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Natural Semantic Metalanguage: Primes, Universals, and Syntax with Data from the Semantic Field Grace in the Old Testaments of the King James Bible and Martin Luther's German Bible

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Natural Semantic Metalanguage: Primes, Universals, and Syntax
with Data from the Semantic Field *Grace* in the Old Testaments of the King James Bible and Martin Luther's German Bible[1]

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"Now when the angel greets Mary, he says: 'Greetings to you, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.' Well up to this point, this has simply been translated from the simple Latin, but tell me is that good German? Since when does a German speak like that - being 'full of grace'? One would have to think about a keg 'full of' beer or purse 'full of' money. So I translated it: 'You gracious one'. This way a German can at last think about what the angel meant by his greeting. Yet the papists rant about me corrupting the angelic greeting - and I still have not used the most satisfactory German translation. What if I had used the most satisfactory German and translated the salutation: 'God says hello, Mary dear' (for that is what the angel was intending to say and what he would have said had he even been German!) If I had, I believe that they would have hanged themselves out of their great devotion to dear Mary and because I have destroyed the greeting.

"I shall say 'gracious Mary' and 'dear Mary', and they can say 'Mary full of grace'. Anyone who knows German also knows what an expressive word 'dear' (liebe) is: dear Mary, dear God, the dear emperor, the dear prince, the dear man, the dear child. *I do not know if one can say this word 'liebe' in Latin or in other languages **with** so much depth of emotion that it pierces the heart and echoes throughout as it does in our tongue.*"
--Martin Luther "An Open Letter on Translation" (Emphasis added)

As usual, Luther hits the nail on the head. In the passage quoted above, he is indignant about the criticism his German Bible translation has received from critics who clearly did not share or understand his aim of making a Bible in authentic German, not merely a "faithful" rendering of the Latin (not even the Bible's original language) word-for-word in German. This passage from Luther's famous and eloquent letter about the agonizing struggle that is the process of translation implicitly expresses the aims of scholars such as Anna Wierzbicka and others. Wierzbicka and her colleagues, in developing semantic primes and an accompanying Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), have the ambitious goal of analyzing the words such as German *liebe* whose "depth of emotion ... pierces the heart" and to analyze words in the context of their culture.

This paper looks at semantic analysis, including semantic fields, through the lens of NSM as described by Wierzbicka and others, how primes combine syntactically to make

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culture. The syntactic combinations and some exploration of how language reflects culture will be explored by examining the semantic field *grace* in the Old Testament of the Bible in German and English and how this field can be analyzed using NSM.

Semantic Universals

Before the work of generative grammarians such as Chomsky, and particularly before linguistics, psychology, and philosophy separated into distinct disciplines in the 20th century, the search for language universals focused on semantics, with philosophers such as Leibniz looking for semantic "simples" that would form the "alphabet of thought." Linguistics as a discipline has focused on many other areas instead of, and in addition to, semantics and semantic universals, and in the 20th century, things like the investigation of American Indian languages early in the century led to an emphasis on the divergence among languages rather than their similarities. The last forty years, however, has seen the creation of a body of research on linguistic universals and corresponding typologies by scholars such as Comrie and Greenberg, including work on semantic universals by Berlin and Kay, Witkowski and Brown, and a number of others. Important recent work on semantic universals has been done by Dixon, Lyons, and Moscow School linguists, among others. Dixon has worked on the intersection of semantics and syntax, using a system of primitives, while Lyons sees semantic universals springing from extra-linguistic, ontological reality, i.e., the way humans see and interact with the world. The Moscow School also developed a system of primitives, the Meaning Text Model (MTM). (Goddard and Wierzbicka: 17-18)

NSM research began in the late 1960s. Wierzbicka says that her interest in "non-arbitrary semantic primitives was triggered by a lecture on this subject ... by the Polish linguist Andrej Bogusławski in 1965." (Wierzbicka 1996: 13) In this influential lecture, Bogusławski

proposed a linguistic approach to the philosophical problem posed by Leibniz and others, the discovery of the "alphabet of thought." This linguistic approach would turn out to be the dogged empiricism and cross-linguistic investigation that marks NSM research. The first step in NSM research, following Descartes, Humboldt, Leibniz, et al., is to develop "semantic primes" or "primitives" that express concepts that are universal and can be expressed in all languages. These primes are something like Leibniz' "alphabet of thought," concepts that every human knows and acquires the words for as he or she learns to talk. The semantic primes attempt to identify the universal "simples" of thought, which can then be used to analyze the way culture is reflected in language, in other words, to show that, beyond the primes, there is no true one-to-one correspondence of words and expressions from language to language. (Goddard and Wierzbicka: 19)

Wierzbicka and others have a strongly stated hypothesis—that all humans have a finite number of innate mental concepts that are lexicalized in all human languages. These "semantic primes" combine to form a syntax that is NSM—a language for talking about semantics that is a subset of a natural language, in which "[p]rimitives … from a given natural language combine according to … the morphosyntactic conventions of that language … the smallest 'mini-language' with the same expressive power as full natural language." (Goddard and Wierzbicka: 12) This is in contrast to the "markerese" of componential and semantic field approaches, e.g., "+animate," which Wierzbicka and others find to be more complicated than the indefinable and undecomposable primes that use natural language. Wierzbicka's view is that these primes represent the concepts that cannot be broken down further and therefore cannot be defined. These primes represent what humans know about themselves and the world in a "culture-free" context. They may have a biological basis, but they do not represent "scientific" knowledge.

(That is, the perception of color is biological, but the description of color is not just biological.)

(Wierzbicka 1996: 286)

The principles of NSM theory: (Goddard and Wierzbicka: 8-13)

I.   Semiotic principle. Signs are composed of signs and meanings are composed of other meanings. "What philosophers know as a fully intentional concept of meaning." (8)

II. Principle of discrete and exhaustive analysis. This contrasts with componential analysis, and "scalar notions" such as fuzzy set theory. "Any complex meaning can be decomposed into a combination of discrete other meanings, without circularity and without residue." (8)

III. Semantic primitive principle. This follows from I and II and posits a "finite set of undecomposable meanings." (8) Many scholars have done work in this area from 17th- and 18th-century figures such as Pascal, Descartes, and Leibniz, to work in the 20th century by Bogusławski, Chomsky, Katz and Fodor, and so on.

IV. Natural language principle. Semantic primitives are a "minimal subset of ordinary natural language." (10)

V.   Expressive equivalence of NSMs. "Complete inter-translatability between NSMs." (12) Equivalent expressive power in every language.

VI. Isomorphism of NSMs. There will be a fairly straightforward one-to-one correspondence between primes cross-linguistically.

VII. Strong lexicalization hypothesis. Primitives "can be expressed through a distinct word, morpheme, or fixed phrase in any language." (13)

Views on the relationship of language, thought, and culture describe a continuum from the absolute universalism of Chomsky to the strong interpretation of Whorf (that language shapes and constrains thought and culture), with more nuanced views in between. Chomsky's idea of lexical universals is based on introspection, not empirical evidence. (Wierzbicka 1992: 5-6) While Chomsky believes that "nature has provided us with an innate stock of concepts" and that "the child's task is discover the labels" for these concepts, Chomsky did no empirical work on this matter. (11) NSM primes, on the other hand, are rigorously and cross-linguistically tested, with criteria that include defining power and universality. (Peeters; Tong, et al.; Goddard and

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Wierzbicka) To Descartes' view that primes should be self-explanatory and impossible to define, and Leibniz' view that "simples [primes] should be building blocks," Wierzbicka and other NSM researchers add the criterion of cross-linguistic empirical evidence of proposed primes. (Wierzbicka 1992: 12)

Wierzbicka differs from philosophers such as Wittgenstein or linguists such as George Lakoff, who see semantic relationships in terms of "prototypes," or "family resemblances"—"the idea that members of a category may be related to one another without all members having any properties in common that define the category." (Lakoff: 12) In contrast to this view of meaning as "fuzzy," Wierzbicka asserts that meaning is complex, but that it can be broken down using an NSM that consists of semantic primes. (Wierzbicka 1992: 23)

While maintaining that all humans and all languages share a core of concepts, Wierzbicka also asserts that language reflects culture and that it is important to guard against ethnocentrism in linguistic investigation. NSM attempts to "find the point of view which is universal and culture-independent … separate within a culture its idiosyncratic aspects from its universal aspects … learn to find 'human nature' within every culture … To study difficult words in their culture-specific features we need a universal perspective … a culture-independent analytical framework." (26) Translation is perilous, and one-to-one equivalence is hard to find, because culture is reflected in the particular words of each language. For example, Russian *duša* does not equal English *soul*; German *glücklich* is not the exact equivalent of English *happy*, and so on. Emphasizing the differences between these words does not deny that they are closely related and that they are the best and most common translations for each other. Moreover, while polysemy is an important issue in this kind of analysis, the polysemy of *glücklich* (which means both "happy" and "lucky"), for example, is not necessarily part of the problem in translation; rather,

the problem is the culture-specific nature of concepts such as emotions. (In fact, it could be argued that *glücklich* is not polysemous, but that the German emotion that corresponds in some ways to English *happy* includes the idea of being "lucky.") NSM explores translation and its limitations, since "every language has its own set of lexicalized concepts" and while the "lexicons of different languages suggest different cultural universes," it is also true that "every language has words for basic human concepts." (20)

The aim of NSM research is to find the smallest necessary set of primes, to find the "atoms" and to decompose all the "molecules." This search for a "set of indefinables" and a "set of defining concepts" that (ideally) are the same leads to a "culture-free semantic metalanguage." Further, "to explain any meanings we need a set of presumed indefinables, and to explain meanings across languages and across cultural boundaries we need a set of presumed universals." (17)

The list of primes has grown from an original list of fourteen to about sixty. These have been tested cross-linguistically, and not all primes on the list are as solidly accepted as others. The primes have been tested by means of "canonical sentences," sentences that ideally use primes exclusively, but which sometimes use some words or concepts that are not primes, e.g., "If you do this, people will say bad things about you" (all primes), or "People say that God knows everything," (all primes except "God.") (Goddard and Wierzbicka: 52) The primes are unanalyzable concepts that are needed to decompose or define other words or concepts. In other words, new primes are proposed because they are seen as necessary for definitions in a certain domain, e.g., *when* is essential for talking about time, *not* is necessary because negation cannot be accounted for without it, and so on. NSM attempts to be "maximally universal and maximally self-explanatory" e.g., *this* is "more self-illuminating than *deictic*" (Wierzbicka 1992: 17-18)

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The primes "represent a standardized and non-idiomatic *metalanguage* rather than a natural language in all its richness and idiosyncrasy." (21)

Work done by Wierzbicka and others has found strong evidence of the presence of these semantic primes in languages from many language families, including English and other European languages, as well as Japanese, Chinese, languages of Australia, Africa, and so on. (Goddard and Wierzbicka) Cross-linguistically, the primes are represented by words, morphological features, or lexical phrases. Primes are semantically equivalent cross-linguistically, but may not be pragmatically equivalent. Thai, for example, is famous for the array of personal pronouns it has for use in various situations and registers. Nonetheless, there are basic words in Thai that correspond to the semantic primes 'I' and 'you.' (14-15)

List of Primes

Primes are divided into traditional grammatical categories and combine syntactically to form NSM.

Category	Primes
Substantives	I, YOU, SOMEONE, PEOPLE, SOMETHING/THING, BODY
Relational Substantives	KIND, PART
Determiners	THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE~ANOTHER
Quantifiers	ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH/MANY, LITTLE/FEW
Evaluators	GOOD, BAD
Descriptors	BIG, SMALL
Mental predicates	THINK, KNOW, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
Speech	SAY, WORDS, TRUE
Actions, Events, Movement	DO, HAPPEN, MOVE
Existence, Possession	BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING), (IS) MINE
Life and Death	LIVE, DIE
Time	WHEN/TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT
Space	WHERE/PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCH (CONTACT)
Logical Concepts	NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
Intensifier, Augmentor	VERY, MORE
Similarity	LIKE/AS/WAY

Semantic Analysis and the NSM Approach[1]

Semantics can be looked at from a number of points of view, including philosophical, cognitive, anthropological and so on. The structuralist tradition of contrastive linguistics has used semantic fields as a means of exploring meaning. Paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations—one of the linguistic dichotomies proposed by Saussure—are important to semantic field analysis. Words are related paradigmatically to each other, through synonymy, antonymy, and substitutability within a certain paradigm, e.g., *A _____ is a kind of bird.* NSM research explores paradigmatic relations in its effort to contrast similar words and to define words exhaustively. Wierzbicka would agree with the paradigmatic description of a robin as "a kind of" bird, but she contrasts "natural kinds" (animals, plants, etc.) which have this relationship and could form a semantic field, with "cultural kinds" (e.g., toys, furniture, and so on) that do not form a field and are not "a kind of" anything. (Wierzbicka 1996: 172-173)

Syntagmatic relations are the syntactic collocations associated with individual words, e.g., in lexical phrases such as French *donner un coup de pied*, 'kick.' Languages differ in what is lexicalized, as this last example illustrates: English uses a lexeme for the concept represented by a French syntagm. NSM research confirms and accounts for this variation across languages: the same semantic prime might be a lexeme in one language, a lexical phrase in another, an affix in a third, and so on.

Semantic fields are structured using various kinds of meaning, including referential, social, and encyclopedic meaning, that is, the denotational (referential), emotive (social), and the combination of the two plus any other historical or cultural associations (encyclopedic). NSM research attempts to account for these aspects of meaning: referential meaning is implicit in the

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[1] Adapted in part from Bolin, Mary K. *Grace: a Contrastive Analysis of a Biblical Semantic Field.* Unpublished MA thesis. University of Idaho, 1999. Chapter 2: "Semantic Analysis."

attempt to create contrastive, non-circular definitions with NSM scripts; social and encyclopedic meaning are reflected in the "cultural" part of "cultural scripts"—the attempt to define a word in the context of its culture.

The exploration of these categories of meaning brings out the central and peripheral characteristics of the words in a semantic field. Speakers may feel, for example that a robin is central to defining the category *bird*, while a turkey may be more peripheral. The prototype of the category may have a cluster of salient characteristics, while other, less-salient characteristics may allow the peripheral members to belong to the category without being prototypical exemplars. Wierzbicka agrees that prototypes may best exemplify categories, but sees NSM scripts as a way of finding the "invariant core," the core that separates the bats from the birds, so to speak. (Wierzbicka 1996: 150-151)

The structural approach also uses the concept of markedness, in which items are marked as having "distinctive features," or in which items are contrasted as unmarked/marked, i.e., default/specialized. The binary features of componential analysis illustrate the usefulness and salience of dichotomy. Contrast is an important part of semantic field theory. NSM has something in common with the componential approach in its attempt to bring out contrasts, but it emphatically rejects "markerese" (e.g., "+animate/-animate"). Moreover, NSM scripts may differentiate synonyms using something like markedness, e.g., 'bad' vs. 'very bad.'

Lyons uses color terms to discuss biological and cultural salience in the study of semantics. He finds it biologically salient that a small number of color terms are lexicalized cross-linguistically, since these probably "correlate with the characteristic colours of the salient objects in man's physical and cultural habitat." (Lyons 247) Wierzbicka agrees with this, and

proposes NSM scripts for colors in which *red*, for example, is "The color thought to be like the color of blood." (Wierzbicka 1996: 247)

Other scholars besides NSM researchers such as Wierzbicka have used the term "primitive" (which has been used along with "prime" in NSM literature) but they mean something quite different from NSM primes or primitives. Lehrer's discussion of componential analysis includes "semantic primitives," concepts such as 'human,' 'male,' 'female,' etc., that he says can be broken down no further, as well as "semantic markers," features that group lexical items together or contrast them. (Lehrer 1974) Other scholars regard paradigmatic relations like synonymy and antonymy as primitives, i.e., that they cannot be further defined or subdivided. NSM analysis would not consider 'human' or other similar categories to be an irreducible prime (although 'human' might be like the NSM prime 'someone'), but the NSM primes 'same' and 'like,' among others, do describe semantic relations such as synonymy.

As stated earlier, Wierzbicka divides the world into "natural kinds" and "cultural kinds." "Natural kinds" are categories that form "taxonomic concepts," such as plants and animals. "Cultural kinds" are "functional concepts," human artifacts and not taxonomic. For Wierzbicka, a robin may be "a kind of" bird, but a doll is not "a kind of" toy, because of the arbitrariness of the category and its lack of defined limits. (Wierzbicka 1996: 173) Beyond the natural world, however, Wierzbicka does recognize some semantic fields that are "coherent" and "self-contained," including, for example, *speech-act verbs*. (173) In fields like this and others, "meanings can be rigorously described and compared if they are recognized for what they are: unique and culture-specific configurations of universal semantic primitives." (175)

Chaffin also talks about primitives, saying that a word's meaning is "a configuration of semantic primitives; therefore, it doesn't depend on the meaning of other words in the lexicon."

(Chaffin 210) Even though words' meanings are not interdependent, "to establish what the meaning of a word is one has to compare it with the meanings of other, intuitively related words." (210) NSM research agrees solidly with this view, seeing words as configurations of primes, and differentiating meaning through comparison.

Using NSM

Substantives, predicates, and so on, combine syntactically to make NSM scripts. NSM grammar of course varies from language to language. As when allophones are the realizations of a phoneme in different environments, primes in one language may demonstrate "allolexy," e.g., English *much/more* are allolexes of one prime. Polysemy is an issue in discovering primes cross-linguistically, e.g., English *know* has two meanings: the English prime 'know' is represented by "I know *this*" rather than "I know *him*."

The following are "cultural scripts," that is, the configuration of primes that describes and emotion in the context of the culture of a linguistic community. The conventional NSM format for emotional scripts begins "X feels something," followed by "Sometimes a person feels something like this" to describe what X feels, concluding with "X feels something like this."

Terrified
X feels something
Sometimes a person feels something like this:
       something very bad is happening
       because of this, something very bad can happen to me now
       I don't want this
       because of this I would do something if I could
       I can't do anything
Because of this, this person feels something very bad
X feels something like this

Petrified
X feels something
Sometimes a person feels something like this:
       something very bad is happening
       because of this, something very bad will happen to me now
       I don't want this
       because of this I would do something if I could
       I can't do anything
Because of this, this person feels something very bad
Because of this, this person can't move
X feels something like this

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Horrified
X feels something
Sometimes a person feels something like this:
      something very bad is happening to someone
      I didn't think that something like this could happen
      I don't want this
      because of this I would want to do something if I could
      I can't do anything
Because of this, this person feels something very bad
X feels something like this

(Wierzbicka 1996: 216-217)

These three NSM scripts show the standard format: what "someone" feels is indented, while what happens "because of this" is left-aligned once more. With some clear success, these three scripts differentiate the similar words that all mean something like "afraid." *Terrified* and *petrified* are identical, except that when one is *petrified,* "something very bad" not only "can happen" (as when one is *terrified*), it "*will* happen," and moreover, "because of this" the *petrified* someone "cannot move." *Horrified* is distinct from both of these, because the "something very bad" has happened to someone else. Wierzbicka has frequently focused on emotions as a fruitful area of NSM research, seeing them as culture-based and not directly equivalent cross-linguistically and cross-culturally, stating, "if we try to explain key emotion terms of other languages (such as … Ifaluk *fago* and *song*) by using English words and combinations of words such as 'anger/passion/energy,' 'love/sadness/compassion,' we are imposing an Anglo cultural perspective on other cultures. For from an Ifaluk point of view *fago* is a unified concept, not a mixture of the concepts encoded in the English words *anger, love, sadness* (for which Ifaluk has no equivalents)." (Wierzbicka 1996:24; see also Harkins and Wierzbicka; Wierzbicka 1992: 118-132)

Creating NSM scripts

Abstract concepts lend themselves more easily to NSM analysis, but NSM seeks to be able to define any word. Some concepts may have to be defined in steps, e.g.,

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sky
Something very big
People can see it
People can think like this about this something:
    It is a place
    It is above all other places
    It is far from people

(Wierzbicka 1996: 220)

After *sky* is defined with NSM, the word itself can be used to define *sun* or *cloud*. The approach taken to creating a script depends on the domain the words being defined comes from. Different primes and different syntactic combinations will be used for emotions, actions, objects, and so on. The NSM formula for emotions and similar words is generally "X feels something/Sometimes a person thinks (or feels) something like this/.../Because of this X feels something good (or bad)/X feels something like this." The formula for a quality such as *bravery* is something like this:

X is someone who thinks something like this:
    It would be good if I did Y
    Because of this, I want to do it
    I don't want to think: 'I don't want something bad to happen to me'
And because of this, does Y ...

and so on. (207)

The formula for an abstract concept like *soul* is quite different:

Soul

One of two parts of a person
One cannot see it ...

and so on. (Wierzbicka 1992: 35)

The scripts can be used to differentiate between synonyms and to explain concepts like emotions cross-culturally and cross-linguistically. They are not really meant to be used to "guess" the word being described (that is, a native speaker of English would not necessarily choose *terrified* as the word being referred to in the first example above), although native

speakers might be expected to match the word to the script when presented with three scripts and three words. Moreover, while NSM aims to be useful and valid in every semantic domain, its virtues are seen most clearly in a domain like emotions, where the meanings can be explored using mostly or only primes, without having to take the many steps back required to define things like animals, objects, geographic features, and so on. Wierzbicka (1996) wrestles cheerfully with semantic problems like color terms and folk taxonomies of plants and animals, applying NSM analysis to them in a thought-provoking and illuminating way, approaching them from the point of view of cultural rather than scientific understanding. While NSM has something good to offer these semantic domains, it is really in areas like emotions and other culturally-laden abstracts such as *freedom, bravery,* and so on that the approach shows its real strength and usefulness.

Data

The English data is from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, primarily from the book of Psalms in the Old Testament (OT). The German data is from the same portions of Martin Luther's German Bible. Both of these are about 500 years old, and therefore this data does not (necessarily) reflect current usage. The scripts are an attempt to explicate usage in these two Bible versions only. The words in the English field are *grace, favor, mercy, kindness, compassion,* and *pity*, while the German field includes *Gnade, Barmherzigkeit, Güte, Gunst,* and *erbarmen*. The current study excludes some words that appeared relatively few times in the original data in both English and German (e.g., English *thankfulness*, German *Mitleid*). Some citations use the noun form, others use an adjective (e.g., *mercy, merciful*), but the noun form is used for the scripts.

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This data was originally collected for the thesis cited in footnote 1. That data included both OT and New Testament (NT) citations, and included original Hebrew and Greek, as well as Latin data in addition to English and German. Analysis included componential analysis of the field(s), pairwise comparisons, maps and other graphic representations.

NSM Analysis[2]

NSM scripts attempt to make distinctions between similar words, as we saw with *terrified, petrified,* and *horrified.* These are "cultural scripts." A number of cultures are involved in this data, including Judeo-Christian culture in general, as well as those of Reformation-era Germany and England. Moreover, the continuing influence of the Bible, including the KJV and Luther translations, is a force that still shapes culture. Moreover, the words in this field describe emotions or have emotional content, and, as mentioned previously, the cross-cultural meaning of emotion is an important and fruitful area for NSM research. It is likely that the understanding of terms like *mercy, kindness,* and *compassion* is influenced by exposure to the Bible for many people, creating a particular "cultural" significance for these and similar words.

The field in English can be divided into two parts: *grace-favor* and *mercy-compassion-pity. Kindness* could go in either group but perhaps fits best with *mercy. Grace* and *favor* are distinct but synonymous to a great extent, as in the common OT expression: *to find grace/favor in someone's eyes. Favor* is unmarked and can mean 'friendly regard, approval, goodwill, kindness,' 'the goodwill of one in authority,' 'partiality.' *Grace* is more marked and connotes authority or some unequal relationship. *Mercy-compassion-pity* is a continuum of markedness. *Mercy* connotes authority since it connotes forgiveness, and it includes mere 'kindness,' but may

[2] Adapted in part from Bolin, Mary K. *Grace: a Contrastive Analysis of a Biblical Semantic Field.* Unpublished MA thesis. University of Idaho, 1999. Chapter 7: "Semantic Relations in the Field *Grace.*"

also imply emotion, sympathy, or tenderness. *Compassion* and *pity* are narrower, and always

imply emotion, sympathy, tenderness, but do not automatically connote authority or forgiveness.

The field in German has a larger number of words than in English, but the core group of

words is *Gnade, Gunst, Güte* and *Barmherzigkeit-erbarmen. Güte* and *Barmherzigkeit* are the

less-marked portion of the concepts 'kindness, mercy, compassion,' while

erbarmen expresses the more marked 'compassion-pity.' *Gnade* is used for both unmarked

'favor' and marked 'grace' as well as for 'mercy' or 'compassion.' *Gunst* also covers the

unmarked 'favor' or 'kindness'. Although the differences between nouns and adjectives are

generally ignored here, the pairs *grace/gracious* and *Gnade/gnädig* do show semantic differences

in this data, with *grace/Gnade* being less marked for emotion and *Gnade/gnädig* more marked

for it.

Explications: English

Citations were selected to show a particular usage or aspect of meaning. Only one or two

citations from the data were selected for each script, and there is an attempt here to look only at

the most "central" or common uses of each word. In the cultural scripts of the Bible, *grace,*

mercy, favor, kindness, and so on, flow from God, and, though they may also be attributed to

humans, God is the model for what is gracious, merciful and so on. An NSM script for *God*:

God
A person
This person doesn't have a body
People can't see this person
People can't hear this person
This person has always been living
This person cannot die
This person is in all places at the same time
All things happen because of this person
This person always does very good things
This person does only good things

This is a provisional script that allows *God* to be used in other scripts.

Kindness

> This is thy **kindness** which thou shalt shew unto me. *Genesis 20:13*
>
> Blessed be the LORD: for he hath shewed me his marvellous **kindness** in a strong city. *Psalms 31:21*

Kindness is a less-marked synonym for *mercy[1]*. It has a mild implication of tenderness, but mostly indicates a general benevolence.

Kindness
X feels something
Sometimes a person feels something like this:
  God does many good things for me
  I can do good things for other people
  Because of this, X feels something good
X feels something like this

Comments: This very general script emphasizes the kindness of God from the point of view of people. It is an attempt to create a cultural script for the concept of *kindness* in the culture of the Bible

Mercy[1]

> Surely goodness and **mercy** shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. *Psalms 23:6*
>
> All the paths of the Lord are **mercy** and truth. *Psalms.25:16*

The first meaning of *mercy* in the KJV OT is shown in the citations above and is the least marked. It means something like 'kindness' but with an implication of tenderness as well, although it is not highly-marked for emotion. It can be explicated with the following script:

Mercy[1]
God does good things for people
God wants only good things to happen to people
Because of this, people feel something good
Because of this, people feel something good about God

Comments: In creating scripts for the words in this field, it is difficult to bring out whether *mercy*, etc., is something that people or God 'feel,' 'think,' 'do,' and so on. This script emphasizes *mercy* as something God does.

Mercy[2]

> Have **mercy** upon me, O Lord, for I am weak. *Psalms 6:2*
>
> Turn thee unto me, and have **mercy** upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted *Psalms 25:16*

This is a more marked usage of *mercy*. It is more marked for emotion and can imply both wrongdoing and misfortune, with the additional implication of authority and power on the part of God:

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Mercy²
X feels something
Sometimes a person feels something like this:
   Bad things are happening to me
   God can do something good for me
   Sometimes I do bad things
   If I do something bad, God can do something bad
to me
   I want God to do something good for me
   People want to feel like God does
   Not all people can feel like God does
X feels something like this
Because of this, X feels something good.

Comments: This script emphasizes what 'people feel,' and attempts to include the need for *mercy* in both distress and sinfulness. In addition, it attempts to bring out the idea that people can be like God and show *mercy*.

Another approach is to combine *mercy¹* and *mercy²* to bring out both aspects of its

meaning:

Mercy
X feels something
Sometimes a person feels something like this:
   Bad things are happening to me
   God can do something good for me
   Sometimes I do bad things
   If I do something bad, God can do something bad
to me
   I want God to do something good for me
   God does good things for people
   God wants only good things to happen to people
   Because of this, people feel something good
   Because of this, people feel something good
about God
   People want to feel like God does
   Not all people can feel like God does
X feels something like this
Because of this, X feels something good.

Comments: This combined script also emphasizes what 'people feel,' and attempts to include the unmarked aspect of *mercy* as part of what people look for from God in a time of need.

Compassion

That she should not have **compassion** on the son of her womb? *Isaiah 49:15*
He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of **compassion**. *Psalms 111:4*

Compassion is more highly marked for emotion than *mercy*, and it includes the idea of

sharing the feelings of another. While it is attributed to God in the second citation, it is extended

to people more frequently than *mercy*.

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Compassion (Wierzbicka 1992, 145)
X thinks something like this:
    Something bad happened to Y
    Because of this, Y feels something bad
    If it happened to me, I would feel something bad
When X thinks this, X feels something good toward Y

Compassion
X feels something
Sometimes a person feels something like this
    Something bad happened to Y
    Because of this, Y feels something bad
    If it happened to me, I would feel something bad
    I can feel what Y feels
X feels something like this
When X thinks this, X feels something good toward Y

Comments: This script differentiates *compassion* from *mercy* with the addition of shared feelings and an emphasis on human emotion. Wierzbicka created the first script for *compassion* in a discussion of the Ifaluk concept *fago*. The second script builds on her definition by adding "I can feel what Y feels."

Pity

> They shall have no **pity** on the fruit of the womb. *Isaiah 13:18*
>
> Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take **pity**, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. *Psalms 69:20*

Pity and *compassion* are very similar in English, as shown by the almost identical verses in which they appear (and which share a common Hebrew original, *racham*). *Pity* is more highly marked for emotion, without necessarily implying shared feelings in the way that *compassion* does.

Pity
X feels something
Sometimes a person feels something like this
    Something bad happened to Y
    Because of this, Y feels something bad
X feels something bad
X feels something good toward Y
X does not feel the same thing as Y

Comments: This script is identical to *compassion* without the indication of shared feelings.

Favor

> With **favor** wilt thou compass him as with a shield. *Psalms 30:5*
>
> For his anger endureth but a moment; in his **favour** is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. *Psalms 30:5*

Favor denotes 'kindness' with the addition of 'authority' and 'preference.' It

encompasses the actions of God and of people.

Favor
God does good things for people
God doesn't do good things because people do good things
God sometimes does good things for one person and not another person
A person can something good for another person
A person doesn't do this good thing because the other person did something good
People sometimes do good things for one person and not another person

Comments: This script attempts to cover the *favor* shown by both God and people. Another approach might be to capture the "invariant core" of this concept in the Biblical context by omitting the human aspect.

Grace

And Noah found **grace** in the eyes of the Lord. *Genesis 6:8*

For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give **grace** and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. *Psalms 84:11*

Certainly in the NT, but also in the OT, *grace* has a more specialized meaning than *favor*

and most often implies that it is a gift of God that is not earned and is not something that people

can bestow.

Grace
God does something good for people
  Because of this, people can do good things
  Because of this, people don't do bad things
God doesn't do this good thing because people do something good
People can't do this good thing that God does

Comments: This script *does* attempt to capture the "invariant core" by attributing *grace* only to God and by omitting the idea of partiality.

Explications: German

Güte

Die Wege des Herrn sind lauter **Güte** und Treue für alle. *Psalms 25:10*
[All the paths of the Lord are **mercy** and truth.]

Beweise deine wunderbare **Güte**. *Psalms 17.7*
[Shew thy marvelous **lovingkindness**.]

Güte, like English *kindness* is an unmarked term that indicates benevolence and goodwill.

Güte
X feels something
Sometimes a person feels something like this:
  God does many good things for me
  I can do good things for other people
  Because of this, X feels something good
X feels something like this

Comments: This simple script is identical to English *kindness*. Comparison of more citations might show some contrast, but the words are very close in meaning with an apparent strong cultural significance.

Barmherzigkeit

So schwöre mir nun bei Gott, daß du mir ... keine Untreue erweisen wollest, sondern die **Barmherzigkeit**, die ich an dir getan habe. *Genesis 21.23*
[Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me ... but according to the **kindness** that I have done unto thee.]

Gutes und **Barmherzigkeit** werden mir folgen mein Leben lang, und ich werde bleiben im Hause des HERRN immerdar. *Psalms 23:6*
[Surely goodness and **mercy** shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever]

Er hat ein Gedächtnis gestiftet seiner Wunder, der gnädige und **barmherzige** Herr. *Psalms 144.1*
[He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of **compassion**.]

This usage of *Barmherzigkeit* corresponds generally to the less-marked area of *mercy* and to *kindness*, with some implication of tenderness (as in the match with *compassion* above) and with the implication that God is generally the kind or merciful one being referred to.

Barmherzigkeit
God does good things for people
God wants only good things to happen to people
God feels something good toward people
Because of this, people feel something good
Because of this, people feel something good about God

Comments: This script is similar to *mercy*[1] with the addition of some emotion attributed to God, an aspect of 'compassion.' 'Forgiveness' is not as strong a component of *Barmherzigkeit* as of *mercy*.

Erbarmen

Denn der Herr wird sich über Jakob **erbarmen**. *Isaiah 14.1*
[For the Lord will have **mercy** on Jacob.]

Erbarmen is etymologically related to *Barmherzigkeit* and this verb form covers some of the marked areas of English *mercy-compassion*.

Erbarmen
X feels something
Sometimes a person feels something like this
   Bad things are happening to me
   God can do something good for me
   Sometimes I do bad things
   If I do something bad, God can do something bad
to me
   I want God to do something good for me
   People want to feel like God does
   Not all people can feel like God does
   Because of this, X feels something good.
X feels something like this

Comments: *Erbarmen* covers some of the area of *mercy*[2] with its implication of 'forgiveness.'

Gunst

Gunst combines something of English *favor* and *kindness* with implications of benevolence as well as partiality.

> Ich suche deine **Gunst** von ganzem Herzen; sei mir gnädig nach deinem Wort. *Psalms 119:58*
> [I intreated thy **favor** with my whole heart, be merciful to me according to thy word.]

Gunst
God does good things for people
God doesn't do good things because people do good things
God sometimes does good things for one person and not another person
A person can something good for another person
A person doesn't do this good thing because the other person did something good
People sometimes do good things for one person and not another person
X thinks something like this:
   I should do good things for Y
When X thinks this, X feels something good toward Y

Comments: *Gunst* includes both 'favor' and 'kindness' and this script attempts to reflect both meanings

Gnade₁

> Herr, hab ich **Gnade** gefunden vor deinen Augen. *Genesis 18:3*
> [My Lord, if now I have found **favor** in thy sight.]

As with *Gunst* and *favor/kindness*, *Gnade* corresponds to both *grace* and *mercy*.

Gnade[1]
God does something good for people
   Because of this, people can do good things
   Because of this, people don't do bad things
God doesn't do this good thing because people do something good
People can't do this good thing that God does

Comments: This first meaning of *Gnade* is equivalent to English *grace*.

Gnade[2]

Ich will singen von der **Gnade** des Herrn. *Psalms 89.2* [I will sing of the **mercies** of the Lord.]

Gnade$_2$
God does good things for people
God wants only good things to happen to people
Because of this, people feel something good
Because of this, people feel something good about God

Comments: This second meaning of *Gnade* is equivalent to *mercy*[1]

As with *mercy*, another approach would be to combine the two scripts for *Gnade*:

Gnade
God does good things for people
God wants only good things to happen to people
Because of this, people feel something good
Because of this, people feel something good about God
God does something good for people
   Because of this, people can do good things
   Because of this, people don't do bad things
God doesn't do this good thing because people do something good
People can't do this good thing that God does

Comments: This script attempts to bring out the 'mercy'/ 'grace' aspects of *Gnade* in the same way that the single script for *Gunst* tried to express both 'kindness'/ 'favor.'

It might also be possible to include the combined meanings of *mercy* in a single script for

Gnade.

Gnade
X feels something
Sometimes a person feels something like this:
  Bad things are happening to me
  God can do something good for me
  Sometimes I do bad things
  If I do something bad, God can do something bad
to me
  I want God to do something good for me
  God does good things for people
  God wants only good things to happen to people
  Because of this, people feel something good
  Because of this, people feel something good
about God
  People want to feel like God does
  Not all people can feel like God does
X feels something like this
Because of this, X feels something good.
God does something good for people
  Because of this, people can do good things
  Because of this, people don't do bad things
God doesn't do this good thing because people do
something good
[People can't do this good thing that God does]

Comments: This combined script attributes both the marked and unmarked aspects of 'mercy'/'grace' to *Gnade*, as noted below:
Distress/sinfulness

The general benevolence of God

'Mercy' as a divine quality that people can emulate

The particular benevolence of 'grace'

'Grace' as a divine quality only. Perhaps the "invariant core" of this word does not include this concept, and a combined script should not include it.

Conclusion

The NSM scripts developed here to analyze this data are preliminary and could be extensively overhauled and edited to make them clearer, more exhaustive, and more contrastive. For example, should there be two scripts for *Gunst* instead of having the aspects 'kindness'/ 'favor' combined in one? Likewise, do *mercy* and *Gnade* need two scripts, or does each have an "invariant core" that should be used to make one script? Nevertheless, NSM analysis confirms things about this data that were already shown by previous analysis, as well as giving further insights about it. The optimism, tenaciousness, and forthrightness of this approach make it intriguing and promising and the staunch empiricism of NSM researchers provides a lot of evidence that can be evaluated and used.

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