Kind, Considerate, Thoughtful:
A Semantic Analysis[1]

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Abstract: This paper presents a semantic analysis of three English words denoting positive character traits, namely *kind*, *considerate* and *thoughtful*. These three words are closely related, and the differences (and similarities) in their meanings can be very difficult to pinpoint. It shall be shown that modern dictionaries demonstrate a great deal of circularity in their definitions of these words, reflecting the closeness of their meanings. An analysis of usage examples provides evidence on the basis of which their differences can be understood. Some of the differences that shall be noted are the following: *kind* and *thoughtful* necessarily involve doing something for another person, while *considerate* does not; *kind* involves not wanting anyone to feel bad, *considerate* involves not wanting anyone to feel bad as a result of one's actions, and *thoughtful* focuses on a specific situation another is in, and not wanting them to feel bad in that situation; *kind* involves wanting to do something for another's good, while *considerate* involves wanting to avoid something that may harm another; and both *considerate* and *thoughtful* imply some kind of thinking about another before one acts, as reflected in their morphology. The Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach, as developed by Wierzbicka (1972, 1980, 1996) and colleagues, is used to propose definitions for these words, with the aim of exhaustively capturing their meaning, and clearly delineating their range of use. Such definitions can be particulárly valuable to second language learners, and can provide a basis for cross-linguistic, and cross-cultural, comparisons of related concepts.

Keywords: KIND, CONSIDERATE, THOUGHTFUL, SEMANTICS, LEXICOGRAPHY, NATURAL SEMANTIC METALANGUAGE, DEFINITIONS, CHARACTER TRAITS, PERSONALITY, DICTIONARY, WIERZBICKA, CIRCULARITY, CROSS-CULTURAL STUDIES

Opsomming: *Kind, considerate, thoughtful:* 'n Semantiese analise. In hierdie artikel word 'n semantiese analise aangebied van drie Engelse woorde wat positiewe karaktertrekke te kenne gee, naamlik *kind, considerate* en *thoughtful.* Hierdie drie woorde is nou verwant, en die verskille (en ooreenkomste) in hul betekenisse kan moeilik uitgewys word. Daar sal aangetoon word dat moderne woordeboeke 'n groot mate van sirkelbeskrywing in hul definisies van hierdie woorde bevat, wat die noue verband in hulle betekenisse weerspieël. 'n Ontleding van gebruiksvoorbeelde lewer bewyse op grond waarvan hulle verskille verstaan kan word. Sommige van die verskille wat uitgewys sal word, is die volgende: *kind* en *thoughtful* hou noodsaaklikerwyse in om iets vir iemand anders te doen, terwyl dit nie die geval met *considerate* is nie; *kind* hou in om enigiemand nie sleg te wil laat voel nie, *considerate* hou in om iemand nie sleg te wil laat voel as gevolg van 'n mens se optrede nie, en *thoughtful* fokus op 'n spesifieke situasie waarin iemand anders is, en om hom/haar nie te laat sleg voel in daardie situasie nie; *kind* hou in dat iets tot iemand anders se voordeel gedoen wil word, terwyl *considerate* inhou dat iets vermy wil word wat ander kan bena-

deel; en beide *considerate* en *thoughtful* impliseer 'n mate van inagneming van 'n ander voor 'n mens optree, soos weerspieël in hul morfologie. Die Natuurlike Semantiese Metataal-benadering, soos ontwikkel deur Wierzbicka (1972, 1980, 1996) en kollegas, word benut om definisies vir hierdie woorde voor te stel, met die doel om hul betekenisse volledig vas te lê, en om hul gebruiksgebied duidelik af te baken. Sulke definisies kan veral waardevol wees vir tweedetaalaanleerders, en kan as basis dien vir kruislinguistiese, en kruiskulturele, vergelykings van verwante begrippe.

Sleutelwoorde: *KIND, CONSIDERATE, THOUGHTFUL,* SEMANTIEK, LEKSIKOGRAFIE, NATUURLIKE SEMANTIESE METATAAL, DEFINISIES, KARAKTEREIENSKAPPE, PERSOON-LIKHEID, WOORDEBOEK, WIERZBICKA, SIRKELBESKRYWING, KRUISKULTURELE STU-DIES

1.   Introduction

Words denoting character traits are a little researched but interesting area in the field of lexicography. It is an area which seems to include many words referring to closely related concepts, the differences between which are often very difficult to capture. Such is the case for *kind, considerate* and *thoughtful,* which are commonly defined via each other in modern dictionaries. In this paper, an empirical analysis of these three words will be used to address the issue of how to define such concepts. A brief look at some dictionary defini-tions of these words will highlight some of the problems with these definitions, and an alternative analysis — the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach — shall be proposed. On the basis of examination of usage examples, definitions for *kind, considerate* and *thoughtful* constructed in accordance with this approach shall be put forward, and these definitions will be used to demonstrate the ability of NSM to accurately and exhaustively capture and explicate meaning.

2.   Treatment of *kind, considerate* and *thoughtful* in modern dictionaries

·The closeness of meaning of *kind, considerate* and *thoughtful* can be seen by the circularity of definitions found in modern dictionaries. The following defini-tions from the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1987) of *considerate* and *thoughtful* serve as a prime example of this.

> *considerate*: "thoughtful for others"
> *thoughtful*: "considerate (*of*), not haphazard or unfeeling"

Any dictionary user who does not know the meaning of both of these words would be no better off in the case of *considerate,* and still very much in the dark regarding *thoughtful.* The element added to "considerate" in the definition of *thoughtful* ("not haphazard or unfeeling") is so broad that it could cover any

range of words, and does little to delineate the meaning of *thoughtful*. Further-
more, what does it mean to be "not haphazard *or* unfeeling"? Does it mean that
a *thoughtful* person may exhibit either one or the other of these properties, and
if so, are both truly part of the meaning of *thoughtful*? How do these properties
relate to each other, and to "considerate", the first element proposed?

The *Collins English Dictionary* (1991), cited below, also provides circular
definitions for *considerate* and *thoughtful*, and includes some circularity in its
definition of *kind*.

kind: "1. having a friendly or generous attitude. 2. helpful to others or another: *a
      kind deed*. 3. considerate or humane. 4. cordial; courteous (esp. in the
      phrase *kind regards*). 5. pleasant, agreeable, mild: *a kind climate*."
considerate: "1. thoughtful towards other people; kind. 2. *Rare*. carefully thought
      out; considered."
thoughtful: "1. considerate in the treatment of other people. 2. showing careful
      thought. 3. pensive; reflective."

Thus, *considerate* is defined via *thoughtful* and *kind*, and both *thoughtful* and *kind*
are defined via *considerate*. Multiple glosses are proposed for each word, which
may be justified in the case of *considerate* and *thoughtful*,[2] but is questionable in
the case of *kind*. This exemplifies another problem prevalent in dictionaries —
that of positing polysemy where perhaps it does not exist (cf. Wierzbicka 1996:
270 ff). In the case of *kind*, for example, surely we would not want to say that
"having a friendly or generous attitude", being "helpful to others or another",
"considerate or humane" and "cordial; courteous" are all distinct meanings in
the same way that "considerate in the treatment of other people" and "pensive,
reflective" are for *thoughtful*. Polysemy is a feature of language, and cannot be
ignored, but nor should it be posited without careful analysis that proves its
existence.

In order to deal with problems of circularity, polysemy, multiple aspects
of meaning and the many other difficulties encountered in attempting to cap-
ture meaning, a rigorous lexicographic theory that specifically addresses these
issues must be utilised. In the following section I shall discuss such a theory,
proposed by Wierzbicka and colleagues, and will then go on to demonstrate
the practical application of this theory in relation to *kind*, *considerate* and
thoughtful.

3.   The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach

The Natural Semantic Metalanguage, or NSM, is a metalanguage used for
defining words and concepts that has been compiled over nearly 30 years of
extensive research by Wierzbicka (see especially 1972, 1980, 1996 and refer-
ences therein) and colleagues (see especially Goddard 1989; Goddard and
Wierzbicka (Eds.) 1994; Boguslawski 1970). The basic tenets underlying this

approach are as follows:[3]

(1)   semantic analysis should be carried out using paraphrase based on natural language as opposed to artificial symbols, features or markers;

(2)   semantic analysis must follow a reductive approach, defining complex concepts in terms of simpler ones;

(3)   there is a finite set of words, the meanings of which are so basic that they cannot be broken down any further;

(4)   this set of words (the so-called "semantic primitives") represents innate concepts that are fundamental to human thought, partly evidenced by their expression (be it by a word, morpheme or phrase) in all languages of the world;

(5)   these primitives can be used as "building blocks" to define all words and expressions;

(6)   there are distinct grammatical patterns that govern the combinability of these primitives, which represents the "innate grammar" of human cognition.

NSM makes use of the "primitives" as its lexicon, and the "innate" grammatical rules as its syntax to construct culture- and language-independent natural language definitions of words and concepts. Although the metalanguage is semi-artificial, the fact that it comprises a subset of natural language (principle (1)) means that the definitions can be understood on their own, without having to decode symbols and features.

The principle of defining complex notions in terms of simpler ones (principle (2)) solves the problem of circularity discussed above, and is perhaps the only way to guarantee resolution of this problem. It also ensures that definitions do not include scientific or other knowledge, such as, for example, when *salt* is defined as "sodium chloride" (cf. *Collins English Dictionary* 1991, among others). It is hard to imagine that someone who did not know the meaning of the word *salt* would know what *sodium chloride* is. This definition provides scientific information about *salt*; it does not capture the everyday meaning of *salt*, as used to refer to something we add to food to give it flavour.[4] If the language of the definition is always simpler than the word being defined, then this problem of turning to scientific information can readily be avoided. NSM follows a reductive approach, until the set of indefinable words is reached, and this set can be used to define all other words (principles (3), (4) and (5)). The proposed set of primitives currently numbers around 60 words, and the English version includes words such as *I, you, someone, something, good, bad, want, know, say, do, think, this, can* etc. The "universality hypothesis" (that these concepts can be expressed in some way in all languages of the world) has been empirically tested in a number of other languages, and has been strongly backed up by this testing.

The NSM lexicon is used to form sentences in accordance with its own

syntactic rules, which are maximally simple and believed to be language-inde-
pendent (principle 6)).

The NSM approach allows the analyst to rigorously test and account for
each component of meaning that is to be posited in a definition, as well as how
it is to be presented. NSM definitions that clearly demarcate meaning can show
precisely where related words differ and where they coincide. This is extremely
useful for anyone in search of better understanding of meaning. It is particu-
larly useful, perhaps, for second-language learners, and can also play an
important role in cross-cultural understanding, facilitating comparisons of
related concepts across languages, that can then offer insights into cultural
values and attitudes.[5]

4.   Defining character-traits

An NSM definition consists of a series of components, each component repre-
senting different elements of the meaning of the word under consideration. In
the analysis presented here, I shall first consider each element (or set of ele-
ments) individually, before compiling them to provide the completed defini-
tion.

The three words to be looked at here refer to character-traits that are re-
alised in interpersonal relations. They refer to an attitude one takes to other
people, or the way one thinks about others in interacting with them. As used in
the frame "X is *kind* / *considerate* / *thoughtful*" these words all refer to an endur-
ing quality, as opposed to something manifested in a one-off incident. That is, a
"*kind* person", for example, is not someone who once did something *kind* for
someone, but someone who regularly acts in a "*kind* way". This must be cap-
tured in the first component of the definition, setting the context for the compo-
nents to follow. This can be done in the following way:

> "X is *kind* / *considerate* / *thoughtful*"
>   X often thinks something like this about people:

The use of "often" reflects the "enduring" nature of the quality being defined,
and the expression "thinking about people" reflects the fact that these words
refer to one's attitude in interpersonal relations. Including X thinks "something
like this" gives the definitions a margin of leeway in their interpretation, and
thus allows for metaphorical and other extensions. I shall now look at, and
attempt to explicate, the attitude entailed in these concepts.

4.1   Kind

4.1.1   Not wanting others to feel bad

Perhaps the most obvious element of the meaning of *kind* is that it implies that

one would not want to do something that may hurt another. This is reflected in the expression:

(1)   He's so *kind*, he wouldn't hurt a flea.

In the light of this expression, it is important to consider the following, which is in apparent contradiction to this:

(2)   You have to be cruel to be *kind*.

What this implies is that sometimes one has to do things that may hurt another, for some eventual good to come of that. It seems, then, that *kind* does not imply not wanting to do something that may harm another, but a more general feeling that one does not want others to feel bad, be that as a result of one's own actions, or independently of them.

Consider the following example of an encounter between three children, one of whom (the one telling the story) has been searched by the other two for something he had been accused of stealing. The two children searching him protect him from further trouble, by pretending not to find the stolen object, and as they leave, one of them smiles at him.

(3)   The girl, before she went with him, gave me a look of *kindness*,[6] and I remembered that it was she who on my first day at this school had come up to me in the school yard to offer me a sweet from a bag of sweets she was carrying.

UE: 315[7]

Presumably the children do not report the stolen object because they don't want the narrator to get into trouble, and this is punctuated by a "look of *kindness*", which reminds the narrator of what he, we can assume, sees as another *kind* act, that of offering him sweets on his first day at school. The implication here is not so much that the girl doesn't want to do something that may harm the narrator, but that she doesn't want him to be harmed in any way. It is for this reason that she doesn't report the stolen object (which would have resulted in him being punished), and that she gave him sweets at school (to make him feel welcome on his first day).

I therefore propose that the following component be included in the definition of *kind* to capture this notion.

X is kind:
  X often thinks something like this about people:
    I don't want anyone to feel something bad

4.1.2   Doing something for the benefit of others

Closely related to this notion of not wanting others to feel bad is an implication that one wants to do things for their benefit, and that one does actually do something because of this. This must be stated independently of the component proposed in 4.1.1, because it is possible that one does not want others to feel bad, but doesn't actually do anything to cause them to feel good. This would be the case, for example, for *sensitive*, which implies avoiding saying or doing things that may hurt others, but not necessarily doing something that would specifically benefit them (Travis 1992). That *kind* must involve doing something for others can be seen in the unacceptability of the following sentence:

> (4)   *He won't do anything for you, but he is *kind*.

Note also the following expression, used for asking a favour, which shows that being *kind* is associated with doing something.

> (5)   Would you be *kind* enough to / so *kind* as to ...

At this stage, I propose the following components to capture this notion, which will be subject to modification with further analysis.

> **X often thinks something like this about people:**
>   **I want to do something good for this person**
> **X does something because of this**

This reflects the fact that being *kind* implies a desire to do things for another's benefit, and the performing of some action because of this desire, but it does not specify that what one does is actually to the benefit of that person. This is important because it is possible that what is intended as an act of *kindness* does not in fact benefit the person to whom it is directed. This can be shown by the fact that we could say the following, of someone who is very generous in offering their help to another:

> (6)   She's very *kind*, and she means well, but I'd rather she'd just let me do it myself.

Another example of this is found in the 1992 acceptance speech of then US President George Bush, in which he promised a "*kinder*, gentler America", one of the features of which was to be no new taxes. With the budget deficit at a record high at that time, whether this would in fact benefit the country was questioned (*Canberra Times* 1992: 10).

For this reason, *kind* cannot be defined as "doing something good for another", but must be defined as simply "doing something". Whether what one does, is to the other's benefit exists in the intentions behind the *kind* act, rather than in the result of it.

4.1.3   Action performed is not a "big" thing

The components proposed in 4.1.2 need qualification, because they imply that any action performed with the intention of benefiting another would be described as *kind* and this is far from true. Consider, for example, the case of aid workers who devote their lives to helping the starving or poverty-stricken in developing countries. Certainly these actions would not be described as *kind*, as is shown in the unacceptability of (7).

> (7)   *It was very *kind* of her to devote her life to helping the starving in Africa.

Rather than *kind*, "self-sacrificing", "selfless", or "humanitarian" would be more likely to be used to describe such people. Another example of something one could do for another's good that could not be described as *kind* would be cutting off another's hand (for example, to save their life by allowing them to avoid military service). It would be impossible to say of such an act:

> (8)   *He *kindly* chopped off his friend's hand.

It seems that both of these examples are unacceptable because of the magnitude of the act being performed, and that *kind* is reserved for relatively simple tasks, that perhaps do not require a great amount of effort, or do not have serious consequences for either party involved (such as would devoting one's life to helping others, or having one's hand cut off).

That *kind* acts are not "big" things is reflected in the expression "little deeds of *kindness*", used below in the poem "Little Things" by Julia Fletcher Carney:

> (9)   Little deed of *kindness*, little words of love
> Help to make the Earth happy, like the heaven above.[8]

It is also reflected in the following Wordsworth quote.

> (10) That best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of *kindness* and of love.[9]

This can be captured in the definition by modifying those components pro-

posed in 4.1.2 above to indicate that what one wishes to do for another is not a "big" thing. This is, of course, "big" in a metaphorical sense, but this seems to accurately capture the notion implied here.

> X often thinks something like this about people:
> I want to do something good for this person
> this is not a big thing

4.1.4   Doing something which one is not obliged or expected to do

Another qualification that needs to be made is that something done out of *kindness* cannot be something one is expected or obliged to do. It implies that one does something for another simply because one wants to. Thus, *kind* would not tend to be used in the following context:

(11) ?The bus driver *kindly* sold me a ticket.

Selling tickets is part of the driver's job, something they are obliged to do, and therefore something that would not normally require any *kindness* on their part. Note that example (11) could be used in a context where there was some reason why the driver should not sell the speaker a ticket. Compare this with the following sentence:

(12) The bus driver *kindly* helped me load my bags onto the bus.

This would be natural, because helping passengers load their bags onto a bus is not one of the driver's prescribed duties, but something they may choose to do if they wish to.

The following is one final example, to illustrate this point, taken from a scene in a novel in which a woman has fallen through her seat in the cinema, and cannot get herself out.

(13) A lady *kindly* went to fetch the manager, ...

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There is clearly no obligation for a patron in the cinema to help another, and thus doing so can be described as *kind*.

Related to this is the fact that we do not usually use *kind* to describe the actions of people with whom one is in a close relationship. Thus, we do not usually say that spouses are *kind* to each other (?My husband is very *kind* to me), or that parents are *kind* to their children (?She's a very *kind* mother). I submit that this is because implicit in such close relationships are a number of obligations and expectations, and this then renders the use of *kind* strange in such a context.

The notion of a *kind* act being performed because one wants to do something for the benefit of another, and not because one feels obliged in any way to do so, can be captured in the definition of *kind* with the following components:

> **X often thinks something like this about people:**
> **I think I can do something good for this person**
> **I know I don't have to do it**
> **I want to do it**

4.1.5   Complete definition of *kind*

The components so far presented can now be combined to form the complete definition of *kind*.

> X is *kind:*
> X often thinks something like this about people:
> I don't want anyone to feel something bad
> I think I can do something good for this person
>   this is not a big thing
> I know I don't have to do it
> I want to do it
> X does something because of this

Being *kind* entails performing some action, that one perceives, and hopes, will be to the benefit of another. It implies that one does not want others to suffer in any way, and so, by implication, that one would not do anything to cause another to feel bad (unless it was for their ultimate good, as discussed above in reference to the expression "to be cruel to be *kind*"). One believes one can do some small thing for the benefit of another person, is aware that there is no obligation to do this, but still wishes to do it, and because of this, does actually do something.

I shall now go on to look at *considerate* and *thoughtful*, carrying out a similar analysis of these words to establish their meanings, and to highlight some of the ways in which these three words differ from each other, and how they are similar.

4.2   Considerate

4.2.1   Not wanting one's actions to cause others to feel bad;
No notion of doing something for the benefit of others

Considerate is similar to *kind* in that both imply a wish that others do not feel

bad. It differs from *kind*, however, in that this is specifically related to not wanting others to feel bad as a result of one's own actions. Related to this is the fact that, unlike *kind*, *considerate* carries no implication that one wants to do something for others. Below are some examples to illustrate these points.

> (14) Mary is very *considerate* of her neighbours, and if she has a party she always makes sure it's not too noisy after about 11, so as not to disturb them.

This implies that Mary thinks of her neighbours, and of how her actions may negatively affect them, and she tries to avoid these negative effects. She takes the feelings of her neighbours into "consideration", and acts so as not to harm them in any way. Note that *kind* would be strange in this context, which I believe is because *kind* implies specifically doing something for the benefit of another, while the focus of *considerate* *is* on avoiding something that may harm another. This can be demonstrated by the following example where *kind* and not *considerate* would be natural.

> (15) Mary is very ?*considerate* of (*kind* to) her neighbours, and always waters their garden, and feeds and walks their dog when they go away.

Consider also the following example, which is from a sign seen in a restaurant in Australia.

> (16) We do not ban smoking here, but please be *considerate* of other diners.

This is asking smokers to think about the effect their smoking will have on other diners, and not to smoke if they judge this effect to be negative. It does not suggest that they do something for the benefit of others, but rather that they refrain from doing something that could cause discomfort to others. Thus, the focus is on not doing something bad, rather than on doing something good. Note that neither *kind* nor *thoughtful* could be used here, which can be explained by the fact that both of these words refer to wanting to do something good for others.

Having shown that *considerate* implies not wanting to do anything that may harm others, I shall now look more closely at whether or not it involves doing something for others. It appears so far that the focus of *considerate* is on *not* doing something, rather than on actually doing something. The fact that it need not involve specifically doing something can be shown clearly with the following example, which was discussed in the preceding section, and shown to be unnatural with *kind* (example (4)), but which works well with *considerate*.

(17) He won't do anything for you, but he is *considerate*.

Thus, doing something for others is not an essential element of the meaning of *considerate*. That is not to say that doing something for others is incompatible with *considerate*, and certainly not that being *considerate* means one does not do anything for others. A *considerate* person may well do things to benefit others, but this is not part of the invariant meaning of this word itself.

While actually doing something is not an essential element of the meaning of *considerate*, not doing something does seem to be essential. Thus if one does not want to do anything that may harm another (such as making loud noise at night, or smoking while others are eating), but for whatever reason does do this anyway, this cannot be described as being *considerate*. This can be seen in the unacceptability of the following example.

(18) ?Mary is very *considerate* of her neighbours, and she doesn't like to disturb them with loud music at night, but when she has parties, they're always noisy till all hours of the morning.

To be *considerate*, one must specifically refrain from doing what one has perceived would be harmful to another, not merely be aware that it could be harmful.

On the basis of the discussion so far, it seems the definition of *considerate* must include something along the following lines:

X is *considerate:*
  X often thinks something like this about people:
    if I do something (W), this person may feel something bad
    I don't want this
    if this person could feel something bad
      I will not do this (W)

These components capture the notion that a *considerate* person is someone who thinks about the potential negative effects their actions may have on others (or rather, the effects of a specific action, denoted here with (W)), and avoids doing that thing.

4.2.2 Not wanting others to feel bad thinking that one doesn't care about them

While it is evident that *considerate* implies not wanting to do something that may cause another to feel "something bad", there needs to be some kind of specification of what kind of bad feelings could fit into this context. For example, acting in a certain way so as not to cause others to become angry or indig-

nant (two emotions that certainly classify as "feeling bad") would not be described as being *considerate*. Thus being careful not to break something that belongs to another person, would not be described as being *considerate*, and nor would keeping a secret someone has told you. We have already seen that being *considerate* can be not disturbing one's neighbours with loud noise, or refraining from smoking while others are eating. Another example would be being quiet in an area where silence is for whatever reason desired. Thus, a librarian could say to people making noise in a library:

> (19) Others are trying to read. Could you please be more *considerate*, and quiet down a little.

It could also mean letting your partner know if you're going to be late home, when they may be expecting you.

> (20) She's *considerate* enough to let me know if she won't be home for dinner, so that I don't worry about cooking for her.

All of these contexts imply that a person could be made to feel something bad if the actor had not thought about them before doing something (smoking, making noise etc.). Specifically, it seems to be the case that the kind of bad feelings they may experience are related to what they would think that person has thought about them. That is, they may feel bad thinking that their own feelings have not been taken into "consideration". Thus, neighbours who have to listen to loud parties at night suffer because they cannot sleep, but also because those having the party have not thought about how they would be affected by their actions. Diners in a restaurant suffer the smoke of others' cigarettes, but they also suffer because the smoker has not thought about them. People trying to read where others are talking, suffer in that their concentration is interrupted, but also because the talkers have not thought about how they would feel. And finally, someone who prepares dinner for another who does not turn up, has perhaps gone to unnecessary trouble, but they also suffer because that person has acted without thinking about them. It seems that the element each of these examples has in common is a bad feeling caused by the fact that another has acted without thinking about them, in a situation where they should have done so.

If we now consider the examples mentioned above where *considerate* is unacceptable, we can find further evidence for this. Being careful not to break something that belongs to another, would not be described as being *considerate* because we would assume that the reason one is careful with others' possessions is not because one doesn't want that person to think that one has not thought about their feelings, but because of an understanding that people don't like to have their things broken. Similarly, people do not keep secrets others tell them because they have thought about how that person would feel if they told

others, but out of respect for the notion of a secret, or for the friendship they have with the person who told them the secret. On the other hand, if someone told you something without telling you that it was a secret, and you told it to someone else who wasn't meant to know, then presumably that could be described as inconsiderate, with the implication that you did not think about how that person would feel if you passed on what they had told you.

Note also that we do not use *considerate* to describe the way we interact with animals. Acting in a way so as not to harm animals is described as being *kind* to them, not as being *considerate* of them. This can be explained by this element of meaning I propose for *considerate*, namely that one does not think of what the animals will *think* if one behaves in a certain way. Even Dr. Doolittle, who certainly made an effort to understand the animals, and would not have wanted to cause them harm, is not described as being *considerate* of them.

It seems, then, that thinking about what another will think about oneself, and consequently feel, as a result of one's actions is inherent in the meaning of *considerate*. What a *considerate* person thinks is that they don't want others to feel bad thinking that they have done something without thinking about how that would make them feel. The components tentatively proposed in 4.2.1, must be modified to incorporate this, and this can be done in the following way.

> X often thinks something like this about people:
>   if I do something (W)
>   this person may think: X doesn't think about what I could feel
>   because X does W
>   because of this, this person may feel something bad
>   I don't want this

4.2.3   Notion of "consideration"

As is reflected in the stem "consider", being *considerate* of others implies that one reaches an understanding of them through thinking about them. A *considerate* person is not someone who is intuitively aware of the potential negative effects of their actions, but someone who makes a conscious effort to think of, and understand, how others may feel.

A person who is not *considerate*, is someone who does not think of how they may make others feel through their own actions. One could therefore ask someone to be more *considerate*, by asking that they think about one before they do something, as shown in the following example.

> (21) Just be a bit more *considerate* — think about how I feel when you do things like that.

Note also that being *considerate* is incompatible with not thinking of others, as is illustrated by the unacceptability of the example (22) below.

(22) *He doesn't think about how I'm affected by what he does, but he is *considerate*.

We therefore need to include in the definition a notion that being *considerate* implies some conscious thought-process to achieve an understanding of another. This can be done with the following components.

X often thinks something like this:
  before I do something (W)
  I want to think about this person
  I want to know if this person will feel something bad
    because I do this (W)

4.2.4 Complete definition of *considerate*

We can now compile the complete definition of *considerate* based on the three notions thus far looked at individually.

X is *considerate*:
  X often thinks something like this about people:
  if I do something (W), this person may think:
    X doesn't think about what I could feel
      because X does W
  because of this, this person may feel something bad
  I don't want this
  because of this, before I do this (W)
  I want to think about this person
  I want to know if this person could feel something bad
    because I do this (W)
  if this person could feel something bad
    I will not do this (W)

Considerate implies thinking about one's actions and the potential effects they have on others, in terms of what one performing that action will make that person think about one's attitude towards them. That is, whether they will think that one has acted without thinking about how they would be caused to feel as a result of that action. The main focus of *considerate* is on not doing something that may harm another. The notion of wanting to do something for the benefit of another is not an essential element of its meaning. This is the most obvious difference between this word and both *kind*, as has been shown in the preceding discussion, and *thoughtful* (although not the only one). I shall now look at the meaning of *thoughtful*, and will attempt to show that, similar to *kind*, it is focussed on what one can do for the good of another, and unlike *considerate*, not on the potential negative effects of one's actions.

4.3   Thoughtful

4.3.1   Polysemy of *thoughtful*

Before looking at the meaning of *thoughtful*, the polysemy of this word must be considered. *Thoughtful* appears to have two meanings: one (that which concerns us here) is that used to describe a character trait that is manifested in interpersonal relations; the other refers not to one's attitude to people, but, for example, the approach one takes to an issue, or an argument. Thus, a newspaper might produce a "*thoughtful* editorial", or a speaker may present a "*thoughtful* discussion of an issue". There are a number of points that justify this polysemy, which I shall briefly discuss below.

Firstly, *thoughtful* as used to describe a way of relating to others (which for the moment I shall call *thoughtful* 1) contrasts with the adjective *selfish*, while the other use of *thoughtful* (which I shall call *thoughtful* 2) does not. Thus a "*thoughtful* 1 person" cannot be selfish, but a "*thoughtful* 2 writer", for example, can be. Secondly, *thoughtful* 1 refers to a person's character, and thus implies a degree of permanence, while *thoughtful* 2 can be used to refer to a temporary state. Thus, one can be *thoughtful* 2 for a moment, but one cannot be *thoughtful* 1 for a moment. And thirdly, the syntactic frames in which these words are used provide further evidence for their polysemy. Only *thoughtful* 1 can be used in the frame: "It was *thoughtful* of him to do X". If we were to describe the writing of a letter as *thoughtful* (a context in which both *thoughtful* 1 and *thoughtful* 2 would be possible), in this syntactic frame, this would have to be understood as *thoughtful* 1. Thus, "It was *thoughtful* of her to write the letter" could only imply that the letter was written with consideration of how that could benefit someone, and was written for that purpose. It cannot mean that the writer put a lot of thought into the ideas that made up her letter.

Both meanings imply some kind of "deep thinking", but the object of that thinking is quite different in each case. Having established that polysemy does indeed exist in this case, I shall now disregard *thoughtful* 2, and will focus only on *thoughtful* 1, which I shall call *thoughtful*.

4.3.2   Not wanting others to feel bad;
Believing one can do something to prevent them from feeling bad

I have argued that *kind* implies a general wish for others not to feel bad, and that *considerate* implies not wanting others to feel bad specifically as a result of one's actions. *Thoughtful* also implies that one doesn't want others to feel bad, but this seems to be related to specific situations, and includes a notion that one can do something to help a person who is in a potentially harmful situation. Thinking about someone in such a situation, and wanting to do something to help them, or something to prevent that situation from developing, is described

as being *thoughtful*. Consider the following example, from a book about how to handle grief, and what one can do for those who are grieving.

> (23) This is a time when *thoughtful* friends should rally in a co-ordinated way in the areas of food, errands, child care, hospitality for relatives and chores.
>
> MM: 44

This implies that friends of the bereaved should think of the bereaved's situation, and try to improve it, determining how they are able to help that person, and doing this. Note that *considerate* would be unnatural in such a context. This can be explained by the fact that there is no implication here of concern over the potential negative effects of one's actions on another, but rather over what one can do for the good of another. *Kind*, on the other hand, could be used here, because, as we have seen, *kind* does imply doing something to benefit another. Consider also the following example, again about how to help people who are grieving.

> (24) Obviously there is no single dramatic gesture or pearl of wisdom that will dissolve the ache, but there are many acts of *thoughtfulness* that can convey your concern and help to soften the blow that a friend or loved one has suffered.
>
> GM: 72

"Acts of *thoughtfulness*" implies things that one can do to help alleviate another's suffering. Note that we could not talk of "acts of *consideration*", which is natural in view of the fact that *considerate* does not imply doing something for others, while we could talk of "acts of *kindness*", as *kind* does involve doing something for others.

The notion of thinking of the situation others are in, not wanting that situation to cause them to feel bad, and wanting to do something to help them can be captured with the following components.

> X is *thoughtful*:
>   **X often thinks something like this about people:**
>   **if something like this happens to a person**
>   **this person can feel something bad**
>   **I don't want this**
>   **I think this person will not feel it if I do something (W)**
>   **I want to do something (W) because of this**

This clearly marks one distinction between *thoughtful* and *kind*, the latter being defined as thinking "I don't want anyone to feel something bad; I think I can do something good for this person", which is much more general than what has

been proposed here for *thoughtful*. It also shows one way it differs from *considerate,* which refers specifically to consideration of the potential negative effects of one's actions on another, and avoiding doing anything that may have such effects.

4.3.3   Wanting others to feel good

We have seen that *thoughtful* implies wanting to alleviate another's pain or suffering. It can also be used to mean wanting to do something for the benefit of another.

  This element of the meaning of *thoughtful* is evident from its use in modifying some nouns. For example, it can be used to describe a present ("a *thoughtful* present"), or a letter ("a *thoughtful* letter"). The components proposed above do not account for such a use, where there is no implication of not wanting others to feel bad. A "*thoughtful* present" is not one given because one doesn't want others to feel bad, but because one wants them to feel something good. It is one into which the giver has put a lot of thought, and as a result of this, has found something they believe the recipient will like, or that will be of benefit to them in some way. Something similar is implied by "a *thoughtful* letter".

  Consider also the following example, where the writer is describing a woman's impression of a new friend of hers in relating to various people.

> (25) She was impressed with the *thoughtfulness* and hospitality Sam showed his guests, ...
>
> <div align="center">KA: 84</div>

This does not imply that Sam treated his guests in a way to minimise any potential hardship they might undergo, but treated them so as to maximise their comfort, to make them feel good.

  It is important, then, to include in the definition that not only does a *thoughtful* person not want others to feel bad, they want to do something to cause them to feel good. This can be captured with the following components.

> **X often thinks something like this about people:**
> **I think this person will feel something good**
>   **if I do something (W)**
> **I want to do something (W) because of this**

This is similar to what has been proposed in the definition of *kind,* namely that one thinks one can do something for the good of another, and one wants to do it. It differs from *considerate* which, as has been discussed, does not include a notion of wanting to do something good for another.

4.3.4   Doing something for others

I have argued that performing some action is an essential element of the meaning of *kind*, and that not performing some action is essential to *considerate*. *Thoughtful* seems to be similar to *kind* in this regard, in that it does involve doing something. The fact that we can talk of "acts of *thoughtfulness*" (example (24)), is one piece of evidence supporting this, while, as mentioned, we cannot talk of "acts of *consideration*". Also consider the following sentence, shown to be unacceptable for *kind* (example (4)), but acceptable for *considerate* (example (17)), which is questionable for *thoughtful*.

(26) ?He won't do anything for you, but he is *thoughtful*.

It seems that being *thoughtful* means that not only does one think about what would be good for others, or what one can do to help others in a potentially harmful situation, but one does do something for another as a result of what one has thought about them. Remembering to give a present on someone's birthday and choosing something particularly appropriate may be described as *thoughtful*, but simply thinking of a wonderful present for someone, but not actually giving it to them, would not be. The following component must therefore be added to those proposed above (which I shall not reproduce here).

X does something because of this

4.3.5   Not a "big" thing

Another element that remains to be captured in the definition of *thoughtful* is that, like *kind*, what one wants to do for another is not a "big" thing; it is rather a small act that is fairly easy to perform. Thus, while helping a sick friend with errands, child care etc. can be described as *thoughtful* (example (23)), taking a week of work to help them would not be.

(27) *He *thoughtfully* took the week off work to look after his sick friend.

It seems that this is because taking a week off work requires too much effort to be *thoughtful*, and is therefore too "big" a thing. *Thoughtful* is reserved for "smaller" things, such as remembering people's birthdays, calling people on special occasions, keeping people informed of news they may want to hear, and so on.

The component given below must be included in the definition, following those components outlining that one wants to do something to prevent another from feeling bad in a given situation, and that one believes one can do something good for them (not reproduced here).

> X often thinks something like this about people:
>   I want to do something because of this
>   this is not a big thing

4.3.6   Notion of "thought"

The notion of a *thoughtful* act being something into which one has put some "thought" is reflected in the examples given above, of a *"thoughtful* letter" or a *"thoughtful* present". These imply things that one has spent some time thinking about (as opposed to an idea that automatically popped into one's head) and because of that, has been able to work out what would be good for the recipient.

This notion of thinking involved here is also reflected in the morphology of the word, being built on the stem *thought*, as was also discussed for *considerate*.

This notion of "hard thinking" can be captured in the definition with the following component.

> X often thinks something like this about people:
>   I want to think about this person before I do something

Note that this is similar to what was proposed for *considerate*.

4.3.7   Complete definition of *thoughtful*

On the basis of this discussion, I propose the following definition of *thoughtful*.

> X is *thoughtful*:
>   X often thinks something like this about people:
>   If something like this happens to a person
>   this person will feel something
>   I don't want this person to feel something bad
>   I think this person will not feel it if I do something (W)
>   I think this person will feel something good
>   if I do something (W)
>   I want to do this (W) because of this
>   this is not a big thing
>   I want to think about this person before I do it
>   X does something (W) because of this

A *thoughtful* person is someone who thinks of the situation others are in, and of what they can do for that person, either to minimise their discomfort, or to

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maximise their comfort in some way. It is someone who goes to some effort to think of small things they can, and want to do for another, and who does do those things.

5.   Conclusion

I have presented here definitions for three common and closely related English words referring to positive character traits. Although these three words appear on the surface to mean something very similar, a detailed analysis of usage examples has revealed fine differences between them. I have argued that *kind* is focussed on not wanting others to feel bad, wanting to do good things for them, and on actually doing something. This explains its use in expressions such as "So *kind* he wouldn't hurt a flea", and "Would you be so *kind* as to ...", where neither *considerate* nor *thoughtful* are used. *Considerate* is focussed on not doing something that could hurt another by demonstrating that one has not thought about that person. Thus, it is *considerate* to not play loud music at night, or to not make noise while others are reading, contexts where neither *kind* nor *thoughtful* are used. *Thoughtful* is focussed on thinking of the specific situation that another is in, and what one can do for them in that situation, and involves doing something for that person. Thus, it is *thoughtful* to help sick friends in small ways, and to remember people's birthdays, for example, while such acts would not be described as *kind* or *considerate*.

I hope to have shown, in the course of this analysis, that the Natural Semantic Metalanguage is an extremely useful theoretical framework for defining words. It facilitates the exhaustive explication of word meaning, and thus allows for differences and similarities between related words to be clearly and accurately stated. As well as helping native speakers better understand their own use of words, this theory has wide-reaching applications for second language learners, and for cross-cultural analysts, and thus has a great deal to offer the field of lexicography.

Notes

1.   I would like to express my gratitude to Anna Wierzbicka, for her inspiration and support with this paper, from its inception to the final stage. I would also like to thank Nick Enfield for his helpful comments and thought-provoking discussion.
2.   The polysemy posited for *considerate*, however, seems to apply more to the noun *consideration* and the verb *consider* than it does to the adjective *considerate*. In the case of *thoughtful*, the validity of (2), and whether this really is a separate meaning from (1) and (3), is unclear. The polysemy evident in *thoughtful* is discussed in section 4.3.1.
3.   See Goddard (1994: 7-14) for a more detailed and theoretical discussion of the principles underlying NSM.

4. See Wierzbicka (1985: 193 ff) for a discussion of the meaning of *salt*.

5. See Travis (to appear), Wierzbicka (1991a, 1991b, among others) for examples of such analyses.

6. I do not wish to suggest that *kind* means the same as its derivations, such as *kindness* and *kindly*, aside from belonging to a different word-class. I do believe, however, that there is a common core to these derivations, and thus will not restrict my data to *kind* alone. It is the common core that I am attempting to capture in my definition of *kind*, and also for *considerate* and *thoughtful*.

7. I have tried, where possible, to use naturally occurring examples, and have indicated the source and page numbers of such examples as done here. All come from written sources; the initials are the author's initials and the numbers represent the page number of the quote. The full reference is given in "Sources Cited" under "References". Those that are not marked in this way are constructed examples.

8. Quoted in Stevenson (1946: 1036).

9. Quoted in Stevenson (1946: 1037). From Wordsworth: "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey".

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