Lecture 9: Lexical Innovation and Semantic Change

All languages are gradually but constantly changing. We have seen how phonological change affects the building blocks of our words - morphemes. However, this is just part of lexical change. Words are aural forms/symbols that we use to communicate meanings. Our consciousness, expressed through language, reflects our reality. Since the world around us is constantly changing, we create new names for new concepts and ideas. That is why linguistic change is most obvious in the realm of vocabulary/ lexis.

Focus Points:
- **Conventionalization of Lexical Innovations**
- **Lexical and Semantic Change: Three Main Methods of *Lexical Innovation*:**
    - Addition of words
    - Loss of words
    - Semantic change

Changes in the shared vocabulary of a language community arise through the **conventionalization** of **lexical innovations.** What do these terms mean?

9.1. Conventionalization of Lexical Innovations
Often, the lexical innovations of individual speakers do not 'catch on.' But when innovations are adopted by other speakers, they may become **conventionalized** as part of the shared language of the entire speech community.

For example, a new word, once created, can spread throughout a language community and become generally accepted as part of the vocabulary of the language, i.e.: *firewall, floppy, cursor, user-friendly*, etc.

This process of spreading happens gradually through social interaction (Refer to Lecture 2: Spread of Change within a Language). This results in lexical **variation** within a speech community. For example, there may be situations when some speakers have adopted the new word, and others have not (you must have talked about lexical variation in your socio-linguistics lectures).

9.2. Lexical and Semantic Change: Three Main Methods of *Lexical Innovation*

By **lexical innovation** we mean **changes in the numbers of words and shifts in their meanings** (quantitative and qualitative changes in the vocabulary). These can occur through:

I. **Addition of Words** via:
   - creating new words (word formation) – page 2
   - using words from other languages (borrowing) – page 6

II. **Loss of Words** – page 6

III. **Semantic Change** (shifts in the meanings of existing words) – page 7

Speakers create new words, extend the meanings of existing words, and, particularly if they are bilingual, use words from other languages (code-mix, or code-switch) all the time. Let us take a closer look at these three main methods of lexical innovation:

> **9.2.1. Addition of Words:**
> - Creating new words
> - Some General Word Formation Processes

New words appear in our lexicon all the time – people make them up to reflect new concepts and realities. One of the relatively recent developments, for example, is amateur journalism on the net – people write on issues they feel strongly about and post their thoughts and comments on their web pages (in itself a new concept ☺). They are *bloggers*, or *'web loggers'*; where did the name come from? You know the word for an official written record of events during a ship's voyage, or an aircraft's flight – '**log**', also '*logbook*' – 'a detailed record of things done, experienced, etc., as in '*keep a logbook*'? That is exactly what bloggers do – they give a detailed written account of their experiences and thoughts, and post them on the web – that is why their writings are called *weblogs / blogs*, their occupation – *weblogging / blogging*, etc. We have no trouble in understanding all those derivative words – why, do you think?

Another example: *morphing.* According to the Collins Gem Computer Jargon list, it is the technique of blending one image smoothly into another to create a radical transformation. Now, would you be confused, if you heard of a bear being *morphed* into a cat, or of *morphing software,* which brings such effects to the average computer? I guess even *morphers* will not surprise us after a while… And have you come across *login,* and *logoff, online* and offline? In the past couple of weeks alone I have heard people talking about *rascality*, and being *rascalled* ☺ Although you, like me, may not have heard some of these terms before, once we have learnt the meaning of a new word, we have no difficulty in understanding its derivatives. Why is it so?

We can understand new words and form new ones, because <u>we know the</u> <u>rules of word formation in the language that we use</u>. Our 'mental dictionaries' have a set of templates, or rules of word-formation, that determine the grammaticality of the words we produce. Last week we briefly discussed derivational suffixes and prefixes that we use to form new words. Let us quickly revise those, and focus on other basic ways in which new words are made. Here is a list and a brief discussion of the general word formation processes:

- **Derivation**
- **Compounding**
- **Blending**
- **Clipping**
- **Backformation**

- **Conversion**
- **Acronyms**
- **Coinage**
- **Multiple processes**

Derivation
Last week we discussed **affixes**, or bound morphemes that are used to 'add' meaning to word roots. We remember that affixes fall into two main groups*:

prefixes, that come *before* the root, and
suffixes, that come after the root

*__infixes__ are not common in English, where they are used mostly in rather vulgar or emotive speech (*Hallebloodylujah! Absogoddamnlutely!*, etc.), but they are fairly common in some other languages, such as Kamhmu, a language spoken in South East Asia (George Yule, *The Study of Language*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.69).

We also remember that the 'amount' of meaning that these bound morphemes add to the roots depends on the kind of affix:

> **prefixes** and **derivational suffixes** change the overall meaning of the word, they help us form <u>new words</u>, whereas
> **inflectional suffixes** add only <u>grammatical meaning</u> that helps us understand the relationships between words in a sentence, but they do not change the core meaning of the word.

English prefixes and derivational suffixes come from a variety of source languages, including Old English, Old French, as well as Latin and Greek.
Affixes, whose meaning is obvious to the average English speaker (i.e., **un**-+clean, or fear/-**less**, etc.), are sometimes called <u>productive,</u> whereas the more obscure ones, whose meaning is not immediately obvious, are called <u>unproductive</u>. Why? Because the average English speaker, without the knowledge of classical Latin or Greek, would not know their meanings, and consequently will not use them to form new words. Here is

<u>A Selective List of Some of the More Common ('Productive') English Affixes</u>:

after- from the Old English preposition, giving compound nouns like *afternoon, afterbirth, afterlife, afterthought, aftermath, after-effects*, etc. A wide range of adjectives is also possible: *after-school, after-work, after-dinner, after-hours,* etc. (The adjectives usually take a hyphen, the nouns don't).
by-   from OE 'by,' giving compounds like *bystander, bypass, bygones*, etc.
dis- /**dif-** /**di-**   from Latin 'apart' or 'another': this prefix can elide ('fuse') with other consonants, giving words like *diffuse, divide, differ.* More importantly, it also combines with many existing verbs to give their opposites: *disagree, disappear, disapprove, dissociate, disconnect, disengage, disinfect, dislike, dislodge, disobey,* etc.
double- from Old French meaning 'two,' as in *double-glazing, double-locked, double-sided, double-jointed, double Dutch, double Scotch,* etc. There is also a meaning of deception in compounds like *double-dealing, double-talk, double-cross*, etc.
down- from OE, giving compounds like *downfall, downcast, downbeat, downturn, downgrade,* as well as vogue terms like *downsize, downturn*, etc.
ex- / **ef-** / **e-** from Latin 'out of,' as in *exhale, exceed, exhume, expatriate, expire, exonerate*. The prefix forms *ef-* and *e-* before certain consonants, as in *effusive, emerge, elapse, erase, evade, escape, educate,* etc. Words like *ex-lover, ex-husband, ex-boxer, ex-president,* etc., indicating people who 'used-to-be' something, are also from this prefix.
extra- from Latin for 'beyond,' as in *extraordinary, extra-special, extra-marital, extra-curricular, extravagant, extraneous*, etc. In many of its hyphenated constructions it act as 'intensifier' meaning 'very': extra-large, extra-bright, etc.
for-   from OE preposition, usually meaning prohibition (*forbid*), abstention (*forbear, forgo*), or neglect (*forsake, forget, forlorn*).
fore-   from OE 'before' or 'in front,' giving compounds such as *forecast, foretell, forewarn, forefather, foregoing, forehead, forestall*, etc.
hand- from OE, giving compounds such as *hand-made, handwriting, hand-grenade, handshake, handbag, handkerchief, handcuffs*, etc.
hyper- from Greek for 'over' or 'above' in the sense of 'excessively,' as in *hyperactive, hyper-critical, hypersensitive, hyperinflation, hypertensive, hyperbole*, etc. A prefix functioning as an intensifier,

hyper- also functions nowadays as an independent word, meaning 'agitated' or 'keyed up': *hype, hyped-up.*

in- from OE preposition, giving compounds like *insight, inbred, inlet, income, inhale,* as well as *endear, enthral, embed / imbed, engrave*, etc.

inter- / **intel-** / **enter-** from Latin for 'between,' as in *interact, intercontinental, intercourse, intermarriage, interview, interrupt, intercom, inter-city, internet*, etc. Also: *intelligent, entertain, enterprise*, etc.

intra- from Latin 'within,' now used as an opposite of 'extra,' as in *intra-European, intravenous, intramuscular, intranet*, etc.

intro- from Latin 'to, towards' or 'within': *introduce, introvert, introspective,* etc.

low- productive contemporary compound, giving *low-key, low-profile, low-budget, low-grade*, etc.

mid- from OE 'middle': *midnight, midday, mid-week, mid-term, mid-semester,* etc.

mis- partly from OE for 'wrongly' or 'badly,' and partly from Latin 'minus' via Old French *mes*, which came to have a similar meaning, giving *misbehave, misjudge, misconstrue, mismanage, misspell, misplace, misdeed, mishap, mischief*, etc.

out- from OE, giving compounds meaning 'do better than': *outdo, outwit, outstrip, outmanoeuvre,* etc. Others, such as *outrage, outlaw, outside* have the prefix stressed, and mean 'outside of.'

over- from OE, giving compounds like *overcome, overtake, overeat, overreact, overdo,* etc.

un- from OE, meaning (1) 'not': *unkind, unfair, unsound, unlikely, unimaginable, unwise, untrue,* etc., and (2) 'back,' with the sense of 'reversal': *undo, untie, unfold, unbend,* etc.

up- from OE: *upright, uptight, upriver, upfront,* etc.

wel- / **well-** from OE adverb: *welcome, welfare, well-bred, well-trained*, etc.

with- from the OE preposition: *withstand, withhold, withdraw,* etc.

-dom OE abstract noun suffix, indicating (1) a state or condition: *freedom, boredom, martyrdom, stardom,* etc., and (2) a territory, as in *kingdom, Christendom,* etc.

-down English suffix giving (1) compound adjectives: face-*down, nose-down, top-down, hands-down, head-down,* etc., and (2) nouns: *breakdown, crackdown, showdown, touchdown, meltdown, sundown,* etc.

-en English suffix giving (1) diminutive nouns: *chicken, kitten, maiden*; (2) verbs denoting 'making like (a quality)': *broaden, shorten, lengthen, sweeten, fatten, lighten, frighten,* etc., and (3) adjectives indicating 'substance' something is made of: *wooden,woollen, silken, golden, leaden, waxen,* etc.

-ful English adjective suffix indicating: (1) quantity: *handful, bagful, mouthful, spoonful,* etc., and (2) characteristics: *beautiful, awful, thoughtful,* etc.

-head English noun affixed to other nouns, giving (1) a range of (usually pejorative) meanings: *egghead, fathead, sleepyhead, paw-paw-head, dickhead, thickhead,* etc. (2)indicating the top, or front of something: *letterhead, masthead, spearhead,* etc.

-ie / -y English diminutive suffix: *baby, dearie, doggy, Annie, Johnny, sweetie*, etc.

-ish English adj. Suffix indicating (1) 'diluted' quality: *bluish, reddish, greenish, boorish,* etc., or (2) nationality: *Irish, British, Scottish, Turkish, Kurdish,* etc.

-less English adjective-forming Suffix, indicating lack of (quality): *timeless, priceless, sleepless, lawless, toothless, dustless (chalk), thoughtless,* etc.

-like / -ly English adjective-forming suffix: *bird-like, fin-like, warlike, lifelike, businesslike, heavenly, manly, lovely, saintly, orderly, fatherly, ghastly,* etc.

-ly standard and most productive English adverb-forming suffix: *quickly, surely, squarely,* etc.

-most English adj. Suffix: *topmost, uppermost, utmost,* etc.

-ship English abstract noun suffix: *friendship, hardship, scholarship, workmanship,* etc.

-y Adj. Suffix: *hairy, moody, bloody, guilty, greedy, guilty,* etc.

Compounding

This is a word-combining process, technically known as *compounding*, very common in Germanic languages (less so in Romanic 'cousins'): *bookcase, fingerprint, armchair, wallpaper, car-park, underground, flyover, expressway, maybe, thunderstorm, blackout, therefore, forehead, weekend, eyeball, birthday, gridlock, toothbrush, standstill, touchdown, shutdown, takeoff,* etc.

Blending

This is when we use two (or more) 'pieces' of different words and combine them into a 'blend' of both:

brunch < breakfast+lunch   *Eurovision < European+television*
modem <modulator-demodulator   *smog < smoke+fog*
breatalyser < breath+analyzer   *motel < motor+ hotel*
electrocute < electro-+execute   *glitzy < glamour+ritzy*
sitcom < situation+comedy   *telecast < television+broadcast*
slithy < slimy+lithe   *biodegradable < biologically degradable*
televangelism < television+evangelism   *chortle < chuckle+snort,* etc.
ginormous < gigantic+enormous

Blending is popular with advertisers, with words like *Schweppervescence, twicicles,* and *nicicles* ☺

Clipping

Clipping is a type of word formation which occurs when a word is abbreviated. The resulting terms are often colloquial, and found more often in spoken rather than written English (as the term suggests, 'clipping' means 'cutting short' the longer words). Who has the time to pronounce *laboratory*, when you can simply say *lab?* Or: *fax, bra, ad, gas, kilo, cab, perm, flu, porn, plane, pram, phone, synch* (in the phrase '*to be out of synch with something*')**,** etc. Names are also typically shortened: *Al, Kay, Ed, Dick, Mike, Ike, Tom,* etc.
There must be a 'lazy bug' present in educational environments, because here we see the blossoming of 'clippings': *exam, typo, chem., gym, math, Prof, doc, uni, varsity, admin*, etc.
Sometimes a whole phrase can be clipped: It *shorted* (it *short-circuited),* etc. A few other examples:

Amp < ampere   Disco < discotheque
Bus < omnibus   Fax < facsimile
Cello < violoncello   Mob < *mobile vulgus* (< Latin: 'the masses')
Chimp < chimpanzee   Phone < telephone
Demo < demonstration   Photo < photograph
Piano < pianoforte   Reps < representatives
Pram < perambulator   Tacs < tactics (as in to 'change tacs')
Pro < professional
Revs < revolutions   Spec < specification, etc.

Backformation

Backformation is a process of forming a new word by <u>removing</u> an element from – rather than adding one to – an imagined root, or base. This is a specialized type of reduction process: typically, a word of one grammatical class (usu. a N) is reduced to form a word of another grammatical class (usu. a V): *television → televise; donation → donate; option → opt; emotion → emote; enthusiasm → enthuse; liaison → liaise; babysitter → to babysit; psychology → to psych ,obsession → to obsess* (on sth.), etc. The word *permutation* has recently been observed attempting to *backform* a verb, *permutate*, when the

verb has in fact existed for centuries, as *permute* (to *backform* is itself a backformation! ☺) A few other examples:

Automate < automation	Vivisect < vivisection,
Craze < crazy	Opt < option,
Eavesdrop < eavesdropper	Synch < synchrony, etc.

Nouns ending in '–er' are often 'backformed' into verbs: *burglars burgle; swindlers swindle; peddlers peddle; editors edit; sculptors sculpt,* etc. – it stands to reason, doesn't it? ☺

Hypocorisms are a special type of backformation, typical of British and Australian English. A longer word is usually 'clipped' to a single syllable, and then the diminutive suffix '-y' or '-ie' is added to the 'tail': *telly, movie, Aussie, hankie, barbie, bookie, cabbie, cookie*, etc.

Conversion
Conversion is a term we use to name a word-formation process which 'converts' words from one part of speech to another, i.e., when we use familiar nouns as verbs, or adjectives (without any reduction):

He buttered his bread.
They import the wine in barrels, and bottle it here.
She likes to vacation in Australia.
It's expected to factor into that = it's expected to impact the outcome

Conversion is particularly productive in modern English: *Prices are bottoming/leveling out. They downned their beer in one long gulp. School party, sea air, user-friendly, vacation time,* etc., etc. – in fact, the use of nouns as adjectives is becoming the norm!

Acronyms
Acronyms are abbreviations pronounced as if they were words, and they are a fairly recent method of word formation. They have proliferated particularly in the past 100 years. Acronyms are made up of the first letters of constituent words (they are shorter, simpler, and more user-friendly! ☺):

CD for 'compact disc'
VCR for 'video cassette recorder'
MP for 'Member of Parliament'
AIDS for 'auto-Immune Deficiency Syndrome'
PIN for 'personal identification number'
ATM for 'automatic teller machine'
UFO for 'unidentified flying object'
laser for 'Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation'
scuba for 'self-contained underwater breathing apparatus'
radar for 'radio detecting and ranging,' etc.
Note that the first set of examples are spelled out as capital letters, while the second set are written as ordinary words (one of the earliest acronyms is found in both forms: OK, or okay, meaning 'ol korrect' ☺)

Analogy
Another, and much more productive method of word formation is **analogy**. Many words and expressions are formed in this way, whether you describe a boring person as '*underwhelming*' by analogy with 'overwhelming,' or say that a person has '*hidden shallows*' by analogy with 'hidden

depths,' or coin words like *motorcade* by analogy with cavalcade, *technobabble* by analogy with 'nukespeak,' or *telethon* by analogy with 'marathon' (we used to have *cleanathons* in POMNATHS!)

Coinage

Because of so many other ways in which we can form new words, coinining, or the *invention* of completely new terms is rather rare in English. Some words, however, like *aspirin, hoover, nylon, kleenex, xerox*, etc., that began as invented trade names, were quickly absorbed into the language and became common words that we use every day. With the IT revolution, so many new concepts entered our reality that new terms had to be invented for many of them, i.e., *kerning* (adjusting the spacing between the letters, so they look better), *modem* (short for Modulator-DEModulator), *dingbats* (a font consisting of graphical symbols), *website*, etc.

Reduplication

Here words are created by partial or complete repetition (reduplication is particularly common among children): *abracadabra, puff-puff* (for train, in the days of steam engines), *wee-wee, teeny-weeny, bye-bye, tom-tom, tut-tut, tick-tock.* Many words formed this way have contrasting sounds, i.e., *hanky-panky, helter-skelter, okie-dokie, hocus-pocus, knick-knack, mish-mash, ping-pong, mumbo-jumbo,* etc.Most of these reduplicative words rhyme – that is what makes them memorable:

Rhyming		**Non-rhyming**
arty-farty	hi-fi	dilly-dally
backpack	hoity-toity	ding-dong
Delhi belly	namby-pamby	singsong
easy-peasy (-japaneasy)	pub grub	shilly-shally
fat cat	silly-billy, willy-nilly, etc.	flimflam, flip-flop, etc.

Repetative: *gaga, goo-goo, go-go, so-so, chin-chin, chop-chop, lik-lik, singsing, toktok,* etc.

Multiple Processes

Often, several word-formation processes are at work: *delicatessen* ➔ *deli* (borrowing + clipping); *to snowball* (compounding + conversion), etc.

Using words from other languages: Borrowing

This is one of the simplest kinds of word formation: the word is simply 'lifted' from another language. Over 70% of all the words in the Miriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary are borrowed from other languages (majority from Old French, Latin and Greek). The new word may be needed in English, because it describes something not previously known to English speakers. That is how the names of exotic plants and animals came into English: orange, lemon, paprika, avocado, yam, yak, kangaroo, pelican, etc. Walter Scott popularized in his novel *Ivanhoe* the realization that while many animals in their lifetime have English names (*ox, cow, calf, sheep, swine, pig, boar, deer*), they reach our table with French names (*beef, veal, mutton, porc, bacon, venison, brawn,* etc.). This is a relic from the time when Norman masters left the care of the living animals to the Anglo-Saxon lower classes, while the superior French *cuisine* was kept in the hands of Norman cooks and *chefs.* Many other borrowings testify to this superiority: *sauce, boil, fry, roast, toast, pastry, soup, sausage, jelly, dainty.* And while the humbler *breakfast* is English, the more sumptuous meals, *dinner, supper,* and *feasts* generally, are French. Most of these borrowings date from the Norman Conquest (1066 AD) and are no longer perceived to be foreign. We tend to be more aware of more recent borrowings, such as *glasnost, perestroika,* etc.

Loanwords are words that exist in one language and are imported into another language. Examples:

bature is a Hausa word for a 'white man' (*baturia* – a 'white woman'), along with numerous other Hausa words, are used extensively in Nigerian English

The words *tai tai* 'wife' and *gweilo* 'foreigner' were imported directly from Cantonese into Hong Kong English

Bilum – which language does it come from? ☺ - is part of PNG English, as are *tokples, toksave,* etc.

As we know, *borrowing* is one of the most common sources of new words in English. English has 'soaked up' numerous loanwords from a multitude of languages through contact with other nations and cultures: *alcohol* (Arabic), *boss* (Dutch), *robot* (Czech), *yoghurt* (Turkish), etc. Here are a few other examples:

Dutch: *apartheid, bluff, brandy, bully, bumpkin, clamp, coleslaw, commando, dope, drill, sledge, slim, snoop, spook, spoor, stoop, trek, golf, frolic, yacht*, etc.

German: *frankfurter, hamburger, hamster, waltz, quartz, schnitzel*, etc.

Norse and the Scandinavian languages: *anger, blink, bloom, blunder, blur, crook, die, dirt, doze, dregs, egg, fellow, gaze, geyser, law, leg, meek, muck, nasty, odd, roof, scold, sky, slalom, sniff, squeal, take, kick, weak, ugly, want, window, etc.*

Indian languages: *mango, bungalow, dungarees, crimson, nirvana, pariah, sapphire, shampoo, sugar, swastika, yoga, etc.*

A **loan-translation**, or **calque**, is a special type of borrowing, which translates a foreign word, phrase, or idiom and adopts its meaning: French *un grate-ciel* → *sky-scraper*, English 'boyfriend' → Japanese *boyifurendo* (borrowing with sound modification), but a *calque* in Chinese: *nan pengyu.* 'Oxota na vedm' is the Russian calque of 'witch hunting.'

9.2.2. Loss of words

Loss of words reflects changes in our social/physical reality and cultural emphasis: words only live for as long as we need them to express certain meanings. When the concepts they signify disappear from our reality, or when a lexical *form* becomes *obsolete* (archaic, old-fashioned) because of our changing tastes (and our tastes are always under the influence of various social/cultural pressures*), a language may *lose* words, simply because people stop using them.

*There might also be other types of cultural restrictions that prohibit the use of certain words in different cultures (see Crowley, pp.158-159).

For example, few people nowadays would use the word *epistle* when they talk of writing a letter, or say that they want to '*embark*' on a PMV (or '*disembark*' from it, for that matter ☺). You would talk of having/going to a 'date,' not a *rendez-vous*, 'pants,' not *pantaloons*, 'faces,' not *countenances*, etc.

There are many words that have fallen out of favor, and out of use, in every living language. Can you think of <u>your own examples</u> of 'dead' (or 'half-dead' ☺) words whose

Forms have become old-fashioned because of our changing tastes (words like *perambulate, venerate, adulation, edifice*, etc.), **or** whose

Meanings no longer exist, because the concepts they signified are no longer part of our social/physical reality (terms for venery in OE, or names of outdated technologies, like *gramophone, telegram*, etc.)?

Loss of words is also a form of lexical change, because it 'renovates' our lexicon.

9.2.3. Semantic Change (shifts in the meanings of existing words)

Example: Pig
Meaning 1: a kind of animal
Meaning 2: a greedy or disgusting person

Semantic Extension occurs when we give a word a new meaning without changing its form. The new meaning is usually related to at least one of the existing meanings.

Semantic extensions often arise from creative use of language. They can be found in creative writing, but they are also very common in ordinary, everyday language. (E.g., She is a *peach,* but her brother is a *pig*.)

Semantic extensions can be **conventionalized** to different degrees.

People sometimes extend words to new meanings in the context of a conversation, or in a written work, but those meanings are never adopted by other speakers of the language, and never become a conventional part of English vocabulary.

In some cases, however, the new meaning once created can be spread throughout a language community and generally accepted as part of the vocabulary of the language. This process of spreading happens gradually, giving rise to partially conventionalized word meanings.

Once a new meaning is fully conventionalized, we can say that **semantic change**, or shift in **meaning** has occurred. Semantic extension and semantic change occur in all languages. Like the form component of a morpheme, meanings are in a constant process of change. Over time, 'quantity changes the quality': all the small cumulative changes add up to cause major shifts in the meaning of the morpheme or the words that use it. Literal meanings of Latin or Greek words in English can differ quite a bit from their modern meaning. Just like changes in form, these seemingly random semantic changes fall into **regular patterns**.

Let us now consider the **processes** leading to meaning shifts, and the **results** of these semantic changes.

Processes of Semantic Change: the Driving Forces behind It
          Metaphor & Metonymy
          Euphemism

Processes of Semantic Change: The Driving Forces behind It
Semantic change is possible because humans have the cognitive capability (the power of analogy) to form **associations** between different concepts.

As we know, there are **three principle *types* of association**:

- **Metaphor**,
- **Metonymy,** and
- **Cause/Effect.**

Metaphor & Metonymy

They are the **processes of semantic extension**, which sometimes (but not always) lead to **semantic change** and **polysemy**.

<u>**Metaphor**</u> always involves **an association between two things that <u>is based on resemblance</u>**.

For example, the morpheme *galac* means 'milk.' Centuries ago, people thought that a certain group of stars, gas, and dust **looked like** milk spilled across the sky, so they called it *galaxy*. Of course, English speakers had formed the same **metaphoric association** and used the same **metaphor** when they named that group of stars 'the Milky Way.' Nowadays, words like *galaxy* and *galactic* are used to refer to any group of stars with a particular structure.

Metaphors express one concept in terms of another, based on the similarity between the two. Often, metaphor involves expressing a relatively abstract concept in terms of a relatively concrete one.

In the history of English, many ordinary English words have been extended to take on metaphorical meanings. The result is typically **polysemy** between literal and metaphorical meanings.

cold – 'low temperature' → 'distant and uncaring'
She gave him a cold look.

hot – 'high temperature' → 'attractive'
He looks very hot today.

big – 'large' → 'noble'
That's big of you to accept defeat so graciously.

foot – 'body part at bottom of leg' → 'bottom'
The house is at the foot of the hill.

Metaphors for entire domains:

In their book *Metaphors we live by,* Lakoff and Johnson (1980) show how metaphors often apply to entire domains of experience, and affect entire discourses, not just isolated words (Re: Lecture 8). Some words become polysemous as a result of metaphorical extension. For example, the words *up* and *down* clearly have the senses of 'happy' and 'sad.'

Whether a metaphorical meaning signals polysemy or not depends on whether the meaning has been conventionalized in the language. **Polysemy** results from the **conventionalization** of a semantic extension and the **retention** of the original meaning.

<u>**Metonymy**</u> always involves an association between two things that **is based on something other than resemblance**. Usually, the meaning changes from one object to another that is **close to it in space or time**.

<u>For example</u>, people often say things like, 'He drank a whole bottle.' Of course, what they really mean is that he drank *the contents* of the bottle, not the bottle itself. But the bottle and whatever is inside it happened to be <u>close together in space and time</u>. This close association leads to a natural **metonymic**

shift – the form that was associated with the bottle comes to be linked with the contents, i.e. it shifts its meaning. <u>Also</u>: 'bottle shop,' 'to go/be on the bottle,' 'to drown one's sorrows in the bottle,' etc. *Please note that there is no resemblance between the bottle and its contents! ☺

So **metonymy** expresses something in terms of one of its attributes or something closely related to it, usually in space or time. In everyday English usage, metonymy is a highly **productive** means of extending the meanings of words (look up some of the examples given in Lecture 8).

Euphemism

Euphemism is another driving force behind some semantic shifts. In **euphemism**, an accurate, but explicit word, which may cause embarrassment or discomfort, is substituted with a gentler and less distasteful term. It is justified when the cold truth is inappropriate, i.e., when trying to avoid giving offence or causing unnecessary distress. The replacing of an unpleasant or rude word with a more pleasant or less offensive one often results in extending the meaning of a relatively neutral word to an unpleasant or taboo meaning.

For example, many people avoid direct reference to death: rather than say, *When I die…*, they prefer, *If anything should happen to me…* Other contexts prone to euphemism include illness, mental handicap, old age, obesity, poverty, dishonesty, and sex. So you get:

She is a little confused = 'mad, mentally disturbed'
He is a senior citizen / getting on in years = 'he is old'
She has a full figure = 'she is fat, obese'
Terminological inexactitude = 'a lie'
He's been economical with the truth = 'he lied'
They sleep together = 'they have a sexual relationship'
His clothes have seen better days = 'his clothes are shabby, worn, ugly and old-looking'
A Third World country = 'a poor country'

Euphemism can sometimes be exaggerated, and even wicked, as in:

A terminal episode = 'death' (in American jargon)
Ethnic cleansing = 'mass displacement of population'
The final solution = Nazi term for the extermination of the Jews
Schedule overrun = 'late, overdue' (in business jargon)

A special variety of euphemism is so-called 'nukespeak' which cunningly deploys acronyms to gloss over the obscenities to which they refer: an ICBM or a MIRV sounds so much friendlier than Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile or Multiple Independently-Targetable Re-entry Vehicle, and terms like 'clean strike,' 'surgical precision,' 'surgical strike,' 'collateral damage' are used to make the unthinkable thinkable. Here euphemism melts into George Orwell's 'mind control.'

Another set of euphemisms derive from the current notion of 'political correctness,' which has given rise to half-humorous euphemistic expressions designed to avoid any kind of discrimination (for which one can be sued! ☺ Nowadays we are told not to call somebody 'short,' or 'small' (even if they are) – but rather 'vertically challenged'; similarly, sex-change operations have become 'gender realignment' ☺

<u>Euphemism, thus, can lead to semantic change and polysemy</u>. Even after semantic change has occurred, in many cases the euphemism is still considered less rude than non-euphemistic words of the same meaning.

Examples:

pass away / pass on -- 'die' 'the departed'-- 'dead'

collateral damage – civilian casualties

neutralize, take out -- 'kill'

to pass wind – to fart

go to the toilet -- 'urinate' (also metonymy)

go -- 'urinate' (also specialization)

grass / weed -- 'marijuana' (also specialization)

Can you think of any euphemisms in other languages? ☺

Possible reasons for using a euphemism:
- to talk about forbidden topics
- to be polite
- to avoid hurting someone else's feelings
- to avoid embarrassment
- to hide the truth from others (e.g., in illegal dealings)
- to justify morally reprehensible acts (e.g., killing: *to take out, collateral damage,* etc.)

The Results of Analogical Reasoning: Types of Semantic Change

The results of our cognitive ability to draw parallels and form metaphorical and metonymical associations between different things (analogy) can cause semantic changes on <u>different levels</u>: on the level of morphemes, words, and groups of words (phrases).

Semantic Widening (generalization)

A word that once had a rather narrow meaning can come to refer to a **broader scope** of things over time, i.e., its meaning becomes more **general**, less specific:

you *guys*: male only → male and female

dogge = specific breed of dog in OE (now, any dog)

manage: to handle a horse → to handle anything successfully (original meaning obsolete)

toxin < Latin 'toxicum' (poison by arrows) – in present day English: 'any kind of poison.'

The term 'national' has undergone semantic broadening/widening in Papua New Guinea English under the pressure of euphemism (to avoid the offensive associations evoked by the term 'native,' the word 'national' now refers to all PNG citizens).

Semantic Narrowing (specialization)

A word that once had a rather broad meaning can become restricted in the scope of things that it can refer to. You could say that the meaning of a word becomes less general, and more specific

For example, the <u>morpheme</u> **bibl** originally meant 'book.' It still carries that general meaning in some words like 'bibliography,' or in Russian and Latvian words for 'library' – *biblioteka*. In many cases,

however, it now refers to one specific book – the Christian Bible. We see this specific meaning in words like *biblical* and *biblomancy.*

Now look at these words:

accident: any event, especially an unexpected one → an unintended injurious or disastrous event (original meaning obsolete)
deer: any four-legged beast (Cf. Dutch *dier, dieren*) → members of the family Cervidae (original meaning obsolete; replaced by the French word *animal*)
ledger: any book that lay permanently in the same place > an accounts book (original meaning obsolete)
goal: aim or purpose > football goal (still polysemous)
OE *mete* [mi:t] = any kind of food in OE, now 'meat' (a specific type of food).

Sometimes idiomatic expressions, and whole groups of words can shift collective their meanings, for example, not so long ago *'to make love'* meant to 'woo,' to 'court.' Nowadays that meaning has become rather more specialized ☺.

Some specializations are motivated by the avoidance of **synonymy**, as in the case of *deer*. Similarly with *pig, cow, sheep, goat*, whose meanings specialized after the words *beef, pork, lamb* and *mutton* were borrowed from French.

Amelioration
A word with an unpleasant or offensive meaning can come to have a neutral, or even positive meaning; also, a neutral word can become very positive over time (from a negative to a positive marker [- → +])

For example, the word *dexter* literally means 'on the right' (neutral meaning, neither positive nor negative). But since the majority of people can do things better with their right hand, the morpheme has come to mean 'skill'/'cleverness' in words like *dexterity* and *dextrous*. These new meanings have definite positive connotations.

Pejoration (degeneration)
Perjoration occurs when a word with a positive, neutral, or 'not-so-bad' meaning acquires a more negative meaning – in fact, meanings are far more likely to change for the worse than to improve! So *pejoration* means extending words to new meanings which convey negative attitudes.

For example, the word 'sinister' is borrowed from Latin, where it meant 'on the left' – a simple fact, neither positive, nor negative. But Roman soothsayers considered the left side to be unlucky, so over time 'sinister' came to mean 'evil,' or 'ominous' – a very negative word indeed! ☺

The word 'rascal' in English means a 'playful or cheeky person, especially a child who likes playing tricks; in PNG English, however, it has acquired a very negative meaning, 'an armed robber.'

Negative attitudes towards certain groups can be reflected in semantic extensions which are intentionally insulting, i.e.:

- addressing a grown man as *boy* to oppress (American South); this reflects negative cultural attitudes towards blacks. (also generalization)
- referring to women as *bitches* 'female dog'

- referring to homosexuals as *queers* 'peculiar'

A kind of euphemism: Negative attitudes towards certain groups can also lead people who oppose those negative attitudes to extend non-discriminatory words to refer to members of those groups:

- they (pl) → (sg.) (a gender-neutral way of expressing 'he or she')
- gay 'happy' → 'homosexual' (also metonymy)
- wymyn 'women'

Reinterpretation
Reinterpretation means extending words to new meanings because of changes in technology, culture, or environment. We often form new words to reflect cultural and technological changes: television, telephone, e-mail, photograph, computer, automobile, etc. However, we also often extend existing words to new meanings.

car: originally referred to a cart or wagon
stove: was wood or coal, now electric or gas
write: originally meant 'scratch'
computer terms: files, folders, desktop, bookmarks, mail, buttons, memory, mouse, pad

Re-cap:
As you answer the following questions, and do the exercises, remember:

the **two driving forces of semantic change** / **processes that lead to shifts in meaning** (metaphor and metonymy), and
five types/consequences of semantic change: widening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and reinterpretation (which can lead to grammaticalization).

Questions & Exercises

Q 1   What is the process of conventionalization? How does it happen?
Q 2   What do we mean by *lexical innovation*? How does it happen?
Q 3   State and briefly describe some general word-formation processes.
Q 4   What is the role of borrowing in the addition of new words to the vocabulary?
Q 5   What causes the loss of words in a language?
Q 6   What is the difference between metaphor and metonymy?
Q 7   What is *euphemism* and how does its use cause semantic shifts?
Q 8   Define and give examples of: semantic widening and semantic narrowing.
Q 9   Define and give examples of: amelioration and pejoration.
Q 10   Define and give examples of semantic re-interpretation.
Q 11   Distinguish between homonymy and polysemy. Give examples.

Exercises

1.   More than one process was involved in the formation of each of the forms below. Can you identify them? Think of 5 examples of multiple word formation processes at work.

I have a new *car-phone*.

John wants to be a *footballer*.
The negotiators *blueprinted* a new peace proposal.
Another *carjacking* has been reported.

2.   Identify the affixes in: *Unfaithful, carelessness, refillable, disagreement, scholarship, referee, impossible*, etc. Analyse 10 words of your own choice.

3.   In deriving new words with the help of suffix –able, there seems to be a constraint on what is permissible: what is it?

> *Breakable, movable, understandable, wearable, eatable, drinkable, acceptable, laughable, renewable, chewable, solvable, observable,* etc.
> But: * *carable, deskable, taskable, housable, pencilable?* Or: * *diable, coughable, sneezable, runable, redable, sleepable*, etc.

4.   What word-formation processes can you identify in the sentences below?
Give your own examples.

> *When I am ill, I want to see a doc, not a vet.*
> *I was a deejay before, but now I am an emcee in a nightclub.*
> *That's a-whole-nother problem!*
> *He is always taking pills, either uppers or downers.*
> Live reporting is very popular nowadays, so we bring you Jenny – live! ☺

5.   Think of at least 10 new words that have recently entered the language you speak, and identify the word formation process(es) that have taken place in their creation.

6.   Compare the meanings of the following forms in English and Tok Pisin: what are the changes that have taken place?

English	Tok Pisin	Meaning in Tok Pisin
arse	as	'buttocks, basis, foundation, tree trunk, stem of a plant'
bed	bet	'bed, shelf'
garden	garen	'plot of ground planted out to food crops for a single season
grass	gras	'grass, hair, whiskers'
cargo	kago	'material possessions'
cry	krai	'cry, wail, weep, moan'
copper	kapa	'roofing iron'
straight	stret	'straight, correct'
hand	han	'hand, arm, wrist, branch of a tree'

7.   What is the plural of *Walkman*? If you use more than one mouse with your computer, how would you refer to them? 'Mouses' or 'mice'? ☺ If you say 'mouses' and 'Walkmans' – why might that be?