

Natural semantic metalanguage (NSM)

I. Wierzbicka (1990) proposes the following definitions for the words *afraid*, *terrified*, and *frightened*. Can you match the definitions to the adjectives? Discuss your reasons for how you matched the definitions with the words.

- (1) Sometimes, a person feels something like this
 something bad can happen
 I don't want this
 I don't know what I can do
 because of this, this person feels something bad
 X feels like this
- (2) Sometimes, a person feels something like this
 something bad can happen now
 I don't want this
 because of this, I would want to do something
 I don't know what I can do
 because of this, this person feels something bad
 X feels like this
- (3) Sometimes, a person feels something like this
 something very bad is happening
 because of this, something very bad can happen to me now
 I don't want this
 because of this, I would want to do something
 I can't do anything
 because of this, this person feels something very bad
 X feels like this

II. Which word is defined by the following explication?

People of one kind

all people are people of this kind for some time, they can't be people of this kind for a long time
 when someone is someone of this kind, it is like this:

this someone's body is small

this someone can do some things, this someone can't do many other things

because of this, if other people don't do good things for this someone at many times,
 bad things can happen to this someone

II. The proponents of an abstractionist view on word meaning start out from the assumption that every word has just one (possibly maximally abstract) meaning. Given that the different senses of polysemous words are related to each other (as opposed to the unrelated meanings of homonymous words), we would therefore expect it to be easier to formulate definitions for polysemous words. Formulate a necessary-and-sufficient definition for the verb *to risk* on the basis of your intuition.

III. Now that you have tried to define *to risk*, have a look at the following corpus examples of *to risk* and see whether your definition covers them all.

I must decide whether to	risk₁	my job by telling you things I should not tell you.
I couldn't	risk₂	believing in you.
she kept a guard on her tongue [...], determined not to	risk₃	another quarrel.
Nor was I prepared to	risk₁	Britain's competitive position in Europe
Only [...] once she had made a few allies would she	risk₂	stirring up so sensitive a subject
Mothers over age 30	risk₃	some hazards in electing to have another child

IV. Try to define *to risk* using only the semantic primitives posited by Wierzbicka and Goddard.

V. Goddard (1998:34) quotes the following definitions of *to complain* from two dictionaries (changed for expository reasons).

Longman Dictionary

- 1) v [I about, to); T+that; əbj] to express feelings of annoyance, dissatisfaction, unhappiness, etc.
 - 2) say in an annoyed, unhappy, dissatisfied way
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Oxford Paperback

- 1) to say that one is dissatisfied, to protest that something is wrong
 - 2) to state that one is suffering from a pain
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Try to define *to complain* in the NSM approach.

VI. Try to define *to lie* using only the semantic primitives posited by Wierzbicka and Goddard.