

### CHAPTER 3

## Language, memory, and concepts of memory

### Semantic diversity and scientific psychology\*

John Sutton

In a theoretical commentary on the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach to the semantics of memory and remembering, this paper argues that evidence of rich cross-linguistic diversity in this domain is entirely compatible with the best interpretations of our interdisciplinary cognitive sciences. In particular, it responds to Anna Wierzbicka's critique of contemporary psychology, suggests some specific modifications to her proposed explications of some ways of talking about what happened before, and questions her claim that certain historically contingent features of modern Western views of memory are built in to the semantics of English terms. The paper concludes by suggesting a different approach to semantic diversity and the study of memory, and a more positive vision of a culturally-sensitive interdisciplinary science.

#### 1. The interdisciplinary study of memory and remembering

There are many different ways to think about what has happened before. I think about my own recent actions, and about what happened to me a long time ago; I can think about times before I lived. I know many things about the past, and about what has happened because people did things before now, or because some good or bad things happened to me.

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These very basic observations about ordinary activities and capacities capture parts of the basic semantic fields of “memory” and “remembering”. In selecting terms to use in these descriptions, I stick fairly close to the English exponents of the conceptual primes postulated in the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002). For now, in advance of a discussion below of some specific NSM explications within these semantic fields, I will use the phrase ‘thinking about what happened before’ as an incomplete and temporary label for my topic: I assume neither that this is at all complete as an explication of any particular meanings, nor that it is equivalent to the English word *remembering*, but only that it orients us, within an NSM framework, to one important and recognizable range of phenomena which are, in Anna Wierzbicka’s phrase, ‘grounded in the reality of human thinking and knowing’ (this volume).

Such basic descriptions of ways in which I can and do think about what happened before are everyday platitudes, part of our common knowledge about ourselves and each other: but like many such platitudes, of course, they do not much advance our understanding of the phenomena in question. We easily interpret and respond to each other in terms of this shared background understanding: you are saying this or feeling like that, I may think, because you are thinking about what happened before. But on its own the successful use of such common knowledge in our ordinary practice does not require or rely on any particular views about the nature or causes or idiosyncratic characteristics of *these* particular kinds of thinking, or about what exactly differentiates them from other kinds of thinking, or about how many forms thinking about what happened before can take.

Such further issues are the legitimate object of many different kinds of enquiry, and some are taken up with great success in the treatments of these semantic fields by other authors in this volume. They are not necessarily the province only of specialised or esoteric enquiry, for they can crop up in or emerge from our more basic shared understanding, especially when we are confronted with circumstances in which that common knowledge breaks down or is extended or challenged. In modern Western culture, for example, the nature of memory and remembering is notoriously an issue of great public interest and concern, well beyond the English-speaking world, as well as a topic of intense specialist study. We worry about memory loss and memory enhancement, memory distortion and memory construction, recovered memory and false memory; about how eyewitnesses remember and misremember, how we remember trauma and are haunted by reminiscences; about national memory and cultural memory as well as personal memory; about politicians’ truths and lies about the past; about mementos, memorials, monuments, and other objects that trigger memory retrieval: the ‘memory boom’ (Winter 2000) spreads across a whole host of issues dear to the heart of writers and artists, lawyers and therapists, scientists and doctors, friends and lovers, activists and authorities.

An accurate survey of the current state of interdisciplinary studies of the kinds of thinking in question would have to acknowledge their extraordinary diversity of

methods, expertise, and scope. Of course it may be that there is little or no unity to this daunting array of topics and disciplines: it may just be a historical and semantic accident that some languages tie them together under the same semantic label. It is, many may suspect, unlikely that there's any substantial sense in which theorists of "memory" – from neurobiologists to narrative theorists, from the developmental to the postcolonial, from the computational to the cross-cultural – are studying the same phenomena. There are, it's true, calls for genuine – integrative, detailed, constructive – interdisciplinary theory-construction in these domains.<sup>1</sup> But, for both principled and pragmatic reasons, profound gulfs between these different kinds of enquiry remain. Such divisions are built in to our educational systems, and with intensifying specialisation it seems likely that students of memory and remembering in the humanities, the social sciences, the cognitive sciences, and the biological sciences respectively will remain relatively insulated from each others' assumptions, methods, and results.

One of the deepest obstacles to any change in this state of affairs is a widespread feeling that built in to the different disciplines are profoundly different attitudes towards any substantial historical, cultural, or indeed semantic variation in the phenomena being studied. Many think that the brain sciences and the psychological sciences deny or neglect evidence of such diversity, and that as a result it's natural for their practitioners to display either respectful and disinterested neutrality or active disdain for historical, cultural, and linguistic studies. And in turn, many think that historians, social scientists, and linguists who focus on this diversity deny or neglect psychological levels of enquiry into thinking about what happened before, and that as a result it's natural for them to treat the cognitive sciences either as important but irrelevant, or as irretrievably marred by individualism and by universalistic scientism. Although I'm here stating these assumptions about the methodological and philosophical differences across styles of enquiry at a crude and general level, I think that in some recognizable form they are shared by theorists on both 'sides' of the gulfs in question. By putting them in such a blunt and unsophisticated manner, and by citing literature which bridges or at least challenges these gulfs, I hope to elicit either more principled defences of the idea that certain disciplines and levels of explanation in the study of memory should remain insulated and autonomous, or – instead and more optimistically – help in forging the elusive connections which might begin to break down both the theoretical divides and the mutual misunderstandings, and to develop better ways to study language, history, culture, cognition, and brains all at once.

One crucial step towards this task would be to show that many strands within the many subdisciplines of the current psychological sciences of memory and remembering already essentially incorporate attention to factors outside the individual, factors which can and do significantly shape or alter the very nature of remembering, and so

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1. See for example Bloch 1997; Nelson 2003; Olick 1999; Siegel 2001; Sutton 2004a; Welzer and Markowitsch 2005.

that at least these currents in the cognitive sciences do not inevitably reduce remembering to an activity of isolated brains or of serial digital computers.<sup>2</sup>

A second step would be to specify just what kinds of historical, cultural, and semantic factors are potentially relevant and to develop richer narratives and descriptions of the kinds of change that might matter for our broader interdisciplinary theorising. We're not only interested, for example, in studies by historians of ideas of different explicit *ideas* about or *theories* of how people think about what happened before.<sup>3</sup> We also want to know, more ambitiously, how culture, concepts, and cognition interact in more practical ways, to understand diversity not only in theories but in practices and activities, not just in how people *think* about thinking about what happened before, but in *how* they think about what happened before, and in what they *do* when they do it: in different ways in which thinking about the past or remembering was or might be embedded in the weave of a life or a form of life. Increasingly, detailed case studies of such cultural and historical diversity in memory practices, and frameworks for interpreting them, have been offered by historians, anthropologists, and sociologists of memory.<sup>4</sup> Not all of these writers see their work as easily compatible with the psychology of memory, but they all think that more attention needs to be given to the relations between the projects: the attempt to do so can be labelled, if necessary, as psychological anthropology or as the comparative and 'historical cognitive science' of memory (Richardson 2001; Sutton 2000, 2002a, 2007) as appropriate. As yet, and notwithstanding the scholarly traditions drawn on so fruitfully by the contributors to this volume, linguistics has not contributed so fully to the interdisciplinary study of diversity in ways of thinking about what happened before. This is, no doubt, due in part to particular features of the history of the discipline which have led, at least until recently, to the relative neglect of semantics: but it is particularly unfortunate, for the sophisticated methods of cognitive semantics could clearly be of enormous value here, both in their own right and in order to feed in to the broader integrative programme I've sketched.

The Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach, in particular, has much to offer the interdisciplinary study of memory and remembering. Those papers in this volume which employ the NSM framework demonstrate that it is already issuing in rich language-specific and comparative studies of semantic fields related to thinking about

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2. Recent integrative works which explicitly allow for substantive culturally-shaped diversity of various kinds in the phenomena of memory include, in psychology, Engel 1999; Middleton and Brown 2005; Pillemer 1998; Rubin 1995; Schacter 1996: and in philosophy Auyang 2001: 283–306; Campbell 2003; Rowlands 1999: 119–147; Sutton 2003; Wilson 2005.

3. For which see, for example, Coleman 1992; Draaisma 2000; Krell 1990; Sutton 1998.

4. Bloch 1997:67–130; Bowker 2005; Carruthers 1990, 1998; Connerton 1989; Fentress and Wickham 1992; Misztal 2003; Rowlands 1993; Small 1997; Tonkin 1991.

what happened before. So, putting aside for the moment the wider and wilder, hopelessly ambitious schemes I've outlined so far, I examine the NSM approach to thinking about what happened before. Cross-disciplinary understanding on topics of such formidable difficulty is hard to achieve, and I hope that my external perspective on the challenging and powerful NSM tradition does not lead to dramatic mischaracterisations. Focussing on Anna Wierzbicka's account (this volume), I develop further two strands of the positive NSM agenda as applied to memory by putting them into contact with independent lines of research in the philosophy and the cognitive and developmental psychology of memory: I examine in turn the conceptual analysis or explication of core meanings of memory-related terms, and the initial investigations of significant cultural variability in this semantic domain. By the end I hope to have identified a range of challenges to and possibilities for integration between the contemporary sciences of memory and the NSM approach to thinking about what happened before.

But before that optimistic synthetic project can get underway, I have to explain why it doesn't fall foul of Wierzbicka's criticisms of the contemporary sciences of memory: so I need first to respond to the negative strand of the NSM approach to the phenomena of memory, and to query the need for certain kinds of theoretical and methodological dichotomies.

## 2. The psychology of memory: science, history, and linguocentrism

Anna Wierzbicka argues that "memory" is 'not something that objectively exists', that it is a 'construct'. Thus she looks forward to the time when future historians can mock "memory" as a 'twentieth-century invention' (this volume). Wierzbicka does distinguish questions about remembering from questions about 'the *concept* of remembering'; and she accepts that '(apart from illness etc.) all people remember, as all people think, feel, want and know' even though they do *not* all 'have a notion of what it means to remember'. So one way to interpret Wierzbicka's position would be to see her as arguing that psychological investigations into memory and remembering (within or across cultures) are legitimate, but inevitably distinct from semantic and cross-linguistic investigations into *concepts* related to "memory" and "remembering".

But there is good reason to think that this is not Wierzbicka's intended view. Much of her richest work – both in this paper and in her remarkable body of research over the years – aims precisely to tease out subtle *interactions* between semantics and psychology, within and across cultures. The NSM framework is meant to incorporate 'semantics, culture, *and cognition*' (Wierzbicka 1992, my italics), and to identify ways in which the specific lexicon of any language has deep cognitive influence. So it would be wholly against the spirit of her project to treat cognition as a realm which could be safely studied by psychologists while semanticists proceeded quite independently: language and thought are too tightly interwoven for that. And Wierzbicka's trenchantly

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critical treatment of the modern cognitive sciences reveals a clear anti-psychological edge to her understanding of the relationship of language and thought. The cognitive study of memory, in particular, should be incorporated or subsumed into cognitive semantics, undertaken within the NSM framework: ‘we can only reach thoughts through words (no one has yet invented another way)’ (1997a: 23). Nick Enfield thus seems right to characterise Wierzbicka’s position as resting on ‘the notion that language provides us not only with the most reliable window on human culture and thought, but *the only reliable one*’ (2000: 136, my emphasis).

For Wierzbicka, the current sciences of memory are illegitimate for two related reasons: they are unwittingly linguocentric in that they mistakenly assume that the English word *memory* refers to ‘something that “exists” independently of the English language’ (this volume); and they simply ignore the ‘remarkable differences’ across languages in the semantic and lexical field of ‘memory’ and ‘remember’, in particular remaining blind to the fact that ‘many languages don’t have a word comparable to *remember* at all’.

It’s not altogether straightforward to identify the target of these charges: the views being rejected don’t all naturally sit together. Among the apparent targets are the ideas that memory is a thing; that it is unitary; that it is ‘a distinct and clearly delimited aspect of human nature’; that it is historically and culturally invariant, or ‘universal’; that it is done by, or is reducible to, brain processes; that it is a computational process. By taking *The Oxford Companion to the Mind* as her guide to ‘the current psychological literature’, Wierzbicka risks missing strands of that literature for which she might have more sympathy. Indeed among the domains of mainstream cognitive psychology, the history of the sciences of memory over the last 25 years arguably offers the sharpest contrast and corrective to the stereotyped image of cognitive science as a scientific quest to reduce human thinking and feeling to the dull mechanism of digital computers: memory research was one of the first areas to be taken out of the lab in the 1980s and 1990s, as psychologists sought to address the kinds of memory that matter in everyday life, and to find ecologically valid methods of studying such memories outside artificial isolated situations (Neisser 1997).

Wierzbicka’s initial complaint that ‘many psychologists and cognitive scientists tend to reify’ the construct of “memory” into a monolithic single thing does not hit home against mainstream cognitivism, in which the multiplicity of memory is widely accepted. Wierzbicka may have other criticisms of particular ways in which different theorists identify and characterise the variety of forms of memory,<sup>5</sup> or of the reductionism with which the idea of multiple forms of memory is sometimes – although by no means inevitably – coupled. Wierzbicka’s reasons for thinking that it’s a mistake to treat all forms of “memory” as essentially identical, a unified object for scientific study,

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5. See Toth and Hunt (1999) and Tulving (2002) for clear statements of two opposing views on this topic.



or a natural kind, are of course entirely different from those given by these writers, who motivate the recommended dissolution of the category from within the relevant cognitive sciences: Patricia Churchland, for example, suggests that our successors will see no more unity to all the varieties of phenomena loosely labelled “memory” and “remembering” than to the categories of archaic scholastic physics, so that ‘remembering stands to go the way of impetus’ (1986: 373; compare Churchland 1983 on “consciousness”). Wierzbicka’s case, in contrast, rests on the evidence for semantic and cultural diversity which is the core concern of her paper, and on which I also want to focus: but on the straight question of the difference between varieties of remembering, such as between ‘experiential’ uses and ‘factual’ uses (Section 3 below), her framework is not necessarily in conflict with the cognitive and psychological sciences.

But Wierzbicka’s criticisms of scientific psychology do find better parallels in a distinct literature on memory within science studies and the history of psychology. In these areas, a number of writers have used evidence of *historical* variation in the constitution of ‘memory’ to argue that memory is not a natural object or a natural kind, in just the same way that Wierzbicka uses cross-linguistic evidence. I suggest that, despite differences in the positive approaches in these distinct traditions, they share a key assumption which should be rejected.

In a series of studies, for example, Kurt Danziger has offered a rich history of the complex 19<sup>th</sup>-century debates around whether or not memory could and should be incorporated into the new institutions and theoretical frameworks of the emerging, self-defining discipline of scientific psychology. His rich historical narratives could be usefully compared with Wierzbicka’s more general sketch of a change in the meaning of the English word *remember*. But what’s relevant here about this historical evidence is its intended scope, covering not just *ideas* about remembering, but the putative activities of remembering themselves. This is why Danziger sees his historical work as threatening what he takes to be core presuppositions of mainstream psychology of memory. For Danziger, mainstream psychology has ‘too easily assumed that psychological objects, like memory for example, have essential qualities forever fixed by nature’: this assumption is incompatible with evidence of historical change in meaning, because ‘regarded as a natural object memory has no history’ (2001: 7, 2002: 1). Danziger thinks, in contrast, that sophisticated historical analysis ‘shows that, contrary to the inspiration that drives much modern theorising, memory has no natural essence’ (2002: 9). On similar grounds, Roger Smith has recently argued (in a paper titled ‘The history of psychological categories’ which builds directly on Danziger’s work) that ‘basic psychological categories refer to historical and social entities, and not to natural kinds’ (2005: 55; and see especially pp.81–85 on memory).

These claims are, I suggest, very close to Wierzbicka’s position, that “memory” is a ‘construct’, and is ‘not something that objectively exists’ (this volume). Like Wierzbicka, these historians are not merely making a point about changes in theories of memory, or ideas about memory, or concepts of memory: as Danziger puts it, ‘the very objects of psychological discourse, and not just opinions about them, have changed

radically in the course of history' (1990: 336, also quoted by Smith 2005: 58). The historical evidence of diversity generated by these writers in support of such claims is theoretically analogous to Wierzbicka's semantic and cross-linguistic evidence, and like it must be taken seriously. But I want to query the metatheoretical lessons drawn from such evidence both by Wierzbicka and by Danziger and Smith, in particular their reliance on dichotomies between nature and discourse, and between science and history.

Danziger argues that, whereas the objects studied in mainstream psychology were 'never understood as discursive objects but as natural objects', in fact whatever historical continuity can be traced in theorising about memory is 'a discursive continuity, not a continuity of natural objects, like rocks or organisms' (2001: 3, 2002: 8). Nothing, in other words, could be both discursive and natural, both constructed and psychological, both historical and scientific. Thus when we discuss the meaning of concepts like "memory" and "remember", for Danziger, 'the targets of our conceptual analysis are discursive, rather than natural objects' (2001: 4, 8). Wierzbicka, in similar vein, also takes it that historical, linguistic, or cultural variability rules out certain kinds of scientific investigation. Only thus can we understand her claim that "memory" is one of many 'culturally determined ways of looking at human beings, *rather than* scientifically determined ways of cutting nature at its joints' (this volume, my italics). But we can and should reject this assumption, which is, I submit, quite unnecessary for us to appreciate and utilise cross-linguistic, cross-cultural, or historical evidence of substantial diversity. There is no reason to accept dichotomies between science and change, or psychology and history, or to think that only static features of reality, with their essential qualities forever fixed, could be amenable to scientific investigation.

The worry here, then, is that these criticisms of scientific psychology themselves rely on an overly stringent picture of what the objects of a truly scientific psychology would have to be. Historical and cross-linguistic investigations can play vital roles *within* a science in showing that current classifications and categories are not the only ones available, or that specific concepts which seem simple or inevitable (to monolingual English speakers, for example) may in fact be overinclusive or underdescribed in unnoticed ways. Much work within the NSM framework can contribute to these goals. But the appropriate response is not – at least not always – the rejection of the relevant conceptual scheme and theoretical framework, but its revision or differentiation or gradual fine-tuning to incorporate new evidence from many sources. Even if the proper objects of scientific psychology did have to be natural kinds – not by any means an inevitable presupposition of most activity in that field – they don't thereby need to be either eternally unchanging and invariant across context, or already perfectly clearly delineated to be successfully studied. On a more plausible philosophy of science, most concepts integral to psychological theorising will be cluster concepts, which play roles in a great many generalisations or theoretical contexts, no single one of which is essential or definitional on its own: as a result, their scope and the putative kinds



to which they are connected by background theories can both shift over time as different features of those theories change (Bermudez 2005: 6–13; Griffiths 2004: 235–8). This allows us both to take seriously the investigation of ways in which our linguistic models and conceptual frameworks affect the world and the forms of our thinking (compare Griffiths 1997: 196–201), and to embrace wholeheartedly the central role given by Wierzbicka to the conceptual analysis of our terms, while nonetheless seeing such conceptual analysis as potentially compatible with scientific psychology, and as potentially informed by and responsive to empirical investigation. There's no doubt that in many domains, such a 'preliminary semantic enquiry' (Wierzbicka, this volume) has been neglected or poorly conducted, or suffers from Anglophone bias: Wierzbicka has convincingly shown this, for example, in the case of the underanalysed use of words like 'altruism' and 'selfishness' in some strands of current evolutionary psychology and cognitive ethology (2004), as she had earlier for 'mind' (1992, especially pp.40–47). But this is done on a case-by-case basis, and in part by engaging in detail with the overarching theoretical frameworks and particular explanatory projects of the sciences in question. Here my point is that no *general* argument against scientific psychology and its terms (such as 'memory') goes through simply on the basis of evidence from historical and cross-linguistic variation. So we can agree with Wierzbicka that 'conceptual analysis should come first' (this volume), without thinking that it should *exhaust* the interdisciplinary enterprise.

A second general argument against the cognitive psychology of memory remains, resting on the charge of linguocentrism: for Wierzbicka, recall, cognitive scientists are misguided to treat the construct "memory" as 'something that "exists" independently of the English language'. Certainly, cross-linguistic data must be useful for scientists in many fields, particularly when the concepts in question span specialist and common usage in complex ways: it would be good for all of us to know more languages. But Wierzbicka doesn't explain what it would take for something to "exist" independently of a particular language. From this context alone, it's not completely clear whether her point is that there are some natural kinds but that memory isn't one of them, or that there are no natural kinds at all. In the next section I examine some of her suggested explications of language-specific ways of thinking and talking about thinking about what happened before. Here again I address the more general attack by proponents of NSM on the 'terminological ethnocentrism' (Goddard, this volume) allegedly exhibited in the use of unanalysed English terms in scientific psychology. My concern on this point is that, if justified, it would prove too much, and would rule out on *a priori* grounds much more than such an argument should.

Concepts employed in non-psychological sciences – such as geology, physiology, meteorology, chemistry, or neuroanatomy – are not illegitimate if or just because they have been developed gradually by refining the terms of a single language, whether English or, say, Greek. Each term in these sciences has a complex history, and there is no guarantee that other languages have words comparable to the English terms in these sciences. We should not question the existence of blood or hearts, clouds or gases

or molecules, amygdalas or synapses, and so on, *just* because the histories of the words we use to describe them are wrapped up with the idiosyncrasies of specific languages and specific culturally-embedded modes of enquiry. The obvious semantic complexity of these terms on its own is no bar to their legitimate and critical employment by both specialists and non-specialists, and is no reason to doubt the independent reality of the things to which they refer. We rightly continue to use these terms whether or not they have been subjected to rigorous cross-linguistic comparison, and despite the fact that equivalent terms cannot be found in every human language. And, crucially, when other terms with equally or more complex histories – such as ether, phlogiston, and animal spirit – have been discarded, and others significantly revised, it has not been solely for linguistic reasons. If it was not possible for a science’s proprietary array of concepts to be sometimes provisionally supported, and sometimes radically challenged, *without* cross-linguistic comparison, then many contemporary sciences which are much more firmly established than psychology would have to be rejected, and there would be no specific threat to psychology alone.

One natural response to this objection is to suggest that there’s some key difference between these examples and the case of the psychological sciences in general, or memory in particular. Maybe there are other reliable ways of getting access to features of the world *other than* human culture and thought. Perhaps it’s possible to test our conceptual schemes and models more directly against the world in domains which don’t exhibit the striking historicity and cultural embeddedness of the ‘mental predicates’. But perhaps not: it’s interesting that this is one of the dimensions on which Cliff Goddard sees Wierzbicka as diverging sharply from Whorf. Whereas ‘Whorf’s instinct was to look outside language for some kind of common measure’, either in ‘objective reality’ or in ‘our perceptual systems’, Wierzbicka, on Goddard’s reading, denies the general possibility of testing conceptual meaning against any ‘non-symbolic realm’ (Goddard 2003: 405).

In any case, within the NSM framework there seem only three options on this issue. The bullet could be bitten, and the legitimacy of *all* scientific terms which derive from a single language and have not been tested against all languages could be challenged; or clearer reasons should be given for thinking that the charge of linguocentrism applies *only* to the terms of the psychological sciences; or, finally, it could be accepted that there are also other means of testing, criticising, revising, provisionally supporting, or eliminating concepts across the range of sciences. On this last view, which I recommend, we should certainly be wary of taking English terms for granted, of simply *assuming* that “memory”, for example, is free from any language specificity or cultural presuppositions: among a wide array of ongoing approaches to memory and remembering across the disciplines, we should actively seek historical and cross-linguistic evidence for patterns of diversity and similarity in meanings and use. But this requires engaging in detail with the existing theoretical frameworks of the psychological sciences, in order to see how the cross-linguistic evidence might apply or threaten these frameworks in specific ways.

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### 3. Conceptual analysis, experiential remembering, semantics, and cultural elaboration

I turn now to Wierzbicka's proposed explications of some relevant English terms. To students of memory inexperienced in semantic analysis, these should be highly productive new ways of getting at both familiar and unfamiliar phenomena. Given my wishful synthetic urge to integrate cognitive and cross-linguistic semantics with other sciences of memory, a number of general issues arise about the NSM's set of universal conceptual primes, including the key mental predicates and time concepts which lie at the heart of the semantic field we're interested in here: we need to know more, for example, about what the proposed explications imply about speakers' actual knowledge of the meanings of their terms, and about the relation between these explications and any possible causal accounts of how thoughts and communicative utterances are produced. These issues, however, arise for any attempt to capture common sense or folk understandings of thinking, knowing, and so on, across all traditions of ethno-psychology (compare for example Lillard 1998): and for present purposes I won't address them directly in this context, operating for now on Wierzbicka's cautious but optimistic suggestion that NSM 'scripts written in lexical universals . . . may not only be useful theoretical constructs but also have genuine psychological reality' (1994: 83, quoted by Enfield 2000: 139).

Wierzbicka uses the English phrase *memories of childhood* to show how the concept of (countable) 'memories' implicates a particular 'model of human life' (this volume):

*Someone's memories (of childhood, etc.)*

- a. everyone knows:
- b. a person lives for some time
- c. during this time many things happen to this person
- d. after these things have happened, this person can think about these things like this:  
"I know what these things were like  
because they happened to me"
- e. a long time after these things have happened  
this person can think about them in the same way  
if this person wants to think about them in this way
- f. other people can't think about these things in the same way

Such memories, then, are of something that "happened to me". The concept of a (countable) memory is thus aligned in some respects with what Wierzbicka calls the 'experiential' use of the word *remember*. In the case of *remember*, her useful distinction between 'experiential' and 'factual' uses is also explicitly defended by the majority of philosophers and psychologists: I can factually remember many things (including things that happened to me, as well as many other things) which I cannot experientially

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remember (Sutton 2003).<sup>6</sup> Wierzbicka makes the extremely interesting claim that the word *memory* cannot be used in the ‘factual’ sense, which if true is something that some philosophers and psychologists have missed. She argues that ‘one can say: “I remember my PIN number”, but not “I have a memory of my PIN number”’.<sup>7</sup> One ordinary grammatical marker of factual remembering, the use of a “that” complement as in “I remember that my parents went to college in Omaha” is at best non-standard with the word *memory* in its countable experiential sense. I have found two instances of this non-standard use in recent academic work, but it’s telling that both are in philosophical works in which the experiential/ factual distinction is precisely at issue, and Wierzbicka may well be right that in ordinary English usage it’s illegitimate to refer to “my memory *that* the cake at the party was chocolate” (Senor 2005, Section 3) or “my memory that my parents went to college in Omaha” (Copenhaver 2006: 182). Here no doubt the established corpus analytic methods of cognitive semanticists can help. But Wierzbicka’s proposed asymmetry between *memory* and *remembering* – that *remembering* has both experiential and factual uses, whereas *memory* has only experiential uses – seems right, and might be better supported if her explication of *memory* was tightened a little, as I now suggest.

The explications of *remember* in its experiential use and of (countable) *memories*, as Wierzbicka will be aware, are in certain respects related in both aim and substance to the conceptual analysis of these terms developed in 20<sup>th</sup>-century analytic philosophy. In the influential analysis offered by C.B. Martin and Max Deutscher (1966), and in its subsequent elaboration and critical development, especially in Deutscher’s own intriguing return to the argument in ‘Remembering “Remembering”’ (Deutscher 1989), we can find one element which is absent in Wierzbicka’s explication of the English ‘folk model’ of *memories*, which is arguably thus too weak in one key respect. Martin and Deutscher’s analysis incorporated a stronger causal criterion which, in their view, is built in to the ordinary model. The problem in Wierzbicka’s explication arises between steps d) and e). Clause d) rightly requires that a person’s ability to think about things which have happened to her is due to them having happened to her: I can think about being stung by a bee in the garden, and I know what these things were like, because I was stung by a bee in the garden. So far so good: but clause e), which notes

6. There is an abundance of terminology for this distinction around in the literature, but Wierzbicka’s ‘experiential’ vs ‘factual’ is perhaps the most straightforward: to call experiential remembering ‘personal’ remembering may work, but the equally common labels ‘episodic’ and ‘autobiographical’ remembering are perhaps unnecessarily technical and can lead to misunderstandings, as can the common psychologists’ label ‘semantic’ for factual remembering.

7. Note though that this would not rule out the use of labels like ‘semantic memory’ or ‘factual memory’, which are common across the psychological disciplines in the “capacity” sense (Wierzbicka, this volume): it rules out only the use of phrases like ‘factual memories’ or ‘semantic memories’, which are not in widespread usage.

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that on subsequent occasions I can still think about those things, does not require that this subsequent ability is itself due in the right way to the original experiences. But consider the possibility that the bee sting which I could once think about may later be forgotten completely. Nevertheless I may later be told convincingly by authoritative informants – my parents, for example – that at a certain age I was stung by a bee, so that now again I can think about being stung by a bee. But this ability in the present is due now not to the original experience, or not in the right way, but instead to a more indirect or deviant causal chain. And in ordinary usage, we would accept that in this case I can now think about what happened, and even that I know that I was stung by a bee: but not, I suggest following Martin and Deutscher, that I still have a *memory* of being stung by a bee. In some contexts like this it's fine to say that I (factually) remember *that* I was stung, but not that I (experientially) remember being stung.

Martin and Deutscher dealt with this by requiring, at a first pass, that the experience must have been 'operative in producing a state or successive states [which are] finally operative' in producing or grounding the present memory and the present ability to remember (1966: 173–177). The spirit of this proposal is met successfully, in fact, in Wierzbicka's explications of the experiential use of *remember*, where the causal link between original experience and present thinking is present (in clauses b) and c) of the explication, for example, of *I remember that feeling*): something like it needs to be introduced into clause e) of the explication of *Someone's memories (of childhood)* too.

Martin and Deutscher went on to argue that this causal criterion, embedded in ordinary English usage, itself implies and can be analysed in terms of 'the idea of a memory trace', which they claimed is 'an indispensable part of our idea of memory' (1966: 186–191). The idea was of course not that, to have a memory or to think about memory, I must have any knowledge at all of neurophysiological theory, but only that I am committed to the existence of *some* causally connected set of states which underlies my ongoing ability to think about what happened to me before (see also Warnock 1987, Sutton 1998: 298–316). This claim, which met and continues to meet with enormous resistance from other philosophers (Squires 1969, Hamilton 1998), is relevant in our present context because it seems to support Wierzbicka's fascinating suggestions about the culturally-specific assumptions built in to the English folk model of "memories", as well as her concerns about the linguocentric universalising and overgeneralising of such assumptions. However I want to respond to Wierzbicka on this point by suggesting that her explications are in certain different respects too strong, in going beyond the basic semantics of the English terms by building in too much idiosyncratic metaphysical baggage.

The modern English folk model, Wierzbicka suggests, includes four strong and tightly connected implications which are not present in the related semantic fields in other languages, and which should thus not be unproblematically assumed within theoretical and scientific treatments of memory and remembering. Firstly, in English phrases like *memories of childhood* there's an implication of internal *storage* which is absent in, for example, Polish and French (this volume). Secondly, and as a consequence,

in English memories are taken to be *static*, fixed items and ‘accumulated knowledge’ to be extracted rather than dynamic, living experiences; and the modern English word *remember* has lost an ‘older, processual meaning’ which implied a dynamic activity. Thirdly, and as a consequence, this semantic field in English incorporates assumptions about ‘a certain *control* over one’s knowledge of the past, as one has experienced it’, with key English words implying ‘a degree of control and initiative’, thus driving a focus on voluntary memory and the unfortunate ‘tendency to view human “memory” instrumentally’. Finally, there’s a strong assumption of ‘privileged access’ built in to some of the English key words which is absent in most other languages: I have a special ‘private ownership’ of the memories I keep in my head, ‘like mental possessions (often, “treasures”)’ (this volume).

I share and applaud Wierzbicka’s uneasiness about these implications or assumptions. But I think her diagnosis of their source and history needs some amendment, and I don’t think she is right to *identify* them so closely with and in the models available either in the contemporary cognitive sciences, or in modern English usage. I have already said enough about the current psychology of memory. There certainly have been theories of memory which embody, in different ways, these four assumptions. Such archival or localist models in which memories are thought of as independent items each kept in a distinct place, to be pulled out of cold storage only by some executive or controller, do indeed now seem to project onto the mind the quite different properties of digital computers; and as has often been pointed out, such models thus neglect or deny some of the most crucial dynamics of human remembering, such as its creative tendencies to blend, associate, and generalise, its deep context-sensitivity, and its intrinsic and open-ended activity. So those research programmes which do argue for, embody, or impose these assumptions have naturally been subject to sharp criticism (Bartlett 1932; Clark 1989: 83–106; McClelland 1995; Stern 1991; Sutton 1998). But, to reiterate, dominant views across the disciplines now specifically reject exactly the idea of static items being held fixed in an internal storehouse which is under the control of an active subject who has special private access to them. While it’s misleading to remain at the level of broad metaphors in characterising the wide range of alternative views available in philosophy, cognitive and developmental psychology, and computational neuropsychology, it’s safe to say that constructive, dynamic, or reconstructive remembering is instead at the heart of many of them.

Secondly, Wierzbicka’s intriguing narrative about the roots of the specific historical and cultural contingency of these four assumptions needs to be amended and weakened in at least two ways. I agree that the real grip which these assumptions have indeed had at some periods and in some contexts has been connected in complex ways to the broader historical and cultural shifts which we can label as the rise of possessive individualism or the invention of autonomy (Schneewind 1997, especially pp.1–11); and my own grand narrative of the decline of dynamics in the history of theories of memory also locates key developments in specifically English Enlightenment ideals about morality and control of the personal past (Sutton 1998). But Wierzbicka sees these

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‘storage-and-control’ assumptions about remembering as essentially and uniquely or primarily modern – the legacy, perhaps, of new dualisms of body and intellect, reason and emotion which took hold of the English language at some point in the early modern period (Wierzbicka 1992: 44–47, 59–63) – whereas in my narrative they are historically more diffuse and culturally more contingent. I also argue (Sutton 1998) that the rise of these fundamentally moral assumptions about memory was independent, both conceptually and historically, of the kind of mechanistic approach with which Wierzbicka associates them. The localist urge to think and talk of memories as independent manageable items separately stored in cells or on coils or etched on wax tablets of the mind is an ancient one, has recurred in various forms across the entire history of Western ideas about and practices of memory, and has never been restricted to the Anglophone world.<sup>8</sup> Even in the history of modern institutionalised psychology, the different phases in which these assumptions have held more sway – such as in Ebbinghaus’s work in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in classical Artificial Intelligence in the 1960s and 1970s – each have quite different sociocultural contexts and different critics and competitors.

Thirdly, and closest to the heart of Wierzbicka’s case, I am suspicious of the idea that these four assumptions about storage and control are built in to the English terms as strongly or as essentially as she suggests, or that there is such a clear and specific ‘model of human life’ implicit in English phrases about memory and remembering. I’m not at all denying either that concepts can be culture-specific, or that such concepts can influence thinking in ways which are not obvious to speakers. My argument is about the particular nature of these English terms and the extent and nature of metaphysical baggage which they carry. I suggest that in this context we should distinguish a more basic semantics (and psychology) from a range of possible cultural elaborations. My case is exactly parallel to an argument against Whorf’s view of ‘Hopi time’ made by Cliff Goddard (2003: 420–7, drawing on Keesing 1994).

Return first to clause e) of Wierzbicka’s explication of the phrase *memories of childhood*:

- e. a long time after these things have happened  
this person can think about them in the same way  
if this person wants to think about them in this way

Wierzbicka makes this clause carry the weight of the assumptions about internal storage and about control and ‘voluntary memory’ which she imputes to ‘the English folk model’: ‘the English phrase implies that the memories in question “are there”, as it were stored in a person’s head’ (this volume). The fact that such a phrase cannot be rendered precisely in Polish, for example, suggests to her that for Polish speakers and

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8. See especially Krell (1990) and Draaisma (2000) for brilliant historical accounts of diverse static models of memory.

thinkers there is no such implication that images or experiences are ‘retrieved from some mental archive where they have been stored’: instead, relevant Polish phrases imply that they ‘are as it were brought back from the past (by thinking)’. As philosophers might say, Polish speakers are thus to be understood as direct realists, assuming that we are in direct contact with the past in remembering, as the things brought to light ‘in thinking about one’s past life’ are ‘not “memories” (stored in the mind) but as it were past events themselves’ (this volume; for one direct realist theory of memory see Wilcox and Katz 1981); whereas English speakers are indirect realists, doomed to make contact with the past only through a mediating realm or veil of representations and traces (for this dispute see my sceptical attempt to dissolve it in Sutton 2003).

But English phrases like this do not carry this degree of metaphysical weight. Rather, in both languages there are certain ways for capturing the point that I can think about many things that happened before even though I am not now currently thinking about them. My (countable) memories are just whatever I can thus remember, in what in more technical language we could call a dispositional sense of *remember*, as opposed to its occurrent sense: my (countable) memories are what I *can* remember, not what I *am* remembering. Of course there’s much more to say about this barer dispositional use of *memories*, and cross-linguistic analysis will of course be fascinating on this point: I hope here merely to have shown that phrases like *memories of childhood* do not carry such a strong implication of some distinct archival form of inner storage. While I’m not qualified to comment for sure, Wierzbicka’s discussion of some Polish words related to “memory” does not seem to rule out the idea that this barer dispositional use is present in Polish too, to mark the difference between what I’m (occurrently) remembering now and what I can remember.

I’m not sure whether the conclusion to draw from this discussion is that the relevant clause of Wierzbicka’s explication should be altered, or merely that we should reject the strong lessons she draws from it. She herself is aware of the danger of building too much in to this clause: in the original version of her paper, as presented at the Workshop on the Semantics of Memory in November 2003, there were two slightly different clauses in place of the version of clause (e) quoted above from the final paper:

- e. a long time after these things happened  
this person can think about some of these things in the same way
- f. if this person wants to think about some of these things in this way  
this person can always think about them in this way

As well as usefully simplifying and condensing these two clauses in the final version, Wierzbicka has rightly if slightly weakened the extra metaphysical implication of storage and control by dropping the word ‘always’ from the replacement clause. This is probably enough, so that our disagreement about the implications of the English model would have to be resolved by other means.

The second respect in which I don’t see that an English folk model *intrinsically* incorporates such strong metaphysical assumptions is in relation to privacy and

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privileged access. The explication of *memories of childhood* includes reference to what has happened uniquely to me, which as Wierzbicka rightly says marks the point that what happened to me ‘is both the source and the content’ of my relevant memories; and it includes the clause (f). other people can’t think about these things in the same way’, which rightly marks the requirement for experiential memory that I have a unique point of view or perspective on what I remember when I remember it. Perhaps I’m not clear on what Wierzbicka means by phrases like ‘private ownership’ and ‘privileged access’: perhaps these notions are only intended to mark this relatively innocent notion of subjective point of view in personal memory, which is after all pretty much definitional of or essential to this kind of experiential memory, according both to Wierzbicka and to psychologists like Tulving (2002). This interpretation seems strengthened when we find that the explication of relevant Polish terms includes the same clauses. What then is the stronger sense of privileged access and metaphysical privacy which Wierzbicka nonetheless thinks is unique to modern English? If the basic semantics of words like *memories* doesn’t show it up, how can we identify its presence and effects?

The distinction I’ve suggested in this context between basic semantics and cultural elaboration, in relation to thinking about what happened before, isn’t hard and fast: what will count as elaboration will depend largely on the grain of one’s interests, and on the kind of evidence being adduced. But just because there’s a spectrum, rather than a sharp distinction, between what’s basic and what’s not in this realm, we can expect a more-or-less metaphysically neutral set of ordinary assumptions about activities relating to the past to be apparent in at least most languages *even if* the relevant words are not themselves primitive. In Nick Evans’s presentation (this volume, conclusion), indeed, Dalabon is precisely one such language: ‘a language that offers a number of distinct ways of talking about remembering – and which appears to conceptualise the dimensions of memory in a way that is reassuringly familiar and unexotic to English speakers – but without having any lexicalised verb for “remember”’.

#### 4. Semantic diversity and the study of memory: some questions and challenges

After I worked so hard, in Section 1 above, to make room for integrating studies of language, of culture, and of cognition in relation to thinking about what happened before, it may seem odd for me thus to be questioning Wierzbicka’s intriguing suggestions. I hope it’s apparent that there is much common ground, and that many of the methods and contributions of the NSM approach, and of cognitive semantics more generally, would greatly benefit a range of areas within the psychology and philosophy of memory. The challenges here go both ways. Can the cognitive sciences genuinely be opened up to become more historically, cross-culturally, and cross-linguistically sensitive? And can proponents of the NSM approach find ways of diluting their natural

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suspicion of the cognitive sciences, and of seeking allies as well as foes in the cross-disciplinary enterprise? So in what I hope is a constructive spirit I want to conclude by identifying a number of questions for future research and topics on which some mutual accommodation may be possible.

Firstly, stressing that my specific criticisms of this account of ‘the English folk model’ are meant to embrace rather than rule out the general form of this enquiry into different cultural models, let me pick up on a couple of features of Wierzbicka’s approach through a discussion of her treatment of one of the key Polish words related to “memory”. In Polish, a *pamiątka* is ‘an object which links the present with the past, and which enables the past to live on in people’s thoughts and emotions’ (Wierzbicka, this volume). Examples include a grandmother’s ring, or a special photo, or a prayer book or a mother’s hairpin which survived the war. Whether such an object has been explicitly designed for this purpose, or whether (as more commonly) it comes to have this role for quite other reasons, it carries an intense emotional value. This kind of object has indeed been significantly undertheorised in Anglophone scholarship. Whereas sociologists and historians have long studied more public monuments and memorials, and there has been some relevant attention to mementos, the crucially personal and relational role of a *pamiątka* puts it in a different category. I can get at the integrative opportunities and questions by way of some remarks about this word *pamiątka*.

Wierzbicka is not arguing that no such objects exist in Anglophone culture, nor that English speakers are incapable of understanding the role and nature of such objects, and acting on the basis of that understanding, but that the absence of a straightforward translation suggests something subtle about the relative cultural importance of such objects. I don’t have the right kind of culturally-situated evidence with which to evaluate the claim that such objects, evoking ‘transience of life, loss, and destructibility of the past’ as well as ‘nostalgia and devotion’ (Wierzbicka, this volume) are not in general so heavily valued in contemporary Anglophone culture. I am, however, certain that Anglophone academic scholarship, at least, has for some years now been addressing exactly these kinds of object, the practices and discourses and habits of remembering in which they are entwined, and especially the key idea that ‘the material links between the present and the past are likely to be fragile and limited’.

This is a notably interdisciplinary interest, spanning (to take just a few examples) anthropology, cognitive archaeology, philosophical ethics, and art history.<sup>9</sup> Now this is of course not to suggest that what these studies address matches exactly the specific inflection given to the relevant Polish practices and models by the notion of *pamiątka*, and indeed critics of the attempt to link the study of memory with emotional objects and material culture have attacked this Anglophone scholarship as exhibiting a spurious sentimentality and overblown religiosity (Klein 2000). Here I’m interested

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9. See Knappett 2005, Kwint 1999, Margalit 2003, Parskin 1999, Renfrew and Scarre 1998, Rowlands 1993.

not so much in how accurately this literature does really reflect Anglophone cultural practices as in the fact that there must be room for an overarching theoretical framework for studying memory and material culture, a framework which can include but is not exhausted by semantic analysis, and which can incorporate both this Anglophone work *and* the Polish concept *pamiętka*.

In particular, both can be understood in terms of the more dynamic picture of cognitive processes which I sketched in Section 1 above, based on the related 'distributed cognition' framework (Hutchins 1996) and 'extended mind hypothesis' (Clark 1997). These frameworks are entirely compatible with (and indeed predict) the existence of dramatic cultural and historical variation in concepts as well as practices of remembering, even if it's true that so far much work under these labels has been insufficiently attentive to issues about language and culture. The reason that these frameworks are particularly relevant for thinking about *pamiętka* is that they see remembering as a complex process which spans brain, body, and the social and material world. In coupling with external symbol systems or objects and with other people in particular contexts, we form temporarily broader or 'distributed' remembering systems (Donald 1991, 2000; Sutton 2004b; Wilson 2004, 2005). So from this perspective, objects which have particular emotional significance over long periods of time, like the grandmother's ring and the treasured prayer-book, don't need to be seen merely as external triggers for remembering: rather they are themselves part of an ongoing extended remembering system. So far does this perspective depart from the notions of inner storage, executive control, and privileged access that the external objects can themselves be understood as (countable) memories or parts of (countable) memories. Arguably this may more accurately reflect the emotional experience of people whose values are so bound up with objects like this. But whether or not we take this extra step, there's no doubt that these frameworks in general call out for more sophisticated methods of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic analysis, so that there is a real possibility for mutually beneficial interaction between these strands of research in cognitive science and in linguistics.

Wierzbicka is also not suggesting that either Polish or Anglo culture is homogenous in the significance attributed to such objects: even though culture, like language, is heterogeneous and changeable, there can still be a real and describable core of conceptions and attitudes (Wierzbicka 1997a: 17–22). So these claims about semantic and cultural differences are entirely compatible with the existence of significant individual differences within a culture (and across cultures). I wonder, then, whether there are any resources within the NSM framework which could help in the study of individual differences, in (for example) making sense of which people or which kinds of people have specific views about or strong emotional investment in the cultural model implicated in the word *pamiętka*, or about the relations between cultural and individual differences on these dimensions. These are great challenges for any form of ethnopsychology, of course: my query is about whether such questions should legitimately be left to other disciplines, or whether cognitive semantics could be expected to contribute.

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I noted above that there's no obvious source of evidence for evaluating claims about the kind of deep differences between Polish and English attitudes to the past, such as those which Wierzbicka makes on the basis of her treatment of the word *pamiętka*. It seems entirely plausible in general that the in-depth analysis of meanings, along with related methods like studies of word frequency, can reflect much not only about cultural preoccupations and values but also about the mental world and about ways of thinking. But because Wierzbicka, as I noted earlier, sees language as the *only* reliable route to thought, we can legitimately ask what kind of evidence could support or challenge, confirm or refute, any particular claims made about thought on the basis of semantic analysis. Elsewhere she does claim that one characteristic generalisation made on the basis of semantic analysis about the common core of Russian culture and Anglo culture respectively 'is entirely consistent with generalisations made independently, on the basis of nonquantitative data' (1997a: 12). How exactly might such independent evidence be found for culturally significant 'different attitudes to the past' in, say, English and Polish culture? Can semantic analysis be supplemented here by, for example, sociological studies of the use and emotional role of particular kinds of object, or psychological studies of different ways of thinking about the past? Or does semantic analysis in principle subsume and trump such alternative approaches? Wierzbicka's paper points towards the most fruitful way forward on this point in her attempt strongly to delineate relevant dimensions, in relation to thinking about what happened before, on which both individuals and cultures might differ or not differ.

My last request for further information or clarification presses again on the question of whether there is anything in Wierzbicka's treatment of cultural differences which rules out the methods, models, and theoretical frameworks of the current scientific psychology of memory, properly understood. In repeating her complaint that contemporary psychology often unwittingly universalises attitudes to memory which are in fact specific to very recent Anglo culture, Wierzbicka notes in passing that 'laboratory studies of "bilingual memory"' exemplify this fault: they treat the "bilingual memory" merely 'as a repository of words from two languages', without questioning underlying attitudes and models of memory which they have unwittingly adopted from modern Anglo culture (this volume).

Wierzbicka's wonderful sensitivity to bilingual experiences and ways of life, and her remarkable eye for telling anecdotes and insights drawn from memoirs and other writings by bilingual authors, are among the great strengths of her work (Wierzbicka 1997b). Presumably she draws more on literary and autobiographical sources than on any psychological studies of bilingualism when she seeks to identify representative features of cultural and bicultural experience and thought just because she thinks that scientific research on (for example) "bilingual memory" is thus tarred with misleadingly narrow preconceptions.

Now perhaps Wierzbicka has a very restricted group of 'laboratory studies' in mind, but I don't see that the contemporary cognitive psychology of bilingual memory either must by its very nature or actually does in practice suffer from such



conceptual myopia. Obviously this is an incredibly difficult research area which needs all the interdisciplinary expertise it can get, and for which the methods of semantic analysis pioneered within the NSM framework may be extremely helpful. Certainly there are a large number of studies in which attention is restricted primarily to the mechanisms by which words from two languages 'are accessed or retrieved' from one or two 'repositories', studies which are aimed at 'understanding general language and memory mechanisms' (French and Jacquet 2004), and these studies may seem remote from the broader experiential and ethnopsychological concerns which animate Wierzbicka's work. But that kind of work is to some extent continuous with research which addresses dimensions of bilingual and bicultural experience much closer to those which she discusses: some dimensions of language-dependent remembering and thinking explored in just a couple of recent studies, for example, are issues about self-orientation and control of the personal past, the emotional tone and valence of attitudes to the personal past, self-esteem, individualism, and narrative style (Marian and Neisser 2000; Ross, Xun, and Wilson 2002; Marian and Kaushanskaya 2005). These dimensions, usefully, can be studied in relation to individual differences and, for example, gender differences, as well as on the larger cross-cultural scale.

This research on memory and the bilingual self thus also makes contact with an existing and robust body of empirical work in the developmental psychology of personal or experiential remembering, with which, again, I think semantic analysis should be compatible rather than in competition. Not only does the flourishing 'social-interactionist' tradition in this area of developmental psychology allow for and investigate very specific cross-cultural and intra-cultural differences in early talk and thought about the past, differences which can be systematically related to differences in local narrative environments (Wang 2001; Brockmeier and Wang 2002; Leichtman, Wang, and Pillemer 2003); it also offers us some important ideas about the various ways in which language shapes and sculpts early remembering activities (Sutton 2002b; Nelson and Fivush 2004). Ongoing longitudinal research addresses longer-lasting influences of language, and seeks to tease apart features of our temporal thinking and practices which remain fairly constant across cultures from those which are more easily and more deeply fashioned by language-specific characteristics of memory concepts (Reese 2002). This last example of an active existing psychological research programme again, in my view, holds out hope for exciting collaborations with comparative cognitive semantics. Conceptual analysis and empirical semantic inquiry can thus be an essential part of a broader interdisciplinary enterprise of coming to understand thinking about what happened before.

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