# Introduction

Zhengdao Ye and Helen Bromhead

This collective volume is dedicated to Anna Wierzbicka, one of the most influential and innovative linguists of her generation, and one of the most prolific scholars in humanities and social sciences.[1] Throughout her six-decade career, Anna has pursued a meaning-based approach to linguistics. Building on Leibniz's idea of 'the alphabet of human thoughts', she has identified basic shared human concepts and words (see Table A1, Semantic primes, in Appendix). This research has formed the foundations of the internationally recognised Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach to meaning—a versatile tool for exploring 'big questions' concerning the diversity and universals of people's experience in the world. Her work spans a number of disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, cognitive science, philosophy and religious studies, as well as her home base of linguistics. This research has inspired generations of scholars to explore the nexus between language, culture and cognition.

In this volume, Anna Wierzbicka's former students, old and current colleagues and 'kindred spirits' engage with her ideas. They continue their engagement (including argument) with diverse aspects of Wierzbicka's work, from ethnosyntax to cross-cultural pragmatics, and from social categories to reported speech. The deep humanistic perspective, wide-ranking themes and interdisciplinary nature of Wierzbicka's research are fully reflected in the contributions.

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1    As of April 2019, Google Scholar tells us that Wierzbicka has 35,182 citations, and that her h-index is 76 and her i10-index 260. Anna Wierzbicka is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences. She is also a Fellow of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a Fellow of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The volume is divided into two parts. Part I focuses on the NSM approach. The contributors are either Anna Wierzbicka's former PhD students, grand-students or those that have been mentored by Anna. They are currently working in universities across Australia, Europe and Asia.

The first two chapters of Part I focus on lexicogrammatical meaning: in Chapter 1, Cliff Goddard illustrates NSM's approach to verb semantics by offering a detailed case analysis of the English verb *climb*; in Chapter 2, Felix Ameka and Deborah Hill compare the meanings of verbs describing 'opening' events in two languages—Ewe, a Kwa language of Western Africa, and Longgu, an Oceanic language of Solomon Islands. The next three chapters illustrate the enduring interests of NSM scholars in cultural keywords and cross-cultural pragmatics. Bert Peeters unpacks the meaning of the Dutch cultural keyword *gezellig*, roughly translated as 'convivial, cosy, fun' (Chapter 3); Carsten Levisen takes on 'royal semantics' by offering an original analysis of 'the Danish *De*' (Chapter 4). His analysis shows how the NSM approach offers a tool for high-resolution semantic and discursive analysis of address terms and for understanding 'relational grammars'; and in Chapter 5, Jock Wong extends his work on cultural keywords in the colloquial variety of Singaporean English (commonly known as Singlish) to a new expression that has become popular among young Singaporean, the interjection *bojio* (literally meaning 'why am I not invited'). Chapters 6 and 7 are both concerned with the semantics of nouns in Australian English: while Helen Bromhead focuses on extreme weather and climate event words, in particular, *bushfire*, Zhengdao Ye undertakes a detailed, corpus-assisted analysis of the distinctive meaning of *migrant* in Australian English. Both of these chapters adopt a corpus-assisted approach to meaning analysis. Chapter 8 by Anna Gladkova investigates the meanings of two Russian verbs expressing visual aesthetic appreciation—*nagljadet'sja* 'to look at someone/something to complete satisfaction/feast one's eyes on' and *ljubovat'sja*, as a means to explore the Russian folk conceptions of aesthetics. The ensuing trio of chapters all concern Romance languages: in Chapter 9, Gian Marco Farese presents a semantic analysis of the Italian *carità*, roughly translated as 'charity/act of love', arguing for the influence of Christian values on Italian language and culture; in Chapter 10, Mónica Aznárez-Mauleón focuses on the semantics of two loanwords in Navarrese Spanish, the noun *chirrinta* and the verb *ciriquiar*, which possibly have their roots in the Basque language and which are specific to the Spanish variety spoken in Navarre and generally not included in dictionaries of the Spanish language; in Chapter 11, Zuzanna

Bułat Silva investigates how the category of TIME relates to the domain of emotion by exploring the meaning of the Portuguese culture-specific *saudade*, a rough equivalent of English longing, and comparing it with the meanings of their counterparts in Spanish, Polish and Chinese. In the final Chapter of Part I (Chapter 12), Yuko Asano-Cavanagh re-evaluates previous studies of the Japanese discourse particle *no da*, and offers new analysis to capture its meanings, which are often thought to be too elusive to pin down. Together with Jock Wong's chapter on Singlish interjection, it not only attests to NSM researchers' interest in lesser-studied word classes, but also demonstrates the effectiveness of NSM in elucidating the meanings of particles.

Anna Wierzbicka's contributions to scholarship are also appreciated by those who work with diverse frameworks. Part II contains chapters by some of Wierzbicka's former and present colleagues at The Australian National University, and selected scholars who have engaged (and argued) with Anna's work continuously. The contributors explore diverse topics relating to meaning, life and culture, and directly connect with her work from their own intellectual perspectives. These perspectives include anthropological linguistics, syntax, cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, intercultural pragmatics and translation studies, as well as other approaches to semantics.

Part II opens with two chapters on Australian Indigenous languages. They engage with Wierzbicka's work on personhood constructs, such as 'mind', and on kinship, respectively: while Frances Morphy and Howard Morphy's chapter (Chapter 13) focuses on personhood terms in Yolngu Matha, Harold Koch, in Chapter 14, examines a largely unnoticed aspect of kinship terminology consistently appearing in widely separated regions of Indigenous Australia. In Chapter 15, John Haiman uses Wierzbicka's work on direct and indirect speech as a springboard for a discussion of the iconicity of eye contact in sign languages. In Chapter 16, Annabelle Mooney examines semantic accounts of 'game' by comparing some of its uses in representations and discussions of economic and financial activity with Wierzbicka's account of games. While pointing out the commonalities of Cognitive Linguistics and the NSM approach in their humanistic endeavour, John Newman, in Chapter 17, further argues for the individual to be more visible in linguistic analysis. In Chapter 18, Avery Andrews proposes NSM-based definitions of parts of speech (specifically, nouns, verbs and adjectives), and discusses their advantages and problems encountered. Both Chapters 19 and 20 are concerned with verb semantics: Ulrike Mosel's chapter deals with CUT-verbs

of the Oceanic language Teop, spoken in Papua New Guinea's Bougainville, treating it to a critical study of collecting and analysing study of a language documentation project; Andrew Pawley's chapter compares the way sensing events are depicted in English and in Kalam, a language of the Trans New Guinea family. The next two chapters engage with Anna's work on meaning, culture and intercultural communication in Russian. In Chapter 21, Alexei Shmelev investigates language-specific words in Russian by using parallel corpora. Tatiana Larina's chapter in Chapter 22 demonstrates how the values of a culture and its communicative styles are closely related, by contrasting the idea of 'sense of privacy' reflected in English and that of 'sense of elbow' reflected in Russian.

In the Acknowledgements of her book *Imprisoned in English: The Hazards of English as a Default Language*, Wierzbicka writes:

> I am also indebted to some more distant interlocutors who over the years have engaged in controversy with me and thus pushed and provoked me to sharpen my ideas and arguments … We do need intellectual friends, but we also need our opponents, detractors, and bêtes noires. They can all fuel the fire of what philosopher Peter Goldie (editor of the Oxford Handbook on Philosophy of Emotions) calls 'affect in intellectual activity', and consequently increase our passion and motivation. (Wierzbicka 2014: ix–x)

The final two chapters engage with Wierzbicka's work in that 'controversial' spirit which she values. In Chapter 23, the semanticist Keith Allan offers a detailed critique of her (1984) semantics for *cup*; and in Chapter 24, two anthropological linguists David Nash and David Wilkins critically respond to Wierzbicka and Goddard's (2018) paper on 'Talking about our bodies and their parts in Warlpiri'.

The topics of the volume are indeed diverse, from linguistics and anthropology to psychology. So are the languages covered. The common thread running through all the chapters in the volume is the primacy of meaning to the understanding of language and culture, and the diversity and universality in language and culture, the underlying themes that have informed Wierzbicka's lifelong work. Her productivity is astonishing. Rather than offering a full list of her 400 or so publications, we list below a selection of the work that the contributors to this volume discuss.

# Selection of Wierzbicka texts discussed

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# Appendix

**Table A1. Semantic primes (English exponents).**

| | |
|---|---|
| I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY | substantives |
| KINDS, PARTS | relational substantives |
| THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE | determiners |
| ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW | quantifiers |
| GOOD, BAD | evaluators |
| BIG, SMALL | descriptors |
| KNOW, THINK, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR | mental predicates |
| SAY, WORDS, TRUE | speech |
| DO, HAPPEN, MOVE | actions, events, movement |
| BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING) | location, existence, specification |
| (IS) MINE | possession |
| LIVE, DIE | life and death |
| WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT | time |
| WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCH | place |
| NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF | logical concepts |
| VERY, MORE | augmentor, intensifier |
| LIKE | similarity |

Notes: Exponents of primes can be polysemous; that is, they can have other, additional meanings.

Exponents of primes may be words, bound morphemes, or phrasemes.

They can be formally, that is, morphologically, complex.

They can have combinatorial variants or allolexes (indicated with ~).

Each prime has well-specified syntactic (combinatorial) properties.

Source: Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014a).