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Book Review

**Studies in Ethnopragmatics, Cultural Semantics, and
Intercultural Communication: Ethnopragmatics and Semantic
Analysis, Lauren Sadow, Bet Peeters & Kerry Mullan (Eds.)
(2019), Springer, ISBN 978-981-32-9982-5**

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1. Introduction

The current book, entitled *Studies in Ethnopragmatics, Cultural Semantics, and Intercultural Communication: Ethnopragmatics and Semantic Analysis*, aims to survey cultural and intercultural semantics and communication. The purpose of the book is to provide an overview of ethnopragmatics and

humor in conversations, and simultaneously, it emphasizes on semantic analysis. It was published to celebrate Cliff Goddard's career and mark his contribution to the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach. The theory of ethnopragmatics has been under development during the last thirty years in the work of Wierzbicka (2005, 2006a, 2010) and later also Goddard (2004, 2005, 2006, 2010).

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The book highlights cross-cultural and cross-linguistic semantics, suitable for advanced level learners. However, it reached linguistic boundaries in ethnopsychology, anthropology, history, political science, and ethics. It was edited by three scholars in the field of linguistics, who are all university professors in Australia. This book is the first in a three-volume set that celebrates the achievements and career of Goddard who is known as a pioneer of the NSM approach in linguistics. The significance of the book is the way in which the authors make everything effective, clear, and exceedingly practical to any reader by bringing appendices at the end of the chapters. Additionally, it probes conversational and ethnopragmatic humor, with a further emphasis on semantic analysis.

The empirical contributions of the book add to a long prior tradition of descriptive and analytical work on culture-specific metapragmatic principles which can be seen to account for cultural variation in speech practice (Bauman & Sherzer, 1974; Duranti, 2001, 2004; Gumperz, 1982; Gumperz & Hymes, 1972, 1986). Often considered as one of the most fully practical, developed, and comprehensive approaches to cross-cultural and cross-linguistic semantics, NSM is on the basis of the evidence that there is a small core of universal meanings that can be expressed in all languages. It has been used for cultural and linguistic analysis in such diverse fields as semantics, cross-cultural communication, language teaching, humor studies, and applied linguistics, and has gone far beyond the boundaries of linguistics into ethnopsychology, anthropology, history, political science, the medical humanities, and ethics. Berger and Luckmann (1991, as cited in Mendes de Oliveira, 2015) stated that language is “coercive in its effect on individuals; that is, the language used in the primary socialization will have long lasting effects on individuals even when they get in contact with other languages and cultures” (p.53). It is worth mentioning that this book is of high appeal to a wide audience of scholars and postgraduate students in linguistics and related fields. The book is comprised of twelve chapters in three parts. Apart from the introductory chapter, section one consists of two parts: part one, called *Ethno-pragmatics*, consists of six chapters; part two, *Semantic Analysis*, contains another four. Part one includes six chapters (3-

8). These six chapters deal with the examples of different concepts, and a broad range of areas in which NSM has been used in scholarly research is addressed.

In accordance with the principles underlying ethnopragmatics as defined by Goddard, the six chapters in this section all approach interactional practices from a nemic perspective. Some are contrastive studies (Farese, 2018, Wakefield et al., 2017), while others describe a single language culture: Persian (Farsi); Australian English (Haugh & Weinglass, 2018); and Vietnamese. One of the chapters does not employ NSM, but is still thoroughly aware of the usefulness of an ethnopragmatic approach.

Part two includes four chapters (9-12). These chapters take pragmatic concerns into account and their various categorizations. Ethnopragmatics and conversational touches of humor are explored, as well. Understandably, given the main thrust of Goddard’s work, ethnopragmatics is also an important component of volume two, while volume three focuses on Minimal English. All volumes contain a list of Goddard’s publications to date, and part three includes Goddard’s list of publications.

2. Chapters 1 and 2: An Introduction to NSM Approach

The first two chapters are dedicated to an introduction to NSM approach and endorse the NSM approach in linguistics. The authors, Peeters, Sadow, and Mullan, have mixed their innovative engagement with natural semantic metalanguage and ethnopragmatics, incorporating additional methodologies (Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach) and analytical tools. Chapter two, written by Sadow and Mullan, entitled *A Brief Introduction to the NSM Approach*, looks at the fundamentals of the NSM approach, ethnopragmatics, and cultural scripts, and Minimal English, and afterwards contextualizes and describes the individual papers.

3. Chapter 3: Condolences in Cantonese and English: What People Say and Why Utilizes the Ethno-Pragmatics Approach

Chapter three probes the cultural-based knowledge that guides Anglo-English and Cantonese speakers when offering condolence

routines. The data came from the existence of discourse completion tasks, cultural key phrases, and the authors' native-speaker intuitions. Furthermore, cultural scripts are there to account for the linguistic contrasts in Cantonese vs. English condolence routines. However, a key difference was identified in the purpose and focus of the two routines: for Cantonese speakers, the focus is on expressing concern for the health and well-being of the bereaved, while in English, the emphasis is on showing sadness for the bereaved's loss. As Wakefield and Itakura (2017) stated, knowledge of this contrast would help individuals respond appropriately to speakers of these two languacultures in such sensitive contexts.

4. Chapter 4: Ethnopragmatics of English Understatement and Italian Exaggeration: Clashing Cultural Scripts for the Expression of Personal Opinions

Chapter four is thoroughly concerned with the theory of cultural scripts to pinpoint the differences in the expression of personal opinions between English and Italian and to show how scripts can be used for cross-cultural training effectively. Also, this chapter is a contrastive study with a practical application. Farese (2018) represents a cultural semantic analysis of the differences in the ways that personal opinions tend to be expressed in Italian and English, namely through understatement and exaggeration, respectively. Following a presentation of these two concepts in both cultures, Farese (2018) utilizes cultural scripts to highlight these differences, claiming that such communicative styles can lead to cases of miscommunication in cross-cultural interactions. While keen to point out that these cultural scripts do not prescribe ways of speaking, Farese (2018) shows how they are effective tools for cross-cultural training for language learners and for cross-cultural encounters.

5. Chapter 5: Ethnopragmatics of HāzerJavābi, a Valued Speech Practice in Persian, Introduces the Practice

Chapter five offers some contemporary examples of ready response, i.e., hāzerjavābi, and pays attention to differences in similar-but-different speech practices in English and some other languages. The analytical framework and other issues are discussed in this chapter

thoroughly. It is one of the few pieces of research to apply an ethnopragmatic approach to Persian. The author illustrates the practice by the use of a number of contemporary and classical instances, indicating how it is similar to a number of speech practices in other languages, such as English. The author, Reza Arab, represents a historical and cultural contextualization of ready response and explains the concept and its cultural significance. Afterwards, he provides a cultural script for the practice, along with the required elements of the ready response.

6. Chapter 6: The Great Australian Pastime: Pragmatic and Semantic Perspectives on Taking the Piss

Chapter six deals with the question of whether "taking the piss" may be best approached as a type of semantic explication or cultural script, and what the consequences of framing it as one or other might be for study on the role of humor in social interaction amongst English speakers of Australia. Haugh and Weinglass (2018) mixed pragmatic and semantic approaches to help us realize how taking the piss is achieved in daily social interaction, and what accomplishing it may mean to (Anglo-) Australians. They indicated that not only can cultural scripts and semantic explications pinpoint the tendency in pragmatics to label phenomena without adequate consideration of what such terms actually mean but also provide tools for analyzing what is going on from the participants' perspective. In addition, the authors stated that pragmatics can inform the formulation of cultural scripts by providing a strong empirical foundation for interactional practices not always accessible through a semantic analysis alone. They proposed that focusing on meta-pragmatic uses of expressions like taking the piss in an interaction could help reveal what is meant by the expression and what it is doing in that specific situated interaction.

7. Chapter 7: Hierarchy in the Cultural Logic of Vietnamese Interaction: An Ethnopragmatic Perspective

The focus of chapter seven is on a project in the ethnopragmatics of Vietnamese, and it reveals interesting aspects of Vietnamese pragmatics. Vo shows how *thứ-bậc* is different from its counterparts in other cultures since it is

commonly conceived of in terms of the relative age difference (divided into three levels). The author utilizes folk sayings and proverbs as linguistic evidence for the communicative virtues and normative values underpinning the cultural logic of interactions. Cultural scripts for *thứ-bậc*, its culturally important constituent of politeness *lễ-phép* (respectfulness), and the norms and skills are provided, too. Vo declared that even though the concepts shown in the study are not exclusive to Vietnamese culture, the way Vietnamese people conceive of and enact them in speech practice is Vietnamese specifically.

8. Chapter 8: Pile of Dead Leaves Free to a Good Home: Humor and Belonging, in a Facebook Community

Chapter eight indicates how the use of spontaneous conversational humor in Facebook groups contributes to the members' sense of belonging in this online community. This chapter excludes cultural scripts and examines specific cultural keywords. The ethnopragmatic approach is evidenced through the analysis of discourse in a cultural context. Here, Mullan investigates the humor in a somewhat irreverent and subversive episode of online joint fictionalization in a local community, highlighting lots of feature practices and humor identified previously as highly valued in (Anglo) Australian culture: co-construction and escalation of absurd fantasy humor, banter, mock impoliteness, irreverence, and jocular mockery and deadpan delivery (Goddard, 2006). While mainly resembling conversational humor, the online environment represents alternative opportunities for creating humor. A small-scale survey administered to the participants of the thread confirmed the significance of spontaneous humor for them, and how it contributes actively to their sense of belonging in this online community.

9. Chapter 9: The Semantics and Pragmatics of Three Potential Slurring Terms

This chapter probes the potentially diverse interpretations of the terms *bitch*, *cunt*, and *nigger*, specified in the lexicon for the different classes of contexts in which such words are utilized. Mainly, this chapter is a lexical-semantic analysis along with interlaced pragmatic elements of three potential and

controversial slurring terms: *bitch*, *cunt*, and *nigger*. Allan (2011) suggested that while the salient senses of such terms are dysphemistic, they can all be utilized without being interpreted or intended as a slur, since, like many other similar slurs, they are sometimes adopted by people who are targeted in the insult potentially and subverted to become markers of in-group solidarity. As a result, according to Allan (2007), the representation of the terms *bitch*, *cunt* and *nigger* in a lexicon requires to be able to forecast the probable intended sense from among the potentially diverse interpretations according to the context of use. In line with the author of the preceding chapter, Allan (2001) selects not to employ NSM, but extends an invitation to Goddard to alter his model lexicon entries for these three terms into NSM explications.

10. Chapter 10: Positive Appraisal in Online News Comments

Chapter ten attempts to investigate the linguistic expression of positive evaluation in English and explains a preliminary typology of linguistic devices used for positive evaluation. This chapter builds on their previous work with Goddard (Taboada, Goddard, & Trnavac, 2017), which considered the use of rhetorical figures in the expression of negative evaluation. In contrast, this latest research explains a preliminary typology of linguistic devices utilized for positive evaluation in online news opinion articles and related comments. By the use of a corpus-assisted analysis, the authors categorize some of the resources that have a significant role in the expression of positive evaluation into phenomena in the lexicogrammar and phenomena that belong in discourse semantics, and compare those resources to the ones deployed for negative evaluation, concluding that positive evaluations do not employ rhetorical figures to the same extent as negative ones. Furthermore, Taboada et al. (2017) utilized NSM to explicate ten evaluative adjectives that carry positive meaning, which fit into the categories of adjectives previously referred to in Goddard et al. (2019).

11. Chapter 11: The Conceptual Semantics of Alienable Possession in Amharic

Chapter eleven probes the semantics of alienable possession in Amharic, with special

reference to recent research in the NSM framework. This chapter deals with the semantics of alienable possession in Amharic, responding to a recent study by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2016) that the primitive “HAVE” cannot capture the meaning of true possession and that true ownership is instead expressed by the use of the semantic prime (IT) IS MINE.

12. Chapter 12: The Meanings of List Constructions: Explicating Interactional Polysemy

Finally, the last chapter mixes the framework of the NSM approach with the analytical methods of interactional linguistics. It is a semantic explication of three structurally various lists revealed in a corpus of naturally occurring Swedish telephone conversations between friends.

13. Concluding Remarks

Reading this great book is advisable since the reader finds rich information about the potential of Minimal English with reference to its use in language teaching and intercultural communication. The book can change the attitudes of the readers toward *natural semantic meta-language*. It can be used in applied linguistics and numerous other fields, such as cross-cultural communication, humor studies, ethnopsychology, anthropology, history, political science, medical humanities, and ethics. This book is the first in a three-volume set that highlights the achievements of Cliff Goddard, a pioneer of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach in linguistics. It is written and formatted in such a way that the content is easy to follow and retain, and additional information and tables are available whenever needed. Accordingly, this helps readers access additional reading lists and deepen their knowledge of a given point. Also, the book contains a list of publications, that is, in press and forthcoming papers by Goddard comprising the author's publications from 1976 to 2019. The concepts provided in the book make it an ideal resource or coursebook for EFL teachers, learners, and those who are interested in humor in conversation. The book was prepared for professional readers. Thus, it cannot be recommended for novice readers and teachers. The texts are complex and require some background knowledge. In addition, the information provided in the book goes beyond

the boundaries of linguistics and into ethnopsychology, anthropology, history, political science, medical humanities, and ethics. After all, *Studies in Ethnopragnmatics, Cultural Semantics, and Intercultural Communication: Ethnopragnmatics and Semantic Analysis* is a prestigious resource that inspires readers to see the challenges in linguistic and cultural analysis.

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