2 Meanings and metalanguage

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present Postcolonial Semantics as an approach that builds a bridge between linguistic semantics and Postcolonial Linguistics. I will focus on "meanings" and "metalanguage" as the two fundamental levels of engagement in Postcolonial Semantics.

There are two main focus areas in the level of meaning: (i) the study of meanings associated with non-prestigious, often non-standardized ways of speaking that emerged out of colonial contact zones, and (ii) the study of meanings associated with prestigious, standardized European national languages that have been, and still are, linguistic and conceptual forces of colonization. At the level of meaning, the key issue is to explore and understand what words mean to people. Thus, this level is emic and representational in its scope. At the level of metalanguage, the scope is critical, but also constructive. This level takes issue with the eticizations of specific emics – that is, the elevation of Anglo and Eurocolonial meanings in the realm of metalinguistics. Constructing a metalanguage that is maximally free from Anglocentrism (and Eurocentrism) is the goal of Postcolonial Semantics, and a number of principles for improving metalinguistic practices will be proposed. Scrutinizing metalanguage, the chapter will critically engage with the problems of "Anglo English as a global metalanguage" and its alternative: "the metasemantic adequacy of all linguacultures".

Having discussed and proposed a general conceptual framework for Postcolonial Semantics, I will turn to a more practical mode, presenting some initial ideas on how to do practical semantic analysis with Postcolonial Semantics.

2.2 The centrality of meanings

While all schools of semantics take "meaning" to be the central question, not all semanticists have taken an interest in both the cognitive and cultural aspects of meaning-making – that is, in the study of linguacultural worldviews. Postcolonial Semantics is about "meanings" in the plural, and about "the centrality of meanings", rather than simply "meaning". It sees the cultural within the cognitive, and the cognitive within the cultural, and proposes an integrated "Cognitive Cultural Semantics" along with scholars of meanings who combine the study of words and ways of speaking, with the study of ways of living, feeling, knowing, and thinking (see e.g. Wierzbicka 1985, 1997, 2006a; Goddard 2011a, 2018; Underhill 2012;

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Corum 2017; Sharifian 2017; Peeters 2019a; Bromhead and Ye 2020a; Mullan, Peeters & Sadow 2020; Gladkova and Romero-Trillo 2021; Głaz 2022; Levisen, Fernández and Hein 2022). Like other works within such holistically conceived semantics, the "cognitive" in Postcolonial Semantics is not a question of individual brains and minds, but of social knowledges and cultural cognitions. Linguacultural ways of knowing and thinking cannot meaningfully be understood simply as "neurons firing", or as the mental lexicon of individuals. Meanings are developed and maintained between people and linguacultural cognition is always about shared conceptualizations, and about sharing ways of thinking and knowing.[1] The study of "meanings" in Postcolonial Semantics is based on these kinds of cognitive cultural works on semantics, and the centrality of "meaning(s)", as well as the idea that meanings are shared conceptualizations are considered to be basic axioms within the approach. For the sake of overview, I will first briefly summarize cognitive cultural assumptions that my work is based on. The points will further be discussed and expanded in the passages that follow.

- The study of semantics gives "meanings" priority over competing terms, such as "forms", "functions", "structures", "uses", "contexts", "identities", and "positionalities", not necessarily by excluding these other terms, but by centering in on meanings.
- Meanings are conceptual constructs, and by symbolic assembly we can say that "words have meanings" (Langacker 1987). On this view, semantics is by definition not referential: words do not refer to things in the world. Rather, words are labels for socially shared concepts, and socially shared concepts differ across linguacultures.
- Meanings are organized radially and by prototypicality, that is, again, by conceptual prototypicality, rather than direct word-to-world linkages. Many word meanings are based on "prototypical scenarios" which capture habitual ways of thinking, knowing, feeling, wanting, and doing, crystalized into word meanings.
- Most words have multiple meanings and "lexical polysemy is a fact of life" (Goddard 2011a: 40). Following Cruse (1986), semantics should take the "individual lexical unit as the primary operational lexical unit" (1986: 80), rather than "the whole lexeme".
- Conventional polysemy does not provide "online" links between units of meaning (Enfield 2002: 97–98). The reason for this is that the so-called lexeme, and all the meanings of a single word that can be collected might only

1 Within works on cognitive cultural semantics, there are several different ways of modelling these relationships, for a distributed cognition view on linguacultures, see e.g. Sharifian (2017).

be available etically – that is, to professional lexicographers. For this reason, I will follow Cruse and the view that semantics primarily is about studying particular lexical units.

All meanings (lexico-semantic units) have a certain generality, and the role of semantics is to account for these generalities. The role of semantic studies is not to try to de-generalize meanings, but rather to account for the generality of specific meanings.

Word meanings have discursive affordances. Meanings have hooks in their conceptual configurations on which discourse prototypes can revolve. Therefore, there can be no sharp distinctions between semantics and discourse, but rather a strong connection between meanings (semantic habits) and scripts (discourse habits). For example, the meaning of the English keyword *country* provides a conceptual hook for discourses of "nationalism", "international relations", and "geopolitics" (Goddard 2020a).

Finally, it is important to make a meta-disciplinary point about semantics. Semantics is sometimes viewed as a "module of language". In my work, I prefer to think of semantics as a perspective, and more precisely, as a meaning-based perspective on the study of linguacultural worldviews, or a meaning-centered lens on human symbolic life.

2.3 The centrality of metalanguage

"Metalanguage" is the other central question for Postcolonial Semantics. In semantics, some traditions have relied on abstract symbols for their metalanguage, especially in the traditions of T-semantics (truth semantics), the logic traditions, and generative semantics (for an overview, see Goddard 2011a). Most of the analysis of this kind has been conducted on English words and sentences in an abstract-technical language without an emic commitment and seemingly without an interest in global linguacultures and semantic diversity. Therefore abstract-technical metalanguages cannot have a place in Postcolonial Semantics. In a defense of ordinary language, John Lyons (1977: 12) wrote that "any formalism is parasitic upon the ordinary everyday use of language, in that it must be understood intuitively on the basis of ordinary language". Abstract formalism therefore is to be avoided, and ordinary language approaches to metalinguistic practices must be advanced, but the question is then: whose ordinary language? In cross-linguistic semantics, we need a metalinguistic practice that is not wedded to any particular ordinariness. As Whorf (1956) made clear almost a century ago, some

of the most ordinary words of English are hard to translate, as they might have no cross-semantic counterparts. As an example, consider Wierzbicka's study on the Anglo keyword *fair* (*that's not fair!*) and the moral vocabulary of *right and wrong* (2006a). The words *fair*, *right*, and *wrong* are all ordinary words in Anglo English, but they are unsuitable for cross-linguistic metalinguistics due to their high degree of Anglo-specificity and untranslatability. The metalanguage challenge, then, is of a double nature: (i) to escape from abstract symbols and instead rely on ordinary words, but also (ii) to restrict these ordinary words in such way that they do not eticize Anglo emics (see also Section 1.7.6).

Another central question in metalinguistic discussions is the "modality of the meta". In Cognitive Semantics, there has been a tendency to favor "diagrams" as the ultimate metalanguage, for example in the form of visual representations, depictions of image schemas, and similar. "Visual stimuli" in the form of videos have made deep inroads into fieldwork linguistics. Despite the fact that such videos are often produced in Europe (such as at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen) and depict Europeans doing European things, these videos have made claims to being "etic". Majid, for example, suggest that "the extensional array in a stimulus set serves as an etic metalanguage" (2012: 57). But to my mind, there is no doubt that videos, pictures, and diagrams cannot qualify as "etic" simply because they are visual. In fact, neither diagrams nor visual stimuli are semiotically neutral. Speaking from the linguacultural tradition of the Australian Western Desert (Yankunytjatjara), Cliff Goddard (2010) takes issue with iconography of diagrammatic presentation favored by cognitive semanticists (see also Goddard 2011a). He says:

> Something like the "arrow" symbol (->) of Western iconography, which is heavily relied upon in cognitive linguistics diagrams, is by no means a transparent and purely iconic sign of movement or directionality. For someone raised in the traditional Central Australian cultures ... it looks more like an emu track than anything else. (Goddard 2010: 93)

Goddard does not see any problem in including both visual and verbal representations in semantic analysis, but he takes issue with the idea that diagrams, iconographies, pictures, and videos are treated as semiotically neutral representations, and the view that they somehow offer an escape from verbal language. On the contrary, he argues that visual symbols require a verbally based interpretation. And when visual stimuli and videos are semiotic representations of semantic concepts particular to English and European linguacultures, they might at best have some value for initial lexical "elicitation", but at worst they assert a form of conceptual colonialism promoting Anglo and European

semantics in the disguise of a non-linguistic visual modality, claiming to be etic and "free from language".

2.4 Anglo English as a global metalanguage

In Postcolonial Semantics, there is an interest in expanding our understanding of meanings, and to de-Europeanize the scope of semantic analysis. However, the main critical impetus in the framework is to study the dynamics of the meanings that make it to the level of metalanguage. The study of "English as a Global Language" is now well established (see e.g. Crystal 2003; Kirkpatrick 2007), and the multiple ways in which English has left its footprint on global linguacultures is a very important arena of research. One of the areas where the footprint of English is massive is at the level of metalanguage. For that reason I suggest that the question of "Anglo English as a global metalanguage" should be added to this current research paradigm. To some extent the question of "Anglo English as global metalanguage" runs parallel to the question of Anglo English as a global language, and historically of course, it would be hard to imagine Anglo English as a global metalanguage without English as a global language. Yet, there is something to be said for studying Anglo English as a global metalanguage in its own right, because it seems to have achieved its own social life, its own scopes and affordances.

"Anglo English as a global metalanguage" studies the tendency in international research to take English for granted as the language of analysis and interpretation, the framing of research questions, the establishment of scholarly discourse and terminologies, and the communication of research results with the international publics. The central bias that the spread of Anglo English as a global metalanguage has enabled is what we could call "conceptual Anglocentrism" (cf. Levisen 2019a). This term describes a practice of knowledge that takes English keywords such as *community*, *happiness*, *fairness*, *the mind*, *gender*, and similar modern Anglo concepts for granted, and as representative for the "human" perspective. Together with a cluster of related biases in linguistics, such as "the written language bias" (Linell 2019), or "methodological nationalism" (Schneider 2019), conceptual Anglocentrism poses a problem for all cross-semantic and metalinguistic work. At best, conceptual Anglocentrism leads to blind spots in research, and at worst to conceptual colonialism, the imposition on Anglo concepts on other linguacultural worldviews.

Perhaps it is important to say that anti-Anglocentric scholarship is not, and should never be, anti-English or anti-Anglo, but precisely anti-Anglocentric. It is rarely meaningful to criticize English meanings or Anglo Englishes per se. Like

any other linguacultures, Anglo Englishes consist of cultural vocabularies, grammars, discourses, and these can be studied as linguacultural products of particular speakers in particular eras. Only when the particularities of these words and concepts are claimed to be speaking for the global human perspective can we talk about conceptual Anglocentrism. In other words, it is the metalinguistic practices of Anglo-international scholarship, rather than speakers of Anglo Englishes, that the critical research agenda in "Anglo English as a global metalanguage" takes issue with.

The main chapters of this book (Chapters 3–7) are all concerned with a denaturalization of English keywords within specific domains, through a semantic exploration of alternatives to the modern Anglo conceptualizations of the world. This, in turn, causes us to rethink our metalinguistic practices. In the following I will introduce and review a thesis on "the metasemantic adequacy of all linguacultures" as an alternative to Anglo English as a global metalanguage.

2.5 The metasemantic adequacy of all linguacultures

"The metasemantic adequacy of all linguacultures" proposes that all linguacultures are capable of presenting meanings. Originally framed as the "meta-semantic adequacy of all natural languages" by Cliff Goddard (2008), the thesis is based on the "conviction that ordinary natural languages are adequate to represent their own semantics via language-internal paraphrase" (Goddard 2008: 3) There are fundamental theoretical and practical questions at stake in this thesis. While few researchers today would perhaps explicitly claim that any language is lacking in "basic expressive power", there are implicit assumptions that de facto suggest that colonial ideologies on metalanguage and the expressive power of languages belong to the "durable categories of colonialism" that Errington identified. In these ideologies of metalanguage, some languages, primarily standardized European ones, are thought of as more apt for reflexive meta-work. In the colonial era, non-European colonial subjects were barely believed to "speak a real language", and the ability to "speak about speaking" was believed to be a European domain and privilege. Thus, the colonial-era answer to the question "do all linguacultures have metasemantic adequacy?" would have been explicitly negative. But the hubristic practice of "eticizing one's own emics", and to grant interpretative superiority to Eurocolonial semantics is not only a problem of the past (on the question of "expressive power in language", see also Wierzbicka 2007).

Perhaps nowhere else so dramatically, the study of "creole languages" reflects and accentuates the importance of these questions (Degraff 2001; Alleyne

2014; de Sousa, Mücke and Krämer 2019; Faraclas and Delgado 2021a). Discourses and ideologies of inadequacy and inferiority have followed in the footsteps of the concept of "creole" and the field of "creolistics" (see Chapter 4). With a point of departure in the discussion on metasemantic adequacy and the expressive power of language, Ryo Stanwood ([1999] 2014) tested empirically the conceptual vocabulary of "Hawaii Creole English". Testing the expressive power and lexicogrammatical capacities against measures of basic linguistic concepts, Stanwood found that these were all fully expressible in Hawaii Creole English. His studies have since been supported by Bartens and Sandström's study on Ibero-Romance creoles (2006) and Levisen and Bøegh's (2017) extensive cross-semantic comparison of so-called "creole languages". The thesis on the metasemantic adequacy of all linguacultures has strong support in these empirical studies. The discourse of inferiority and "lacks", then, seem to be directly linked to the aforementioned colonial ideologies that classify some ways of speaking as "broken" and "bad", etc. (on "creoles" and colonial ideologies, see also Krämer 2014; Krämer and von Sickard 2020).

Based on these investigations, there is no philosophically valid defense for the practice of using Anglo English as the default global metalanguage. In other words, the only reason why the semantics of Bislama, Jamaican, and Saramaccan are used so sparsely in metalinguistic and metasemantic work has nothing to do with the capacities of Bislama, Jamaican, and Saramaccan, but solely the ideals and policies that guide the current practices of Anglo-international knowledge production.

2.6 In search of a suitable metalanguage

The search for a suitable verbal metalanguage, a language in which we can represent meanings "in other words", is in a sense a refinement of a very old technique, namely the practice of translation. In the history of humankind, translational practices have played an important role for communal life and living, within both "interethnic communication" (Baker 1994), and "small-scale multilingualism" (Lüpke 2016). In Bislama, translation has traditionally been conceptualized as *tanem toktok* 'turn words', and someone can *tanem toktok i kam long* Bislama 'turn a word into Bislama'. The pluri-lexical awareness that comes with such *tanem toktok* experiences can be viewed as the precursor for a more principled verbal metalanguage. Likewise, explaining the meaning of words to children through paraphrasing is another source of metalinguistic practices rooted in the history of "translational metalanguaging".

One salient culturally-oriented branch of Cognitive Semantics is the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach (On NSM Semantics, see Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014; Ye 2017; Goddard 2018, Levisen and Fernández 2022). This approach is translational at the core, and its use of verbal metalanguage has been refined for decades. The word "natural" in the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach should be understood in the context of the debate on whether metalanguages should rely on abstract and artificial symbols and "artificial language", or on translatable words from "natural language". The NSM approach is a strong proponent of the latter. The translational method of this approach is an attractive companion for Postcolonial Semantics. Firstly, it is one of the few approaches to linguistic semantics that is explicitly anti-Anglocentric, and it takes seriously the challenges from methodological Anglocentrism and conceptual colonialism. Secondly, it allows for practical semantic analysis based on a translational philosophy of metalinguistics.

In the following I will clarify the principles on which my semantic analysis is based, and illustrate the attempt to apply these principles through a case study of Bislama's metalinguistic capacity.

2.6.1 The principle of metalinguistic restriction

Inspired by the restrictive metalinguistics practiced by Wierzbicka, Goddard, Ameka, Ye and colleagues, Postcolonial Semantics is looking for a metalinguistic safe ground, where Anglo-specific or Euro-specific meanings will be excluded from the metalinguistic lexicon (see e.g. Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014). The purpose of such restrictions is to secure a shared understanding, and to improve cross-semantic metalinguistic intelligibility. These semantic concerns align with the voices in Postcolonial Linguistics that call for an end to "colonial representation … [that] displays a disciplinary aesthetics", and a practice of analysis that "created 'noisy' texts of which only fellow linguists – or those schooled in some way in linguistic practice – can make sense" (Deumert and Storch 2020: 10). Metalinguistic reliance on terms such as "first person singular pronoun", "past participles", and "comitative case", or the even more esoteric forms "1Ps", "PP", and "COM" is obviously problematic for a semantics of understanding. Likewise, prestige words of Anglo academia such as "*identity*", "*communication*", "*information*", "*emotion*", and "*relevance*" will be deemed unfit for a such a semantic metalanguage. In Bislama, such words are called *expensif inglis* 'expensive English' or show-off words: they index a speakers' status, or attempts to create status.

They do not secure understanding – on the contrary, they hinder access through semantic stratification.

The principle of metalinguistic restriction bars both "technonyms" and *expensif inglis* from the metalanguage, circumventing both Eurocolonial terminologies born out of the grammar of Latin, and the "Anglo-etic" grid of concepts that dominate the metalanguage of the humanities. Importantly, the principle of metalinguistic restriction must not be misunderstood as an irrational logophobic fear of certain words. In the prose, and the discussion, any term or analytical concept can of course be mentioned and perhaps also used as loose heuristic tools for exploring certain topics. What the principle of metalinguistic restriction requires is that metalinguistics ultimately should avoid *relying* on Anglo-etic/Eurocolonial terms, since they inadvertently distort the representation of other linguacultural worldviews.

We can sum up the principle of metalinguistic restriction as follows:

- A semantic metalanguage should be grounded in emically available concepts.
- A semantic metalanguage must not be grounded in concepts that are unavailable to the speakers concerned.

2.6.2 The principle of translatability

Linguistic and literary studies have long recognized that there are "untranslatables" (Levisen 2019d) – words that defy translation (on translation and linguistic worldviews, see Głaz 2019a, 2019b). Some of the most prominent examples of these "untranslatables" are cultural keywords (Section 1.7.5) and other words that are "carriers of cultural meanings" (Goddard 2018: 159f). The untranslatability of meanings is the result of human creativity and the human capacity to conceptualize. As historical products formed through shifting conceptualizations in changing social worlds, meanings differ cross-culturally, but also across historical eras (Bromhead 2009; Levisen and Hamann 2017).

The question of translatability is central in any kind of cross-linguistic work, but the key questions seem to have changed. In the universalist traditions of linguistics, the skeptical question used to be "are there any (non-trivial) untranslatables?" In the current diversity-oriented research climate one is more likely to encounter the opposite question: "are there any translatables at all?" While the pendulum swings back and forth between the searching for universals and the search for diversity, there is, in my view, a need to reconcile the search for the shared and specific aspects of linguacultural living, instead of radicalizing one of

the two positions. Radical untranslatability and diversity may be celebrated, but radical incommensurability and absolute non-universalism run counter to what human groups have always attempted: to translate their ideas, feelings, and knowledges from one group to another (Wierzbicka 2007). Also, radical anti-universalism might run the risk of sealing off linguacultures into bubbles of isolation. Instead, Postcolonial Semantics recommits itself to the notion of the "psychic unity of humankind". This unity can help us to study the shared aspect of human linguacultures, while at the same time maintaining and appreciating diversity, and the rich capacity for diverse human conceptualization.

In other words, there are "untranslatables", but there are also "translatables". Some meanings appear to be shared across linguacultures. Through these translatables a basic shared understanding can be ensured, and even "untranslatables" can ultimately be translated. But it is important to distinguish between two conditions of translatability: ready-made and crafted translatability. Ready-made translatability is when equivalent categories between two meanings exist in advance. Consider for example *bra* 'good' in Swedish and *god* 'good' in Danish. *Bra* and *god* are ready-made lexicalized options: words that despite their different lexical form are identical in meaning (i.e. they exemplify "translatables").

Consider now again the word *fair* (*that's not fair!*) a cultural keyword of the modern Anglo English world (Wierzbicka 2006a). In most linguacultures, there are no ready-made replacement candidates or equivalents that can replicate the meaning of *fair*. On the other hand, such replication can be crafted. "Crafted translatability" acknowledges that there is no ready-made lexicalized twin concept, but that translation might still be possible through conscious effort. This often results in a paraphrase consisting of several words, whole utterances, or even short texts. Crafted translatability comes with an effort and may sometimes fail, but ultimately, the creation of new paraphrases serves as a key to unlocking highly complex, culturally specific words and to translate untranslatables where no conventional translations exist.

The principle of paraphrase will be discussed further in the following section, but for now we can formulate the ideal of translatability in metalinguistic work as follows:

- A semantic metalanguage should allow for cross-semantic translation
- A semantic metalanguage should not be locked into untranslatables

2.6.3 The principle of paraphrasing

In common parlance, "paraphrase" usually relates to a language-internal mode of conveying and compressing meaning through rewording. A speaker might paraphrase what others have said, or his or her own words, such as in the phrase *let me paraphrase what I just said*. To paraphrase, then, means "saying the same with other words". Translation and glossing always involve some kind of paraphrase, of conveying meanings in "other words" (cf. Baker 2011). Paraphrasing has also found its use as a more principled analytical practice in cross-semantic studies. In the study of cultural keywords and other types of culturally specific vocabulary, grammatical constructions, phraseological elaborations, and language rituals, paraphrasing has proven to be a method that can enable a high-resolution semantics of understanding (for a wide span of uses of the paraphrase method, see e.g. the works of Felix Ameka 1992, 2002, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2015).

In cross-semantic work, paraphrasing proves important as a common measure, or a *tertium comparationis*. In semantic paraphrasing, the goal is not to summarize, but to represent. The goal is not to minimize meaning, but rather to unpack it, and to mirror it as faithfully as possible. In the semantic paraphrases of highly complex word meanings this will most often entail a textual expansion in the form of metasemantic texts that can represent the complexity of meanings packed into words, and we cannot make do with a compilation of rough translations of the words.

The method of paraphrasing is only as good as its metalanguage allows. A poor metalanguage, that is, one without emic grounding or without the capacity for cross-semantic comparability, will not allow the fine-grained articulation of meaning that is needed for the study of complex, culturally specific meanings. Paraphrasing is an art and a craft. It requires curiosity, patience, and a collaborative mindset. Through a series of trial-and-error experiments paraphrases are carefully crafted, taking one word meaning at a time. "Error", perhaps, should be put in inverted commas, given that we are dealing with intuitive judgments based on linguacultural evidence. Making "emic errors" in a paraphrase is to postulate meanings, or elements of meanings within a paraphrase that do not match the conceptual currency of the word in question, or which use cognitively implausible scientific or technical language that does not shed light on meaning but obscures it.

Michael Billig's book "*Learn to Write Badly*" explores the obscurity in academic jargon and the "onslaught of big words" in social sciences. He says:

> I have avoided reading the technical journals which I should read and which I occasionally publish in. I have never taken on the technical terminology as if it were my first language.

> I still have to translate if I wish to understand the academic articles that I do read. But I no longer feel ashamed. (Billig 2013: 3)

Billig seeks to reinstate a confidence in ordinary words as capable for academic reasoning, and campaigns against "long words … dressing up banalities as profundities" (2013: 3). His argument for the beauty and necessity of simple words is liberating and worth following. A commitment to paraphrasing based on simple words can lift the "shame" and lead to a semantics of shared understanding. We can capture these insights in two points:

- A semantic metalanguage must involve paraphrases
- A semantic metalanguage must employ paraphrases that consist of simple words, rather than complex words

2.6.4 The principle of connectivity

As a fourth principle, we must consider "connectivity", or the ability of a metalanguage to bring together analysts from different linguacultural backgrounds, and also to bridge the gulf between the analyzer and the analyzed. In essence, the question is this: how can metalinguistic practices include, rather than exclude? The importance of this question is accentuated in a postcolonial linguistic context.

If the analysis of meaning is paraphrased in a metalanguage that locks the analysis into a particular universe of meaning, be that "Anglo concepts", "academic jargon", or "technonyms" the analyzing world is de facto sealing itself off from the analyzed world. This split, or lack of connectivity, can of course be convenient for the analyst: there is then no way of correcting, improving, or disputing the analysis from the perspective of the speakers concerned. The loss of control involved in establishing a connecting metalanguage can be uncomfortable, as it potentially destabilizes the authority of the experts. On the other hand, the possibility of engagement, and the testing, checking, and contributions to semantic analysis that connective metalanguages allow, is also a gift for the analysts and for the quality of any analysis. This is not to say that all people would want to connect with the kind of analysis that semantic scholarship can offer. Certainly, not all people would find it interesting to spend time on doing deep semantic analysis or to engage in the kind of reflective scrutiny that semantic work requires. The principle of connectivity suggests that a metalanguage should be formed in a way that ensures access, and which can bring people together, rather than separating them. For that reason, a shared conceptual lingua franca is of paramount importance. Instead of imposing technical concepts from Anglo-

European traditions, the shared conceptual lingua franca might instead attempt to find linguacultural intersections.

In short:

- A semantic metalanguage should be based on a conceptual lingua franca
- A semantic metalanguage should connect people: professionals and non-professionals, and analysts from different linguacultural backgrounds

2.7 Bislama and Anglo English

Bringing these principles together, I will now turn to an illustration based on Bislama and Anglo English. Guided by the principles of metalinguistic restriction, translatability, paraphrase, and connectivity, and applying the insights of Wierzbicka, Goddard, Ameka, Ye, and colleagues, we can provide a metalinguistic vision that allow us to study semantic concepts. In NSM semantics, the quest for finding shared human concepts in a world of radically different linguacultures has always been concrete, rather than speculative. The working hypothesis is that there are just some two hundred meanings that can be found across linguacultures, and of these, sixty-five appear to be simple meanings, or "semantic primes". Another group of words, "semantic molecules", with around sixty to eighty meanings, are slightly more complex, but appear to be also found across linguacultures (Goddard 2018). Apart from these two main groups, the primes and the molecules, there are words which are clearly not universals, but still relatively common across linguacultures. In other words, shared and simple meanings are few and rare; the vast majority of meanings in any linguaculture are both complex and culturally specific.

Let us take a look at the semantic primes, the set of basic, simple word meanings with maximal pan-human appeal, as they have been identified in NSM semantics. The they have been found to be lexicalized widely, and perhaps universally, but in the following I will present the Anglo English and Bislama lexicalizations (see also Levisen et al. 2017).

ANGLO ENGLISH	BISLAMA
I	mi
you	yu

ANGLO ENGLISH	BISLAMA
someone[2]	man
something	samting
people	ol man
body	bodi
kinds	kaen
parts	pat
this	hemia
the same	semak
other	nara(fala)
one	wan
two	tu
many	plante
few	hamas … nomo
some	samfala
all	olketa
good	gud
bad	nogud
big	bigfala
small	smol
think	tingting
now	save
want	wantem
don't want	no wantem
feel	harem
see	luk
hear	harem
say	talem
words	toktok

2 In early NSM literature 'person' was considered to be an allolex of 'someone'. Later, this allolexy pattern of Anglo English was questioned, and in the current practice it is common to avoid 'person'. However, in one combination, 'someone' + 'this', it seems to me that 'person' could still be a viable allolex. 'This someone', on all accounts, is too clumsy and difficult to work with. Instead of 'this someone', I will write 'this person', using 'person' as an allolex only in this particular context. In Bislama, there is no issue, and no allolexy: 'man' and 'man ia' are equivalents of 'someone' and 'this someone/person'.

ANGLO ENGLISH	BISLAMA
is true	i tru
do	mekem
happen	hapen
move	muv
be (somewhere)	stap (long wan ples)
there is	ikat
be (someone/something)	-i (wan man/wan samting)
(is) mine	(hemi) blo mi
live	liv
die	ded
when	taem
now	nao
before	bifo
after	afta
a long time	long taem
a short time	sot taem
for some time	samtaem
moment	wantaem nomo
place	ples
here	lo ples ia
above	antap
below	andanit
far	longwe
near	kolosap
side	saed
inside	insaed
touch	tajem
not	no
maybe	ating
can	save
because	from
if	sapos

ANGLO ENGLISH	BISLAMA
very	tumas
more	moa
like	olsem

In this overview, I have showed only the main lexicalizations of primes in Anglo English and Bislama. There are variants of these lexicalizations, known in the semantic literature as allolexes (on the concept of allolexy, see Goddard 2018). In Appendix 1, I have added a short discussion on the allolexes for each of these exponents in Bislama, in relation to Anglo English and other related Anglocreole linguacultures in the Pacific.

The second group meanings, the semantic molecules, are not simple, and not necessarily shared either. They function as building blocks in concept formation, and are needed for adequate metalinguistic representations of many concepts. For instance, in Anglo English semantics, 'children' functions as a molecule in words such a *toys*, *play*, *daddy*, and *mama*, and 'money' functions as a molecule in words such as *buy*, *sell*, *pay*, and *bank* (Goddard 2018: 153). As mentioned already, some semantic molecules appear to be universally lexicalized, but others are areal concepts, that is, they might be shared across a specific linguistic area such as Europe or the Pacific. Other semantic molecules are highly local, and might function as building blocks in only a handful of meanings within a particular linguaculture. What all semantic molecules share, regardless of their scope, is that they can be paraphrased into the simpler units of semantic primes. In the following, I have listed some examples of semantic molecules that have been commonly found in the conceptual configurations and concept formation across linguacultures (Goddard 2016, 2018: 128), including postcolonial linguacultures (Levisen and Aragón 2017).

For this presentation, I have zoomed in on semantic molecules with a wide scope. The molecules listed below appear to have a high degree of cross-semantic currency, presented again in their Anglo English and Bislama lexicalizations:

Environmental molecules
sky, ground, sun, during the day, at night, water, sea, fire
skae, graon, san, lo de, lo naet, wota, solwata, faea

Body part molecules
hands, mouth, eyes, head, ears, nose, face, legs, teeth, fingers, breasts, skin, bones, blood

ol han, maot, ol ai, hed, ol sora, nus, fes, ol leg, ol tut, ol finga, ol titi, skin, ol bun, blat

Biosocial molecules
be born, children, women, men, mother, father, wife, husband[3]
i bon, pikinini, woman, man, mama, dadi, waef, man

Human activity molecules
hold, sit, lie, stand, sleep, play, laugh, sing, make, kill
holem, staon, stanap, silip, pleple, laf, singsing, mekem, kilim i ded

It matters not only what words can be used in metalinguistic practices, but also how combinations of words can be made into sentences and texts. This combinatorics play an important role as well in the metalinguistic practices of the NSM tradition. It goes beyond the scope of this work to review the philosophy of metalanguage grammar in the NSM research program, but I will, in the practical analysis provided in this book, seek to adhere to the principles of keeping syntax simple and cross-translatable. Consider below some examples (1–3) of Anglo English and Bislama lexicogrammar based on semantic primes and molecules:

Example 1a, (Anglo English)
something good happened to me

Example 1b, (Bislama)
samting gud i hapen lo mi

3 On this list, 'wife' and 'husband' seem to be the least convincing candidates for exact equivalence (for a discussion, see also Levisen and Aragón 2017). In Bislama, there two competing Bislama conceptualizations, *waef* and *woman*. In Anglo English "his woman" sounds inherently macho or sexist, but the Bislama *woman blehem* 'his wife/woman' is not. There is, however, both a semantic and stylistic difference between the socio-relational words *waef blehem* 'his *waef*' and *woman blehem* 'his *woman*'. The *waef* has a more middle-class, and Christian, ring. Intuitively, the English phrase *his wife*, and the Bislama *waef blehem*, and *woman blehem* appear to have micro-semantic differences which makes them only candidates for "loose universals". Such micro-semantic differences in molecules do not necessarily pose a major analytical problem, but in terms of the principle of translatability, it is important to account for and discuss even very small differences in the setup of words.

Example 2a (Anglo English)
I want to say something now

Example 2b (Bislama)
mi wantem blo talem wan samting nao

Example 3a (Anglo English)
all children in this place think like this: "this is very good"

Example 3b (Bislama)
olketa pikinini lo ples ia i tingting olsem: "hemia hemi gud tumas"

We can form entire translatable texts in this way. Below, I have exemplified this in the form of a text that briefly accounts for "nocturnal interaction" in the Pacific. The idea captured in the paraphrase below is that it is important to verbally make oneself known though a greeting or similar, if you meet someone at night, and the assumption that silence in such a situation is an indication that the other person might have bad intentions:

Example 4a (Anglo English)
at night, when people can't see other people,
 if you know that someone is near you,
 it is good if you say something to this person,
 it is bad if you don't say something
if you don't say anything, people can think like this:
 "maybe this person wants to do something bad to me"

Example 4b (Bislama)
lo naet, taem ol man i no save luk nara man,
 sapos yu save se ikat wan man klosap lo yu,
 hemi gud spos yu talem wan samting lo man ia,
 hemi nogud spos yu no talem wan samting
sapos yu no talem wan samting, ol man i save tingting olsem:
 "ating man ia i wantem blo mekem nogud samting lo mi"

Throughout this book, I will provide paraphrases like the ones above, ensuring that all the analysis provided on Bislama words will also be stated in Bislama, and not just Anglo English.

2.8 Semantic portraits

Having accounted for the conceptual and analytical principles of Postcolonial Semantics, I will now further describe the framework in more practical terms. Central to the framework is the analytical concept of "semantic portraits", inspired by Apresjan's "lexicographic portrait" (2000), but with a more explicit focus on semantics. Providing a semantic portrait for the meaning of a word (lexical unit) is essentially to tell the story of a word, covering both its semantic radiality and richness, and to account for the discourses it allows and affords.

Word meanings are small epistemes: they represent knowledges and axioms, and have the power to affect and connect people. When providing a semantic portrait, the idea is to account holistically for the meaning of a particular word and its scope in the world. This approach differs from the practice of a lexicographer whose ideal is to account for all the senses of all the words in a single language. Unlike the lexicographer, a semantic portraiteer is not committed to account for all the polysemous senses and phraseological units of "the lexeme". Rather the level of granularity that semantic portraits aim for is "single senses of single words" (cf. the discussion in Section 2.3), and these particular senses are studied in their own right and in a fine granularity. In principle, all senses of all words deserve to be studied with such granularity, but that is not practically possible. Instead those words with keyword status (cf. discussion in Section 1.7.5) are more likely to be singled out for analysis. Staying with meanings, exploring them, and providing accounts of the prototypical meanings is the end goal and the purpose of the analysis.

2.8.1 Words and scripts

In order to write semantic portraits, I will provide paraphrases of word meanings, supplemented with paraphrases of cultural scripts (Wierzbicka 2003; Ameka and Breedveld 2004; Goddard 2006a, 2006b). The difference between these two levels of analysis can be compared to the two realizations of relativity, "linguistic relativity" and "communicative relativity" (Hymes 1966), or the habitual cultural cognition that is expressed through word meanings and discourse practices, respectively. Where the word-focused paraphrase seeks to capture the meaning of

lexical units, a scripts-focused paraphrase aims to account for cultural discourses of the "shared understandings of a given community of discourse" (Wierzbicka 2006b: 35)

To illustrate these two levels of paraphrase, I will draw on studies in color semantics, a domain which has attracted considerable interest in Cultural Semantics. Below I have reproduced (in a somewhat simplified version) a paraphrase that attempts to account for the meanings of the lexical semantics of the English words *yellow* and *blue*, in the construction "something X is green" from a word-focused perspective (Wierzbicka 2006b; Levisen 2019c).

Something X is yellow

people can think like this about the color of X:

"it is like the color of the sun"

Something X is blue

people can think like this about the color of X:

"it is like the color of the sea"

at the same time they can think like this:

"at many times the sky can be this color during the day"

The analysis is prototype-based and makes use of environmental semantic molecules, "the sun" for *yellow*, and a double prototype "the sea" and "the sky" for *blue* (on the use of paraphrase in color studies and visual semantics, see Wierzbicka 2006b; Aragón 2016; Tao and Wong 2020). The analysis also makes use of "color" as a superordinate molecule, a molecule that is needed in order to account for "color terms".[4]

We could also view the cultural embeddedness of "color" in Anglo linguaculture from a script-based perspective. In doing so, we could study the discourse-semantic question of what "color" means in specific discourse worlds. What, for instance, does *red* and *blue* mean in the visual language of US American political discourse?

4 Studies in visual semantics have shown that there is a color bias in Anglo and Eurocolonial comparative research (Wierzbicka 2013, 2016b), and that visual concepts in non-European linguacultures often differ dramatically from the superordinate-based "color term"-driven tradition (for a postcolonial semantic study on visual semantics, see Levisen, Sippola and Aragón 2017).

A cultural script for "color" in Anglo-American political discourse

In United States, it is like this:
there are two big parties,
 one is called the Republican Party,
 the other is called the Democratic Party
people here know:
 red is the color of the Republican Party,
 blue is the color of the Democratic Party

In all its simplicity, the paraphrase above spells out the knowledge surrounding conventionalized color discourse in American politics: *red* as the color of the Republican party and *blue* as the color of the Democratic party. It is well-known that *red* in most European Englishes is linked with the Left, with Labor parties and Social Democrats, and blue with Conservative parties, and thus, the script is clearly not a script for English, let alone Anglo Englishes; rather it articulates a shared understanding within a particular discourse community (in this case: US politics).

The illustration from color semantics points to the general principle that the two levels of analysis, the lexical-semantic and the discourse-semantic levels, are trying to account for knowledges, but in different ways: the knowledge hidden in culturally specific words, and the knowledge of culturally specific discourse practices.

2.8.2 Cross-semantic confrontations

In semantic portrait-making, the study of words and scripts is supplemented by a second mode of analysis, which we could call a "cross-semantic confrontation". This is a comparative mode of analysis modelled on Leezenberg's "cross-linguistic confrontation" in which taken-for-granted assumptions are critically analyzed through comparison (Leezenberg, Komlósi and Houtlosser 2003). In linguistic traditions, the concept of "comparative" has systemic overtones, and has largely failed to address the inequalities and the power relations between what is compared. But comparing Anglo English concepts with Bislama concepts, without accounting for the difference in status, prestige, colonial history, and postcolonial relations, is a contextually impoverished comparison that fails to yield results.

For Postcolonial Semantics, the critical potential is important and cross-semantic confrontation allows for a critical perspective on words, meanings, concepts, and the views of the world that are created, maintained, circulated, and opposed. While the analyses that will be presented in this book are not always

directly serving a critical purpose, there is a latent sense of critique of the metalinguistic inequalities that linguacultural worldviews based on Anglo and Eurocolonial concepts continue to enforce and create, and the consequent silencing of words, meanings, voices, and worldviews of linguacultures with less global prestige and power.

In an ideal world of research, there would be nothing truly confrontational about bringing meanings, voices, and views that are often not considered into global scholarly attention. But as soon as these other words and views are taken seriously, they inadvertently, will lead to both a denaturalization and destabilization of the Anglo order of knowledge and the scholarly works and global knowledge productions that it affords. Cross-semantic confrontations challenge the "defaults" that were established in the colonial eras and the conceptual colonialism that these defaults produce, if they are not identified. The identification, in turn, allows us to reconsider and improve the empirical, analytical, and theoretical basis for linguacultural comparison.

2.9 A résumé of key ideas

In this chapter, I have outlined the contours of a general conceptual framework for Postcolonial Semantics as a bridge between Cognitive Cultural Semantics and Postcolonial Linguistics. The theoretical centrality of "meanings" and "metalanguage" was accentuated and contextualized. The methodological problems of Anglocentrism and conceptual colonialism that "Anglo English as a global metalanguage" pose, were identified as the main obstacle for multipolar research in linguistics, and social and cognitive sciences.

In the search for metalinguistic reform, I discussed four principles, (i) the principle of metalinguistic restriction, (ii) the principle of translatability, (iii) the principle of paraphrase, and (iv) the principle of connectivity, all of which seem important for the rethinking of metalinguistic practices. With Bislama as an example, I provided paraphrase-based textual experiments within a translatable metalanguage and outlined "semantic portraits" as a style of analysis. These portraits operate on a logic of semantic radiality and with exemplars as powerful prisms for both analysis and theorizing. Two different but related types of semantic portraits were discussed: lexical-semantic (word-focused), and discourse-semantic (script-focused). Finally, the concept of "cross-semantic confrontation" was accounted for as a way of doing comparative work that engages critically with the disciplinary knowledges that operate on Anglocentric premises.

In the following five chapters (3–7), I will further test the frameworks for analysis that I have laid out in this chapter, providing paraphrase-based semantic portraits. I will focus on providing new analysis of Bislama keywords, but with a critical metalinguistic reference to Anglo keywords and concepts in other Euro-colonial linguacultures. These five studies can be seen as model studies in Post-colonial Semantics.