USE OF THESES

This copy is supplied for purposes of private study and research only. Passages from the thesis may not be copied or closely paraphrased without the written consent of the author.
Desire in language and thought: A study in crosscultural semantics

Jean Harkins

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University

December, 1995
DECLARATION

Except where otherwise acknowledged,
this thesis is my own work.

[Signature]
15 December 1995
## Contents

Abstract iv  
Acknowledgements v  
Abbreviations and conventions vi  
Map vii  
List of languages viii  

### Chapter 1. Desiderative constructions and crosscultural semantics  
1.1 Why study desiderative constructions? 3  
1.2 Theories of desire in human experience and conceptualisation 6  
1.3 'Wanting' in cognition and language 12  
1.4 Crosscultural semantic analysis in cognitive science 16  
1.5 Outline of chapters 28  

### Chapter 2. Toward a typology of desideratives  
2.1 Desiderative words and constructions 30  
2.2 Morphological desideratives 33  
2.3 Desideratives and lexical relations 38  
2.4 Body part desideratives: metaphor or polysemy? 45  
2.5 Wanting, feeling, saying and thinking 46  

### Chapter 3. Grammar of desiderative constructions  
3.1 Parts of speech and grammatical roles 57  
3.2 Desideratives and their complements 74  
3.3 Verbal and clausal complements 101  
3.4 Coreferential and non-coreferential complements 106  

### Chapter 4. Polysemy and ambiguity in desiderative grammemes  
4.1 Functions and senses of grammatical morphemes 116  
4.2 How many meanings does a 'desiderative' inflection have? 134  
4.3 Wanting, liking and irrealis in Buru 135  
4.4 Polysemy and disambiguation 138  
4.5 Linguistic description of multifunctional grammemes 147  

### Chapter 5. Desiderative grammemes and interclausal relations  
5.1 Wanting and potentiality in Kayardild 157  
5.2 Purpose constructions and wanting 164  
5.3 Modality, -THu and wantir, 2 167  
5.4 Meanings of -THu (--THuru) 169  
5.5 Wanting within and across clauses 174  

### Chapter 6. Universal and language-specific in desideratives  
6.1 WANT as a language universal? 180  
6.2 Patterns of equivalence across languages 183  
6.3 Problems with WANT as a crosslinguistic universal 187  
6.4 A 'universal syntax' of desiderative meanings? 191  
6.5 Cultural values and language change 194  

### Notes  
202  

### Bibliography  
207
Abstract

This thesis is a semantic-typological study of desiderative constructions in languages of the world. Focussing on both meaning and grammatical structures, it explores how the properties of desiderative expressions in languages of the world reflect universal elements and language-specific configurations of meaning. Chapter One sets out the nature and scope of the work, explaining the purpose of examining desiderative constructions across languages, and outlining the theoretical context and orientation of the study. Chapter Two presents a typological overview of desiderative expressions in a selection of languages from diverse genetic groups throughout the world, noting crosslinguistic trends in lexical relations and syntactic patterns associated with desiderative constructions. Chapter Three focusses on grammatical properties of desiderative expressions across languages, exploring how the semantics and grammar of different construction types interact with the meanings of individual lexemes to encode a range of desiderative meanings. Chapter Four examines multi-functional grammatical morphemes with desiderative functions, using the principles of NSM analysis to investigate whether they have a single meaning or semantic core, or are truly polysemous. A set of procedures is proposed for specifying how many meanings a grammeme has, and how these relate to its various grammatical functions. Chapter Five compares constructions where a desiderative expression takes a complement clause (as in English I want to dance), and those where a desiderative grammeme occurs within the same clause that represents the wanted event (as in the Kayardild equivalent Ngada wirrka-ju), and explores the interpropositional nature of desiderative meaning. Chapter Six pursues the question of WANT as a semantic and lexical universal, ‘n view of the diversity of desiderative constructions across languages. Specific criteria are proposed for the assessment of semantic equivalence across languages, and for distinguishing language-specific phenomena from potentially universal elements and configurations of meaning. This leads to a proposal for a ‘universal syntax’ of desiderative meaning. The influence of cultural values and attitudes on the expression of desire is explored with a view to explaining aspects of the interaction between social and linguistic structure and its impact on the range and types of desiderative constructions found in different languages, and how a theory of language universals might deal with processes of language change.
Acknowledgements

A project of such duration incurs more debts of gratitude than can possibly be enumerated here; these acknowledgements are inevitably incomplete. Above all I am indebted to my supervisors, Anna Wierzbicka and Bob Dixon, who were unfailingly encouraging, stimulating, patient, and most generous with comments and advice; such quality of supervision is something one can only hope to pass on in part to one's own students. I am grateful to many other colleagues for lengthy discussions of the issues considered here; these include Gedda Aklif, Avery Andrews, Bob Bugenhagen, Tim Curnow, Tony Diller, Tamsin Donaldson, Mark Durie, Robert Early, Nick Evans, Cliff Goddard, Chuck Grimes, Harold Koch, Ulrike Mosel, Masa Onishi, Andrew Pawley, Bert Peeters, Orawan Poo-Israkij, Tim Shopen, Ryo Stanwood, David Wilkins, and others whom I apologise for omitting. Several non-linguists have also endured ear-bashing and given helpful input to aspects of this work, and I thank in particular Peter Clark, Mark Deffenbaugh, Libby Fitzgerald, Gail Reekie, Lynden Lawton, Asafo So'o, Rose-Mary Swan, Mereana Otene Waaka, and Stella Wilkie. The financial support of the Australian National University is gratefully acknowledged. Graphic design for the map was by Louise Campbell.

I would also like to acknowledge gratitude to fellow members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) for faithful witness to the value of openness to new light from wherever it may come, and pursuing truth wherever it may lead; to the ANU Counselling Service and particularly Geoff Mortimore for helping students like me, for whom moving through personal and family difficulties is a vital part of the process of academic study and learning; to comrades in twelve-step recovery for encouragement in proceeding one step at a time; to the Canberra Gay and Lesbian Choir for helping to take my mind off work; to my colleagues at UNE for support and understanding during the final production phase; and to my parents for the experiences that first awakened my interest in languages and cultures. My gratitude to Pamela Richards for standing by me through all the ups and downs goes far beyond words. Needless to say, none of the above are in any way responsible for my errors and omissions in this work, nor are they under any obligation to agree with what I say here.
Abbreviations and conventions
(Spelling and punctuation are in accord with standard Australian English practice.)

1 first person NOM nominative
2 second person NomNEG nominal negator
A third person NP noun phrase
ABIL ablative NPP non-past progressive
ABL abilitative NSM natural semantic meta-
ACC accusative language
ACT actual NZN nominalisation
ALL allative ø zero morpheme
APL ablative OBJ object
APP applicative OBL oblique
AVER aversive OPT optative
CAUS causative ORIG origin
cf. compare p plural
CLOC complementising locative PC past completive
COBL complementising oblique [PC] pronominal clitic
COND conditional PAST past tense
COP copula PERF perfect
CPLT complement PPL pluraliser
CTRFCT counterfactual POSS possessive
CZR complementiser POT potential
D d dual PRES present tense
DAT dative PRI prior
DECL declarative PrPART present participle
DES desiderative PROG progressive
DETR detransitiveiser PROP proprieteive
DISTR distributive PURP purposive
DUR durative Q question
e.g. for example RDP reduplication
ERG ergative REAL realis
EMOT emotive REF referent
ex exclusive REFL reflexive
FOC focus s singular
FUT future S subject
GIV given SA same actor
GO&DO associated-motion form SER serial mark:
HORT hortative SJV subjunctive
i.e. that is SPEC specific
Imm immediate TAM tense/aspect/mood
IMP imperative THEMAT thematic
in inclusive TOP topic
INCH inchoative U undergoer/undergoer-taking
INF infinitive UNC uncertain
INST instrumental UNR unrealised
IRR irreals V verb
LD locative-directional VDAT verbal dative
LOC locative ViALL intransitive verbal allative
NCR non-compositional relation viz. namely
NEG negative VP verb phrase
NegPOT negative potential VPURP verbal purposive
NF non-future VTRL verbal translativa
# List of languages

The languages referred to in the text and notes are listed here with an indication of their genetic affiliations (generally following Ruhlen 1987) and traditional locations, corresponding to the numbers on the map.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Acehnese (Austronesian; ntn Sumatra)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Albanian (Indo-European; Balkans)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Arrernte (Pama-Nyungan; cent. Australia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bahasa Indonesia (Austronesian; Indonesia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Basque (Isolate; northern Spain)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bengali (Indo-Iranian; Bengal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bodega Miwok (Penutian; California)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bulgarian (Slavic; Bulgaria)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Burmese (Tibeto-Burman; Burma)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Buru (Austronesian; Moluccas)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Diegueño (Yuman; southern California)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dyirbal (Pama-Nyungan; ntn Queensland)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>English (Germanic; England)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ewe (Niger-Congo; Ghana/Togo)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Fijian (Austronesian; Fiji)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Finnish (Uralic; Finland)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>French (Romance; France)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Georgian (Caucasian; Georgia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>German (Germanic; Germany)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Greek (Indo-European; Greece)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Greenlandic (Eskimo-Aleut; Greenland)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Haitian (Creole; Haiti)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Hausa (Chadic; Nigeria)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Hebrew (Semitic; Israel)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Hindi (Indo-Iranian; northern India)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Hixkaryana (Carib; Amazonas, Brazil)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Hungarian (Uralic; Hungary)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Iatmul (Ndu, Papuan; Sepik River basin)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Irish (Celtic; Ireland)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Italian (Romance; Italy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Jacaltec (Mayan; Guatemala)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Japanese (Altaic; Japan)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Jarawara (Arwak; Amazonas, Brazil)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Kalam (Kalam, Papuan; NG cent. h’lands)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Kaluli (Bosavi, Papuan; NG sth h’lands)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Kayardild (Tangkic,Austral’n; Carpentaria)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Khmer (Austroasiatic; Cambodia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Kiwai (Kiwaian, Papuan; Fly R. delta)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Korean (Altaic; Korea)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Kpelle (Niger-Congo; Liberia/S’ra Leone)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Kwaio (Oceanic; Solomon Islands)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Lakhota (Siouan; north-central USA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Latin (Italic; extinct)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Longgu (Oceanic; Solomon Islands)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Luiseño (Uto-Aztec; stn California)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Maasai (Nilo-Saharan; Kenya/Tanzania)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Malay (Austronesian; Malaysia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic; north China)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Mangap-Mbula (Oceanic; Umboi Is.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Maori (Polynesian; Aotearoa/NewZeland)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Maricopa (Yuman; southern California)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Miskito (Chibchan; Nicaragua)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Mojave (Yuman; southern California)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Moru (Nilo-Saharan; Sudan/Zaire)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Navajo (Athabaskan; Arizona/NM)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Ngiyamba (Pama-Nyungan; westn NSW)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Nunggubuyu (Non-Pama-Ny.; Arnhem Lnd)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Pashto (Indo-Iranian; Afghanistan)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Polish (Slavic; Poland)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Quechua (Andean; Ecuador/Peru)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Romanian (Romance; Romania)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Russian (Slavic; Russia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Samoan (Polynesian; Samoa)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Sanskrit (Indo-Iranian; extinct)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Saramaccan (Creole; Surinam)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Selepet (Huon, Papuan; ntheastern NG)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Sierra Miwok (Penutian; California)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Spanish (Romance; Spain)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Swedish (Germanic; Sweden)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Tahitian (Polynesian; Tahiti)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Tamils (Dravidian; south India)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Telugu (Dravidian; south India)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Thai (Austro-Tai; Thailand)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Turkana (Nilo-Saharan; Kenya)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Turkish (Altaic; Turkey)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Ulwa (Chibchan; Nicaragua)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Uzbek (Altaic; Central Asia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Vietnamese (Austroasiatic; Vietnam)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>Wolof (Niger-Congo; Senegal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Yagaria (Gorokan, Papuan; NG e. h’lands)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Yankunytjatjara (Pama-Nyungan; W.Desert)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Yidiny (Pama-Nyungan; ntn Queensland)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>Yimas (Lower Sepik, Papuan; Sepik basin)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Yup’ik (Eskimo-Aleut; Alaska)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

Desiderative constructions and crosscultural semantics

When all the desires that dwell in the heart are cast away, then does the mortal become immortal, then he attains Brahman. Bṛhad-āranyaka Upaniṣad (Radhakrishnan 1953:273)

There is no more intimate, more radical self-expression of the conscious individual than that which is conveyed by the term ‘desire’. It is the one genuine subjective register of character. A man is known by his works, but he knows himself by his desires. C.A.F. Rhys Davids (1911:666)

The wish, i.e. some want, is the condition which precedes every pleasure. But with the satisfaction the wish and therefore the pleasure cease. Thus the satisfaction or the pleasing can never be more than deliverance from a pain, from a want. Arthur Schopenhauer (1950,v.1:411-412)


Is desire really innate and universal? Does it lie at the core of the human condition, in every place, time, and human society? Many of the philosophical and religious traditions of the world grapple with questions of desire, the human will, the problem of wanting what is not, and what is the relationship of these phenomena to human biology, instinct, feeling, thought, intention, choice, and action.

This study does not aim to answer any of these big questions. It will, however, consider why and how they should come to be asked, by students of human nature in many different places, times, cultural traditions, and languages. For if experiences of desire, wanting, and will are thought, written and spoken about as important aspects of human life, then it could be expected that these experiences would be represented in all human languages: that this might be a clue to a linguistic universal. And this is a matter that can be investigated empirically.
By looking at actual linguistic data, at words and grammatical constructions from languages from around the world, it should be possible to establish, on a strictly factual basis, the answers to two questions: Are experiences of desire or wanting expressed in all human languages, or a reasonable sample thereof? And if so, is it possible to identify any specific linguistic elements, characteristics or tendencies that such expressions have in common, that could be regarded as universal across languages?

Such an empirical investigative enterprise runs immediately into the problem of how to deal with the many differences between languages. Whatever language is taken as a starting point, no other language has words and constructions exactly matching those of the first language, to express desire or any other aspect of human experience. Bilingual dictionaries, for example, usually give some equivalents for ‘want’ or ‘desire’, but these words display such dramatic differences in semantic content and grammatical behaviour in different languages that they cannot be assumed to refer to the same human experience. Only careful analysis of the nature of the similarities and differences can reveal to what extent they really refer to the same concept.

In many languages there is no term exactly equivalent to ‘desire’ because the words that often refer to desire can also refer to a variety of more or less related experiences, such as needing, liking, seeking or looking for something, and so on. This would pose no problem if the same set of ideas were always related to desire, but this is not the case. The range of use of such terms is different in each language, and it is necessary to have some basis for assessing whether words like, for example, di ‘want, like, seek, look for’ in Ewe or suka ‘like, want’ (but not ‘look for’) in Buru, can be considered to refer to desire.

Grammatical differences between languages raise a similar set of questions. Terms referring to something like desire display a great variety of grammatical properties: some languages have transitive verbs like Ewe di or English want, while others employ different parts of speech like the Japanese adjective hoshii ‘desirable’. Some languages appear to have no word at all corresponding to ‘desire’ or ‘want’, but indicate desire for something by means of grammatical markers attached to the words for what is desired. Again in these cases, there is a need for some basis for determining to what extent these expressions refer to the same thing.

The concept of wanting is also central to other important grammatical categories and constructions found in large numbers of
languages. For example, many causative constructions encode not only a cause-effect relation, but also that the agent intends or wants to produce the effect (e.g. I got her to go home). Purpose constructions (e.g. I climbed the tree to get a coconut; She lay down to sleep) convey that an action is performed because the performer wants something else to happen. Imperatives, jussives and hortatives convey wanting someone to do something, vocatives convey wanting to speak to the addressee, and so on.

Not only the words and grammatical constructions, but the customs and conventions for referring to desire in different languages vary tremendously. In some societies, people are expected to express what they want freely and openly, while in others, the direct expression of desire is strongly discouraged. These differences affect both the frequency of use and the range of functions of desiderative expressions in different languages, and this too raises questions about the supposed universality of desire. Do groups of people who express what they want directly and often, and groups who view this as inappropriate, have the same concept or experience of desire?

This study aims to explore each of these questions about the linguistic expression of desire and related notions, and to arrive at an assessment of the empirical evidence for and against the existence of a linguistic universal or universals in the area of desiderative meaning. In so doing, it draws upon and develops a set of theoretical principles and practical procedures for analysing the ways in which linguistic meanings and functions are arranged and encoded in different languages and cultures. This approach, which could be termed crosscultural semantic analysis, offers insight into the nature of lexical and grammatical relationships, social and cultural patterns of language use and language change, and ultimately perhaps into the structure of human cognition.

1.1 Why study desiderative constructions?

The present work takes a fresh approach to studying human conceptualisation through language, and to analysing linguistic data in depth. It focusses both on meaning and on grammatical structures, showing how the grammatical properties of desiderative expressions in different languages reflect universal elements and language-specific configurations of meaning. This approach treats semantics as prior, but
essentially inseparable from syntactic structure. It is only through detailed study of the structural organisation of languages that the elements of meaning and the configurations in which speakers combine them to form meaningful (meaning-full) utterances can be accessed.

Apart from its relevance to the philosophical question of the universality of desire in human experience, and human beings’ conceptualisation of their experience, the expression of desire and related notions in language is richly deserving of study for a variety of other reasons. It is central, perhaps universal among the functions of human language, both in self-expressive and communicative functions. Expressing what one wants is an important form of self-expression for most human beings. It also forms the basis of much interpersonal communicative behaviour, including requests, directives, imperatives, and explanations of reasons for actions. Although cultural constraints on individual self-expression vary widely, and some groups favour highly indirect modes of communicating desire in most contexts, people everywhere have ways of saying, directly or indirectly, what they want.

The linguistic forms whereby people do this are many and varied, but they often reveal a great deal about the semantic and grammatical structures of the languages in which they are expressed. The semantics of desiderative expressions may provide clues to cultural values, worldview, and patterns of thought. For example, desiderative meanings in some languages, like French or Buru, are associated with particular modal categories such as subjunctive or irrealis; in some languages, like Arrernte or Yidiny, they are associated with bodily parts or processes. In some languages, like Japanese, the direct expression of desiderative meanings may be avoided altogether in many contexts.

The grammar of desiderative expressions in every language displays important grammatical categories and syntactic processes. Languages deploy some of their most complex grammatical apparatus for the purpose of linking, for example, a desiderative verb and a dependent clause expressing the desired event (e.g. Spanish Quiero [que vengan aquí] ‘I want [them to come here]’), or an action clause and a subordinate clause expressing the desired outcome of the action (e.g. Arrernte Itne alengke-iwelheke [itne akertnengentyele areketyenge] ‘They hid [so that they couldn’t be seen from above]’). Investigation of such constructions can contribute much to the understanding of the grammar of any language.
Desiderative notions may be centrally involved in a number of other important semantic and grammatical categories. For example, the meanings of many emotion terms include a desire or impulse to perform some action, as in the case of anger, where the experiencer wants to do something to the person who has aroused the anger. Wanting is also central to the meanings of speech acts, which by their very nature have an illocutionary purpose, something that the speaker wants to do by means of the act of speaking. The speaker may want to cause someone else to know something (as in telling, informing, promising), to do something (as in ordering, pleading), to think about something (as in advising, hinting), to join in (as in discussing, chatting); or the speaker may want to express thoughts or feelings (as in exclaiming, guessing).

Wanting may also be crucially involved in grammatical categories and associated syntactic processes. For example, in many languages the transitivity properties of verbs like ‘kick’ or ‘break’ (compared with intransitives like ‘fall’ or ‘die’) have a semantic basis involving an agent who wants something. The action is performed because the agent wants to do it, or wants to produce a particular effect on the patient. Other grammatical processes in a number of languages are sensitive to factors like volition or control, and these too may be understood in terms of wanting. Volition involves an agent’s wanting to do something, and control involves being able to do or cause an action or event that one wants.

Therefore, a study of desiderative constructions across languages has the potential to contribute significantly to the understanding of linguistic structure, and possibly also of cognitive structure. At the very least it will yield a rich harvest of observations and comparisons of semantic and grammatical characteristics of diverse languages. If desire in some form is found to be semantically universal, this could provide a key to understanding and explaining many phenomena that can be observed across languages, from illocutionary purposes to transitivity. And if any language universals can be identified in this area, this would constitute substantial evidence for the universality of desire both in human experience and in human cognition as reflected in language. Such findings would of course have major implications for cognitive science.

Investigation of desiderative constructions across languages will also yield observations of importance in crosscultural communication, both among individuals and at the level of international trade and
1.1 Why study desiderative constructions

political relations. In any international or interethnic endeavour it is necessary for the parties to communicate effectively with one another about their desires and what they want to achieve. A better understanding of what is similar and what is different about the expression of desire and related notions in languages of the world could contribute substantially to improving intercultural relations.

The major part of what follows is a descriptive account of the interactions of meaning and structure in desiderative expressions in a variety of languages. The discussion is cast within the broad ambit of linguistic description as developed through the work of Sapir, Bloomfield, Chomsky, Comrie, and a great many others. Concepts in linguistic theory are drawn upon as needed in the service of the main descriptive task, but the use of jargon and symbols has been avoided wherever possible, since it is maintained that these too would have to be explained in natural language terms.

The rest of this chapter sketches the theoretical context and orientation of this study, and the descriptive principles it employs. Although based firmly on linguistic description, it draws upon and has many implications for other disciplines; space permits only a very brief mention of some of the most relevant ideas from philosophy, psychology and anthropology. This is followed by an outline of theoretical preliminaries to the linguistic analysis, with more detailed background information on the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) method that is used as the basis for description of meanings.

Detailed notes and references are provided at the end of each chapter, including exact references to direct quotations, works and authors mentioned in passing, and sources of examples. A wide range of sources is drawn upon, both for individual languages and for alternative views on theoretical points, and details of these are thus made available without obstructing the reader’s progress through the main argument.

1.2 Theories of desire in human experience and conceptualisation

Students of human nature have pondered the nature of desire and wanting, from at least the time of the earliest records of quite diverse intellectual traditions. In China in the sixth century BC, Lao Tzu taught that desire was part of human nature, but that true inner peace lies in
freedom from it: '...if I cease to desire and remain still, the empire will be at peace of its own accord.' Hindu and Buddhist writings of similar antiquity identified desire (Sanskrit kāma) as one of four basic drives in human nature. The Hindu sacred text Bhagavadgītā teaches that fulfillment involves freedom from desire and passions. One of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhist teaching is that all human sorrow and suffering arise from desire; liberation comes with the cessation of desire. The theme of wanting as a central human problem from which liberation is to be sought is also found in Neo-Platonist, Christian and Sufi mystical traditions. Contemporary philosophers like Schopenhauer have shared the view that wanting is part of the human plight: '...so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with their constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we can never have lasting happiness nor peace.'

Aristotle saw desire as an integral part of human nature, and as essential to all human action based on choice: 'The origin of action... is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end.' In his view, desire necessarily involves mental representation of what is desired; and reasoning and choice follow from this as the way to bridge the gap between wanting itself and attainment of the desired end. Aristotle distinguishes desire from feeling and emotion because of its active, goal-oriented character. The relationship of wanting with thought leading to action is explored by many later philosophers.

The Stoics saw desire as one of four basic emotions (along with fear, joy and sorrow), and characterised it as an inclination towards an expected good. Ever since, debates about the nature of desire have focussed on, among other issues, the relationship of wanting with thinking, doing, needing, and what is good and bad for people. Hebrew scholars identified two aspects of desire, the desire for evil (yetzer ha-ra) and the desire for good (yetzer ha-tov), viewing the former as innate and the latter as emerging only when one becomes a spiritually mature person (bar/bat mitzvah). On the other hand, Thomas Aquinas considered that no evil as such can be desirable, or directly wanted. Wanting was effectively equated with thinking of its object as good or pleasant in J.S. Mill’s suggestion that these are ‘two different modes of naming the same psychological fact’. But others have proposed that we neither think of something as good because we want it, nor want it because we think it good, but that wanting and valuing are independent of one another.
1.2 Theories of desire in human experience

A related question is how wanting may be related to needing. Locke's idea was that wanting something creates a feeling of uneasiness and hence need, while others have thought that precisely the reverse is true, that the need for something generates the desire for it. This view is suggested by Schopenhauer, in the quotation at the start of this chapter. Some languages show lexical and semantic relations between 'wanting' and 'good', 'thinking', 'feeling' or 'needing', and the linguistic evidence examined in this study may shed some light on the nature of such relationships in human conceptualisation.

The view that 'desire is the very nature or essence of a person' was expressed by Spinoza, and this theme has been taken up in contemporary psychological theory, most notably by Lacan. Spinoza asserted that there are only three basic human emotions: joy, sorrow and desire, and of these he considered desire the most important. The questions of how desire or wanting is related to emotions, self-concept, and motivation have been explored by many psychologists.

Although the pioneering psychologist William James saw emotions as deriving from physical arousal, he considered will (wanting) to be basic, irreducible to knowledge or appetite. Of several proposals by researchers seeking to delineate sets of basic human emotions, only those of Arnold and Frijda include desire or wanting as such, but in many other studies of emotions it is treated as a basic parameter or component of emotional states. In a major study of the cognitive structure of emotions, Ortony and colleagues identify 'desirability' as a central variable in the cognitive appraisal of emotion-inducing situations. They differentiate their use of 'desire' from wanting an outcome, viewing it instead as a function of the beneficial (good) consequences of the outcome; but in their system, desirability is computed with reference to goals, which are ultimately defined as 'things one wants to get done' and 'things one wants to see happen'.

Much of modern psychological theory has taken as given that people want pleasant experiences, that is, whatever makes them feel something good, and want to avoid unpleasant experiences, or whatever makes them feel something bad; or that they want what they think will make them feel good rather than bad. The troublesome paradox that we often choose to do things that we know are bad for us and will ultimately cause us to feel something bad, and choose not to do things that are good for us and will make us feel better, has of course been explored. Research
in the psychology of moral development, as well as in addiction and compulsion, has had to distinguish wanting from both feeling (positive/negative or pleasure/pain) and from appraisal of value (good/bad).

Such distinctions have, however, been made in a fairly ad hoc way, with little agreement between researchers in the use of terminology. Generally, appraisal and valuing are recognised as essentially cognitive processes (thinking about a situation, or thinking of something as good or bad), while pleasure, pain and so on are seen as ‘affective’ states (feeling something good or bad). The status of ‘will’ or wanting is usually less clear; wanting is often seen as arising from appraisal or affect (thinking or feeling) but is not entirely reducible to either.

While the role of wanting in child development and the formation of concepts of self is discussed from varying theoretical standpoints, there is some agreement that experiences of not getting what one wants are of great importance in the development of an awareness of separateness from the environment and other people. People who too rarely get what they want may develop feelings of inadequacy and lack of self-efficacy, leading to depression, in infancy or later in life. On the other hand, some Japanese psychologists have observed that the attention paid in their culture to thinking of what others might want and supplying it in advance may contribute to the development of a Japanese concept of self as interdependent and part of a network of relations rather than separate from others.

Studies of children’s language acquisition in several different cultural settings indicate that wanting and not-wanting (rejection) are among the first concepts that children use words to express. Wellman reports that two-year-olds ‘use such desire words as want and related emotion words such as happy’ in spontaneous language use, even before other early words like think, know and surprise, and that even at this stage children clearly understand complex predicate complement constructions like Sam wants to find his rabbit. Other studies discussed by Harris report that most children talk about both their own and other people’s desires well before two years, by which age words like want and see are produced by almost all children, while early emotion terms happy, mad are ‘a bit less prevalent’ but still used by most two-year-olds, and cognitive terms know, think develop a little more slowly; at this stage, references to self are more frequent than references to others.
A comprehensive review of children’s earliest word combinations across languages by Braine found that such patterns include both patterns like ‘want + X’, and rejection ‘no + X’, not only in English but also in Samoan, where combinations like *fia moe* ‘want sleep’ and *fia ’ai lole pepe* ‘want eat candy baby’ are found at 26 months. In English, combinations *want this*, *want jump* and *want daddy fix it* are found at 21 months, and in Swedish, *jag vill inte ‘I don’t want’, vill inte ha den ‘don’t want to have it’ and den vill inte stå ‘it doesn’t want to stand’ occur at about the same age. Imperative verb forms are also very common at this stage, not only the unmarked imperative verbs of English, Swedish and Samoan, but also Hebrew verb forms correctly marked for imperative and gender. In Japanese, Clancy found *iya ‘I don’t want* among the earliest words at the one-word stage, and the desiderative inflection *-tai ‘want* at the two-word stage. Even in Kaluli, where wanting is expressed by a serial verb construction with future marking and the verb ‘do’, two-year-olds correctly produce constructions like *deyo gilimenc dowab* [fire light:1FUT do:3PRES] ‘I want to light the fire’.

In English and Italian, *want* and *volere* are the earliest verbs used for sentence embedding, and for a long time the only ones. By six years, most children can readily articulate highly complex, recursive structures like *She didn’t want her friend to know that she really feels happy that she won*. Studies also show a close relation between children’s expressions of desire and modality and their acquisition of future tense. Most early speech relates to the here and now, but even before two years, children express intentions and desires concerning potential subsequent events. Bates, Elman and Li report that ‘in Mandarin Chinese, children often use the modal verbs *hui ‘can* and *yao ‘want* to express their intentions, which prepares for the occurrence of future marking’ (cf. section 2.5 below); and Trabasso and Stein show how children’s understanding of goals (what people want) contributes to the development of future time expressions.

A critique of modern and/or Western emphases on an individuated self has developed through crosscultural studies in psychology and anthropology, as well as through postmodernist theories, with their focus on subjectivity and social practice rather than internal experience. Russell and Lutz have pointed out that ‘emotion’ itself is a cultural category, constructed within a particular social context. While people everywhere do seem to experience a range of feelings, the conceptualisation of specific feelings, how they are categorised, whether they are considered important
as inner experiences or determinants of people’s actions, and how they are related to social and political constructs such as gender, varies greatly from one cultural context to another.

One might expect that this would call into question any notion of individual desire or wanting, particularly if the notion of self is seen as a variable sociocultural construct. But in fact this is not the case: the concept of wanting is at least as central to these recent ideas about human subjectivity, as it is to the concept of the autonomous individual. No matter how different the content and categorisation of kinds of feeling may be across cultures, most (perhaps it is not too bold to say all) psychological, anthropological and sociological accounts make reference to people’s wanting to do things associated with their feelings, whether this is described in terms of impulses, action tendencies, goals, or social practices.

Linguistic analyses of the semantic content of emotion terms in a wide variety of languages and cultures support the view that wanting is basic to most emotions. For example, concepts of love, affection, compassion and so on have been shown to vary greatly across languages and cultures, but in each case, wanting is one component of the concept: wanting to be with or to do good things for the other person, wanting good things to happen or bad things not to happen to that person. Similarly, concepts akin to anger are constituted differently in each language and cultural group, but most such concepts involve wanting to do something about the situation, or to some other person involved in it.

Postmodernist theories of the social and cultural construction of identities have also seen desire or wanting as playing a central part in conceptualisation and the construction of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Indeed, there would be no construction of identities if humans did not want to produce effects in the world or in a network of relations: to engage in social practice as active, speaking subjects. Lacan even sees desire as fundamental to the origin of human language, as people experience lack (*manque*) and hence desire to fill the empty space, and develop language as a means of referring to what isn’t there, to something in its absence.

Such a concept of desire does not necessarily imply any fixed, individuated self as the locus of wanting, a view anticipated by Hume, and reflected also in Gurdjieff’s assertion that ‘Man has no permanent and unchangeable I. Every thought, every mood, every desire, every sensation says “I”’... Man’s every thought and desire appears and lives quite
1.2 Theories of desire in human experience

separately and independently of the Whole.' Despite the concern of post-structuralists to challenge universalist views of human nature, it seems that conceptual and linguistic universals such as wanting and even 'I' (a different 'I' every time, perhaps, but still an 'I') would not be incompatible with, and indeed may be fundamental to a conceptual capacity for constructing subjectivity.

The linguistic evidence concerning how such possible universals are represented in the many different human languages becomes of even greater importance as cognitive science comes to grips with how human conceptual structures operate in the mental representation of experience and action, from the formation of identities to the cognitive structure of emotions, causal relationships, spatial perception and so on. The present work tries to show how the study of empirical linguistic evidence for just one element in the linguistic representation of meaning can contribute to a larger picture of relations between desire and other elements of human conceptualisation, and how such relations between elements may operate in the building up of cognitive structures.

1.3 'Wanting' in cognition and language

The discussion thus far has used the terms 'desire' and 'want' or 'wanting' more or less interchangeably. From the point of view of lexical semantics, however, they are not exactly the same. Terms like 'desire' and 'will', 'volition' and 'intention' are more commonly used in the register of academic discourse than the everyday verb 'want' for a variety of reasons, but as demonstrated in the next chapter, such words are semantically complex and can be decomposed in terms of more basic elements such as 'want'. This semantic complexity facilitates precision in referring to particular configurations of meaning, and hence the complex terms are often more suitable in academic writing, but for the purpose of crosslinguistic investigation the simpler term 'want' will be used when referring to a basic element of desiderative meaning. The question of the comparability of the word want and other English desiderative terms with desiderative expressions in other languages is explored extensively in the following chapters.

This study represents the first systematic comparison of desiderative expressions across languages. As such, it takes a typological approach to
the question of language universals, but a more strictly semantically-oriented approach than the typological work of Greenberg, Comrie, Nichols or Bybee. This semantic-typological orientation is influenced in particular by Nedjalkov and Sil'nickij's proposed typology of causative constructions, although it goes far beyond any other typological work in seeking to identify underlying semantic universals.

The absence of any other linguistic studies of desiderative constructions as such is worthy of some comment. Wanting is not associated with any single obvious grammatical category in most languages, other than the handful of languages that have morphological desiderative marking. It is not as obviously reflected in syntactic structure as is, for example, causation, which has more direct effects on the valency of predicates. It is something of a covert category, lurking relatively unobtrusively behind some other more obvious linguistic phenomena like imperative and purposive constructions as well as causatives and many modals. Most detailed investigations of such categories recognise its semantic import, but usually discuss it in more abstract and technical-sounding terms such as 'volition', 'intention' and 'control'.

These terms also have the cultural advantage of sounding more objective and scientific than 'wanting' or 'desire'. The recent proliferation of studies on emotion is a refreshing sign of change, but until recently anything so intangible as wanting or feeling was generally considered hopelessly unsuitable as a subject for serious scientific inquiry, within those cultures that promote this form of intellectual activity. Thus, both the history of linguistic inquiry, and the cultural context within which it is conducted, have militated against the recognition of desiderative expressions as a category worthy of investigation.

The semantic focus adopted here leads almost immediately to a close examination of grammatical constructions whereby desiderative meanings are expressed. This follows from a Saussurean view of language as an integrated system in which everything works together to convey meaning: where grammar is neither autonomous from semantics, nor ineffable; and where syntactic properties are important clues to semantic content, and indeed, can ultimately be predicted on the basis of semantic representations. These ideas are central to the work of Anna Wierzbicka, particularly in her studies of the semantics of grammar.

Although the research programmes of the two scholars differ greatly, the same general principles are shared by R.M.W. Dixon, and are
reflected in the many excellent descriptive grammars produced by what has been called the ‘ANU school of grammatical description’. According to one of the practitioners, D.P. Wilkins, this body of work is informed by a shared perception that: ‘Above all, a description of a particular language must attempt to be true to the extraordinary complexity of the linguistic system and to the intricacy of the system’s relation to both the social and the cultural context of the speakers of the language, regardless of whether or not current theory has a way of dealing with or explaining the details which must be described.’ The present work is a serious attempt to extend current theory, so as better to deal with and explain the details of a particular set of constructions, comprising the desiderative expressions of different languages, in a way that captures the relations of their grammatical properties to meaning and to social and cultural context.

This approach to grammatical description is as sensitive to the finer details of grammatical constructions as it is to major syntactic mechanisms, and draws upon grammatical theories as and when they provide useful perspectives on the linguistic data. Functional theories of grammar are particularly compatible with such an orientation. The description of desiderative constructions here has been influenced by the insights of both Role and Reference Grammar and Lexical-Functional Grammar, particularly with regard to the associations of semantic roles with predicates, and the nature of interclausal relations.

Grammatical relations, as seen by Foley and Van Valin, must ultimately be described in terms of semantic roles. Their illuminating account of actor/undergoer properties on a scale relative to but not to be confused with an agent-patient hierarchy of thematic roles has influenced the description given here of semantic and grammatical roles of arguments in desiderative constructions. Another particularly helpful perspective on both argument roles and interclausal relations is provided by Andrews, who distinguishes between semantic roles (determined by predicate semantics), grammatical functions (the grammatical treatment of semantic roles at clause level), and grammatical relations, representing the interaction of semantic roles and grammatical functions interclausally.

Important though the functions of lexicogrammatical components in constructions are, it is equally important for the present discussion to distinguish carefully between functions and meanings. This distinction is crucial to the analysis of some highly ambiguous desiderative constructions in the following chapters. The treatment of ambiguity owes
much to the insights from pragmatics, and in particular to Kempson's view of propositional content as radically underdetermined semantically, and her analyses of principles of inference invoked in language use to generate interpretations. Both Leech's and García's analyses of the interaction of pragmatic principles with the rules of semantics and syntax have contributed to the views developed in this work.

However helpful the insights gained from these various theoretical approaches, the radically semantic orientation of the present study holds that all the grammatical and functional relations they describe are analysable in terms of meaning; that meaning is not reducible to anything else, and hence language is semantics all the way down. This radically intensional view of meaning, shared by semiotists from Peirce to Eco, maintains that it is not possible to escape from the realm of meaning or to reduce it to anything else: not to structural relations, not to mathematical relations, not to truth conditions, not to neurophysiological responses, and not to patterns of usage.

Semantics all the way down to what, then? To indivisible elements of meaning, a set of primes: semantic primes, not mathematical, logical, structural, ontological or phenomenological ones. Everything in language conveys meaning, and any complex meaning or combination of meanings can be analysed or decomposed into a combination of simpler meanings, until one reaches a set of elements so basic that no further decomposition is possible: these are the semantic primes. The main contemporary advocate and prolific practitioner of this approach, Anna Wierzbicka, has documented the history of these ideas in philosophy and linguistics, but only Wierzbicka herself has developed them for practical use in a wide-ranging and highly productive programme of linguistic research. The resulting Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) methodology is described in more detail below.

Even if it is true that all languages can ultimately be analysed into a set of basic elements, there is no a priori reason for supposing the set would be the same for every language. The great diversity of the world's languages, cultural and social practices, each with its distinctive internal structure of conceptual associations and configurations of meanings, stands both as a monument to human intellectual creativity, flexibility and diversity, and as a monumental challenge to any universalistic view of human nature or human conceptualisation. An important part of the agenda of modern descriptive linguistics has been to dispel erroneous
assumptions about language, race, intellectual functioning and social structure, that were based on European linguistic and cultural ethnocentrism. This, together with the practical task of documenting the languages of the world and describing their many and diverse structures, has resulted in a general trend away from looking for universals of linguistic meaning, in contrast with a lively interest in identifying universals of linguistic structure.

The results of Swadesh’s search for universals of vocabulary, though still useful in fieldwork and comparative linguistics, yielded so many crosslinguistic differences and counterexamples as to make any search for lexical universals appear hopelessly unrealistic. The crosslinguistic lexical surveys of C.H. Brown have found many translation equivalents whose semantic content nonetheless differs significantly. Other attempts to identify notional universals in terms of semantic markers, features, categories, or semantic types have tended to produce theoretical constructs more complex and abstract than the linguistic elements they seek to describe, or to reveal tendencies and implicational relations that are not necessarily represented in every individual language. Hence not only the notion of semantic primitives, but any notion of semantic universals at the level of surface structure, represented in every language, is regarded by many linguists as misconceived, and in any case entirely marginal to the proper concerns of linguistic science.

This study of desiderative expressions poses a significant challenge to such views, in that it not only evaluates empirical evidence for and against the existence of universals of desiderative meaning, but also proposes formal criteria for the identification of such universals in surface structure across languages. It maintains that semantic universals cannot be proven or falsified by enumerating or cataloguing observable similarities or differences across languages, but only by establishing principles of semantic equivalence that are valid across languages as a basis for assessing whether or not, for example, any particular language does or doesn’t have a word for ‘want’ or the means to express such a concept.

1.4 Crosscultural semantic analysis in cognitive science

The methodology adopted here for analysing and comparing the meanings of desiderative constructions in different languages is, as
indicated above, the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) method of semantic analysis. The NSM approach has already proved its usefulness in detailed analyses of the meanings of lexical items, grammatical constructions, illocutionary acts, conversational routines, and other aspects of language use in a wide range of structurally and genetically diverse languages. It has also been of demonstrated effectiveness in describing and explaining crosslinguistic differences and similarities in areas as diverse as the semantics of emotion vocabularies, moral and ethical concepts, the grammar of causative constructions, the pragmatics of interjections and conversational responses, and the relationship of language use to cultural values.

The method is particularly suitable in approaching a crosslinguistic study of desiderative constructions for three main reasons. First, it provides a means of comparing meanings expressed in different languages in terms that are essentially independent of any particular language or culture, yet can be expressed in any language. Second, it is capable of providing a unified account of lexical, grammatical, and language-use phenomena, all of which have to be considered in comparing desiderative expressions across languages. Third, this method has the capacity to represent theoretical claims in highly specific and accessible forms that are open to empirical verification or falsification.

In the NSM approach, the meaning of any lexical or grammatical form can be represented in the form of a semantic explication. This is an explanatory definitional paraphrase that seeks to represent all and only the elements of meaning that are necessary and sufficient to account for all instances of use of the item that is being explicated. The primary empirical test of such a paraphrase is that it should be substitutable for the item itself, without loss of meaning. Substituting an often lengthy paraphrase for a single unit usually entails loss of naturalness and ready comprehensibility, by comparison with the immense power of natural languages to group many elements of meaning into a smaller number of conceptually manageable chunks. Applying the substitutability test may therefore involve a detailed process of checking that all elements of meaning represented in the paraphrase correspond to the original. This procedure is of course founded on an assumption that meanings can be analysed in a fully determinate way; that complex meanings can be decomposed into combinations of simpler ones, without circularity and without residue. Although this principle is a controversial one in semantic theory, nothing
in its application here must be accepted 'on faith'; all explications of meanings in the following chapters can be tested against actual language data.

A semantic explication or statement of meaning in NSM is constructed using a restricted and standardised metalanguage based on natural language. The lexicon of this 'natural semantic metalanguage' consists of a set of basic terms like 'I', 'you', 'someone', 'say', 'think', 'do', 'happen', 'this', 'because' and so on; the full set of NSM terms used here is shown in Table 1 below. These terms are based on the hypothesised system of universal semantic primes referred to above, and ongoing research into the translatability of NSM explications across a range of languages thus far supports their crosslinguistic applicability. The mini-lexicon of this metalanguage has undergone considerable expansion, discussion, revision and testing in more than twenty years of NSM research. The set of 55 terms listed here is the most recent inventory, but ongoing research may lead to further changes. The terms used in the present study are among the more well-established members of the set of hypothesised primes; they do not include all of the elements listed in Table 1 because some (e.g. ALIVE, TWO, SMALL, UNDER, ABOVE) are not relevant to any of the desiderative constructions examined here.
Table 1  
NSM LEXICAL/SEMANTIC PRIMES  
(as proposed in Wierzbicka, 1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantives</td>
<td>I, YOU, SOMEONE/PERSON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PEOPLE, SOMETHING/THING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental predicates</td>
<td>THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>SEE, HEAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions, events, movement</td>
<td>SAY, WORD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence, life</td>
<td>DO, HAPPEN, MOVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determiners</td>
<td>THERE IS, ALIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantifiers</td>
<td>THIS, THE SAME, OTHER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribu’tes</td>
<td>ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MANY/MUCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>GOOD, BAD, BIG, SMALL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WHEN, NOW, AFTER, BEFORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interclausal linkers</td>
<td>WHERE, HERE, UNDER, ABOVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clause operators</td>
<td>FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metapredicate</td>
<td>BECAUSE, IF, IF...WOULD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensifier, augmentor</td>
<td>NOT, MAYBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxonomy, partonymy</td>
<td>CAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>VERY, MORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KIND OF, PART OF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LIKE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The English verbs *like* and *love* (as in *Jane likes Mary, Jane loves Mary*) are shown below as a preliminary illustration of how an NSM paraphrase is constructed by combining such basic elements of meaning together. The aim here is to demonstrate the form of semantic representation used in the following chapters, rather than to focus on the detailed content of these particular words, but this may also illustrate the accessibility of such formulae to the reader’s intuitive agreement or disagreement with various individual components as well as to more systematic testing against examples of the words’ use.

*Like* indicates a fairly general positive disposition, while *love* involves a more specific set of attitudes and feelings; hence the explication for *like* is more brief and general than that for *love*. One can *like* people whom one sees frequently or rarely, or who are comparative strangers, and one may think of them often or seldom. All that is implied is that one usually feels positively toward them when one does think of them; usually but not always, because it’s possible to feel negative things such as annoyance toward people whom one basically likes. This overall positive orientation typically results in enjoying their company, and perhaps being willing to do occasional favours for them, but one can *like* someone from a distance, so references to being with the person or doing things for them would make the explication too specific to apply in every instance of the use of the word *like*. These aspects of the word’s meaning are expressed in the following NSM formula:

\[
\text{like } (X \text{ likes } Y) \\
\text{when } X \text{ thinks about } Y, \text{ } X \text{ often feels something good} \\
\text{sometimes } X \text{ wants to do something because of this}
\]

People usually *like* many more people than they *love*, because *love* encompasses more specific elements of meaning, and fewer relationships involve all of these specific things. Explications for *love* proposed by Wierzbicka and by Goddard differ in some details, but agree on the main elements shown here:
1.4 Crosscultural semantic analysis

\[ \text{love (X loves Y)} \]
\[ \text{X knows some things about Y} \]
\[ \text{X thinks many good things about Y} \]
\[ \text{X wants to do good things for Y} \]
\[ \text{X often wants to be with Y} \]
\[ \text{when X thinks about Y, X often feels something good} \]

While much more could be said about each of these sample explications, their purpose here is to illustrate some of the key features of NSM analysis that are of importance in the following chapters on desiderative constructions. Because NSM theory takes the utterance, rather than the word or morpheme, as the basic unit by which speakers convey meaning in any language, each word or morpheme is explicated as it occurs in a specific syntactic frame, such as \( X \text{ likes } Y \). One can then test whether or not a similar explication can be used for the same word in other constructions. Obviously the above explication does not apply to the adjective \( \text{like} \) (as in \( X \text{ is like } Y \)); \( \text{no} \) combination of meanings can be found that applies to both the verb and the modifier. Thus there are semantic as well as syntactic grounds for regarding \( \text{like} \) as polysemous, and it can be seen from Table 1 that the modifier is in fact one of the hypothesised semantic primes. Syntactic formulae like \( X \text{ likes } Y \) are the only uses of arbitrary signs or conventions permissible in the NSM method, and even this device is purely for ease of visual reference; \( 'X' \) and \( 'Y' \) could always be represented in the appropriate ‘pure’ NSM terms such as ‘this person/thing’, ‘this other person’ and so on.

Each of these explications represents a hypothesis that this is the minimum set of elements of meaning conveyed whenever the word is used in ‘the specified sense and context. Because the hypothesis is readily intelligible and fully specific, it can be tested both directly and indirectly: directly via native speakers’ knowledge of what the word conveys, and indirectly by checking its substitutability across a range of attested uses of the word. Each component is constructed through a process of experimentation too lengthy to reproduce here, but it will be noted that the method is powerful enough to pinpoint differences in meaning that conventional dictionary definitions can only hint at, using complex phrases and terminology like ‘find agreeable or congenial’ (for \( \text{like} \)) and ‘entertain a strong affection for’ (for \( \text{love} \)).
Moreover, NSM explications aim at predictive as well as explanatory adequacy. These examples have the power to predict not only semantic but also grammatical properties of like and love. Both verbs have animate, usually human subjects, as predicted by the segments 'X feels' and 'X thinks'. The verb like can take either an animate or an inanimate object, and the explication proposed above could apply to either Jane likes Mary or Jane likes chocolate. However, the third and fourth lines of the explication proposed for love suggest that its object would typically be a person. English dictionaries and native speakers tend to agree that the non-interpersonal use of love (as in Jane loves chocolate) is a different meaning, much closer to like; its explication would contain no reference to wanting to do good things for Y or to be with Y.

The prime elements included in an NSM explication are combined together according to a set of combinatorial principles that are also held to be universal, and are realised through the basic syntactic structures of each natural language. This accounts for the occurrence in these examples of English words that are not included among the primes in Table 1. For example, the elements because and this are linked by the preposition of in English, while the same semantic linkage is realised by a variety of other grammatical devices in other languages (for example, the ablative inflection in Arrernte ikwere-ngge 'because of this', see 4.1 below).

The only complex constructions allowable in the NSM method are those language-specific devices required to realise specified combinatorial relations between primes, sometimes also indicated for convenience by commas or indentations in explications. The prime WHEN, for example, can link two events in a combinatorial relation realised in English by the syntactic device of subordination, as in the sample formulae above. Explications sometimes include language-specific variants of combinations of primes, as in the above where the English terms 'often' and 'sometimes' represent combinations of WHEN with MANY and SOME; such expressions may only be used if fully explicable in terms of primes. Although derived from natural languages (in this case English), the semantic primes used in NSM explications are much more tightly constrained than the corresponding words in the full natural language. Each prime represents only one meaning, where in ordinary use many of them are polysemous; for example, 'feel' in the formulae above is only a psychological predicate, not an action (as in feeling something with one's hand).
The combinatorial properties of semantic primes may also be thought of in terms of 'valency options', provided care is taken to distinguish semantic valency from grammatical valency. For example, the primes KNOW, THINK and SAY can each combine with two other elements (in addition to a knower/thinker/sayer): something that is known, thought or said; and something or someone 'about' which this is known, thought or said. In English grammar the former is represented as the grammatical object of the verbs know, think, say, while the latter is presented in a prepositional phrase introduced by about. BE and DO can each combine with another element in relations represented in English by the preposition with; and DO can also combine with a beneficiary introduced in English by the preposition for (as in 'do good things for Y').

Grammatical structures specific to individual natural languages also produce a form of contextual variation, termed 'allolexy' in NSM theory. For example, the rules of English grammar dictate that the element I occurs as the grammatically conditioned variant me in specific syntactic contexts (as in 'about me'), and the negator no/no. occurs preverbally as don't (as in 'don't know'). The criterion of naturalness also leads to the representation in English of 'this someone' by 'this person', and of 'some somethings' by 'some things' (where the plural marker is also applied by a rule of English grammar to agree with the quantifier 'some'). The prime element DO is often represented in English by the phrase 'do something'. The following chapters have much to say about valency options and allolexy in desiderative constructions.

Thus, while the NSM hypothesis is that the basic semantic elements are available in any language as a subset of the full natural language, there is a considerable degree of language-specific variation in their representations. In approaching the crosslinguistic study of desiderative constructions, it is important to be able to distinguish universal from language-specific properties of these constructions, and to give satisfactory explanations of both. The NSM approach provides a theoretical basis for drawing such distinctions, and the present work makes a substantial contribution to identifying and articulating principles and procedures for practical application in crosscultural semantic analysis. The term 'crosscultural' is preferred to 'crosslinguistic' in this context because the same language may be used by different cultural groups to represent culture-specific lexical, grammatical and illocutionary meanings, as
demonstrated by the present writer in a study of Australian Aboriginal English.

Although each NSM explication represents a hypothesis that can be tested, these hypotheses can only be proven to the extent that no counterexamples are encountered in natural language. There is no absolute, incontrovertible proof; it is a strength rather than a weakness of the theory that all aspects of it are open to being disproven, or at least to being shown to require modification, on the basis of empirical evidence. If an example is found where the explication is not fully substitutable for the definiendum, it is often more appropriate to adjust the content of the explication on the basis of the new evidence, than to abandon it as a hypothesis altogether. Thus NSM, like many theoretical models in linguistic and cognitive science, serves as a research tool as well as a theoretical construct, and shows itself powerful enough to deal with real data.

In the initial stages of this project, numerous attempts were made to construct explications for desiderative constructions that did not rely upon any specifically desiderative element of meaning. Many of these attempts proceeded along lines suggested by some of the philosophers mentioned above, by trying to represent ‘want’ (as in ‘X wants Z’) in terms of other meanings such as ‘good’ (Z is good for X; because of this X feels something good toward Z), ‘feel’ and possibly ‘think’ (X thinks: if I have/do Z I will feel something good), or something like lack or need (X doesn’t have/do Z; because of this X feels something bad; or, if X doesn’t have/do Z, X will feel something bad / something bad will happen to X).

Each of these hypotheses was disproved by failure of the substitutability test, particularly when it came to defining other words and constructions that seem to depend upon an element of desiderative meaning. For example, in contexts like the love example above, the component ‘X wants to be with Y’ could perhaps be recast as ‘when X is with Y, X feels something good’ (though of course this isn’t always the case in even the most loving of relationships); but the same strategy would not work for ‘X wants to do good things for Y’, which means more than just ‘when X does good things for Y, X feels something good’.

Another example is that of imperatives (e.g. Stop!), which in all languages include a component of meaning along the lines of ‘I want you to do this’; this is of course one of the criteria by which imperatives are categorised as such. This semantic combination cannot be reduced to any
of the above proposals (if you do this I will feel something good, or if you
don't do this I will feel something bad, etc.) without substantial loss or
alteration of meaning. But these failures to disprove the existence of an
indivisible element of desiderative meaning (WANT) by no means
constitute positive proof of its existence as a semantic prime, as
demonstrated in the following investigation of evidence for and against it.

The practical utility of a method of linguistic analysis that enables
complex meanings to be made explicit has led to the enthusiastic
application of aspects of the NSM approach in education and crosscultural
communication as well as in linguistic fieldwork and practical linguistic
description. But in earlier stages of its development as a research
paradigm, the radical content-orientation of NSM seemed to leave it too
unconstrained for theoreticians attuned to structural theories of grammar.
Criticism was frequently directed at the fact that NSM did not have a
clearly articulated theory of the syntax of the metalanguage itself, and was
therefore presumably unable to say much about the syntax of natural
languages. In reality, the theory has always held that meaning itseif must
provide all the structure that there can be in language; that any formalised
specifications of structure must themselves be defined in language, for
there is no escape from the realm of meaning.

Recent developments in NSM research are yielding a much clearer
picture of just how meanings are structured. Major studies by Wierzbicka
and others into the nature of grammatical and pragmatic meanings have
demonstrated how all the meaningful elements of an utterance, from
morphemes and particles to syntactic constructions as well as prosodic
elements, operate together to convey meaning. At the same time,
Wierzbicka and other NSM practitioners have continued to refine and
simplify the metalanguage, eliminating complex syntax and reducing the
combinatorial sequences to the minimum set needed for the purpose of
explicating meanings.

This has led to the current fairly intense research focus on the
combinatorial properties of individual semantic primes, and to the present
study's concern with separating out what is universal from what is
language-specific in the combinations and constraints on combinations of
meaning in desiderative constructions. These theoretical developments
have emerged in the non-linear fashion characteristic of NSM as a
thoroughly grounded theory, in which theoretical models emerge only as
a product of intense engagement with empirical language data and the
practical work of describing it. The far-reaching consequences of the emerging model of a universal syntax based exclusively on meaning refute any notion that empirically based linguistic research is incompatible with a genuine commitment to the construction of an explanatory theory (or indeed, vice versa).

As the combinatorial properties specific to each prime element are identified, the essential character of NSM as a formal semantic system becomes clearer. By eschewing any premature imposition of formalism for its own sake, NSM research has been able to proceed on the basis of principles derived solely from natural language, to a point where formal relationships become identifiable as properties of semantic elements themselves.

The emerging system of prime elements plus combinatorial rules that are properties of these primes, rather like the bonding properties of atoms of the different chemical elements, constitutes a far more powerful relational network than any other contemporary theory of ‘formal semantics’ can provide. Truth-conditional models are inevitably constrained to binary (true/false) oppositions in a way that natural language is manifestly not (in addition to the problem of their reliance on what may be a fundamentally ethnocentric conception of truth). More powerful semantic models based on higher-order intensional logic, despite their success in preserving internal consistency within a more flexible system, still depend on a set of relational concepts far too restricted to explain many of the ambiguities and apparent anomalies of natural language, from the illocutionary properties of quantifiers to the interpretation of tautologies.

By deriving all of its relational principles from natural language, the NSM approach is able to provide a coherent account of relations between forms and functions, while avoiding the pitfalls of autonomous syntax. The most recent developments in this theoretical framework have involved exploration of the mapping between primitive elements of meaning and their surface lexical and syntactic representations in a wide range of natural languages. This has brought renewed attention to problems of ambiguity, ‘polyadicity’ (predicate argument structure in relation to grammatical functions), and the possibilities and constraints on combinations of meanings in surface grammatical representation.

The present study of desiderative expressions is the first in-depth investigation of a single hypothesised semantic prime, namely WANT, as
represented across a range of typologically diverse languages. It goes well beyond even the most recent studies of lexical universals to consider all possible configurations of desiderative meaning. The question of WANT as a semantic universal, and how it is or is not represented in various meaning combinations across languages, is relevant to most of the key issues in current NSM research. While the findings presented here must necessarily be regarded as a very preliminary offering, they are nonetheless quite promising.

There is found to be abundant evidence that desiderative meanings are indeed expressed in all of a highly diverse though necessarily finite selection of languages from different parts of the world. The language-specific representations of these meanings in lexical material and grammatical constructions present important issues of lexical polysemy, structural ambiguity, combinatorial potentials and constraints, and pragmatic conventions. It is demonstrated that all of these issues as they affect desiderative expressions can be and are resolved in the everyday application of natural language principles by speakers, and that these principles provide a key to analysing how universal elements of meaning in specifiable combinations are mapped into surface representations according to language-specific lexical, grammatical and pragmatic systems.

The systematic identification of universal and language-specific properties of desiderative constructions has far-reaching implications for linguistics and cognitive science. It offers a coherent account of why surface-level lexical universals do not appear in a 'pure' or superficially obvious form in every language, and how their representation is modified not only by language structure but also by social and cultural influences. A common core of desiderative meaning shared across languages and identifiable with the NSM universal WANT is found to have important relational properties as an interpropositional operator, suggesting that substantive and relational universals may not be mutually exclusive categories.

A set of universal combinatorial properties of this prime element WANT is found to be specifiable across languages, and WANT is distinguishable from certain other universals on the basis of this 'universal syntax' of desiderative meaning. This set of relational potentials and constraints may provide clues to the operation of 'desire' in conceptual structure, for example in cognitive representations and processes involved in purposeful or goal-oriented behaviour, and in
emotion concepts and related behaviour. Moreover, if individual sets of
combinatorial properties and contrasts are identifiable in like manner for
each of a full set or network of semantic primes, the result could be the
first fully computationally tractable model of natural language.

Such a model of semantic structure has the potential to go beyond
the present level of debates about the interaction of language and culture,
and of conceptual universalism versus cultural relativism. It may not
really matter whether semantic primes like WANT represent innate ideas,
or potentials in the cognitive faculty that emerge in conceptual structure
only as human beings interact with the world. If it is possible, as argued
here, to distinguish in a principled way between what is universal and
what is specific to individual languages, and to explain both in terms of a
set of elemental meanings with fully specifiable combinatorial properties,
this meaning-based model provides a unified account of linguistic and
cultural constructs that need not designate either as prior, and that
accommodates both similarities and differences without having to declare
either more important than the other.

1.5 Outline of chapters

This introductory chapter has set out the nature and scope of this
work, explaining the purpose of examining desiderative constructions
across languages, and outlining the theoretical context and orientation of
the study. Chapter Two presents a typological overview of desiderative
expressions in a selection of languages from different genetic groups
throughout the world, outlining crosslinguistic trends in lexicalisation of
‘want’ and related notions, patterns of polysemy and lexical relations,
syntactic patterns associated with desiderative constructions, and other
construction types involving desire, such as imperatives, purposives,
aversives.

Chapter Three focusses on the syntactic properties of desiderative
expressions across languages, including patterns of wordclass membership,
transitivity, complement structures, and grammaticalisation of
desideratives. It explores how the semantics and grammar of different
construction types interact with the meanings of individual lexemes to
encode a range of desiderative meanings.
Chapter Four proceeds to a detailed examination of languages that have grammatical morphemes which express wanting in many contexts, but have also a variety of other functions as markers of tense/aspect/mood. In detailed case studies of the Kayardild 'desiderative' inflection -da and the Buru TAM marker and complementiser la, the principles of NSM analysis are used to investigate whether such multifunctional grammemes have a single meaning or semantic core, or whether they are truly polysemous. A set of procedures is proposed for discovering and specifying how many meanings a grammeme has, and how these meanings relate to its various grammatical functions.

Chapter Five addresses a striking contrast between constructions where a desiderative expression takes a complement clause (as in the English *I want to dance*), and those where a desiderative grammeme occurs within the same clause that represents the wanted event (as in the Kayardild equivalent *Ngada wirrka-ju*). A close examination of the relationship of desiderative morphemes to the clause or clauses over which they operate suggests that WANT may function as an interclausal or interpropositional operator in all languages, but that language-specific syntactic mechanisms govern how WANT combines with other semantic elements in each natural language, and hence in a semantic metalanguage that is a subset of each natural language.

Chapter Six pursues the question of WANT as a semantic and lexical universal, in view of the diversity of desiderative constructions across languages and the particular constraints that each language imposes on the lexical and grammatical means of expressing wanting. Specific criteria are proposed for the assessment of semantic equivalence across languages, and for distinguishing language-specific phenomena from potentially universal elements and configurations of meaning. This leads to a proposal for a 'universal syntax' of desiderative meaning. The influence of cultural values and attitudes on the expression of desire is explored with a view to explaining aspects of the interaction between social and linguistic structure and its impact on the range and types of desiderative constructions found in different languages, and how a theory of language universals might deal with processes of language change.
Chapter 2

Toward a typology of desideratives

Desideratives have not been given the kind of attention in crosslinguistic studies that has been devoted to certain other semantic and grammatical categories of constructions, perhaps most notably the causatives. The reasons for the comparative neglect of desideratives are, as suggested earlier, partly linguistic, partly historical, and partly cultural. The present work is intended as a start at remedying this, and in so doing perhaps to discover some of what a crosslinguistic study of these constructions can teach us both about the linguistic description of particular languages, and about patterns and trends across languages.

To this end, a broad range of desiderative words and constructions was examined in over fifty languages selected from different language families throughout the world (as shown in the map preceding Chapter 1). The purpose of this exercise was to see whether there are any similarities in the ways different languages handle desiderative notions; whether such notions are indeed expressed in all languages, and to what extent there is a meaningful basis for treating desideratives as a crosslinguistic typological category. Only after examining these questions would one be in a position to look at the possibility of universals in the expression of concepts of desire or wanting across languages and cultures.

Desiderative constructions involve the interaction of many aspects of linguistic structure, including morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. In approaching a study of the linguistic expression of desiderative concepts, it is necessary to establish as a starting point a broad characterisation of desiderative notions, before proceeding to look at how these are dealt with in a range of languages. The most typical desiderative situation is one in which someone, usually a human being, wants something: either an object of some kind (e.g. *I want a cup of water*), an action (*I want to drink some water*), an action by another person (*I want you to give me some water*), or an event of some other kind (*I want it to rain soon*). The desired event is often a voluntary action by a person, but we should also consider situations where what is wanted is an involuntary action, state or process (e.g. *I want to sneeze/sleep/grow tall/be admired*).
Although the English examples given above all involve a construction with the main verb *want* and an object or a complement clause, the desiderative situations described are independent of any linguistic parameters. For example, a situation where one person wants an action by another person (e.g. *I want you to give me some water*) is frequently given linguistic expression in the form of an imperative (*Give me some water!*) Interestingly, most if not all human languages seem to have imperatives (as well as a range of directive and request forms that differ from language to language). Although the morphology and syntax of imperatives varies somewhat, no language was found in which it is impossible to say things like 'Go away!' or 'Give me water!' indicating that the speaker wants the addressee to do something. Desiderative situations may also be expressed in many languages by means of morphological devices, such as desiderative, optative or purposive affixes; by particles or auxiliaries (like *will* indicating desire or intention, as in *She will smoke, despite her asthma*); and by words with desiderative meanings, like *want* and related verbs (*wish, hope* etc.), or other parts of speech (*my heart's desire* is something I want very much; *a desirable residence* is one that people are likely to want, etc.) Each of these linguistic items occurs in particular grammatical constructions, often involving complex syntactic structures such as clause subordination and complementation (for example, the verb *want* is followed by various complement clauses in sentences given above).

While some of these types of desiderative expressions will be more interesting linguistically than others, starting from a deliberately broad characterisation of situations involving wanting or desire provides a perspective from which to observe the range of words and constructions by which each language encodes desiderative concepts. Such an approach offers an important advantage in a crosslinguistic study of the kind attempted here: it reduces the risk of linguistic or ethnocentric bias that could result from starting with particular words and constructions from one language and examining the presence or absence of equivalents for them in other languages.

Even with such a broad scope of inquiry, there remains a theoretical possibility that some languages might simply not encode meanings of this type at all. It is at least theoretically possible that in some cultures people might never find occasion to speak of people wanting anything, perhaps viewing events as happening or not happening as part of a natural pattern
regardless of what individual human beings might feel about it. Desiderative concepts of the kind sketched above might never be expressed in the language of such a culture.

However, no such language was encountered in the course of this study. In addition to the apparently universal existence of imperatives in human languages, each language that was examined was found to have a range of words and constructions referring to people's desires, hopes, intentions, purposes and so on. Nevertheless it seems that, indeed, more attention is paid to such matters in some cultural contexts than in others, and that this fact may be reflected in language structure as well as in discourse; a point that will be taken up in subsequent chapters.

It was also found that certain languages or groups of languages raise particular issues about the range and nature of desiderative constructions. For example, some languages associate desire with a particular part of the body, such as the eyes, throat, heart or digestive tract; and such body part terms may be the basis for some of the desiderative expressions in these languages. Some languages seem to associate wanting with motion toward something, and to use direction terms (like Maori ki, and perhaps even English to) to introduce complements in desiderative expressions. Many languages associate wanting with the future, or with unrealised events, using similar constructions to express desired and projected or imagined events. Many languages have ways of expressing notions of desire or wanting without necessarily attributing a desire to a particular individual person; and some languages distinguish between expressing one's own directly experienced desires and observing or inferring what other people want.

A crosslinguistic survey of types of words and constructions used to express desiderative notions can hope to produce at least two potentially useful outcomes. First, to sketch out the range of variation among languages in the ways they deal with these kinds of meanings; what, if any, are the limits on such variation; and what patterns and tendencies may be common to a number of languages. And second, to explore whether any common core of elements, semantic or structural or both, may be found in the desiderative constructions of all languages; that is, whether any linguistic universals may be discerned in the area under investigation.

The following sections of this chapter offer an overview of the types of desiderative expressions that were found, in terms of their lexical,
morphological and syntactic characteristics. The aim here is primarily descriptive, to lay the groundwork for a more detailed discussion of problems and issues surrounding the search for language universals in this area.

2.1 Desiderative words and constructions

The apparent universality of imperatives in the world’s languages is accompanied by the curious fact that, in a very large number of languages, there is no lexical or morphological material that signals or encodes the imperative meaning. Imperatives are frequently the most bare, morphologically unmarked form of the verb, as in English: imperatives like Stop! or Run! consist of the base form of the verb, with no other lexical or morphological elements to convey the meaning that the speaker wants the addressee to do the action denoted by the verb (though it may be argued that his meaning is at least partially expressed by intonation).

This widespread characteristic of imperatives raises an interesting question. If all languages do have an identifiable imperative, used to express a situation where one person (the speaker) wants someone else (the addressee) to do something, then do all languages also have a way of expressing this meaning in another form? That is, do all languages have the means of defining, explaining or rephrasing their own imperatives, as in the case of the English example, by saying something like ‘I said “Stop!” because I wanted you to stop’?

The extent to which language-internal definition of this kind is possible is both a theoretical and an empirical question, and will be considered further in Chapter 6. For the present, it can be noted that every one of the languages examined has some construction by which it is possible to define or rephrase an imperative. Indeed, for linguistic fieldworkers this may prove a useful technique for eliciting one or more of the main desiderative expressions in a language. Since imperatives are heard every day in most languages, it can be relatively easy for the fieldworker to ask something like ‘What did you mean when you said “Stop!”’, and the reply is likely to be a desiderative construction (unless it is a synonym, like Halt!). Often, though by no means always, this rephrasing will involve the main or most common desiderative construction in the language.
This is not to suggest that imperatives can be simply equated with the meaning 'I want you to do this', since the meanings of some imperative forms may be more complex, as discussed in 6.5, but they do include a desiderative element. Whatever the form of the construction thus elicited, it is likely to contain some word or morpheme that is identifiable as carrying a desiderative meaning (at least in this construction). This element may be a main verb, like English want, or some other type of word or morpheme.

Most languages have not just one desiderative word or morpheme, but a whole set of terms expressing different shades of meaning, and used in different construction types. English, for example, has three important desiderative verbs, want, wish and desire; but there are many other words expressing these and closely related concepts, for example the verbs yearn, long, crave, covet, lust; like, feel like; need, require; hope, intend, expect; and modal auxiliaries will, shall, would, should. Moreover, English has a large number of speech act verbs relating to the expression of what people want: request, order, command, beg, implore and dozens more. Philosophical discussions in English about what people want tend to use the nouns will, desire, volition and intention rather than the more everyday verb want, and so do linguistic discussion of modals, desideratives, requests, directives and so on. The lexical relations among sets of desiderative terms like these are discussed in section 2.3 below.

The commonly used desiderative words and morphemes in most languages are verbal in character. Some are main verbs, as in English I want to go, where want is a main verb with a complement to go; while others are verbal modifiers that add a desiderative meaning to a main verb, as in examples (1a) and (9)-(14) below. There are also languages in which the main desiderative terms are nominal, like the Arrernte ahentye discussed in section 2.3, or adjectival, like the Japanese hoshii discussed in 3.1. The wordclass properties of desideratives are considered further in the next chapter, but from a typological point of view it is noteworthy that in fewer than five percent of the languages surveyed are the main desiderative terms anything other than verbs or verbal modifiers. Even in these cases they often have special verb-like syntactic or morphological properties not shared with other members of their wordclass, as shown in several of the detailed studies that follow.

Many languages use a different word or construction for one or more of the types of desiderative situation outlined earlier. For example,
Samoan (like several other Austronesian languages) distinguishes lexically between situations where a person wants to do something (as in (1a), where wanting is expressed by the verbal modifier fia), and situations where a person wants someone else to do something (as in (1b), where the verb mana'o is used). Fia cannot occur in the latter context at all; this distinction is discussed in more detail in 3.3 below:

(1) a. *'Ou te fia alu.*
    1s TAM want go
    'I want to go.'

    b. *'Ou te mana'o e alu le uso.*
    1s TAM want TAM go the brother
    'I want my brother to go.'

Spanish (like several other Indo-European languages) uses the same word, the verb querer, for these two situations, but in two different construction types. When a person wants to do something, this action is denoted by a verb in the infinitive form (like *ir* 'to go' in (2a)), while a wanted action by another person is in the subjunctive form (like *vayas* in (2b)), and is introduced by the complementiser *que* 'that':

(2) a. *Quiero ir.*
    want-1s go-INF
    'I want to go.'

    b. *Quiero que tu vayas.*
    want-1s that 2s go-2sSJV
    'I want you to go.'

The Central Australian Aboriginal language Arrernte, on the other hand, uses the same verb (*ahentye*neme*) 'want', see also 3.2 below) followed by a purposive-marked verb for the desired action, regardless of whether this action is by oneself or another person:

(3) a. *Ayenge ahentyeneme lhetyeke.*
    1s want go-PURP
    'I want to go.'
b. Ayenge ahentyeneme unte lhetyeke.
   1s want 2s go-PURP
   'I want you to go.'

When speaking of someone's wanting a thing, Spanish and English treat this thing as the direct object of the desiderative verb:

(4) Quiero un vaso de leche.
    want-1s a glass of milk
    'I want a glass of milk.'

But in Arrernte, a thing that is wanted is marked with the dative suffix -ke:

(5) Ampe yanhe merne-ke ahentyeneme.
    child that food-DAT want
    'That child wants food.'

In Samoan, a thing that is wanted appears in a prepositional phrase, with the locative-directional marker i:

(6) 'Ou te mana'o i le tusi.
    1s TAM want LD the book
    'I want the book.'

A single desiderative term may take different complement structures according to the type of situation, as already seen in example (2). In Finnish, the same desiderative term takes an infinitive complement where a person wants to do something, and a nominalised complement where one person wants someone else to do something:

(7) a. Haluan mennä.
    want-1s go-INF
    'I want to go.'

b. Haluan hänem menevän.
    want-1s 3sPOSS go-PrPart-ACC
    'I want her to go.'
Still another type of complement with *että* ‘that’ has a softening effect, as indicated by the English gloss:

(8) *Haluan, että hän menee.*

want-1s that 3s go-3s

‘I wish that she would go.’

This should not be taken as an indication that the lexical content of *haluan* ‘I want’ has changed to ‘I wish’, but rather that the *että* complement introduces an element of uncertainty (I want her to go, but I don’t know if she will). In English this uncertainty is part of the meaning of the verb *wish*, discussed further in the next chapter, while in Finnish it is expressed by the complement type alone.

On the other hand, many languages have desideratives that take the same type of complement clause in all situations. In Arrernte, complement verbs of *ahentyeneme* ‘want’ are always purposive; in Kpelle, complement verbs of *jwêlî*i ‘want’ are a ‘ways hortative; and in Jarawara, complement verbs of *nofa* ‘want’ are nominalised. In many other languages there is no special marking on the complement verb, as in example (1b) above where the clause *e alu le uso* ‘my brother goes’ carries no special marking when it appears as a complement of *mana*’o ‘want’.

Many of the desiderative words and constructions mentioned here are examined in greater depth in the following chapters, which will explore several of the grammatical structures involved in these constructions, and the similarities and differences in meanings of various construction types. From this initial overview, two pertinent observations can be made.

The first is that, in view of the diversity of constructions that can be used to convey desiderative meanings, one would not expect a great deal of similarity in the ways different languages encode notions of desire. It could be expected that the most common, everyday ways of referring to wanting or desire would be in some languages nouns, in other languages verbs, adjectives, verbal auxiliaries, or particles; and that perhaps in some languages wanting might be associated with a particular grammatical construction rather than with an individual word or morpheme. While many languages have more than one of these devices, and details of several such constructions are discussed below, an overall finding of this study is that an unexpectedly high proportion of languages do have verbs
or verbal constructions as their most commonly occurring desiderative expressions.

The second general observation to be made at this point is that, while languages divide up the range of desiderative situations in different ways, there is again more similarity across languages than might be expected. There is no prima facie reason to suppose that any language would use similar words or constructions for different types of desiderative situations. Yet in all of the languages examined in this study, the same desiderative expression is used for more than one type of situation. Languages as unrelated as French and Arrernte, for example, use the same word to refer to wanting to do something oneself, and wanting someone else to do something. Samoan and Japanese, which use different words for these two types of situation, nonetheless use the same word for wanting another person to do something, and for wanting a thing. No language was found that has entirely different constructions for each type of desiderative situation, treating them as if they were completely unrelated concepts.

2.2 Morphological desideratives

Some languages have a desiderative particle or affix, that adds the meaning of wanting or desire to a predicate. For example, Japanese has a desiderative suffix -tai, which is added to a verb:

(9) Watashi wa eiga ga mi-tai.
    1s TOP movies OBJ see-DES
    'I want to see movies.'

Japanese has another important desiderative, the adjective hosshii, which is used somewhat more freely than the bound morpheme -tai; the relationship of these two terms and the constraints on their use are explored in Chapters 3 and 6 below. However, some languages have a bound morpheme that is clearly their main desiderative form.

In the Maricopa language of California, a desiderative verbal suffix -lya (→-ly) indicates that the action or event denoted by the verb to which it is attached is wanted:
(10) *Nyaa ny-yuu-ly 'i-m.*
   1s 1/3-see-DES say-REAL
   'I want to see her.'

This morpheme refers only to the wishes of the person who is speaking, so the following example cannot mean 'you want to help me':

(11) *Nym-wik-lya.*
   2/1-help-DES
   'I wish you would/want you to help me.'

To talk about someone else's wants in Maricopa one uses a desiderative-marked verb as a complement of a main verb *'ii-m 'say' or aly'ii-m 'think':*

(12) *Kwesede-sh m-dol-ly m-aly'ii-m?*
   doctor-S 2-be-DES 2-think-QREAL
   'Do you want to be a doctor?'

This construction can also be used to speak of wanting in the first person, as seen in (10) above, but when the desiderative affix appears by itself as in (11), it is interpreted as referring to the speaker.

It seems, then, that this desiderative morpheme is inseparable from the first person. Hence it is tempting to interpret its use with 'say' or 'think' as a kind of quotation. On this view, example (10) could be interpreted literally as: 'I say, "I want to see her".' But one would then expect the desiderative-marked verb in (12) to carry a first-person rather than a second-person pronominal prefix, to be interpreted in a quotative sense: 'Do you think, "I want to be a doctor"?' The fact that both verbs have the second-person prefix in this construction suggests that, while the construction may have developed historically out of a quotative construction, it is synchronically a separate construction type. The importance of distinguishing synchronic meaning from etymology is a recurring theme in the following chapters, and criteria for drawing such distinctions are examined in Chapter 6.

A somewhat similar pattern is seen in a language from the other side of the world, the Papuan language Yagaria. The Hua dialect of this language has a set of morphological desideratives as part of the verbal paradigm, but these forms are limited to first-person use, as in
desumi(\_)hue 'I want to eat'. However, in this language wanting is not linked exclusively with the person expressing it, since in these expressions the speaker can include another person or persons via the first-person dual and plural forms, thus attributing the desire to these other persons as well as the speaker: \textit{visu\'mi(\_)hu\'e} 'we two want to go', \textit{kesupihune} 'we want to see it'.

However, desiderative forms cannot be used in Hua to talk about the desires of second or third persons. To ask what an addressee wants, one uses a subjunctive verb form, not the desiderative. To talk about a third person's wants one has to use a construction with the future marker -gu and the main verb 'say':

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{(13) Do-gu-e hi-e.}
\item \hspace{1cm} eat-FUT-DECL say-DECL
\item 'He wants to eat.'
\end{itemize}

The desiderative forms can be used in the third person, but this conveys not wanting but near future; the third-person desiderative form of 'eat' is \textit{desimi(\_)hie}, meaning 'he is about to eat', not 'he wants to eat'. Neither the desiderative nor the subjunctive forms can be used to denote wanting in the past; and the only construction by which this can be done is again a construction with 'say'. Thus not only the desiderative forms but the future tense marker and the verb 'say' play a part in expressing desiderative meanings. The issues raised by constructions of this kind are explored in later chapters.

Morphological desiderative markers in some languages have fewer constraints on their use. The Yup'ik verbal postbase -\textit{sqi-} 'want' is most frequently used in relation to the speaker's desire to \textit{co} something, but can also be used in constructions like \textit{angutem neresqa\'a tan'gurraq akutamek} 'the man wants the boy to eat some akutaq'. In Korean, the verbal auxiliary \textit{sip-} 'want' is rarely used in constructions where someone wants another person to do something, because in this context it is generally considered more polite to use the verb \textit{para\-} 'hope'. However, \textit{sip-} constructions like \textit{mag\'\'i motage hago sib\'\'a} 'I want him not to eat' are grammatically acceptable.

While many Australian Aboriginal languages have desiderative verbs or other lexemes referring to wanting, like the Arrernte examples given above, some have morphological desideratives. The Kayardild
language of northern Queensland has two verbal suffixes often used in referring to wanting, as in the following examples:

(14) \textit{Ngada} warra-da ngarn-kiring-inj.
\begin{tabular}{llll}
IsNOM & go-DES & beach-ALL-EMOT \\
\end{tabular}
'I would like to go to the beach.'

(15) \textit{Ngada} wirrka-ju.
\begin{tabular}{llll}
IsNOM & dance-POT \\
\end{tabular}
'I want to/can/will dance.'

This language does not seem to have morphologically independent desiderative words that are used in similar contexts, and the multifunctional nature of these verbal inflections raises interesting issues that are explored in detail in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. They are not limited to first-person use; in both of the above examples \textit{niya} 'he' could be substituted for \textit{ngada} 'I'.

Although the number of languages with morphological desideratives of the kind described here is too small to provide a basis for much in the way of crosslinguistic generalisation, some tentative observations may be made. Desiderative morphemes seem to be a good deal more restricted in their use than independent desiderative words are. For example, the Japanese desiderative suffix -\textit{ta}i is subject to more constraints on its use than the desiderative adjective \textit{hoshii} is. Syntactically, -\textit{ta}i is limited to use on verbs whose agent is coreferential with the person who wants the action; while \textit{hoshii} can be used with either a verb or a nominal as the object of wanting, and is not subject to a coreferentiality constraint. Moreover, while both \textit{hoshii} and -\textit{ta}i are usually used only in first-person contexts because it is regarded as impolite to refer to other people's internal states such as wanting, the use of -\textit{ta}i with reference to another person is even more constrained than the use of \textit{hoshii}, as discussed in 6.4 below.

The Kayardild desiderative morphemes mentioned above are both subject to a number of syntactic constraints, which affect the ways in which they are interpreted in particular constructions. For example, although the 'potential' inflection in (15) above is ambiguous in this particular construction, and can be interpreted as meaning 'want to', 'can' or 'will', in other construction types it can mean 'want' unambiguously, as detailed in