic knowledge for semantics. Indeed, certain phenomena that are relevant to linguistic theory and description cannot be explained on the level of intralinguistic regularities as, e.g., the “associative anaphor” in (1), which the hearer can only interpret against the background of his world knowledge:

- (1) *We arrived at the village. Unfortunately, the church was closed.*

The papers brought together in this volume show that it is necessary to partially or even entirely anchor diachronic studies in encyclopedic knowledge. While some authors do not discuss this problem explicitly, others claim that semantic knowledge is exclusively extralinguistic (→ Langacker and esp. → Taylor).<sup>2</sup> → Geeraerts clearly gives priority to the encyclopedic knowledge, but nevertheless recognizes the relevance of intralinguistic semantic facts. → Blank emphasizes the overall importance of encyclopedic knowledge for semantic change, but also accounts for changes induced by intralinguistic constellations. On the one hand, → Krefeld highlights diverging segmentations of the human body in different languages

(Latin vs. Romance), on the other hand, his analysis is rooted in fundamental anthropological and gestaltist categories. While observing very accurately intralinguistic semantic factors, → Rastier nevertheless stresses the importance of social values for semantic change.

In our opinion, linguists should not renounce completely the distinction between encyclopedic aspects of meaning and intralinguistic semantic features. It is true that intralinguistic features are not *substantially* different from encyclopedic information, but they have acquired a *categorially* different status, insofar as they reflect semantic oppositions that in some languages are expressed by a simple lexeme, while other languages either have recourse only to a complex word or a paraphrase or even simply cannot realize them at all.<sup>3</sup> Divergent semantic structures of this kind must be interpreted as emanating from cognitive constellations, because the diversity of pragmatic and social relevance and the resulting differences in the *profiling* of a concept determine the linguistic strategies used by the speakers of one language. Thus, distinguishing intralinguistic from encyclopedic knowledge opens a new field of research to cognitive semantics, esp. with regard to cross-linguistic (and to “cross-cultural”) studies.

**2.2.** The verbalizing of extralinguistic entities is always related to the problem of *categorization*. According to the framework of cognitive linguistics, categories have a *prototypical* internal structure and their external hierarchical relations show a different cognitive profiling (superordinate/basic/subordinate level). It now appears that diachronic semantic processes often involve questions of categorization and of prototypicality (cf. Geeraerts 1997; Koch 1995, 1996; Blank 1997). For example, the phenomenon of semantic change can be understood as the immediate corollary of the blurred boundaries of prototypically organized categories (→ Geeraerts). From a different perspective, prototypical conceptual constellations are viewed as necessary – but not sufficient – conditions for certain types of semantic changes (→ Blank). Indeed, as demonstrated by → Koch, metonymies and metaphors operate on a prototypical view of source

and/or target domains. While most work in cognitive linguistics takes prototypicality for granted, → Rastier raises the question of how new prototypes in language emerge.

**2.3.** Information relevant to meaning organizes not only in categories – be they prototypically structured or not –, but also in conceptual networks, i.e., *frames*, *scenarios*, *domains* etc. This is another important point for historical semantics, because semantic change can derive from altered perspectivization, profiling or highlighting of concepts or conceptual aspects inside these cognitive networks. These processes play an important role in → Langacker's work, esp. with regard to his conception of subjectification (cf. section 2.4.) as well as in the interpretation of changes based on contiguity in → Blank, → Traugott, → König/Siemund and → Koch. In contrast to frame and scenario, the notion of "domain" is rather blurred, as it is used indifferently to describe structures based on contiguity and taxonomic relations (cf. the terminological distinctions made in Taylor 1995: 83-87). This terminological inaccuracy can even lead to explicit rejection of the term "domain" for the description of semantic change (→ Warren).

Many studies in cognitive linguistics have emphasized the role of the *human body* as a fundamental reference point of cognition. In a diachronic perspective, this frame has a double function. First, if we take the body as a target domain, we can find examples for innovative denominations of body parts, which are of great cognitive interest, and we can even find evidence for a change of the conceptualization of the body itself (→ Krefeld). Secondly, the body also serves as a source domain for diachronic processes and for grammaticalization, e.g., the creation of intensifying adverbs out of co-referential pronouns, which themselves derive from words for body parts (→ König/Siemund).

**2.4.** Specific properties of prototypically organized categories and particular conceptual structures build the cognitive background of semantic change. When it comes to a concrete semantic transfer,

speakers intentionally or accidentally perceive or reinterpret a given concept *in relation to* another concept. The question is which types of associative links can relate the source to the target domain and how the resulting linguistic processes of semantic transfer can be described systematically.

This observation leads us directly to figures of speech like metaphor, metonymy, synecdoque or ellipsis and some others whose history goes back to antique rhetoric. On the basis of the work done in cognitive linguistics, these tropes are now considered as notions of theoretical linguistics, instead of tools of practical rhetoric, and have to be submitted to systematic analysis and definition. The contributions of → Nerlich/Clarke, → Warren and, partially, of → Lüdtkke are going in this direction; → Blank shows some typical correlations between certain types of associations and the motivations for semantic change.

A highly interesting aspect in a large number of papers is the great, if not to say, outstanding relevance of *conceptual contiguity* ("metonymy"). It is fundamental for the studies of → König/Siemund, and – together with metaphor and semantic extension – it also plays a central role in → Koch. Seen from this perspective, even "subjectification" (according to both → Langacker's and → Traugott's understanding) can be completely reduced to the profiling of concepts against a background that is constituted by the respective frames or contexts.

### 3. Recent issues in diachronic linguistics

In the last two decades, diachronic linguistics have been strongly influenced by pragmatics, a tendency that has also marked the present volume.

First of all, we note that linguists have "rediscovered" the importance of the speaking subject, but the hearer's role has also been reconsidered. Thus, language as a means of self-presentation and expression of subjectivity (→ Traugott) is coming into view. Speaker-

and hearer-oriented linguistic strategies (→ Geeraerts) and, in a more general way, the importance of expressivity and efficiency in lexical change are emphasized (→ Lüdtke; → Geeraerts; → Blank; → Nerlich/Clarke). Finally, one encounters the phenomenon of the “valorization” of words and concepts (→ Rastier) and the process of “pragmatic strengthening” (→ Traugott; cf. also König in several other publications).

The greatest progress in diachronic linguistic theory during the last years has been the conception of language change as an “invisible-hand process” (cf. detailedly Keller 1994). The theory of the “invisible hand” provides us with an explanation for language change that combines a framework taken from pragmatics (e.g., the speaker- or hearer-oriented strategies as mentioned above) with cognitive regularities of linguistic innovation (see section 2.), which are corroborated by the interpretation of empirical data (→ Lüdtke; → König/Siemund; → Koch). In this context, it has been discovered that many diachronic processes are unidirectional and therefore normally are not reversible.

#### 4. Grammaticalization

During the last two decades, grammaticalization has been a major line of study in diachronic linguistics. In as much as grammaticalization constitutes both a formal and a semantic process, linguists have inevitably resorted to concepts such as “semantic bleaching”, subjectification, metaphor and metonymy (cf. Heine, Claudi and Hünemeyer 1991; Hopper and Traugott 1993). Therefore, exploring the “grammaticalization channels” and “scales” (Lehmann 1995: 25) opens a broad field of study to cognitive linguistics. Conceptual mechanisms involved in grammaticalization are explored by → Langacker (who uses the term “grammaticization”), → Traugott and → König/Siemund.

Insofar as grammaticalization is typically unidirectional (cf. → Lüdtke, → Traugott, → König/Siemund), it serves a good example



for invisible-hand processes. Once a word or a syntagmatic construction is conventionalized as a grammatical rule there seems to be no way back to the lexicon.

## 5. Two perspectives in semantic investigation: semasiology and onomasiology

Traditional synchronic and diachronic semantics distinguish between two complementary perspectives on the objects of investigation: **semasiology** and **onomasiology**. The present volume includes studies in both directions (excepted Taylor's contribution, where general problems of semantic theory are discussed). The semasiological perspective prevails or is exclusively chosen in the following papers:

Traugott investigates the "development of meanings associated with a form" (p. 181) on the example of Engl. *in fact*. In other words: the conception of "subjectification" that is developed and illustrated in her paper is semasiological in nature.

Langacker considers "an expression's meaning" as "a function of both the *content* it evokes and the particular *construal* it imposes on that content" (p. 149). Thus, "subjectification", as Langacker defines it, is also a semasiological process.

Investigating the relation of the types of lexical change with contextual factors, Warren starts with the following clearly semasiological question: "in what ways can dictionary meanings be modified to yield new meanings?" (p. 224).

Nerlich and Clarke focus on synecdoque and define it as an autonomous, semasiologically described trope that is clearly distinct from metonymy and metaphor.

Geeraerts sees "changes in the extension of a single sense of a lexical item ... as expansion of the prototypical centre of that extension" (p. 93) and thus makes use of a semasiological conception of prototypes.<sup>4</sup>

Other articles variously combine aspects of the semasiological and of the onomasiological approach.