Kayardild grammar, the target event appears as the main clause rather than as a complement of ‘want’.

Semantically, wanting also implies the existence of someone who experiences wanting. The ‘wanter’ is usually a person, and never an inanimate thing (unless personified); its range of reference corresponds exactly to the scope of the proposed NSM universal SOMEONE.

Grammatically, the relationship of the ‘wanter’ to English want and Kayardild -THu is markedly different. In English, the ‘wanter’ is the grammatical subject of the verb want, but the Kayardild -THu cannot take a grammatical subject in the way that a verb does. In the sentence Ngada wirrka-ju ‘I want to dance’, ngada ‘I’ is the grammatical subject of the wanted event ‘dance’. The suffix -THu ‘want’ tells us that someone wants the event ‘I dance’, and in this construction (X V-THu) the someone is the subject of the main verb ‘dance’. The earlier part of this chapter showed how -THu in a subordinate clause always points to a ‘wanter’ identified by the main clause.

The grammeme -THu can therefore be seen as operating across clauses. When located within a subordinate clause, it marks that clause as the target of wanting, but it also points outside its own clause, to a ‘wanter’ identifiable from a higher clause. In the insubordinated construction, no higher clause is present and therefore the wanter is not identifiable from it, but -THu still conveys the information that someone wants the target event.

In the analysis proposed above, when -THu ‘want’ occurs in a main clause, -THu retains its function of pointing to the main clause subject as the ‘wanter’, but in this case the main clause is the same clause as the one containing -THu: hence in Ngada wirrka-ju the ‘wanter’ is identified as the main clause subject ngada ‘I’. Notice that this clause-internal reference is not possible in insubordinated clauses, where the subordination marker (CLOC/COBL) indicates that -THu must refer to a higher clause, even though that clause is not syntactically present.

In the monoclausal X V-THu construction, then, -THu can perform both of its functions within the same clause: marking the event ‘X V’ as ‘wanted’, and identifying the main clause subject ‘X’ as the ‘wanter’. But X V-THu has only one grammatical subject, unlike the other -THu constructions where there is another subject in a higher clause. This may be a clue to why -THu can be polysemous in this and only this construction.
There are certain contexts that are unfavourable to the interpretation of $X$ $V$ -$THu$ as ‘$X$ wants: $X$ will do $V$’. For example, for pragmatic reasons it is highly unusual for a speaker to tell an addressee what the addressee wants. Therefore, while $Nginda$ $wirrka$-$ju$ ‘$2sNOM$ dance-$POT$’ can mean ‘You want to dance’, the pragmatic dissonance of such an utterance might well motivate an alternative meaning being assigned to this construction. There is no subordination marker to indicate that -$THu$ refers to a ‘wanter’ outside the clause, as there is in examples like (5) above, ‘You should chop the wood’, i.e. ‘Someone (unspecified) wants you to chop the wood’. Without such a subordination marker $Nginda$ $wirrka$-$ju$ would not be interpreted as ‘Someone wants you to dance’. But it is of course open to the interpretation that this is -$THu_2$ ‘can after this time’, and in this case the utterance could be interpreted as ‘You can dance’.

What I am suggesting here is that -$THu$ in a main clause of the $X$ $V$ -$THu$ type may become open to an alternative interpretation, thus becoming polysemous, in a way that -$THu$ in subordinate clauses is not, precisely because of the fact that in this monoclausal construction there is no higher clause subject for -$THu$ to point to as the ‘wanter’. With no clause-external ‘wanter’, and perhaps assisted by the operation of unfavourable contexts like the one mentioned above, -$THu$ becomes open to reinterpretation as a purely clause-internal operator, stripped of its reference to a second entity outside the clause.

What could its meaning then be? What is the closest thing to a ‘wanted event’ without a wanter? There are a few different possibilities for the interpretation of such a meaning, including the possibility that it could mean ‘this event would be good’ (like the monoclausal -$da$ construction). Another possibility arises from the fact that wanted events are usually events that are as yet unrealised, and are usually (though perhaps not always) thought of as possible. So the concept of future possibility (‘can after this time’) is quite a likely candidate for the meaning of a construction similar to ‘$X$ wants: $X$ will do $V$’ but involving only one subject-like argument: hence, perhaps, the meaning ‘$X$ can do $V$ after this time’.

This is quite a hypothetical suggestion, but it could help to explain why desiderative grammemes in several unrelated languages display a pattern of polysemy involving a non-compositional relationship between wanting (WANT) and possibility (CAN), and irrealis mode or futurity
(involving concepts such as CAN and/or AFTER THIS TIME and/or NOT BEFORE THIS TIME). The previous chapter discussed a similar polysemy for \textit{la} in Buru. In Maricopa, too, the desiderative verbal affix -\textit{lya} marks the verb as 'wanted' in statements, and irrealis in questions.

A view has been proposed above of -\textit{THu}$_{1}$ 'want' as essentially an interclausal operator, whose semantic and syntactic effect is to link the clause that it marks as 'wanted' with a higher clause. Monoclausal -\textit{THu} constructions are then seen as special cases: the insubordinated construction implying a link with some unspecified higher clause ('someone wants:...'), and the \textit{X V-THu} construction involving a clause-internal operation identifying \textit{X} as the 'wanter'. This view also offers a possible basis for explaining the polysemy of -\textit{THu} in the \textit{X V-THu} construction. While this analysis of -\textit{THu} is of course a theoretical proposal, it seems a promising one in terms of its consistency with the data, its economy in providing a unified account of all -\textit{THu} constructions, and its power to predict the interpretations that can be applied to the various -\textit{THu} constructions and to explain the relationships between them.

If a desiderative grammeme within the wanted-event clause can be seen as an interclausal operator linking its own clause to a higher clause, then other types of desideratives can also be seen as operating interclausally, but in the opposite direction, linking their own clause with a lower one. The English verb \textit{want}, like its equivalents in many other languages, usually calls for a complement clause: either a full clause, as in \textit{I want you to dance}, or a subjectless one if coreferential (\textit{I want to dance}). The monoclausal constructions where want takes a nominal object (\textit{I want water}) have also been explained in terms of an interclausal analysis of \textit{want}, as discussed in 3.1 above, where what is wanted is a situation in which the wanter has the object at her disposal:

\begin{align*}
\textit{I want NP} \\
\text{I want this: if I want to do something with this thing, I can do it}
\end{align*}

The Buru \textit{la} discussed in Chapter 4 can operate in either direction, depending on the construction type. As a preverbal TAM marker it occurs within the wanted-event clause, linking its own clause with a higher clause in the \textit{X V$_1$ la V$_2$} and \textit{X POSS suka la V} constructions. In the monoclausal \textit{X la V} construction \textit{la} seems to operate clause-internally,
identifying X as the 'wanter', very like the Kayardild X V-THu — and with the same kind of polysemy. But as a complementiser la operates in the other direction, linking its own main clause with a complement wanted-event clause in the X la X V, X V₁ la X/Y V₂, and X POSS suka la X/Y V constructions.

If the analysis proposed here is correct, then the major desiderative construction types found in languages of the world would all be understood as involving an interclausal operation of the kind discussed here, linking two clausal propositions in one direction or the other depending on the location of the 'want' word or morpheme: whether it is located within the clause expressing the wanted event, or in the clause containing the entity to whom the desire for this event is attributed. This would suggest that the essential nature of the universal WANT across languages is that of an interclausal or interpropositional operator.

The idea that the combinatorial properties, or 'primitive syntax', of semantic universals could involve complex structures of more than one clause is a very recent one in NSM theory, but WANT is not the only NSM universal that apparently operates across clauses. The function of linking two clausal propositions seems to be an essential property of the relational operators BECAUSE and IF (cf. the discussion of Kayardild -da in Chapter 4). In addition, KNOW seems always to require some proposition as its complement; and SAY and THINK apparently must be able to take such complements as well, though they may alternatively combine with object-like arguments.

In view of the suggestions made above about a non-compositional relationship between WANT and CAN, or wanting and possibility, it is worth noting here that CAN does not operate across clauses. As a marker of possibility or ability, it operates solely upon the proposition to which it belongs; and as suggested above, this property may be the key to the fairly common pattern of polysemy whereby a form identified with WANT in interclausal contexts may be identified with CAN in monoclausal ones.

However, the relationship of the 'can' of possibility and ability may also have something to do with the relationships of propositions to their arguments in clausal structures. The 'can' of possibility applies to a proposition as a whole, marking it as 'possible' (if 'I can dance' then the event 'I dance' is possible). But the 'can' of ability can also be understood as applying to a particular entity within a proposition: 'I can (am able to) dance' conveys that an ability to dance is a property of the subject, 'I', not a
property of the proposition 'I dance'. This orientation of habilitative 'can' toward the subject-like argument in a proposition produces an effect that could also be expressed by two linked propositions: one relating to the subject ('I have an ability') and one denoting the nature of that ability ('to dance'). Notice that in English, this situation can be expressed either via the monoclausal construction I can dance, or via be able with a to complement: I am able to dance.

A full treatment of CAN would require a work of similar scope to the present study of WANT, but these observations may shed some light on the nature of the relationship of these two semantic elements, and why some associations between them can be observed in different languages even if they are compositionally unrelated. In the way described above, CAN sometimes functions almost like a link between two propositions, but its scope is always limited to a single clause, while WANT operates interclausally. Thus it is maintained here that possibility (CAN) may indeed be seen as a property of propositions, while WANT is perhaps not so much a propensity of individual persons, as an interclausal and interpropositional operator.

As well as shedding some light on the 'primitive syntax' of WANT across languages, the syntactic properties of clause-internal desiderative constructions may yield some insights into how language-specific grammatical rules in natural languages affect the structure of the natural semantic metalanguage that is, in NSM theory, derivable from each natural language. In recent work on Kayardild, for example, Evans has pointed out that the grammatical status of -THu, as well as its polysemy, places certain constraints on its ability to combine with other elements in Kayardild definitions.

This raises questions about whether the language-specific combinatorial limitations of -THu would make it difficult or impossible to represent in Kayardild certain meanings or combinations of meanings involving wanting. The evidence examined thus far indicates that Kayardild is not short of means for expressing desiderative concepts, and that -THu appears to be the main Kayardild exponent of WANT; but the grammatical properties of -THu make it behave rather differently from equivalents of WANT in many other languages.

Constructions like the Kayardild imperatives, hortatives and verbal purposives, for example, need to be explicated in terms like 'I want: you will do V', 'someone wants: X will do V', or 'I want: someone will do
something', as suggested above. But the grammatical constraints on the
inflection -THu do not permit it to be used in these same syntactic frames.
One can say 'I want to do V' by marking the verb with -THu (ngada V-
THu), but to say 'I want you to do V' is not nearly as straightforward.
Moreover, the fact that -THu can express two important basic meanings,
'want' and 'can', presents problems when these senses need to be
contrasted, for example in propositions like 'this person could do V but
doesn't want to', or 'I wanted to do V but I couldn't do it'.

Does this mean that, although the presence of the concept WANT can
be established in Kayardild, the language does not have an adequate lexical
equivalent for this semantic universal?

Not necessarily. The principle of language-internal definitional
paraphrase allows for each language to combine its basic elements of
meaning (its indefinable semantic primes) in a language-specific
definitional metalanguage, according to the rules of the natural language
itself (Kayardild, English or whatever natural language is being studied).
This means that, while the basic elements (semantic primes) should have
precise lexical equivalents in each language, the grammatical devices by
which each language realises combinations of these elements are to some
extent language-specific.

Therefore, while a meaningful combination of basic elements in
one language (such as 'I want someone to do something' in the English
natural semantic metalanguage) should be translatable into other
languages, we should not expect it to be translatable as a calque, morpheme
by morpheme or lexeme by lexeme. Each language imposes its own
natural structures upon any combination of primes, as English imposes a
language-specific complement structure (to VP) on the complement of
WNT. Even if a version of the English metalanguage is used that does not
contain this to complement structure (saying instead 'I want: someone
[will] do something'), English still imposes language-specific constraints. It
has no completely neutral verb forms, so whatever form is used (for
example do, will do, want) carries language-specific grammatical informa-
tion in addition to its meaning as a prime. This is not a problem in
constructing definitions, it is simply a characteristic that is specific to the
NSM derived from English.

On the other hand, the syntax that each language imposes on its
definitional metalanguage requires careful attention. The 'mini-syntax' of
the metalanguage should be reduced to the minimum necessary to
construct intelligible definitions in the language, and any obligatory but non-prime semantic information (such as the tense, person and number information that is obligatorily part of English verb forms like *does, do, want, wants*) must itself be definable in the metalanguage.

Thus, the language-specific constraints on combinability of semantic primes need close and careful attention, but the existence of such constraints does not invalidate the primes.

In Kayardild, the constraints on combinability of -THu require several language-specific structures to be employed in constructing definitions of complex desiderative constructions. Each of these structures needs to be examined and evaluated to verify its status as a necessary and valid part of a Kayardild natural semantic metalanguage. Some possible structures of this kind will be examined here; others may emerge from further research with Kayardild speakers, and as more language-internal definitions are constructed using a Kayardild semantic metalanguage to explicate more Kayardild words and constructions.

First, consider how -THu would work in many Kayardild definitions where wanting is involved. For example, many speech act terms involve as one component of their meaning something like 'I want to say something'. In a Kayardild definition, WANT here would be expressed by -THu: *ngada kamburi-ju* 'I want to say something'. As noted above, the X V-THu construction is ambiguous: in ordinary Kayardild this sentence could also mean 'I can/will say something'. But the Kayardild semantic metalanguage must not permit such ambiguity, and would therefore have to rely upon one of the disambiguation strategies available within the language to distinguish -THu₁ ‘want’ from -THu₂ ‘can after this time’. This would probably be achieved by specifying that in this metalanguage, CAN is to be expressed only by the -nkuru construction discussed above, and -THu can thus be associated uniquely with WANT.

This type of semantic constraint is in no way specific to Kayardild, but applies to the NSM of any language: the metalanguage must rule out ambiguity in a principled way. This is equally true of the English word *want* in English metalanguage definitions. In the English version of NSM, English *want* is used only for the semantic prime WANT, not for the other meanings that *want* can have in everyday English: *I want* is equivalent only to 'I WANT', not to any other sense of *want*; other meanings would have to be spelt out in terms of the relevant semantic primes. Similarly, in the Kayardild metalanguage, *ngada V-THu* must be
equivalent only to ‘I WANT: I [will] do V’, not ‘I can do V’ or ‘I [will] do V after this time’. The other meaning (-THu\textsubscript{2}) would have to be spelt out in terms of the relevant primes, probably including -nkuru (CAN) and -ngarrba (AFTER), along the following lines:

\[ X \ V-THu_{1} = X \ \text{WANT}[s]: \ X \ V \]

\[ X \ V-THu_{2} = X \ \text{CAN} \ V \ \text{AFTER THIS TIME} \]

A major grammatical constraint that Kayardild imposes on -THu ‘want’ is that it cannot combine with a subordinate subject in the way that English \textit{want} can, in constructions like ‘I want someone to do something’ or ‘I want something to happen’. This syntactic fact of Kayardild does not necessarily mean that -THu is not available to express WANT in such contexts. Rather, it may mean that the Kayardild metalanguage must use a different -THu construction for this purpose, namely an interclausal construction where -THu means that the event i.e. marks is wanted by an entity represented in a higher clause.

For example, Kayardild has an imperative suffix attached to verbs:

(37) \textit{Ngij-uru \ barrki-j!}

\begin{verbatim}
wood-PROP  chop-IMP
\end{verbatim}

‘Chop the wood!’

The meaning of this suffix is that the speaker wants the addressee to do something, the action named by the verb. That is, \textit{V-TH ‘V-IMP}’ conveys the meaning ‘I want: you will do V’. This meaning can be stated in Kayardild, but in a construction quite different from the English representation. In example (5) above, reproduced here as (38), -THu ‘POT’ indicates that someone wants the action to be performed by the addressee:

(38) \textit{Nyingka ngij-uru-ya barrki-juru-y.}

\begin{verbatim}
2sNOM  wood-FUT-CLOC  chop-POT-CLOC
\end{verbatim}

‘You should (i.e. someone wants you to) chop some wood.’

This is close to a statement of the meaning of (37), but the insubordinated clause by itself, as explained earlier, does not specifically identify the
speaker of the imperative as the one who wants the addressee to chop the wood.

By the rules of Kayardild grammar, if the person who wants an action or event to occur is not the one who performs the action, then the wanted event is presented as a subordinate clause with 'potential'-marked verb, and the 'wanter' is the subject of the main clause to which the wanted-event clause is subordinated. But to add to (38) the information that the 'wanter' is the speaker, in Kayardild it is necessary to add not only *ngada 'I' but a full higher clause, and this clause must have a verb. There is no way of adding only *ngada. In stating the meaning of an imperative such as (37), this grammatical requirement can be met by using *kamburij 'say' as the higher clause verb, since an imperative is an act of 'saying'. Hence, the following can be regarded as an adequate Kayardild statement of the meaning of (37):

1sNOM say-ACT 2sNOM wood-FUT-CLOC chop-POT-CLOC
‘I say: I want you to chop some wood.’

If this is so, then the general semantic formula for the meaning of an imperative in Kayardild would be:

\[ V-TH! \; ('V-IMP') = \]
\[ ngada \; kamburij: \; nyingka \; V-THu-CLOC/COBL \]

Contrasts like 'I wanted to go but mother wanted me to stay' are also discussed in Evans' work on Kayardild. In such a case the mother would of course be likely to say something expressing her wish, and this would be expressed as follows:

(40) [Ngada warra-ju.] *Ngama-thu kamburi-jarr, nyingka ngaka-th.
[1sNOM go-POT] mother-NOM say-PAST 2sNOM stay-IMP
‘[I wanted to go.] Mother said: you stay!’

However, if the mother didn’t actually say anything, but showed her wish by a facial expression, Kayardild speakers would say something like 'I looked at my mother’s face; I would not go, since she looked at me angrily'. This situation could also be expressed in terms of the
construction $X V_1 X(Y$ $V_2$-THu-CLOC/COBL. The wanted-event clause ($Y$ $V_2$-THu) in this case would be ngada warra-nangku ‘I go-NegPOT’ plus the complementising suffix (CLOC/COBL). The higher clause ($X V_1$) would be ‘Mother looked at me’, and since in this construction -THu identifies the higher clause subject (‘Mother’) as the wanter, this provides an entirely adequate contrast with the proposition Ngada warra-ju ‘I want(ed) to go’.

Another way to express ‘X wants Y to do V’ in Kayardild without attributing to X any other action, or act of saying, would be to use the higher clause verb marrulmaratha ‘think’: $X$ marrulmara-th $Y$ V-THu-CLOC/COBL (e.g. Dathin-a dangka-a marrulmara-th nyingka ngij-uru-ya barrki-juru-y ‘that-NOM person-NOM think-_ACT 2sNOM wood-FUT-CLOC chop-POT-CLOC’). This is not strictly speaking a purpose construction, since the higher clause action is not performed with the purpose of producing the subordinate clause event (you chop wood); but the subordinate clause event is wanted by the higher clause subject. At the present stage of understanding of Kayardild, this seems to be the simplest means the language has for expressing ‘X wants: Y will do V’ (cf. ‘X wants: X will do V’ = $X$ V-THu).

The sketches offered here are only a preliminary to the process of language-internal explication required in Kayardild, as in any other language, to discover the language-specific details of how the semantic primes are combined in a definitional metalanguage. For each natural language, the definitional metalanguage should include only the minimal set of language-specific rules sufficient to produce all the combinations of semantic primes that are necessary to define more complex meanings in the language. The main conclusion to be drawn at this early stage is that the differences in syntactic properties between desideratives internal to the wanted-event clause (like -THu) and desideratives external to it (like want) should not of themselves constitute a barrier to regarding the constructions containing them as semantically equivalent in NSM definitions.
Chapter 6

Universal and language-specific in desideratives

The preceding chapters have focussed on some of the details of various desiderative expressions in languages. The emphasis has been on examining what kinds of constructions are used to express desiderative meanings, and on seeking to understand the functions of the lexical material and the grammatical structures in the expression of these meanings. In doing this, an attempt has been made to assess how these constructions perform their function of conveying desiderative meanings, to identify some of the components of these meanings, and to take note of both the similarities and differences that can be observed across languages.

This chapter aims to draw together these observations and to address specifically the question of language universals. In view of the diversity of kinds of desiderative expressions surveyed in this work, can any common elements or common structures be discerned? If so, how do these elements or structures interact with the many language-specific features of desiderative expressions that have been observed? What can be said about those properties of desiderative expressions that are specific to particular languages, and what are the possible influences at work in the origins and development of such language-specific properties? Finally what, if anything, might all this indicate about the nature of the mental lexicon; what could be the kinds of connections between meanings as they may be stored in the mind, and how they are represented in natural languages?

It is appropriate at this point to sound a note of caveat. In any discussion of possible universals among languages, it is desirable to take specific steps to avoid proceeding on unquestioned assumptions based upon either universalism or cultural relativism. In particular, any assertions about underlying similarities between languages must be based on specific linguistic evidence; and assertions about fundamental differences between languages must be based on more than the observation of superficial differences between particular forms. The following discussion tries to demonstrate the usefulness of these principles in seeking a balanced assessment of what may be universal and what is language-specific in the area of desiderative expressions.
6.1 WANT as a language universal?

Like many other areas of language, desiderative constructions present some tantalising similarities in the patterns of expression that are found across languages. What is tantalising is a sense of some kind of underlying unity among these constructions, but a unity that appears highly intangible, perhaps even illusory. On the one hand, unexpected similarities are found between quite unrelated languages, for example the behaviour of morphological desideratives in Kayardild and Maricopa, the desiderative use of body part terms in Mangap-Mbula and Arrernte, or the links between 'want' and 'look for' in Ulwa and Ewe. On the other hand, even closely related languages display remarkable differences, for example the morphological desiderative construction in Maricopa versus the verbal one in Mojave; the borrowed want in Miskitu versus the polysemous walnaka in Ulwa (see 6.5 below); or the to complement in English versus the subjunctive complements of many other European languages.

Perhaps the major challenge in searching for a possible universal element or elements of meaning among the desiderative expressions of various languages is to specify what it is that seems to be shared. What things do desiderative expressions have in common? And are these shared elements really evidence of something universal, or can they be explained away in terms of chance similarity, or as an artefact of the descriptive framework?

If what is shared is a very basic element of meaning, a semantic prime, then it will be all the more difficult to specify, in that it will not be definable in any terms other than itself. An element so basic as to be indefinable could well account for a sense of underlying, though intangible, unity among desiderative expressions; but this is certainly not sufficient evidence for asserting that such a semantic prime is present.

Fortunately for the purpose of semantic analysis, indefinable is not the same as indescribable. What cannot be divided up any further internally can still be described from the outside. Even if what desiderative expressions have in common cannot be analysed in terms of smaller elements, it should be possible to observe its outward shape. It should be possible to specify this element of meaning both in terms of the
semantic space it occupies, that is what areas of meaning it covers; and in
terms of its interactions with other elements of meaning.

These are the kinds of things that have been touched upon many
times in the preceding chapters, particularly in the detailed case studies
that have looked at what areas of meaning are covered by a particular
desiderative word or morpheme, and at how this lexicogrammatical
element combines with other elements to form various types of
desiderative construction. This provides a basis for proceeding now to
identify what these constructions do have in common, and to assess
whether such shared features can be considered to embody something
universal across languages.

Recall that the introduction to Chapter 2 set out a range of
desiderative situations, that could be identified independently of any
linguistic parameters. Situations like these arise often enough in the
course of human experience for each language to have a substantial range
of linguistic structures that are used in association with them, from the
imperatives, directives and request constructions used in situations where
one person wants someone else to do something, through a variety of
desiderative, purposive, volitive, optative and other constructions used in
situations where someone wants to do something or wants something to
happen.

Because the present discussion is in English, the English words
want, desire and desiderative are used many times with reference to these
situations, but these English words neither define nor fully coincide with
the semantic domain under investigation. It has been shown that the
word desire can be defined in English in terms of want and some other
elements; desiderative is of course also complex in meaning. Want in
English has also been shown to have more than one meaning, though in
what has been called its desiderative sense it may be indefinable; and this
is the sense in which it has been used to characterise desiderative
situations in terms of someone wanting something. Does this mean that
the whole discussion is circular, depending ultimately on the meaning of
‘wanting’ in English?

No, for two reasons. First, even if this sense of want in English is
indefinable, as it should be if it corresponds to the crosslinguistic semantic
prime that is the focus of this search, it is not indescribable. Second, once
the semantic prime has been described, it can be seen that the English word
want corresponds to it only in part; far from defining the proposed
semantic prime, *want* in English is no better nor worse a representative of this basic meaning than are the desiderative forms in any other language, from *ahentye* in Arrernte or *-THu* in Kayardild to *-sqe-* in Yup’ik Eskimo. The illustration of these two points provides a focus for assessing the status of this semantic prime as a possible semantic universal.

It may seem confusing to proceed to call this still hypothetical semantic prime WANT, even though the NSM term WANT is here distinguished typographically from the English word *want*. However, the point of a natural semantic metalanguage is that it uses a subset of terms from the natural language, in this case English, and the following discussion sets out quite explicitly the differences between the NSM WANT and the English *want*, as well as desiderative terms in several other languages.

The nature of the element WANT, although formally indefinable, can be described informally as an internal experience of a particular kind. In this it is somewhat like certain other internal experiences that have sometimes been called ‘mental predicates’ in NSM theory, particularly THINK, KNOW and FEEL. However, WANT does not share any elements of meaning with these other mental predicates. What distinguishes WANT from other internal experiences is the particular kind of experience it is. This is rather harder to describe, but it can be thought of as an experience that has a specific focus. This focus is essentially a projected outcome; the WANT experience is oriented toward some action, event, state of affairs, or in some cases, a concrete object.

Perhaps the essence of WANT as a semantic prime is the unique relationship that it denotes between the experiencer of this internal phenomenon, and the projected outcome upon which the experience is focussed. In effect, WANT is the name of this relationship between an entity and a projected occurrence. To WANT something is entirely distinct in character from any other internal experience; it is not the same as to THINK about something, to KNOW that something can or will happen, or to FEEL something about it. Nonetheless, there are some intuitively valid but semantically noncompositional relations linking WANT with these and certain other concepts, and these links too can help to explain some of the linguistic phenomena discussed here.

Thus a picture begins to emerge of the semantic space occupied by this WANT element. The range of meaning it covers is limited to a particular kind of relationship between an entity and an occurrence or
outcome. In this relationship, the entity is usually human, but not always; the real criterion is that, for WANT to be predicated of an entity, this entity must be thought of as 'someone' who does or is capable of doing at least some of the things that humans do, such as wanting, thinking, feeling and so on. Thus, WANT is related, though not in any compositional way, to another prime in the NSM system, SOMEONE. Who and what can be thought of as SOMEONE is partly determined by culture; for example, in the languages of most cultures there are some animals that are more likely than others to be spoken of as 'someone' who could WANT something. In some cultures people readily speak of spirits, natural forces like wind, spiritually significant places or objects as 'someone'; in some cultures, speakers are fairly free to personify inanimate things, speaking of them as if they were 'someone' who could WANT something, while in other cultures this way of speaking is rare, perhaps even unthinkable.

In addition to the SOMEONE to whom WANT applies, there is also a projected outcome that is the focus or target of WANT. This is usually, but not always, something that might occur in the future; the temporal/modal status of the projected outcome is represented according to the tense and mood systems of the language in which it is spoken of, and culture as well as language influences how speakers view the temporal/modal status of occurrences. The nature of the projected outcome may encompass quite a broad range of kinds of occurrence. The wanter may WANT to do something, or for someone else to do something, or some event or state of affairs such that something happens or the wanter gets or has something. This range of types of outcome is represented via a range of different grammatical structures, according to the grammar, and in particular the complementation system of the language in which the outcome is spoken of. Again, culture and grammatical systems both play a role in determining how speakers view and speak of different kinds of outcomes.

Although this description is informal and not compositional, it gives a fairly detailed outline or silhouette of the kind of meaning that is represented by the NSM element WANT, and some of the ways in which it interacts with other elements of meaning. To summarise, WANT is an internal experience that is predicated of someone and focusses on some projected outcome. For convenience in the following discussion, the 'someone' or wanter will be called the Principal, and the projected outcome will be called the Objective. The element WANT itself encodes an
experience that is internal to the Principal, yet at the same time constitutes a particular kind of link or relation between Principal and Objective.

Having specified as far as possible the nature of this hypothesised basic element WANT, the next step is to review the evidence in order to assess the extent to which this element may be considered to be shared among the desiderative expressions of different languages, including English. It should already be clear from this characterisation of WANT that it is not semantically coextensive with the English word want, and we proceed now to examine more closely the ways in which this word and other desiderative terms do or do not reflect this basic WANT meaning.

6.2 Patterns of equivalence across languages

Looking through the desiderative constructions examined in this study, one is struck by their heterogeneity. Not only is the English word want different in scope and use from the proposed basic desiderative element, but no language appears to have a desiderative expression that is fully coextensive in meaning with the proposed WANT. (Similar issues arise in relation to several of the other proposed NSM primes, and the present investigation of WANT may shed light on these problems.) This could signal one of two things. Either the characterisation of the hypothesised semantic prime is faulty, or its expression is modified in every language by factors specific to the structure of that language.

An important corollary to this observation is that it is unusual to find in any natural language a desiderative expression that is precisely coextensive in meaning and use with any other desiderative expression. If there are no perfect matches of desiderative expressions across languages, no immediately observable isomorphism, then how is it possible to identify any shared element of desiderative meaning?

There are a couple of possible approaches to this problem, approaches that are not wholly incompatible with each other. One is to identify the contexts in which the use of desiderative expressions in different languages does match up, and to assume that these contexts represent the shared part of the meaning, and that the uses that do not match are idioms or language-specific constructions. This approach is quite common in comparing words and constructions in closely related languages. For example, it is generally assumed that in French and Italian,
the verbs vouloir ‘want’ and volere ‘want’ are not only cognate but essentially synonymous, and that the very minor variations in the scope of their use are idioms particular to each language. These words are a perfect match in most contexts (e.g. Je veux aller = Io voglio andare ‘I want to go’), and the only cases where they do not exactly match are thought of as idiomatic (e.g. the use of volere in Ti voglio bene ‘I love you’ does not match any use of vouloir in French, cf. je t’aime).

This kind of approach is, quite rightly, treated very cautiously by many linguists when examining the meanings of expressions in unrelated languages and cultures. Many crosscultural studies have pointed out the error of assuming that words in different languages are synonymous when they overlap only partially in use. For example, words like arofa in Tahitian, sayang in Malay or mukuringanyi in Yankunytjatjara are used in some of the same contexts as love is in English, and hence are often translated as ‘love’, but both anthropologists and linguists have pointed out significant differences between the concepts encoded in these words. To assume that they actually mean the same as love, and that their use in contexts where love is not used were simply idiomatic, would be to ignore some of the most important aspects of the meanings of these emotion terms and their social and psychological ramifications in each culture.

Words like these are complex in meaning, and semantic analyses of words for ‘love’ in several languages by Wierzbicka and Goddard have shown how a full account of their meanings can pinpoint both the shared elements and the differences in meaning between words like these. They all involve ‘feeling something good’ in relation to another person, but the protective, caring flavour of sayang, the compassionate flavour of arofa, the nurturing flavour of mukuringanyi and the romantic flavour of love can all be captured in specific components of these complex meanings (e.g. the component ‘I want Y to feel good’ is unique to sayang, ‘something bad happened to Y’ is unique to arofa, ‘I want to be with Y’ is shared by mukuringanyi and love but not sayang or arofa).

This is all very well for words that have complex meanings, but what of the indivisible WANT element that is the focus of the present investigation? This seems to present something of a dilemma for semantic analysis. In developing an empirically based account of subtle differences in meaning that can explain the differing uses of these ‘words for love’, these meanings have been spelt out in terms of more basic terms like ‘want’, ‘feel’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ as seen in the components mentioned
above. But if the words for ‘want’, ‘feel’ and so on in each language also
display subtle and not so subtle differences in use, how can they be
regarded as basic?

On the one hand, if it is possible to pinpoint the differences between
sayang, arofa, mukuringanyi and love in explicitly stated components of
meaning, shouldn’t it be possible, and perhaps quite illuminating, to
identify and state the subtle differences of meaning between vouloir and
volere? Perhaps this would reveal something important about Italian
cultural attitudes to love and desire, that allows volere to be used in a
context where vouloir is not used in French. Moreover, while muku-
inganyi is sometimes used in contexts where it can be translated as love
in English, in other contexts it is better translated as want. If one were to
equate mukuringanyi with either of these English words, wouldn’t this
obscure an important conceptual link between these two aspects of muku-
inganyi in Yankunytjatjara culture? Shouldn’t these facts be reflected in
components in the definitions of volere, vouloir, mukuringanyi and
want, just as the differences between sayang, a.ofa, mukuringanyi and
love are reflected in appropriate components of their definitions?

But on the other hand, ‘want’ is apparently needed as a basic
element to be included within the components of meaning of sayang,
mukuringanyi and love mentioned above, as well as in the definitions of
words and constructions in many other languages. This ‘want’ as used in
definitions is meant, in the subset of NSM terms drawn from English, to
signify the indivisible semantic prime WANT. But if most or even some of
the ‘words for want’ in natural languages have different patterns of use,
and if these differences in use reflect identifiable differences in meaning,
then aren’t we always using semantically complex words, whether drawn
from English or any other natural language, to represent this supposedly
basic WANT? And doesn’t this preclude any equivalence of definitions
across languages, and vitiate the idea of a universal, basic meaning
element like the hypothesised WANT?

The solution to this apparent conundrum may lie in the second of
the abovementioned approaches to the problem of identifying elements of
meaning that may be shared among the non-coextensive desiderative
expressions of various languages. This approach, developed from
Bogusławski’s proposals for distinguishing the semantic content of a full
expression from ‘matrices of distinctive features of meaning’ of the
individual morphs contained in it, involves an examination of more than
just individual elements of meaning, broadening the scope of inquiry to encompass the possibility of matching patterns or combinations of meanings across languages. This means looking not for desiderative expressions that are coextensive in meaning with each other or with the element WANT as described here, but instead for expressions that involve the interaction of a desiderative element with certain other elements, in the same way as WANT has been described as interacting with other elements referred to above as the Principal and the Objective.

This approach would equate vouloir with volere and with want, in a set of specifically identified combinations, such as je veux aller, Io voglio andare, and I want to go. Each of these is a language-specific realisation of a combination of three elements that can be represented by NSM primes: a Principal, in this case I, the predication WANT, and the Objective, in this case ‘go’, which is further decomposable into a set of semantic primes including DO and PLACE (to ‘go’ is essentially to do something, because of which one can be in another place after this time). Each of these equivalent propositions contains elements corresponding to I (je, io, l), to WANT (veux, voglio, and want), and to ‘go’ (aller, andare, and go). The assertion is, then, that these three statements are semantically equivalent, that is, that they express exactly the same thing. The fact that the distribution of vouloir, volere and want in other contexts varies somewhat is not relevant to their semantic equivalence in this specific combination of meanings.

Most people would have little difficulty with the idea that these three statements in closely related European languages mean exactly the same thing. But it is worth pointing out some of the differences between them, and their implications for the question of semantic equivalence. First, the matter of differences in distribution of vouloir, volere and want in other contexts cannot be dismissed as trivial. It is important to consider, for example, the fact that the English want is sometimes used in contexts where vouloir would not be used in French, but rather il faut ‘it is necessary’. As discussed in 2.5 above, it can be established on formal criteria that want in English has more than one meaning: it corresponds to WANT in the context I want to go, but in certain other grammatical environments it corresponds not to the semantically indivisible WANT, but to a different, specifiable meaning.

When semantic equivalence is posited across languages, any variations in scope of the proposed equivalents needs to be investigated in
similar detail, on a case-by-case basis. Such variations, however minor, cannot be dismissed, nor is there any blanket solution to the analysis of semantic content of individual lexemes. Other variations in use of these three words should be examined in like manner, for example the use of *volere* in *ti voglio bene*, which does not correspond to *vouloir* or *want*; and the use of *want* with sexual connotations, as discussed in 3.2 above. But variations in the range of use of lexemes is not in itself an obstacle to their functioning as semantic equivalents in specific contexts like the one under consideration here: the context 'I want to go', or more broadly, 'I want to do something'.

There are three other ways in which *Je veux aller*, *Io voglio andare* and *I want to go* may be regarded as less than perfect equivalents. These are the differing verbal inflections for person/number and tense, the grammatical possibility of omitting the first person pronoun (pro-drop) in Italian but not English or French, and the question to what extent *to go* in English can really be considered equivalent to the infinitive forms *andare* and *aller*. Each of these matters is related to important issues in assessing semantic equivalence across languages.

While each of the proposed equivalents has an overt first person pronoun corresponding to *I*, this and other information is also present in the inflection on the verb that corresponds to WANT. Does this pose any obstacle to regarding *veux*, *voglio* and *want* [+zero inflection] as equivalent to each other and to the semantic prime WANT, which carries no such extra information?

No, this is not an obstacle, because the additional information carried by the verb form can be shown to be semantically redundant, while grammatically obligatory. That is, the person and number information included in the verb form (first person singular) simply follows from and agrees with the meaning of the semantic prime *I*, represented by *je*, *io*, and *I* respectively. This person/number agreement is required by the grammar of some languages, while in many others it is not required (as in Arrernte *Ayenge ahentyeneme ihetyeke* 'I want to go', where the verb *ahentyeneme* 'want' is inflected for tense but not for person or number, while in Thai *Chán yàak pay* 'I want to go' the verb *yàak* 'want' is completely uninflected, carrying no content additional to 'want'. Like Malay *mau* discussed below, *yàak* may be interpreted as referring to times other than the present, depending on context, but the verb itself carries no temporal marking.) This is a very simple illustration of the way the form in which a semantic
prime is expressed may be modified by language-specific grammatical requirements.

In Italian it is normal to omit the pronoun in this grammatical context, since the same information is clear from the verb form. It is more usual to say *Voglio andare* than *Io voglio andare*; indeed, the latter could be considered more complex semantically, in instances where the non-obligatory pronoun is used to add some emphatic or contrastive meaning. However, in formal NSM representation each element of meaning should be represented explicitly, I by *io* and WANT by *voglio*. The person/number information carried by the form *voglio* is obligatory but redundant as explained above, and therefore no additional semantic or pragmatic inference should be attached to the presence of *io* in the Italian equivalent of I WANT and corresponding propositions in other languages (*je veux, I want*, etc.)

In the NSM drawn from Italian, then, the pronoun is no longer non-obligatory, as it is in everyday Italian. This is not an arbitrary discarding of the pro-drop characteristic of Italian grammar, but a recognition of the fact that the NSM representation *io voglio* (= I WANT) is a semantic representation, and as such it should reflect the fact that the first person is semantically present in the everyday utterance *voglio andare*. The form *voglio*, and each of the other forms in the conjugation of *volere*, should be regarded as contextually conditioned variants of the same semantic element, WANT; these variants are governed by language-specific grammatical rules. The rules that allow pro-drop in everyday Italian but disallow it in French and English are semantically efficacious, in that they operate to preserve meaning. The English verb paradigm distinguishes only the third person singular *wants* from the form *want*, so there is not enough information available on the verb to allow *I* to be dropped; and in French, although *veux* is distinguishably first person singular in the written form, in contemporary spoken French it is homophonous with other forms, rendering the pronoun indispensable to convey this meaning.

Each of these verb forms, *voglio*, *veux* and *want*, is a present tense verb form, and this too poses an issue in assessing the semantic equivalence of such expressions across languages with different systems of tense marking. For example, Thai and Malay, along with many other languages, do not require any overt morphosyntactic or lexical marker of tense in a clause. Hence *Chân yàak pay* in Thai and *Aku mau pergi* in
Malay are equivalent in meaning to I want to go or Je veux aller, but want and veux are more complex in meaning than yâak or mau by virtue of the tense information as well as the person/number information they contain.

As we have seen, the person/number information contained in a form like veux can be deemed redundant because of the presence of the meaning element I in combination with WANT, but the tense information cannot be handled in quite the same way. The reference to present time contained in the form veux can of course be made explicit in the NSM representation via the basic elements 'at this time' or 'now': Je veux aller means 'I want to go at this (present) time'. But where the element I is represented by je in addition to the verb form, the elements 'at this time' or 'now' are not represented anywhere else than in the verb. Does this mean that yâak and mau can be deemed equivalent to each other and to the semantic prime WANT, but not to veux? In languages where there are no verb forms that are unmarked for tense, are there no 'pure' equivalents of yâak, mau or WANT, which carry no such tense information?

In languages without obligatory tense marking, information about time can be made explicit when necessary; for example in Malay one can say Aku mau pergi sekarang 'I want to go now' or Sekarang, aku mau pergi 'Now, I want to go'. In the former, sekarang 'now' may be taken as applying only to pergi 'go' (e.g. as in 'I want to go now rather than later'), but when sekarang introduces the clause, it has scope over the entire clause, and thus locates mau 'want' in the present time. Of course, present time can also be made explicit in this way in French: Maintenant, je veux aller 'Now, I want to go'. The difference is that in Malay the use of a temporal term like sekarang 'now' is the only way of introducing explicit reference to present time in the clause. In the absence of any specific time term it would normally be assumed that aku mau pergi refers to present time, but this is an inference that is not based on any information specifically mentioned in the clause. In French, on the other hand, je veux aller is specifically marked for present tense even without maintenant 'now'.

A parallel can now be seen between this situation and the one discussed above, where voglio andare 'I want to go' in Italian contains a reference to first person even without the pronoun io 'I'. In everyday speech, the information obligatorily included in the verb form need not be duplicated by adding io to voglio, or maintenant to veux. But in a
semantic representation every element of meaning must be specified. Therefore in a verb form like veux, the meaning ‘now’ (or any other temporal element) should be seen as separate and separable from the meaning ‘want’. In a semantic representation, that is in the NSM drawn from French, the correct verb form is governed by language-specific grammatical rules, while the semantic content must be made explicit. Hence the meaning ‘I + want + present time’ should formally be represented (in NSM semantic formulae) as maintenant, je veux, not just je veux; and conversely je veux by itself contains the elements ‘I’ and ‘want’, but the tense of the verb should be regarded as a contextually conditioned variant.

Semantically complex verb forms, then, are determined by language-specific grammatical rules, but these in turn are conditioned by the semantic environment. If elements of meaning like ‘I’ or ‘now’ or ‘before now’ are present in the semantic context, then the grammatical rules provide the appropriate variant of the verb: first person, present or past tense. This process is independent of the semantic content of the verb itself — whether we are talking about ‘want’ or any other verb. Therefore, the semantic content of veux, voglio, and want in je veux aller, lo voglio andare, and I want to go can indeed be seen as equivalent to the semantic content of the uninflected yàak and mau in Chân yàak pay and Aku mau pergi. The language-specific rules that govern verbal inflections do not prevent us from identifying a shared and possibly universal element of meaning, namely WANT.

The last of the questions raised above about the equivalence of Je veux aller, lo voglio andare and I want to go was the matter of the complement type. In traditional approaches to English grammar, to go has often been viewed as an infinitive verb form precisely equivalent to aller or andare. But if these were fully equivalent, then can should also take the to infinitive: compare Je veux aller, I want to go with Je peux aller, I can (*to) go. So, do veux aller and want to go correspond exactly in meaning, or does the to in English convey something that is more complex semantically than just aller or go?

The meanings of various types of complement structures associated with desiderative expressions have been explored at some length in earlier chapters, as well as in the extensive literature on the semantics and grammar of complementation. Our present focus is on only one combination of meanings, the ‘I want to go’ frame, so it is not strictly
relevant here that the infinitive complement of *veux* is replaced by the subjunctive in another context (e.g. *je veux qu'elle y aille* 'I want that she there go-sjV') where the English verb form to go is unchanged (*I want her to go there*).

Although the English *to* is indeed semantically complex, both in its role as a complementiser and in its directional use, the principle of equivalent combinations of meaning applies in this case just as in the case of the semantically complex verb forms discussed above. In the context *I want to go*, *to* is just as obligatory and just as semantically redundant as the person/number and tense inflections of *veux* and *voglio*. This is so because the *to* complement is the only possible complement type for *want* in this context: there is no semantic contrast in English between *want to go* and some other complement of *want* (such as *I want go* or *I want that I go*).

The reason why the complementiser *to* is obligatory with *want* is certainly to do with the complex semantics of *to* and its interaction with the meaning of *want*. It has been demonstrated by Wierzbicka that wanting is a key element in the meaning of *to*, and her analysis is compatible with many other linguists’ observations on the behaviour of *to* complements. In the context *I want to go*, the presence of *to* is in effect dictated by the presence of the desiderative element WANT. *To* adds nothing to the meaning of *want*, but is needed as a formal means of connection between *want* and *go* because of the language-specific syntactic properties of *want*. *Want* in English is formally a transitive verb in the sense of taking an NP object, though it is not as prototypically transitive (in the sense of denoting an effect produced intentionally by an agent upon the object) as *kick* or *break*. To replace the syntactically favoured NP object with a verbal complement requires a complementiser whose meaning does not clash with the meaning of the verb itself. The appropriate complementiser in English is *to* because its meaning is fully consistent with the meaning of the verb *want*.

Indeed, the meaning of *want to V* in English is so basic a combination that there is no way of expressing this meaning in any simpler terms, except to divide this proposition into two semantic segments: WANT (with its Principal and Objective), and the proposition that constitutes the content of the Objective. This means that *I want to go* can be expressed as two simple propositions linked in a particular relationship, which can be represented as 'I want this: I will go'. The
implications of this semantic structure, and issues surrounding the combinations ‘want this’ and ‘will go’, are discussed in 6.4 below.

It is important to recognise that the proposals advanced here about the semantic redundancy of obligatory grammatical elements are in no way intended to suggest that such elements are semantically empty or arbitrary, or even that they are semantically ‘bleached’ in a particular syntactic context. In the cases discussed above, the contextually conditioned person/number variations of vouloir and volere are redundant in that they duplicate the semantic information contained in the pronoun (je, io, I); hence each of these verb forms is semantically equivalent to WANT in the context under consideration. But this is not the same as saying that the person/number inflections of veux or voglio are meaningless, or that their semantic content is neutralised in the environment of the first person pronoun. Each inflection still carries its own meaning, but is semantically non-contributory when this meaning is already present in the semantic content of the full construction.

It is precisely because the form voglio is fully consistent with the meaning of io voglio, that this combination of meanings can be equated exactly with I WANT and its equivalents in other languages, regardless of differences between language-specific inflectional systems. There is nothing in the meaning of the form voglio that either adds anything to or clashes with the meaning of the combination io voglio, or interferes semantically with its equivalence to the same combination of meanings in other languages: je veux, I want, aku mau and so on. Moreover, it is this same consistency of meaning that underlies and semantically licenses the language-specific grammatical option in Italian of dropping the first person pronoun.

The same applies to systems of verbal tense marking. The present tense verb form in I want to go, or the past tense form in I wanted to go, must be grammatically consistent with the temporal information in the semantic context. This can be demonstrated by making the temporal information explicit: Now, I want (*wanted) to go; At some time before now I wanted (*want) to go. The tense inflection is not semantically reduced or neutralised in these environments, it is just consistent with its environment, and if it were not, it would violate the grammatical rules specific to this language.

So it is with the complementiser to: its meaning is not neutralised or subsumed by the presence of want in want to go, but fully consistent
with it. To neither adds anything more, nor does it introduce any element of meaning that contrasts with the meaning of want or with any other complement construction that can occur with want. In the context of want, the complementiser to is thus semantically non-contributory.

An interesting piece of evidence in support of this view is the way in which many English speakers can imagine how the meaning of a construction like *I want that I go (if it were acceptable in English) would differ from the meaning of I want to go. The effect of the complementiser that would be to introduce an element of uncertainty, thus adding something that contrasts with the meaning of want: *I want that I go sounds as if I want to go but I don’t know if it will happen. No such contrast is introduced by the complementiser to in I want to go. Of course, the idea of such a contrast in meaning may arise by analogy with verbs like hope, which can take either to or that complements. I hope to go sounds more confident than I hope that I (can) go; indeed the latter sounds better with can, because of the uncertainty of outcome conveyed by the that complement.

This effect arises because the central meaning of that has to do with knowing (or with what has been called factivity); the combination hope that conveys that one can’t know if the projected outcome will occur. The meaning of hope includes both wanting, and not knowing if the outcome will happen, and this is why either that or to can be consistent with the meaning of hope. Hope to (e.g. I hope to go) focusses more on the wanting aspect, while hope that (e.g. I hope that I can go, I hope that she goes) focusses more on the unknowability of the outcome. When I want to do something myself, I can be fairly confident about the outcome, that I will do it if I can; this explains why I hope to go and I hope that I can go both sound better than I hope that I go. The degree of uncertainty about what I myself will do implied by hope that would arise only if there is some doubt about whether I can do it. On the other hand, other people’s actions are more unpredictable, so that but not to is consistent with the unknowability of the outcome in I hope that she goes; *I hope her to go is ungrammatical (in contrast to I expect her to go or I want her to go).

These properties of English complementisers illustrate one more important point to be noted when assessing the equivalence across languages of combinations of meaning like Je veux aller, I want to go and so on. This is the fact that, while we may be able to find equivalent combinations of meaning across languages, the grammatical systems that
determine the structural details of these combinations are language-
specific. In considering whether complement structures like *want to go*
and *veux aller* are equivalent in meaning, we have to take into account
not just the individual items *to go* and *aller*, but also how they fit into the
grammatical systems of complementation in English and French
respectively.

Before we can say whether *to go* means the same as *aller*, we have to
know what *to go* means; and an adequate analysis of the meaning of *to go*
can only be arrived at through a detailed investigation of the system of
complementation specific to English, including the meanings of other
complementisers like *that*, and what is the place of the *to go* complement
within this system as a whole. The same applies to *aller*: to understand its
meaning, it is necessary to investigate how it fits into the language-specific
grammatical system of complementation in French, including the
meaning of other complement types such as the subjunctive (as in *Je veux
qu'elle y aille* 'I want her to go-SJV there')..

This is a very tall order, and it may make the task of assessing the
equivalence of combinations of meaning across languages seem
impossibly huge, or far too complex to be achievable. Similar objections
could be raised in most areas of linguistic research, and indeed this may be
seen as one of the occupational hazards of linguistics; for languages are
systems in which everything is connected to everything else. Linguists
have to define the scope of their current analytical enterprise, but try at the
same time not to exclude any relevant data on aspects of language that
may lie outside the immediate focus.

A mitigating factor in the present instance is that what we have
been considering here is how the structure of desiderative expressions is
influenced by the major grammatical systems of each language: systems of
verbal inflection, tense marking, and complementation. Each of these
systems involves a set of grammatical morphemes and grammatical rules
that is language-specific, and must of course be analysed as part of the
grammatical description of each language, but there are not very many
major grammatical systems of this kind in each language, and good
linguistic descriptions of many of the world’s languages are already
available.

As a final illustration of the language-specific effects of grammatical
systems on the structure of desiderative expressions, let us return to the
matter of tense marking in expressions involving the same combination
of meanings as I want to go or Je veux aller. The verb ahentyeneme in Arrernte Ayenge ahentyeneme lhetyeke 'I want to go' was mentioned earlier in this section as an example where the verb is inflected for tense but not person/number. Systems of tense marking are not isomorphic across languages, and the tense suffix -me in Arrernte does not correspond precisely to the present tense of English want or French veux. In the tense system of Arrernte, -me is best categorised as 'non-past progressive', and as such it corresponds just as often to present progressive forms with -ing as it does to plain present tense forms in English.

Proceeding on the same principles as the foregoing discussion, this is no obstacle to regarding Ayenge ahentyeneme lhetyeke as expressing the same meaning as I want to go; the English present tense of want and the Arrernte non-past progressive of ahentyeneme are both fully consistent with the same semantic context of present time ('at this time'/ 'now') and contribute no new or contrasting elements of meaning.

However, if the English present continuous form were substituted (?I am wanting to go) this would not only be odd grammatically (though acceptable in some dialects, such as Indian English), but it would not mean the same thing as I want to go, because the -ing form in this context introduces an additional element of aspectual meaning: it conveys not only that what is denoted by the verb happens in the present time, but also that it continues for some time. Thus, in English, there is at least a potential contrast in meaning between the present tense want and the present continuous wanting; and it is the -ing form that adds an element of meaning not present in the simpler want form.

But in Arrernte there is no such contrast between the tense marker -me and any semantically simpler tense form consistent with a present time context. Ahentyeneme is the only available tense-marked form of 'want' in Arrernte that would be compatible with present time. Therefore, in the combination of meanings under consideration here, ahentyeneme should be regarded as equivalent to want, not wanting; that is, Ayenge ahentyeneme lhetyeke should be regarded as fully equivalent in meaning to I want to go, Je veux aller and so on.

Note, too, that by the language-specific rules of complementation in Arrernte, the complement lhetyeke 'to go' takes an obligatory purposive inflection, -tyeke. The meaning of this inflection in Arrernte is to do with purpose or intention, essentially 'I want this; I think: I will do something because of this'. Because wanting is central to the meaning of -tyeke, this
affix is fully consistent with the meaning of *ahentyeneme* ‘want’. The other elements involved in *-tyeke* (I think: I will do something because of this) do not clash in any way with the meaning of *ahentyeneme*; and because *-tyeke* is obligatory in this construction, it does not contribute any contrastive meaning. Hence this language-specific complement type poses no barrier to assigning semantic equivalence to *Ayenge ahentyeneme lhetyeke*, *I want to go* and the same combinations of meaning in other languages.

The tense marking system of Arrernte poses one more issue, however. As pointed out in 2.4 above, the Arrernte desiderative term *ahentye* ‘want’ can be inflected for tense by the addition of the verbal elements *-ne-* or *-irre-* plus a tense marker, as in *ahentye-ne-me* ‘want’, but this is not obligatory. Without these verbal elements, *ahentye* ‘want’ functions grammatically as a nominal, but still takes a purposive complement. Arrernte nominals are not inflected for tense, so the meaning combination ‘I want to go’ can be expressed without any tense marking by the construction *Ayenge ahentye lhetyeke*. Does this mean that the best equivalent for *I want to go* or *Je veux aller* is not the tensed clause *Ayenge ahentyeneme lhetyeke* but the tenseless *Ayenge ahentye lhetyeke*? Like the tenseless *yàak* and *mau* in Thai and Malay, this tenseless *ahentye* ‘want’ is fully consistent with the temporal information in its semantic context, which can be made explicit (e.g. *Lyete, ayenge ahentye lhetyeke* ‘Now, I want to go’).

It would seem obvious that *Ayenge ahentye lhetyeke* is the best equivalent for *I want to go*, and that the verbal elements and tense inflection must add elements of meaning that would create a semantic contrast between this construction and the more morphologically complex *Ayenge ahentyeneme / ahentyirrreme lhetyeke*. But taking at face value what seems obvious is no substitute for language-specific semantic analysis. No semantic contrast has yet been found between these three variants of ‘I want to go’ in Arrernte. Moreover, no way has yet been found to predict which of the three forms *ahentye, ahentyeneme* or *ahentyirrreme* will be used, other than the need for tense marking if the temporal information is not otherwise clear from the context.

Of course, differences in linguistic form usually signal differences in meaning. Yet, as illustrated throughout the present discussion, this principle does not operate in a fully transparent way so as to bind each form to each meaning in a set of biunique relationships. There is some
evidence in Arrernte to support the view that, unusual though such a situation is, these three constructions could indeed be fully synonymous.

First, as described in 2.4, the semantic content of -ne- as an optional copula, meaning ‘be somewhere’, and -irre- meaning ‘happen’, can be fully consistent with the meaning of ahentye ‘want’. Every instance of ahentye ‘want’ refers to some Principal, and this entity exists somewhere, so -ne- does not necessarily add anything that is not already inherent in the meaning of ahentye. Neither does -irre-, because every instance of wanting involves something (namely, the experience of wanting) happening in or to the Principal. This is not to say that the elements ‘be somewhere’ or ‘happen’ are components of the meaning of ahentye, but just that they are fully consistent with its meaning, and hence they may be regarded as semantically transparent in this particular context; this and other kinds of noncompositional relationships are discussed in 6.4 below.

Second, the only discernible motivation for Arrernte speakers’ using a tense marked form (ahentyene/me/ahentyirreme) instead of just ahentye is in contexts where this is needed to clarify what time is meant; for example, in reference to past rather than present wanting: Ayenge ahentyeneke lyetyeke ‘I wanted (-ke ‘PAST’) to go’. This would suggest that the Arrernte tense marked forms could be viewed as contextually conditioned variants, much like the tense marked forms of vouloir, volere or want. As in the other cases of tense marked verb forms, the Arrernte tense markers are applied by grammatical rules and must agree with the time frame of the semantic context; the elements -ne-/irre- serve the derivational function that allows the originally nominal ahentye ‘want’ to take verbal tense marking, and the semantic content contributed by these derivational elements adds nothing new or contrasting to the meaning of ahentye ‘want’. It may even be that ahentye ‘want’ is undergoing a process of change from being more nominal to being more verbal in character in Arrernte; we return to this question in 6.5.

Throughout the present section, the focus has been on only one combination of meanings, namely ‘I want to go’. The length and scope of this discussion gives a fair idea of the number and complexity of issues involved in assessing the semantic equivalence of language-specific versions of even a single fairly simple proposition. Nevertheless, certain principles have proved to be useful in finding a reasonable solution to each of the semantic puzzles addressed here. On the basis of these principles, it is possible to propose a set of criteria for assessing the
equivalence of desiderative expressions across languages, as an essential preliminary to identifying shared elements of meaning that may correspond to language universals.

As illustrated above, it is unrealistic to expect that expressions of similar or even identical meaning will match exactly, lexeme by lexeme and morpheme by morpheme, even in closely related languages. Therefore the first criterion must be that of expressive equivalence: looking not for perfectly isomorphic, calque-like structures, but for constructions that have the power to express the same combination of meanings (for example, the combination 'I want to go').

Next, each lexical and grammatical element within these constructions is examined not only as to its function in the particular construction, but also with regard to its language-specific lexical and grammatical properties. This must be done with reference to a second criterion, that of contextual equivalence: to be deemed equivalent, words or morphemes in different languages do not have to have the same range of functions and meanings, but they must express the same thing in the particular context under consideration.

Language-specific variations in semantic scope and range of use are to be expected, and each case needs to be examined to determine whether or not it produces any identifiable semantic difference in the specified context. This requires the application of a third criterion, that any meaning differences must be specifiable: if two items seem to be similar but not identical in meaning, the difference must be stated explicitly. This of course follows from the principle, fundamental to NSM theory, that semantic content consists of discrete and determinate elements of meaning. Its application as demonstrated here means that any way in which a word or morpheme differs in function or use from its near equivalent in another language is investigated to see if a semantic explanation for the difference can be found; an explanation that can be stated clearly, and justified on the basis of empirical evidence from the language.

A fourth criterion is that only specifiable differences in elements of meaning constitute a barrier to semantic equivalence; other kinds of difference are formally irrelevant in this regard. Thus if two words are equivalent in a particular combination of meanings like 'I want to go', but one or both of these words has other meanings leading to differences in
use in other contexts, they are still regarded as equivalent in the context under consideration.

A fifth criterion is that of semantic consistency or contrastiveness: elements of meaning that are obligatory, redundant or non-contrastive have no effect on semantic equivalence. Language-specific grammatical rules may attach elements such as tense or aspectual markers, complementisers or derivational affixes to an expression in one language that have no corresponding elements in an otherwise equivalent expression in another language. These elements do have meanings of their own and are not semantically neutral, but so long as these meanings are consistent with the meaning of the expression as a whole, their effect on crosslinguistic semantic equivalence is nil.

The final criterion is that the semantic content of each element in a construction, and hence whether it is consistent or contrastive with the other elements, has to be established on a language-specific basis. An element that is contrastive in one language may not be contrastive in another, as the element of continuous aspect in English wanting contrasts with plain want, but a similar aspectual element in Arrernte ahentyeneme does not contrast in the same way with plain ahentye. The semantic content of grammatical elements like these, and the sets of contrasts in which they participate, can only be identified by studying them in relation to other members of the same grammatical system (in this case, the tense/aspectual system) in the language of which they are a part.

6.3 Problems with WANT as a crosslinguistic universal

The previous sections of this chapter have sought to lay a foundation for addressing the question of the existence of a universal element of desiderative meaning across languages, by sketching out what would be the nature of such a universal if it exists, and by establishing a set of criteria for the crosslinguistic comparison of desiderative expressions to see what elements of meaning they may have in common. The criteria proposed above for assessing the semantic equivalence of combinations of meanings in different languages should be applicable to many more semantic combinations than just the desiderative expressions, but these remain the focus of the present study; and they provide many
opportunities for testing and refining the procedures for semantic analysis that are proposed here.

These principles and procedures have already proved useful in indicating some plausible solutions to a series of fairly minor problems in assessing the semantic equivalence of various language-specific versions of the combination of meanings 'I want to go'. However, this combination of meanings represents only one of the many kinds of desiderative construction found across languages, and it corresponds to only one type among the range of desiderative situations that this study seeks to encompass.

This is quite a simple type of desiderative situation, in that the Principal, who wants the Objective, is also the performer of the projected action that constitutes the Objective (that is, going). The action of going is one that a person can usually carry out, if this person wants to; there are very few potential complicating factors that may intervene between the Principal's desire for and actual performance of the Objective. That is by no means the case in other types of desiderative situation, where the prospects for realisation of the Objective may depend on someone or something quite outside the Principal's control (as, to give just one example, in the case of an infant wanting to be fed).

This section and the next deal with a number of these other types of desiderative constructions, several of which pose difficulties for the identification of any universal element of desiderative meaning, because the language-specific structures by which they are represented seem to have little or nothing in common. In these cases, too, a careful assessment is necessary of the extent of semantic correspondence, and the exact nature of the crosslinguistic differences. The methods demonstrated above prove useful again in helping to distinguish between what is clearly language-specific and what may be universal.

A wide range of kinds of desiderative expressions found in different languages has been examined in this study. It has explored a variety of syntactic structures used to express meanings similar or equivalent to the concept of WANT outlined above, and has tried to take into consideration any other types of construction associated with desiderative situations, including imperatives, optatives, hortatives and so on. The purpose of this was to cast the net widely enough to cover desiderative expressions in all languages, and to avoid distortion that would result from limiting the discussion to equivalents of the desiderative expressions of a particular
language. It is now desirable to narrow the focus somewhat, but to do so on a basis that has the potential to hold true for all languages, whatever their individual characteristics.

Consider for a moment, by way of comparison, the two widely recognised crosslinguistic categories of imperatives and causatives. Both categories are represented by morphological devices in some languages, and in some languages by distinctive syntactic constructions. Some treatments of causative expressions aim to encompass all lexemes with any element of causation in their meaning, and to explain or predict from this aspects of their syntactic behaviour. Although the grammatical properties of causatives and imperatives are highly salient for linguists, the categories themselves are recognised on primarily semantic grounds, and both are linked in some way with desiderative elements of meaning.

Imperatives, which seem to exist in all languages, are constructions which express that the speaker wants the addressee to do something. Causatives are rather more complex, expressing a relation between two elements such that something happens because of something else; many but not all of them express that someone does something because this person wants something to happen. While these generalised sketches of meaning are formulated in terms that reflect NSM theory, the same general ideas of what constitutes an imperative or a causative are found throughout the literature; for these semantic notions are the basis on which linguists classify a particular construction in a particular language as an imperative or a causative.

The point of these not particularly novel observations is this: there is nothing else, no single morphological, syntactic or lexical property that can be taken as definitive of all imperatives or all causatives in all languages. To establish the presence of a semantic universal, it is necessary to be able to test empirically whether this semantic element is represented by some specifiable linguistic form in each language. Imperative forms exist in most, perhaps all, languages; however, these forms represent not a single universal meaning, but language-specific combinations of meanings. They include the combination 'I say: I want you to do this' by which they are classified as imperatives, but they may include other language-specific elements, as shown in the following section. Causatives in most languages consist of a range of lexical and grammatical forms representing a variety of combinations of meanings. It may be possible to identify a single universal element (such as NSM
6.3 *Problems with WANT as universal*

BECAUSE underlying most or all of them, but this involves a more detailed analytical enterprise than just assigning them to the general category of causatives.

To test empirically for the presence of a semantic universal of desiderative meaning, then, requires a more fine-grained analysis of the various constructions that have been recognised as generally desiderative in character. This analysis should be aimed at identifying a specific element that is both shared by all desiderative expressions, and represented in each language by some specifiable linguistic form. This may seem contradictory, if desiderative expressions take a variety of linguistic forms; but if for each language there is one specifiable form in terms of which the others can be defined, then it can be concluded that this form represents the semantic universal. If it proves impossible to identify such a form, this is of course strong evidence against the existence of a semantic universal.

Theoretically, a linguistic form representing a semantic universal could be a lexical form or a grammatical structure. For example, the proposed semantic universal PART (something being composed of parts) is perhaps most precisely represented in Arrernte not by any word or morpheme, but by a part-whole construction which places the part and the whole in a unique grammatical relationship. This construction is marked only by its distinctive syntax, not by any lexical form. But this raises the question of language-internal definition: is it possible to express, in Arrernte, what this construction means? If this construction represents a true semantic prime, an indivisible and indefinable element of meaning, then perhaps it would not be possible to say what it means other than via its semantic equivalent in some other language.

Nonetheless, while there is no nominal in Arrernte equivalent to the English noun *part* (as in *P is a part of W*), the same relationship (*W P* in the part-whole construction) can be expressed via the possessive and proprietive markers (*W P-kerpe, P W-kenhe*); so, the semantic prime PART can be considered to be represented in Arrernte by the morphemes *-kerpe* and *-kenhe* as well as by the grammatical part-whole construction. The matter remains a focus of ongoing research in NSM semantics, but empirical investigation has not yet revealed any case in which a grammatical structure expresses a meaning that is otherwise indefinable in the same language. The currently available evidence thus favours Wierzbicka's 'strong lexicalisation hypothesis', that every semantic prime
is represented by some lexical material (word or morpheme) in each language.

The same question arose in the present study, particularly in relation to imperatives, which are much more readily identifiable across languages than desiderative constructions are. Many languages have 'bare' imperative forms with no specific morphological marker, but couldn't the construction itself be regarded as representing a universal meaning? This is a plausible hypothesis on both semantic and structural grounds. Telling another person to do something may be a universal function of human speech; it makes sense that this function would find expression in a corresponding linguistic structure in each language. It could be argued that other desiderative expressions may be analysable in terms of an internal imperative, as in an earlier proposal by Goddard that 'I want to go' might be defined via 'something in me says: "Go!"'.

There are, however, two important pieces of evidence against this proposal. One is that when the use of imperatives is investigated in individual languages, it becomes apparent that some imperative forms have complex meanings, including not just the general imperative meaning (saying one wants the addressee to do something) but in many cases, other language-specific illocutionary meanings (e.g. 'I think you will do it because I say this'). These meaning components are related to and to some extent regulated by cultural values, as discussed in 6.5 below. Telling someone to do something is a complex speech act, one of a set of speech acts within each language and culture. Although grammaticalisation of this general speech function may indeed be universal, imperative forms vary from language to language, and their language-specific content can only be determined by studying them in relation to the system of speech acts and illocutionary meanings in each language.

The other piece of evidence is that the empirical investigation undertaken in this study has not found any language in which the meaning of an imperative is indefinable, as it should be if it represented a semantic prime. In all languages examined here, an imperative form can be defined in terms of more basic elements, as a combination of meanings involving not only 'saying' in addition to 'wanting', but also, crucially, 'I' and 'you'. That is, no language was found in which it is impossible to express a combination of meanings equivalent to, for example, '(I say:) I want you to go', where each of these elements of meaning (I, you, say,
want, go) is represented by a specifiable linguistic form, a word or a grammatical morpheme.

This is an important finding, providing further support for the strong lexicalisation hypothesis in NSM theory. Its main implication for the present study is that, if there is a universal of desiderative meaning to be found across languages, this universal should be represented in each language by some lexical material, in the form of words or morphological markers.

A further implication is that here is another specific combination of meanings likely to be found in most or all languages: the combination 'I want you to do something (e.g. go)'. In this combination, the Principal (I) and the predication (WANT) are the same as in the combination 'I want to go', but the Objective differs: it involves not only a projected outcome ('go') but a nominated performer of that outcome, in this case YOU. This element will be referred to as the Performer. In 'I want to go' there is no Performer element because the Objective is to be performed by the Principal.

Both of these implications are of major methodological significance in a program of research aimed at finding and evaluating empirical evidence for semantic universals. Together, they point to a way of meeting the abovementioned need for a crosslinguistically valid delineation of the range of desiderative expression types to be compared, in attempting to identify shared or universal elements of desiderative meaning.

Evidence in favour of the strong lexicalisation hypothesis and the occurrence of certain combinations of desiderative meaning across languages suggests a process for investigation of desiderative expressions across languages in four phases. First, identifying a limited set of desiderative meaning combinations that may be found across languages (including the combinations 'I want to do something', 'I want you to do something', and a very few others). Second, determining empirically how these combinations are represented in a wide variety of languages. Third, comparing the relevant constructions across languages, on a defined set of criteria like those proposed above, to establish whether they are semantically equivalent. Fourth, comparing specifically the desiderative elements in semantically equivalent constructions, to determine whether these elements can be held to represent the same meaning across languages, that is, a semantic universal WANT.
Returning now to the combination 'I want you to go', the matter of how this type of combination is represented in each language has been investigated empirically in several of the case studies in this work. Such constructions are identified first on the grounds of their power to express this meaning, without reference to any particular linguistic structure. The next step is to assess the degree of equivalence of the relevant constructions in different languages, on the same criteria that were used in assessing the equivalence of language-specific versions of the combination 'I want to go'.

It is this stage of analysis that raises further problems for identifying a universal WANT element. As well as issues similar to those discussed for the combination 'I want to go', the addition of a Performer to the scenario of Principal and Objective (in combinations like 'I want you to go') brings added complications, both semantic and grammatical. Pragmatically, the general effect of this is to shift the locus of control over the Objective away from the Principal, since the realisation of the Objective now depends on its enactment by the Performer.

But this is a gross overgeneralisation. There are situations where the realisation of the Objective may involve only the Principal but still not be under that person's control, as in wanting to sneeze or to fall asleep. And where a Performer is involved, the Principal may have a greater or lesser degree of control depending on the nature of the Objective (compare 'I want you to hear me' and 'I want you to believe me'), the animacy of the Performer, and the like. The semantic and grammatical systems of languages are complex enough to respond with great flexibility and sensitivity to finer distinctions of this kind, and they do so by a variety of language-specific means.

This is why, for example, explanations of infinitive versus subjunctive complements in French in terms of coreferentiality are not powerful enough to be fully predictive. The French complementation system is capable of representing subtler distinctions than simply whether the Objective is enacted by the Principal or by a separate Performer, as seen in example (46) in Chapter 3 (Je veux que je sois en mesure d'attaquer à l'aube 'I want to be-SJV able to attack at dawn'). Although the Objective is to be carried out by the Principal, not anyone else, the subjunctive construction type normally associated with a separate Performer provides an effective means of expressing a greater than usual degree of uncertainty about whether or not the Principal will be able to realise the Objective.
However, the capacity of the French complementation system to express fine gradations of meaning does not affect the semantic content of the simpler combination ‘I want you to go’, or stated in a more general form, ‘X wants Y to do V’. This follows from the principles explained above. The meaning combination ‘X wants Y to do V’ is expressed in French by the construction X veuq que Y V-\text{SJ}V (e.g. Je veux qu’elle y aille ‘I want her to go there’). An assessment of the equivalence of this construction with expressions of the same combination in other languages (e.g. English X wants Y to V, as in I want her to go there) recognises that in this particular construction type, the subjunctive complement is obligatory in French (as the to complement is in English). There is no choice between this and some other complement type here, in either French or English. Hence the complement type is non-contrastive; although French subjunctives and English to complements are distributed differently in other contexts by language-specific rules, in this context they are semantically equivalent.

So what about the availability of a contrastive choice in French between the infinitive and subjunctive complement types in contexts like that mentioned earlier (je veux V-\text{INF} vs. je veux que je V-\text{SJ}V)? Analysis of the language-specific rules of French complementation shows that the subjunctive can be used here to express a contrast between the normal combination je veux V-\text{INF} ‘I want to do V’, and the greater uncertainty of je veux que je V-\text{SJ}V meaning ‘I want to do V’ plus the additional element ‘I don’t say it will happen’.

This uncertainty element is always present in the subjunctive form, but it is only contrastive in some contexts. In the context X veuq que Y V-\text{SJ}V, the subjunctive does not lose its meaning ‘I don’t say it will happen’; rather, this meaning is fully consistent with a situation where one person wants someone else to do something, because one can’t really be sure that Y, the Performer, will do what X, the Principal, wants. Thus, the meaning of the subjunctive isn’t neutralised in this context, but its contrastive value or potential is inoperative, by virtue of the fact that only the subjunctive is grammatically possible in this construction.

The presence of a subjunctive complement in the French equivalent of the combination ‘X wants Y to do V’ is just one example of the way language-specific systems like complementation respond to each combination of meanings. This study has found a variety of other ways in which languages reflect the presence or absence of a Performer element in
desiderative constructions. In some languages it makes little or no
difference, as in the Arrernte \textit{X ahentye V-tyeke} / \textit{X ahentye Y V-tyeke},
Malay \textit{X mau V} / \textit{X mau Y V}, or English \textit{X wants to V} / \textit{X wants Y to V}.
In other languages it is reflected by a difference in the complementiser or
complement type, as in French \textit{X veut V-INF} / \textit{X veut que Y V-SJV}, or Thai
\textit{X yàak V} / \textit{X yàak háy Y V}.

Still other languages reflect the presence or absence of a Performer
by differences in the lexical expression of the desiderative meaning, as in
Japanese \textit{-tai} and \textit{hoshii}, or Samoan \textit{fia} and \textit{mana' o}. This kind of
situation, which has been termed allolexy, can be understood in terms of
the same principles of semantic equivalence as have been applied to the
other desiderative constructions discussed here. The expressive
equivalents of \textit{X wants to V} and \textit{X wants Y to V} in Japanese are \textit{X wa V-tai}
and \textit{X wa Y o V-te hoshii}, and \textit{-tai} and \textit{hoshii} in these constructions satisfy
the criteria for contextual equivalents of \textit{WANT} (though subject to some
person constraints discussed below). The language-specific properties of
these desiderative expressions are of course different from those of \textit{WANT}
terms in other languages, but close examination of these properties reveals
that they pose no obstacles to semantic equivalence with other basic
desiderative elements across languages.

In the case of Samoan \textit{fia} and \textit{mana' o}, the pattern of allolexical
distribution is again governed by language-specific rules. On the same
criteria for semantic equivalence, it can be established that \textit{mana' o} is
equivalent to \textit{WANT} in the context \textit{e mana' o X e V Y} 'X wants Y to do V',
while the combination 'X wants to do V' is expressed by either \textit{e fia V X} or
\textit{e mana' o X e V Y}. This distribution of allolexes is more complex than a
simple pattern of complementary distribution, in that both \textit{fia} and \textit{mana' o}
are found in the semantic environment 'X wants Y to do V'. Thus the
association of \textit{mana' o} and \textit{fia} with the presence or absence of a Performer
is not a biunique relationship. But the allolexical alternation between \textit{fia}
and \textit{mana' o} is governed by syntactic rules whereby each occurs in a distinct
construction type: \textit{fia} with a verbal complement and \textit{mana' o} with a full
clausal complement.

The notion of allolexy as a theoretical construct is so recent and so
powerful in its potential that it is best approached with some caution. Like
other kinds of contextual variation in language (such as allophony,
allomorphy), allolexical variation cannot be posited in an unconstrained
way. It will usually be accompanied by some evidence as to the contextual
conditioning, though some degree of free variation is also a feature of natural languages. The only way to avoid recognising something akin to allolology in semantic theory would seem to be the unpalatable, or at least unrealistic, alternative of allowing only biunique relationships between forms and meanings; or the equally unpalatable admission that some aspects of lexical and grammatical relations are genuinely indeterminate but that there is no means of predicting which variations in form do and do not correspond to different meanings.

The present discussion has included examples of each of the types of allolology thus far identified in NSM theory, and of the constraints that govern them. Lexical conditioning determines the selection of variants of Italian volere 'want', governed by language-specific rules of person/number agreement with the nominal denoting the Principal. Positional allolology is seen in Samoan, where fia 'want' occurs preverbally and mana'o 'want' elsewhere (and, as Goddard and Wierzbicka argue, in English where the grammatically conditioned pronominal form I rather than me occurs preverbally as in I want). Combinatorial allolology governs the alternation of hoshii and -tai 'want' in Japanese, where hoshii occurs in combination with a Principal and a Performer, while -tai is restricted to Principal-only contexts.

Thus allolology, like other kinds of largely contextually conditioned variation, is quite common and apparently natural in languages, and operates in a principled and rule-governed manner. Since allolexical variation is governed by the lexical and grammatical rules of each language, it is a major source of language-specific variations in the expression of desiderative meanings across languages. The rules predicting the occurrence of allolexical variants in each language can be identified and located within the grammatical system. This permits the assessment of semantic equivalents of the proposed universal WANT across languages with different patterns of allolexical distribution, in the same way as has been illustrated for languages with different patterns of distribution of complement types.

These differing patterns of allolexical distribution themselves provide some further support for the idea that there is some underlying universal of desiderative meaning. If many languages had one desiderative lexeme in the context 'X wants to do V', and a different one in the context 'X wants Y to do V', in perfectly complementary distribution, these might not be allolexes representing the same element of meaning,
but two different meanings. That is, one might be able to distinguish
'personal volition' (wanting to do something) and 'interpersonal desire'
(wanting someone else to do something) as two entirely different concepts
having nothing necessarily to do with each other.

But the empirical evidence shows that languages do not distinguish
between these meaning combinations in any such mutually exclusive,
watertight way. Natural languages display a great variety of patterns of
distribution of different allolexes, and of different construction types,
associated with combinations of desiderative meanings. Although this
situation requires a great deal of language-specific analysis of these
patterns, it is at least an indication of a single underlying theme with
language-specific variations, instead of two or more mutually exclusive
themes.

The observable diversity of allolexical distribution across languages
also foretells a serious analytical difficulty that would arise if personal and
interpersonal wanting were found to be separable semantic elements: the
many desiderative terms that encompass both of these (from English want
to Mandarin Chinese yào to Yankunytjatjara mukuringanyi) would all
have to be explained via polysemy, positing for each of these words at least
two meanings, one referring to personal volition and the other to
interpersonal desire. Polysemy on such a grand scale would be fairly hard
to see as plausible. It is not unusual for one language or a group of
languages to display a particular association of meanings, like the lexical
associations surveyed in Chapter 2; but it would be very difficult to sustain
a hypothesis that so many languages from different geographical and
cultural regions should combine the same two meanings.

This point may provide a useful perspective on the matter of
polysemy, which is the other major source of problems with the idea of a
semantic universal WANT. Many of the desiderative terms examined in
this study have proved to be highly polysemous. Although some general
tendencies in association of meanings can be observed across languages, as
discussed in 2.3 - 2.5 above, the semantic content of individual lexemes
(like the distribution of lexical variants) cannot be determined without
language-specific analysis. Such analysis may yield a number of different
results, as illustrated in earlier chapters of this work. One possibility is that
the apparently desiderative use of a lexeme may result from an element of
meaning not directly related to wanting, as in the case of the Kayardild -da
described in 4.2 above.
A more common situation illustrated in several examples here is that a language has several different lexemes and several different constructions used to express desiderative meanings, but that there is one of these (with or without rule-governed allolexes) in terms of which all the others can be defined. Such a lexeme would be a very plausible candidate for the equivalent in this language of the proposed universal WANT, particularly if it occurs in basic combinations such as 'I want to do this' and/or 'I want you to do this'.

However, in almost every such case, the lexeme in question occurs in at least one context where it obviously serves to express something other than the proposed universal desiderative meaning. This means one of two things: either this lexeme encodes something other than WANT; or it is polysemous, with more than one meaning, one of which may or may not encode WANT. Polysemy, like allolexy, cannot be posited without hard evidence supporting the proposed meaning distinctions. Considerable analytical effort is required to establish how many meanings there are, what is their composition, and what is the nature of their association with one another, before one is in a position to assess whether one of them can be identified as the equivalent to the proposed universal WANT and its exponents in other languages.

The widespread occurrence of this kind of polysemy among the desiderative expressions described above is enough to raise serious questions about whether a universal desiderative meaning can be found across languages. Much of the analysis in previous chapters is devoted to exploring this question in particular languages, and to developing reliable criteria for assessing polysemy in desiderative expressions. Polysemy among desideratives would indeed be a serious problem for identifying a universal WANT were it not for certain constraints on it that become apparent from the empirical evidence.

Polysemy is common and evidently natural in languages, and like other aspects of language systems, it too can be seen to operate in a principled and rule-governed way. It has been observed that the commonest elements in languages are those most likely to be polysemous; nowhere is this more apparent than among those basic elements that represent the proposed semantic primes. It is not only desiderative terms that are highly polysemous, but also words in many languages for 'know', 'think', 'say', 'do', 'can', 'because', and most of the other NSM primes. The result of this would be complete communicative chaos, if these polysemy
operated in an unconstrained way; any form could convey just about any meaning.

Fortunately for all humans, not just semanticists, the evidence is that the real situation is far from this. NSM research has demonstrated that, for every language, meanings can be identified and stated explicitly in a way that can be verified or falsified on the basis of empirical linguistic data. The studies of desiderative expressions offered above illustrate that, while it is unrealistic to seek unique form-meaning correspondences, meaning differences are usually, perhaps always, accompanied by some identifiable differences in linguistic form. Thus it is realistic to require that polysemy never be posited without some formal supporting evidence: if two different meanings are posited, then they must be associated with specifiable differences in syntactic or semantic contexts of occurrence.

Although the same set of principles and procedures can be applied to the problem of polysemy in each language, the results are highly language-specific, because the evidence for or against a particular desiderative o. other lexeme's having more than one meaning is drawn from the distinctive grammatical and lexical structures of the language in which it occurs. For example, the use of a desiderative expression in reference to an inanimate object in one language may be evidence for a second meaning, while in the grammatical system of another language it may have quite different implications, as shown in sections 2.5 and 3.4 above.

Polysemy too, then, contributes in important ways to language-specific variations in the expression of desiderative meanings in different languages. Because the number and content of meanings of a desiderative lexeme can be determined on the basis of specific evidence in each language, polysemy is not in itself an obstacle to the identification of semantic equivalents of a universal WANT.

Another language-specific factor affecting the perception of desideratives as equivalents of a universal WANT is the operation of semantic resonance effects. In the course of this study at least four different sources of semantic resonance have been observed; in each case a desiderative lexeme may acquire a certain 'feel' that is not reflected in any specific element of its semantic content, by virtue of its association with other elements in the linguistic system.

Wordclass resonance is a product of the association of a desiderative term with other members of its grammatical class, whether as a part of
speech (like the nominal and adjectival desideratives discussed in 3.1 above), or as a member of a subclass (like the Acehnese verbs discussed in the same section). While there appears to be a greater than chance tendency for the main desiderative terms in languages to be verbal in character, their wordclass membership is somewhat arbitrary. It may be influenced by historical, cultural, and other variable factors in the course of language change, as outlined later in this chapter.

This kind of resonance can arise not only by association with the more prototypical members of the particular wordclass, but also by the syntactic properties of the class, for example the 'indirect' feeling contributed to the Japanese hoshii 'want' by the fact that it can occur in a predicative construction where overt mention of the Principal is not obligatory (e.g. Kare ni hayaku ki-te hoshii '[I] want him to come soon'); or the 'direct' feeling of the English transitive I want her to go, where the Performer (her) is in the same position as a direct object of want would be in I want a banana.

Wordclass properties can thus contribute to what might be termed syntactic resonance, which can also arise from other language-specific construction types in which a desiderative lexeme can occur. For example, the Samoan fia 'want' may have a slightly more passive resonance than some other desideratives by virtue of its occurrence in a construction where the Principal wants to undergo an action by someone else (e.g. E fia si'i le pepe 'The baby wants to be carried').

Another kind of resonance could be termed distributional resonance, arising from the range of contexts in which a desiderative term can occur. An example of this is the anxious or urgent feeling associated by some Japanese speakers with -tai 'want', which may be because this form is typically used in contexts where someone wants to do something. Such effects can also apply to a whole construction type; for example, desiderative constructions where subjunctive forms are obligatory may acquire some resonance from the use of the subjunctive in other contexts to convey uncertainty. Distributional resonance can also be a product of polysemy, as for example lele-1 'want' in Mangap-Mbula may acquire some connotation of a 'gut feeling' by association with the body part use of lele-2 'insides'.

Some caution should be observed in attributing a particular resonance to an expression in any language, because native speakers are often unconscious of associations that seem obvious to an outsider.
Individual Arrernte speakers may or may not consciously associate *ahentye* ‘throat’ with *ahentye(neme)* ‘want’, just as English speakers may or may not consciously associate the physical *body* with *somebody*. Linguists for whom grammatical structures are highly salient may tend to overestimate syntactic and wordclass resonance, perceiving a different ‘feel’ to expressions like *Ayenge ahentye lhetyeke* and *I want to go*, whose expressive equivalence may seem more obvious to Arrernte-English bilinguals. Linguists also tend to have more awareness of morphological complexity than ordinary speakers, for whom historically complex words may be synchronically indivisible (e.g. *because* from *by*+*cause*, or *Yankunytjatjara* *mukuri-* ‘want’ from inchoative *-ri-* plus *muku* which does not occur elsewhere in the language).

Similar caution is needed in approaching the task of definition. It cannot be assumed on the basis of visible etymology that a definition of Arrernte *ahentye* ‘throat’ should include any reference to wanting or vice versa. Even if the idea of the throat as the seat of desire is familiar to most present-day Arrernte speakers, this could be merely a part of general cultural knowledge rather than an essential component of the meaning or a necessary condition for the use of the word *ahentye* ‘throat’. This is the kind of issue that can only be resolved by very thorough language-specific lexicographic research. Likewise, it cannot be assumed that the definition of Yankunytjatjara *mukuringanyi* ‘want’ must contain some inchoative element corresponding to *-ri-*: The synchronic indivisibility of *muku* from *-ri-* supports the idea that *-ri-* (like its Arrernte cognate *-irre-* in *ahentyirreme* ‘want’ mentioned above) may be consistent with but compositionally non-contributory to the meaning of *mukuringanyi*.

It is worthy of note that resonance effects can usually be explained in terms that are broadly semantic, but not compositional. That is, explaining links like ‘when someone wants something, this person feels something in the throat’ (for *ahentye*), or the resonance of nominal desideratives arising from association with more prototypical nouns that are words for ‘a kind of thing’, are explanations based on associations of meaning. Providing semantically informed accounts of these associations is a separate matter from constructing definitions, which should contain only the minimum set of necessary and sufficient elements of meaning to explain and predict the use of a word or construction. In constructing definitions, associations like those discussed here should always be
considered, but it is necessary to investigate carefully whether or not they correspond to essential components of meaning.

Therefore, resonance effects do not in themselves pose any obstacle to the assessment of semantic equivalence on the criteria proposed above. If two desiderative expressions seem to have different connotations or a different 'feel' to them, they are still deemed equivalent if there is no specifiable difference in their compositional semantic content. Differences in resonance can be based on associations of meaning that are not essential components of definitions; thus they can be semantically real (and able to be represented in NSM terms) without being compositional in nature.

Non-compositional relationships (NCRs) are an area worthy of further investigation in NSM semantics. Those observed in the course of this study seem to arise in at least two ways. One type arises from the combinatorial properties of a semantic element. For example, a combinatorial NCR between WANT and SOMEONE arises because WANT seems inherently to require a Principal, who may be I, YOU or someone else, but can always be thought of as SOMEONE.

Another type could be called circumstantial NCRs; for example, a link between WANT and HAPPEN arises circumstantially because the experience of wanting is like something happening in or to a person. When people want something, often at the same time they feel something, and/or think about the Objective, and/or express what they want in some way; hence circumstantial NCRs may be found between WANT and FEEL, THINK, or SAY. Such circumstantial links are often reflected in lexical relations like those observed in 2.5 above, and they almost certainly play a significant role in lexical change, discussed later in this chapter.

The role of circumstantial NCRs in polysemy has been illustrated in several of the case studies explored above. This could lead to the identification of two types of polysemy, compositional and non-compositional. Traditional lexicographic views of polysemy suggest that if a single lexeme has two meanings, these should be related in some way; if not, they are assigned to unrelated homophones. But there can be a practical difficulty in knowing where to draw the line between related and unrelated meanings.

The easiest cases are those where the meanings are compositionally related, in one of two ways. A common situation is that two meanings may share some elements but not others, as the two meanings of the
English word *love* do. *Love* has an interpersonal sense (e.g. *My mother loves me*) and a somewhat different, non-interpersonal sense (*My mother loves chocolate*), which share a component of 'feeling something good' toward the object, but differ in other elements of their meaning (e.g. the former involves knowing the other person and wanting to be with them). Sometimes one meaning can be defined in terms of the other; this is the case with Yankunytjatjara *mukuringanyi*, where one meaning is demonstrably equivalent to WANT and the other is often glossed as 'love' of a benevolent and nurturing kind. A key element in this latter sense of *mukuringanyi* is wanting to do good things for the other person: thus, the semantically simpler meaning WANT is included in the definition of the other.

This does not seem to be the case with the two meanings of the Kayardild inflection -*THu(ru)* discussed in the preceding chapter: one of these is equivalent to WANT, while the other sense is definable in terms that do not include wanting, but involve a different semantic prime, CAN. Yet these are not as unrelated semantically as homophones like *k.10w* and *no*, or a coastal *bay* and a *bay* tree, because of the circumstantial NCR between wanting and future possibility: the things that people want are usually thought of as things that may possibly come about in the future.

All of these examples of polysemy, whether compositional or non-compositional, are cases where one or both of the meanings in question is complex, composed of more than one element. This is an essential condition for compositional polysemy: if both meanings were indivisible (like WANT) then there would of course be no possibility of a compositional relationship between them. The next section addresses the possibility of non-compositional polysemy between indivisible elements like WANT and IF, CAN and SAY.

In dealing with a variety of problems with finding any constant element of desiderative meaning across languages, and with the idea of a semantic universal WANT, this discussion has tried to identify principles and methods for identifying semantic content and semantic equivalence that are applicable to and that hold true for any language. All of the issues discussed here have to do with language-specific variations in the expression of desiderative notions, and the need to develop analytical tools powerful enough to distinguish between language-specific phenomena and potentially universal features. The remainder of this chapter looks at more ways in which factors specific to individual
6.3 Problems with WANT as universal

languages and cultures operate to modify the expression of desiderative meanings.

6.4 A 'universal syntax' of desiderative meanings?

The discussion thus far has examined in depth two specific combinations of desiderative meaning. One of these consists of three elements: a Principal, WANT and an Objective ('X wants to do V'); the other consists of four elements: Principal, WANT, Performer and Objective ('X wants Y to do V'). This section looks at other possible desiderative combinations, and at the limitations on particular combinations in different languages. The purpose of this is to see if there may be certain combinations that are always allowable, within the set of syntactic constraints imposed by each language.

Consider first the combination of a desiderative term with a Principal. This study has found that in some languages this is a syntactic requirement (as in English where a subject NP is obligatory in X wants to do V), but other languages allow the Principal to be omitted, subject to language-specific rules; for example a subject NP is optional in Spanish (Yo) quiero ir 'I want to go', the speaker is understood to be the Principal in Japanese Mizu o nomi-tai 'I] want to drink water', or the identity of the Principal can be left vague in Samoan E fia tatā lāvalava nei 'These clothes "need" washing' (an unspecified someone wants or would want them washed). But no language was found whose syntax prohibits the combination of Principal with desiderative to form expressions equivalent to 'I want to go'. Of course each language has syntactic rules that determine how this combination is effected, so that things like the wordclass of the desiderative and the case marking of the Principal may vary, but in no language is the combination impossible.

Languages also place different constraints on who or what can function as the Principal in a desiderative expression, particularly with respect to animacy. Only in some languages can inanimates be cast in the role of Principal: it is grammatical in English to say things like That car doesn't want to go, but in Arrernte this would be simply ungrammatical (*Mutekaye yanne lhetyke ahentye kwenyen); while in many languages an inanimate is associated with a shift of interpretation from desiderative to
future. But no language was found that prohibits the combination of a
human Principal with a desiderative term.

Some languages have further semantic and syntactic constraints
related to the person of the Principal. In languages whose syntax allows a
desiderative construction without an overt Principal, there is often a
presumption that the Principal is the speaker, i.e. first person. Such effects
may be very strong, as in Japanese (Watashi wa) kare ni ki-te hoshii ‘(I)
want him to go’ where the presumption that the speaker is the Principal is
so strong that the first person pronoun watashi ‘I’ sounds infelicitously
redundant in ordinary speech. In other languages the presumption is
weaker, as in Thai Yáak pay káp thoee ‘[Someone] wants to go with you’,
where the person of the Principal is deduced from context; in a
conversation it would usually be first person (the speaker), but in the
context of a discourse about someone else it would be assumed that the
Principal was the third person.

These effects are best understood as pragmatic in origin, though
grammaticalised to varying degrees in different languages. The nature of
the proposed universal WANT is such that it can be directly accessed only by
the Principal; hence in desiderative constructions without specific
mention of a person, the speaker is likely to be referring to her own
experience, and this results in the first person being privileged in such a
context.

The view that this is basically a pragmatic effect is strongly
supported by the interpretation of questions and imperatives. In most,
perhaps all languages, desideratives in questions carry a very strong
presumption that the Principal is the addressee, who is the only person
with direct access to the information the speaker requires. Even in
English, where a subject NP is usually obligatory, the second person
pronoun can be omitted in informal usage in questions like Want a
drink?, yet the Principal is unmistakably the addressee. And imperatives
in all languages grammaticalise the ‘I-you’ relationship (‘I want you to do
something’), though only a few languages have overt person marking in
imperative constructions.

This pragmatic principle can explain why some languages have
desideratives that are limited to first person use, for example the
desiderative morphological paradigm in Hua. As mentioned in 2.2 above,
the Hua desiderative forms only refer to wanting in the first person; third
person forms in the same paradigm refer not to wanting but near future.