

Syntactic Change

and gender with the noun which it modified, losing its passive sense, with the verb *haber* becoming the 'perfect auxiliary', and Modern Spanish no longer permits agreement between the participle and the object, as in (4):

- (4) Hemos escri-to cart-a-s
have.we write-Past.Part letter-Fem-Pl
'We have written letters'

The adjectival participle source with number and gender agreement still survives in other contexts (but not in the perfect construction with forms of the verb *haber*), for example:

- (5) Tenemos cart-a-s escri-t-a-s en tint-a roj-a
have.we letter-Fem-Pl write-Past.Part-Fem-Pl in ink-Fem.Sg
red-Fem.Sg
'We have letters written in red ink'.

In the series of changes described here, the meaning is no longer 'X possesses that which has been done', but 'X has done', and is accompanied by the structural change of *haber* from main verb to an auxiliary.

Stage IV: Additional changes in connection with the new 'perfect' construction also came about. First, the verb *ser* 'to be' had formerly also been a perfect auxiliary used with certain intransitive verbs (especially verbs of motion) (as in (6a) and (7a)), but this was replaced by the auxiliary *haber*, as seen in the Modern Spanish equivalents in (6b) and (7b):

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| (6a) Old Spanish | ella <i>es</i> naci-d-a
she is born-Past.Part-Fem |
| (6b) Modern Spanish | ella <i>ha</i> naci-d-o
she has born-Past.Part
'she has been born' |
| (7a) Old Spanish | ellos <i>son</i> i-d-o-s
they are go-Past.Part-Masc-Pl |
| (7b) Modern Spanish | ellos <i>han</i> i-d-o
they have go-Past.Part
'they have gone' (Lapesa 1981: 212) |

Second, the word order changed, placing the participle closer to the auxiliary, for example from the equivalent of 'I have a letter written' (as in (2)) to 'I have written a letter' (as in (4)).

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They that dally [= converse idly] nicely [= foolishly] with words may quickly make them wanton [= unmanageable].

(Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* III, 1)

10.1 Introduction

Changes in meaning and vocabulary excite people. Non-linguists are fascinated by why *bloody* and *bugger* are obscene in Britain and not in America – the words don't even mean the same thing in the two places – and why *pissed* means 'angry' in the USA but 'drunk' in the UK, and why *pissed* is so much less obscene and more tolerated than it was a generation ago in both countries. People want to know how words such as *ditz*, *dork*, *dweeb*, *geek*, *nerd*, *twit*, *wimp*, *wuss* and *yutz* get added to the language so fast and why their meanings seem to change so rapidly, and whatever happened to the *groovy* of late 1960s love songs, anyway? Some find a certain delight (some would say a twisted satisfaction) in the seeming irony in the semantic history of *to bless*, from Old English *blēdsian* (earlier *blōdsian*), which originally meant 'to mark with blood' in an act of consecration in pagan sacrifice. With umlaut in mind, it is easy to see the connection between *blood* and the *blēd-* part of *blēdsian* (just think *to bleed* to see the connection more clearly). Some are charmed (perhaps perversely so) by a favourite example of handbooks, the story behind *cretin*. English *cretin* is borrowed from French *crétin* 'stupid', which comes, to the surprise and delight of etymology-lovers, ultimately from Latin *christianum* 'Christian'. In Romance languages,

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the term for 'Christian' was used also for 'human being' to distinguish people from beasts; the semantic shift which gives the modern sense of *cretin* 'a stupid person' apparently came about in Swiss French dialects especially in reference to a class of dwarves and physically deformed idiots in certain valleys of the Alps, used euphemistically to mean that even these beings were human, and from this came the semantic shift from 'Christian' to 'idiot'. Those who learn other languages often ask how true cognates can come to have such different meanings in related languages, as in the English-German cognates *town/Zaun* 'fence', *timber/Zimmer* 'room', *bone/Bein* 'leg', *write/reissen* 'to tear, rip'. They ask why a seemingly innocent French word such as *baiser*, which the dictionary says means 'to kiss', has changed its meaning to 'to copulate' with no warning to save the unsuspecting language learner from embarrassment. Vocabulary change can be a matter of alarm and deep emotional concern. This is evidenced by the creation of language academies and the appointment of language commissions to protect the purity of languages such as French and Spanish, and as seen, for example, in letters to the press in Canada, Britain, New Zealand and South Africa which denounce on the one hand the invidious creeping encroachment of Americanisms in vocabulary and on the other hand decry the degeneration of students' all-too-limited vocabulary into nothing but slang (so they claim), holding up famous American and British writers as models of how we all should talk in order to be considered proper human beings who uphold our moral and linguistic obligations to the language. This chapter is about what linguists think about changes in meaning and in vocabulary, the topic which non-linguists find so exciting and alarming.

In linguistics (also in anthropology, philosophy and psychology), there are many approaches to semantics, the study of meaning. Unfortunately, these various theoretical approaches to semantics and the traditional historical linguistic treatments of change in meaning have typically had little in common, though clearly we would be in a better position to explain semantic change if we could base our understanding of change in meaning on a solid theory of semantics. Some recent approaches do attempt, with limited success, to reconcile the differences. Given the importance of semantic change, this chapter presents both a traditional classification of kinds of semantic changes and some more recent thinking concerning regularities and general tendencies in meaning change. Semantic change deals with change in meaning, understood to be a change in the concepts associated with a word, and has nothing to do with change in the phonetic form of the word. However, there are also aspects of lexical change which do not fall under this definition of semantic change, and

we will look into them as well. Note that some aspects of semantic change and vocabulary change have already come up in previous chapters, under analogy in Chapter 4, calques (semantic borrowing) in Chapter 3, and grammaticalisation in Chapter 9.

10.2 Traditional Considerations

Work in semantic change has been almost exclusively concerned with lexical semantics (change in the meaning of individual words), and that is the focus in this chapter. Semantic change is mostly concerned with the meaning of individual lexical items, whereas much of semantic theory involves logical relations among items in longer strings. There are various classifications of types of semantic change, and there is nothing special about the classification presented here. Some of the categories overlap with others, and some are defined only vaguely, meaning that some instances of semantic change will fit more than one type while others may fit none comfortably. It is probably best to consider this classification as offering a sort of broad scheme for organising kinds of semantic change, but with no pretensions of being particularly complete or adequate, only (it is hoped) useful.

10.2.1 Widening (generalisation, extension, broadening)

In semantic changes involving widening, the range of meanings of a word increases so that the word can be used in more contexts than were appropriate for it before the change.

(1) *Dog*. English *dog* first appeared with the more specific meaning of 'a (specific) powerful breed of dog', which generalised to include all breeds or races of dogs.

(2) *Salary*. Latin *salārium* was a soldier's allotment of salt (based on Latin *sal* 'salt'), which then came to mean a soldier's wages in general, and then finally, as in English, wages in general, not just a soldier's pay.

(3) *Cupboard*. In Middle English times, *cupboard* meant 'a table ("board") upon which cups and other vessels were placed, a piece of furniture to display plates, a sideboard', whose meaning then became 'a closet or cabinet with shelves for keeping cups and dishes', and finally in America it changed to mean any 'small storage cabinet'. In parts of Canada, *cupboard* has been extended to mean also what others call a 'wardrobe' or 'clothes closet'. Spanish *armario* 'cupboard' was borrowed from Latin in the Middle Ages where it had to do with 'arms', 'weapons', and meant 'armoury'; later its meaning widened to include

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present-day 'clothes closet, cupboard'. French *armoire* 'wardrobe, locker, cabinet' (also borrowed into English from French) has the same history.

(4) Spanish *caballero*, originally 'rider, horseman', expanded to include also 'gentleman, man of upper society' (since only men of means could afford to be riders of horses).

(5) Spanish *estar* 'to be' (especially 'to be in a location') < Latin *stāre* 'to stand'.

(6) Spanish *pájaro* 'bird' < Latin *passer* 'sparrow'.

(7) Finnish *raha* 'money' originally meant 'a-fur-bearing animal' and its 'pelt'. The skins were an important means of exchange in the past, and *raha* came to mean 'skin used as medium of exchange'; when new means of exchange took the place of the old ones, *raha* shifted its meaning to 'money', its only meaning today (Ravila 1966: 105).

10.2.2 Narrowing (specialisation, restriction)

In semantic narrowing, the range of meanings is decreased so that a word can be used appropriately only in fewer contexts than it could before the change.

(1) *Meat* originally meant 'food' in general (as in the King James translation of the Bible) and later narrowed its meaning to 'meat' ('food of flesh'); this original meaning is behind compounds such as *sweetmeat* 'candy'. (Compare the Swedish cognate *mat* 'food'.)

(2) *Hound* 'a species of dog (long-eared hunting dog which follows its prey by scent)' comes from Old English *hund* 'dog' in general.

(3) *Wife* meant 'woman' in Old English times (as in the original sense of *midwife*, literally a 'with-woman'). It narrowed to mean 'woman of humble rank or of low employment, especially one selling commodities of various sorts'. The former meaning is preserved in *old wives' tales* and the second in *fishwife*. Finally it shifted to 'married woman, spouse'.

(4) *Deer* narrowed its sense from Old English *dēor* 'animal' (compare the German cognate *Tier* 'animal').

(5) *Fowl* 'bird (especially edible or domestic)' has narrowed its sense from Old English *fugol* which meant 'bird' in general (compare the German cognate *Vogel* 'bird').

(6) *Girl*, which meant 'child or young person of either sex' in Middle English times, narrowed its referent in Modern English to 'a female child, young woman'.

(7) *Starve* 'to suffer or perish from hunger' is from Old English *steorfan* 'to die'. (Compare the German cognate *sterben* 'to die').

(8) French *soldat* 'soldier' comes from *solder* 'to pay' and thus meant

'a paid person', a narrowing from 'any paid person' to 'someone in the military'.

(9) French *drapeau* 'flag' meant first 'the piece of cloth fastened to a staff' (derived from *drap* 'cloth, sheet'; compare English *drape*, borrowed from French).

(10) Spanish *rezar* 'to pray' < Old Spanish *rezar* 'to recite, say aloud' (from Latin *recitāre* 'to recite, say aloud', the source from which *recite* in English is borrowed).

As noted in Chapter 9, many examples of grammaticalisation involve semantic narrowing, from a broader lexical meaning to a narrower grammatical function.

10.2.3 Metaphor

Definitions of 'metaphor' (from Greek *metaphorā* 'transference') vary and are often vague; that is, it is often difficult to determine whether a given instance fits the definition or not. Metaphor involves understanding or experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thing thought somehow to be similar in some way. Metaphor in semantic change involves extensions in the meaning of a word that suggest a semantic similarity or connection between the new sense and the original one. A much-repeated example is English *bead*, now meaning 'small piece of (decorative) material pierced for threading on a line', which comes from Middle English *bede* 'prayer, prayer bead', which in Old English was *bed*, *beode* 'prayer' (compare the German equivalent *Gebet* 'prayer'). The semantic shift from 'prayer' to 'bead' came about through the metaphoric extension from the 'prayer', which was kept track of by the rosary bead, to the rosary bead itself, and then eventually to any 'bead', even including 'beads' of water. Frequently mentioned examples of metaphoric extensions involve expressions for 'to kill': *dispose of*, *do someone in*, *liquidate*, *terminate*, *take care of*, *eliminate* and others. In slang, there are many metaphoric changes for 'drunk' based on forms whose original meaning is associated with being 'damaged' in some way: *blasted*, *blitzed*, *bombed*, *hammered*, *obliterated*, *ripped*, *shredded*, *smashed*, *tattered*, *wasted* and many more. Another area of metaphor for 'drunk' involves being saturated with liquid: *pissed*, *sauced*, *sloshed*, *soaked*.

Other examples are:

(1) French *feuille* 'leaf, sheet of paper' < 'leaf (of plant)'; Spanish *hoja* 'leaf, sheet of paper' < 'leaf' (both from Latin *folia* 'leaves, plural of *folium* 'leaf').

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(2) French *entendre* 'to hear' comes by metaphor from original 'to understand' (compare the Spanish cognate *entender* 'to understand').

(3) Spanish *sierra* 'saw' was applied by metaphor to 'mountain range'; now there is *sierra* 'saw' and *sierra* 'mountain range'.

(4) Spanish *pierna* 'leg' < Latin *perna* 'ham'.

(5) *root* (of plant) > 'root of plant, root of word, root in algebra, source'.

(6) French *fermer* 'to close' originally meant 'to fix, make firm or fast'. Spanish *firmary* 'to sign (with one's signature)' has the same source.

(7) Latin *captāre* 'to catch, to try to seize, to trap' became in French *chasser* 'to hunt, to chase, to drive away, to cause a hurried departure' (the source from which English *chase* is borrowed, which means both 'to go after, try to catch' and 'to drive (away)').

(8) French *chapeau* 'hat, bonnet' originally meant 'garland'.

(9) English *stud* 'good-looking, sexy man' of slang origin, derived by metaphor from *stud* 'a male animal (especially a horse) used for breeding'.

(10) English *chill* 'to relax, calm down' of slang origin came about by metaphoric extension of the original meaning of *chill* 'to cool'.

10.2.4 Metonymy

Metonymy (from Greek *metōnomia* 'transformation of the name') is a change in the meaning of a word so that it comes to include additional senses which were not originally present but which are closely associated with the word's original meaning, although the conceptual association between the old and new meanings may lack precision. Metonymic changes typically involve some contiguity in the real (non-linguistic) world. They involve shift in meaning from one thing to another that is present in the context (though being present may be a conceptual judgement call not necessarily immediately apparent to us before the change takes place). For example, English *tea* means, in addition to the drink, 'the evening meal' in many English-speaking locations. A much-repeated example is English *cheek* 'fleshy side of the face below the eye'; Old English *cēace* meant 'jaw, jawbone', which over time shifted to the sense of Modern English *cheek*. Some examples of metonymy are:

(1) French *jument* 'mare' < 'pack horse'.

(2) Spanish *cadere* 'hip' < 'buttocks' < ultimately Latin *cathedra* 'armchair'. (Compare the French cognate *chaise* 'chair', from earlier *chaire*.)

(3) Spanish *mejilla* 'cheek' < Latin *maxilla* 'jaw'.

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- (4) Spanish *plata* 'silver' has been extended to mean also 'money'.
- (5) Spanish *acera* 'sidewalk' < Old Spanish *façera* 'façade, front of buildings on street or square'.
- (6) Spanish *timbre* 'bell (as a telephone bell or doorbell), postage stamp' originally meant 'drum'; by metonymy this extended to include a 'clapperless bell' (struck on the outside with a hammer), then 'the sound made by this sort of bell', and then 'the sonorous quality of any instrument or of the voice', then 'tone' (of a sound); from the round shape of a bell, it also extended to mean 'helmet-shaped', then 'the crest of a helmet', 'the crest in heraldry' (the ornament place above the shield), and from this the meaning was extended to include 'the official mark stamped on papers', to 'the mark stamped by the post office upon letters', and finally to 'postage stamp'. (French *timbre* 'tone, postage stamp' has the same history of semantic changes; English *timbre* 'the distinctive quality of a sound' is borrowed from French.)

(7) French *sevrer* 'to wean' comes from Latin *sēparāre* 'to part, divide, separate' (that is, from 'to separate' in general to 'to separate from the mother's breast'). (English *sever* 'to separate (by force, by cutting or tearing)' was borrowed from French *sevrer* before the semantic shift to 'to wean' had taken place.)

(8) English *flake* 'irresponsible person' of slang origin is by metonymy from the original meaning of *flake* 'a small, loose, flat bit' – 'flaking' is usually considered an unfortunate thing to happen to most things.

A common sort of metonymy is the use of the name of the place for a product characteristic of it, as in French *champagne* 'champagne', from the name of the region, *Champagne*. (For other examples, see section 10.4.2 below.)

10.2.5 Synecdoche

Synecdoche (from Greek *sunekdokhé* 'inclusion'), often considered a kind of metonymy, involves a part-to-whole relationship, where a term with more comprehensive meaning is used to refer to a less comprehensive meaning or vice versa; that is, a part (or quality) is used to refer to the whole, or the whole is used to refer to part, for example *hand*, which was extended to include also 'hired hand, employed worker'. Some common examples found in various languages are 'tongue' > 'language', 'sun' > 'day', 'moon' > 'month'.

(1) Spanish *boda* 'wedding' comes from Latin *vōta* 'marriage vows', where the term for part of the whole, namely the 'vows', came to signal the whole, in this case the 'wedding'.

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(2) German *Bein* 'leg' originally meant 'bone' (cognate with English *bone*).

(3) French *tableau* 'picture, panel, board' < Latin *tabula* 'board' (compare English *table*, a loanword ultimately from this same source).

A special kind of synecdoche is *displacement* (also called *ellipsis*), where one word absorbs part or all of the meaning of another word with which it is linked in a phrasal constituent (usually Adjective–Noun), for example, *contact(s)* from *contact lens(es)* and *a capital* from *a capital city*, where the notion of 'city' has been absorbed into the word *capital* (English *capital* is a loan from French). (Some see this also as a kind of syntactic change.)

(1) French *succès* 'success' comes from *succès favorable* 'favourable issue, event' (derived from *succéder* 'to follow, transpire'; compare Latin *successus* 'advance, result', derived from *succedere* 'to follow, undergo, replace'). (French is the source of borrowed *success* in English.)

(2) French *journal* 'newspaper' is a displacement from *papier journal* 'daily paper' (*papier* 'paper' + *journal* 'daily'). In English, *a daily* (from *daily paper*) has the same meaning and has developed in the same way.

(3) Spanish *hermano* 'brother' < Latin *frāter germānus* 'brother of the same parent', where *germānus* 'of the same parent' was used in the sense of 'true, authentic' and eventually displaced the expected form from Latin *frāter* 'brother'.

(4) *sexual intercourse* > *intercourse*.

(5) French *foie* 'liver' and Spanish *higado* 'liver' < Latin *iecur ficatum* 'fig-stuffed liver' by ellipsis so that only the reflex of *ficatum* 'fig-stuffed' remains in the meaning 'liver'.

(6) Finnish *yskä* 'cough' comes from original *yskä tauti*, literally 'chest sickness', *yskä* 'breast, lap' + *tauti* 'sickness', where *yskä* now no longer has the connotation of 'breast, chest' (Ravila 1966: 106).

(7) An often-cited example is *private soldier* > *private*, where *private* after the change came to mean 'ordinary/regular soldier' (contrasted with 'officer'), taking on the meaning of the whole phrase.

10.2.6 Degeneration

In degeneration (often called *pejoration*), the sense of a word takes on a less positive, more negative evaluation in the minds of the users of the language – an increasingly negative value judgement. A famous, oft-cited example is English *knave* 'a rogue', from Old English *cnafa* 'a youth, child', which was extended to mean 'servant' and then ultimately to the modern sense of *knave* 'rogue, disreputable fellow' (compare the German cognate *Knabe* 'boy, lad'). Examples of the degeneration of

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terms for women are well known and are often cited as examples in works dealing with social issues. For example, in colloquial German, *Weib* means 'ill-tempered woman' though in Standard German it just means 'woman' (contrast the English cognate *wife*, which formerly meant 'woman'). A great many of the terms for women which initially were neutral (or at least not so negative) degenerated so that today they are quite negative in connotation:

spinster 'unmarried older woman' < 'one who spins'.

mistress < originally from a borrowing from Old French *maistresse* 'a woman who rules or has control'; earlier in English it meant 'a woman who employs others in her service, a woman who has the care of or authority over servants or attendants'.

madam 'the female head of a house of prostitution' < 'a polite form of address to women'.

Italian *putta* and Spanish *puta* 'whore' earlier meant just 'girl' (compare Old Italian *putta* 'girl', *putto* 'boy'; Latin *putus* 'boy', *puta* 'girl').

Spanish *ramera* 'prostitute' earlier meant 'innkeeper's wife, female innkeeper'.

Some other examples of degeneration are:

(1) English *silly* 'foolish, stupid' comes from Middle English *sely* 'happy, innocent, pitiable', from Old English *sælig* 'blessed, blissful' (compare the German cognate *selig* 'blissful, happy').

(2) English *churl* 'a rude, ill-bred person' is from Old English *ceorl* 'man, man without rank, lowest rank of freemen', which became 'serf, tenant farmer' in Middle English, later 'countryman, peasant, rustic', then debased to 'base fellow, villain', and finally it came to have the modern sense of 'rude, ill-bred fellow' (compare the German cognate *Kerl* 'guy, chap, fellow').

(3) English *villain* 'criminal, scoundrel' was borrowed from French *villein* 'person of the villa/farm/homestead, serf, farm worker', and in Middle English meant 'low-born, base-minded rustic, a man of ignoble ideas or instincts', but later came to mean 'unprincipled or depraved scoundrel' and 'a man naturally disposed to criminal activities'.

(4) Spanish *siniestro* 'sinister' < Old Spanish *siniestro* 'left' (from Latin *sinister* 'left', the source of the loanword *sinister* in English).

(5) English *dilettante* did not originally have a negative connotation, but meant 'devoted amateur, one with love of a subject'; it shifted its meaning to 'a dabbler, amateur who lacks the understanding of professionals', and then to 'one with superficial interest in an area of knowledge'. *Amateur* is similar, originally a lover of the topic (a French loan

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into English, from Latin *ama-tor* 'lover, one who loves'), then it acquired the meaning of 'a non-professional who engages in an activity for pleasure', and eventually was extended also so that now it includes the meaning of 'an incompetent person'.

(6) English *disease* 'illness' formerly meant 'discomfort' (*dis-* + *ease*, like *un-easy* today).

10.2.7 Elevation (amelioration)

Semantic changes of elevation involve shifts in the sense of a word in the direction towards a more positive value in the minds of the users of the language – an increasingly positive value judgement.

(1) *pretty* < Old English *prættig* 'crafty, sly'.

(2) *fond* < past participle of Middle English *fonnen* 'to be foolish, silly'.

(3) English *knight* 'mounted warrior serving a king', 'lesser nobility (below baronet)' comes from Old English *cniht* 'boy, servant', which shifted to 'servant', then 'military servant', and finally to the modern senses of 'warrior in service of the king' and 'lesser nobility'. (Compare the German cognate *Knecht* 'servant, farm hand'.)

(4) Spanish *caballo* 'horse' < Latin *caballus* 'nag, workhorse'.

(5) Spanish *calle* 'street' < Latin *calle* '(cattle-)path'.

(6) Spanish *casa* 'house' < Latin *casa* 'hut, cottage'.

(7) Spanish *corte* 'court' < Latin *cohortem*, *cortem* 'farmyard, enclosure', which came to mean 'division of a Roman military camp', which was extended to include 'body of troops (belonging to that division)' to 'imperial guard' and then further to 'palace' (see English *court*, a loan from Old French *court*, Modern French *cour* 'court (legal, royal), courtship' with the same Latin origin as the Spanish forms).

(8) The *villa* of the Middle Ages meant 'farm, homestead', but was elevated in French *ville* to 'city, town', Spanish *villa* 'village, town, country house' (compare Italian *villa* 'country house').

(9) English *dude* 'guy, person' (slang in origin) was in 1883 a word of ridicule for 'a man who affects an exaggerated fastidiousness in dress, speech and deportment, concerned with what is aesthetically considered "good form", a dandy'.

10.2.8 Taboo replacement and avoidance of obscenity

Much is written about semantic changes and changes in vocabulary which involve responses to taboo and obscenity, and euphemism in general,

though many of these changes might better be treated merely as examples of degeneration and metaphor and so on. In the sorts of semantic changes considered so far, focus is on changes in the meaning of words whose phonetic form mostly remains unaltered. There are cases of lexical replacement where a meaning remains but the phonetic realisation of it is changed in some way, usually by substituting some other lexical item which had other denotations of its own before the change. Thus, lexical replacements involve more than meaning shifts, although change in the meaning may also be involved. Changes involving taboo and obscenity are prime examples of this sort. For instance, in English, *ass* 'long-eared animal related to a horse' has essentially been replaced in America by *donkey* (or *burro*) because it is considered too close for comfort to obscene *ass* 'derriere, arse'; *cock* 'adult male chicken' is replaced by *rooster* due to discomfort from the obscene associations of *cock* with 'penis'. In dialects of English where *bloody* is obscene, what is generally called a *bloody nose* in North America becomes *blood nose* or *bleeding nose* in order to avoid the taboo word. The following two examples were mentioned in Chapter 6.

(1) Spanish *huevo* 'egg' came to mean both 'egg' and 'testicle', but because of the obscene associations of 'testicle', in colloquial Mexican Spanish *huevo* as 'egg' was avoided and replaced by *blanquillo* 'egg', originally 'small white thing' (*blanco* 'white' + *-illo* 'diminutive').

(2) Latin American Spanish *pájaro* 'bird' came to be associated obscenely also with 'penis', and for this reason *pajarito* is usually substituted for 'bird', from *pájaro* 'bird' + *-ito* 'diminutive'. This taboo avoidance is carried even further in Kaqchikel and K'iche' (Mayan languages of Guatemala), where in many dialects the native term *ts'ikin* 'bird' has become taboo due to influence from Spanish *pájaro* 'penis, bird' (Spanish is the politically dominant language of the region), and therefore has been replaced by *čikop* '(small) animal'. Thus the meaning of *čikop* has been extended to include both '(small) animal' and 'bird', while that of *ts'ikin* has been restricted now to only or predominantly 'penis', with the meaning 'bird' either eliminated or now very recessive.

Changes involving *euphemism*, the replacement of words regarded as unpleasant, are part of this discussion. Favoured examples involve the many euphemistic replacements of words meaning 'toilet'. Terms for 'toilet' frequently come to be considered indelicate, and substitutions lacking the distressing sentiments are made. The room where indoor toilets were installed was called *water closet* (abbreviated *WC*) in Britain; this was soon replaced by *toilet*, originally a loan from French *toilette* 'small cloth' (diminutive of *toile* 'cloth, towel') which in English originally meant 'a wrapper for clothes, a night-dress bag', then 'a cloth

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or towel thrown over the shoulders during hairdressing', then 'a cloth cover for a dressing table', then 'articles used in dressing', 'furniture of the toilet' 'toilet-table', 'toilet service', and then 'the table upon which these articles are placed', 'the action or process of dressing', 'a dressing room with bathing facilities', and finally 'toilet/WC/bathroom'. Other euphemistic replacements include *lavatory*, *bathroom*, *restroom*, *com-mode*, *loo*, *john* and many others.

Spanish *embarazada* 'pregnant' (originally meaning 'encumbered') has essentially replaced earlier *preñada* 'pregnant'. (English *embarrass* also earlier meant 'to encumber, impede, hamper [movements, actions]', a borrowing from French *embarrasser* 'to block, to obstruct'.)

Not only can words be replaced or lost due to avoidance of obscenities and taboo, but also they are often changed phonetically to give more euphemistic outcomes, one source of new vocabulary. English has many such 'deflected' forms, for example: *blasted*, *darn*, *dang*, *dadnabbit*, *fudge*, *gadzooks*, *gosh*, *jeez*, *shucks*, *zounds* and many others. Varieties of Spanish have *pucha*, *puchis*, *púchica*, *futa* and the like as euphemistic replacements for *puta* 'whore' (very obscene); *chin* in Mexican Spanish replaces the very obscene *chingar* 'to have sexual intercourse (crudely)'. Examples of this sort are found in many languages. (Other cases of avoidance of taboo and obscenity are also seen in the discussion of *avoidance of homophony*, Chapter 11.)

10.2.9 Hyperbole

Hyperbole (*exaggeration*, from Greek *hyperbolē* 'excess') involves shifts in meaning due to exaggeration by overstatement.

(1) English *terribly*, *horribly*, *awfully* and other similar words today mean little more than 'very' (a generic intensifier of the adjective which they modify); by overstatement they have come to have no real connection with their origins, *terror*, *horror*, *awe* and so on.

(2) German *sehr* 'very' < 'sorely'.

(3) German *quälen* 'to torment, torture' < Proto-Germanic **k^waljan* 'to kill' (compare the English cognate *quell*, from Old English *cwellan* 'to kill, slay').

(4) English slang *lame* 'stupid, awkward, socially inept', from the original meaning 'crippled, having an impaired limb'.

10.2.10 Litotes

Litotes (*understatement*, from Greek *litótēs* 'smoothness, plainness') is exaggeration by understatement (such as 'of no small importance' when

'very important' is meant). In many languages, examples of litotes are found involving verbs meaning 'to kill'. For example, English *kill* originally meant 'to strike, beat, hit, knock'. If you were to say *hit* but intend it to mean 'kill', this would be an understatement.

(1) French *meurtre* 'murder, homicide' comes via litotes from 'bruise', still seen in the etymologically related verb *meurtrir* 'to bruise' (compare the Spanish cognate *moretón* 'bruise, black-and-blue spot').

(2) French *poison* 'poison' originally meant 'potion, draught' (English *poison* was borrowed from French after this semantic shift).

(3) English *bereaved*, *bereft* 'deprived by death' < 'robbed' (Old English *be-* + *rēafian* 'to rob, plunder, spoil').

(4) English slang *inhale* 'to eat something fast' < 'to breathe in, draw in by breathing'.

10.2.11 Semantic shift due to contact

Though it is not generally found in traditional classifications of semantic change, examples of semantic shift due to language contact are occasionally pointed out in work on the history of specific languages. The following are a few examples.

(1) In K'iche' (Mayan), *kje:x* originally meant 'deer'; however, with the introduction of horses with European contact, *kje:x* came to mean 'horse'. Eventually, to distinguish 'deer' from 'horse', the term for 'deer' became *k'iče' kje:x*, literally 'forest horse'.

(2) In Lake Miwok (in California, of the Miwok-Costanoan family), with the introduction of European guns, the word *kó:no*, which originally meant 'bow', shifted to include 'gun'; the 'gun' meaning then extended so fully that 'bow' is now *hintí:l kó:no*, literally 'old-time gun' (*hintí:l* is a borrowing from Spanish *gentil* 'pagan', originally used to refer to unchristianised Indians) (Callaghan and Gamble 1997: 112).

10.2.12 Summary of traditional classification

As is easy to see, the categories of semantic change in this classification are not necessarily distinct from one another; rather, some of them overlap and intersect. For this reason, some scholars consider 'narrowing' and 'widening' to be the principal kinds of semantic change, with others as mere subtypes of these two. Some emphasise the tendency for change to be in the direction from *concrete* to *abstract* (see below). Instances of overlapping and intersection are easily found in the examples listed here. For example, a semantic change could involve widening, degeneration

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and metonymy all at once, as in instances where terms for male and female genitals have taken on negative meanings for a man or woman of negative character, though often obscene (as in the meanings of English *prick* as 'penis' and 'miscreant male'). Another case is Yiddish *schmuck* 'penis, fool, stupid person', which originally meant 'jewel' (compare German *Schmuck* 'jewel, ornament'), but shifted to mean 'penis' (roughly analogous to the English jocular expression *the family jewels* to refer to the same general thing), then, as in the previous example, was extended further to 'fool, stupid person' (and along the way lost the original meaning of 'jewel'). *Schmuck* has been borrowed into English, primarily with the meaning of 'miscreant male'.

10.3 Attempts to Explain Semantic Change

Such general classifications of semantic change seem to offer little in the way of explaining how and why these changes take place in the ways they do. Nevertheless, many scholars have called for a search for regularities and explanations in semantic change, and some general tendencies have been discussed and some generalisations proposed. It is important to see what general understanding they may offer. The more traditional classifications of kinds of semantic change are generally thought to be useful for showing what sorts of changes might occur, but some of the generalisations that have been based on them amount to little more than a repetition in different form of the classification on which they are based. Others point out that semantic change and lexical change will not be explained in a vacuum, but will require appeal to and coordination with analogy, syntax (especially in the form of grammaticalisation; see Chapter 9), discourse analysis, pragmatics and social history. Because sociocultural historical facts are often relevant, some insist that it is useless to seek generalisations to explain semantic change, although most would admit that some general statements about how and why meaning changes may be possible even if not all semantic changes are regular or predictable.

Earlier work on semantic change was not totally without attempts at generalisation. A general mechanism of semantic change was believed to be the associative patterns of human thought, and thus traditional approaches to meaning change typically had a psychological-cognitive orientation, though social context and pragmatic factors were emphasised by others. All of these factors play a role in more recent work on semantic change.

In the past, it was rarely asked how semantic change might come

about, what pathways it might follow, and how it was to be explained, but many now recognise that semantic change must go through a stage of *polysemy*, where a word has more than one meaning. Thus in a historical shift a word might expand its sphere of reference to take on additional readings, becoming polysemous. Alternatively in a semantic change, a polysemous form may lose one (or more) of its meanings. A view which some have of semantic change combines both these situations: the word starts out with an original meaning, then acquires additional, multiple meanings, and then the original sense is lost, leaving only the newer meaning. Schematically this can be represented in three stages, beginning with form *a* which has meaning 'A':

- Stage 1: a 'A'
Stage 2: a 'A', 'B' ('A' > 'A', 'B')
Stage 3: a 'B' ('A', 'B' > 'B')

Some examples will be helpful.

(1) English *timber*, German *Zimmer* 'room'. In Stage 1, form *a* = Germanic **tem-ram*, meaning A = 'building' (originally from Proto-Indo-European **dem-rom*; compare Latin *dom-us* 'house' and Old English *timrian* 'to build'). In Stage 2, English *a* = *timber*, A = 'building', B = 'material for building', 'wood which supplies building material'. Similarly in Stage 2, German *a* = *Zimmer*, A = 'building', B = 'room'. In Stage 3, English *a* = *timber*, B = 'material for building', 'wood which supplies building material' (meaning A 'building' was lost). In Stage 3, German *a* = *Zimmer*, B = 'room' (meaning A 'building' was lost).

(2) English *write*. In Stage 1, *write* meant 'to cut, score' (compare the German cognate *reissen* 'to tear, split'). In Stage 2, the meaning was extended to include both 'to cut, scratch' and 'to write'; the connection is through runic writing, which was carved or scratched on wood and stone (compare Old Icelandic *rísta* 'to scratch, to write'). This stage is attested in Old English *writan* 'to write', 'to cut'. Stage 3 is illustrated by modern English *write* meaning 'to write' only, where the sense of 'to cut' or 'to scratch' has been lost.

(3) Spanish *alcalde* 'mayor', when first borrowed from Arabic *qâdi*, meant 'judge (in Islamic law)' (A), but was later broadened to mean 'an official who is magistrate and mayor' (B, added with A), and then eventually the term was restricted in meaning to only 'mayor' (only B, since A was lost).

This view recognises (at least implicitly, and often explicitly) an intervening stage of polysemy as necessary in semantic changes. Others do not emphasise this view so much; rather, they recognise that lexical

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items typically have a core meaning (or group of related core concepts) but also various less central, more peripheral senses when used in a variety of discourse contexts, and they see semantic change as a less central sense becoming more central and the original core concept receding to be more peripheral, often being lost altogether. Still others see meaning as a network or semantic map where items within a semantic domain and from other domains are related by various overlappings in the polysemous choice which each lexical item has. Semantic change in this view follows paths of connections in the network, selecting and emphasising different senses which the items have in different contexts. These are not really different approaches, but rather just more realistic versions of the view that holds that polysemy is a necessary intermediate step in semantic change.

Most linguists, past and present, have looked to structural (linguistic) and psychological factors as a primary cause of semantic change; however, historical factors outside of language have also been considered important causes of semantic change. Changes in technology, society, politics, religion and in fact all spheres of human life can lead to semantic shifts. Thus, for example, *pen* originally meant 'feather, quill' (a loan from Old French *penne* 'feather, writing quill'; compare Latin *penna* 'feather'), but as times changed and other instruments for writing came into use, the thing referred to by the word *pen* today is not remotely connected with 'feathers'. As guns replaced older hunting implements and weapons, terms meaning 'bow' (or 'arrow') shifted to mean 'gun' in many languages. Thus in the Lake Miwok example mentioned above, *kó:no* 'gun' originally meant 'bow'. The word for 'blowgun' in K'iche', *u6*, shifted its meaning to include 'shotgun'. In the wake of automobiles and aeroplanes, *fly* and *drive* have taken on new meanings. There are countless such examples, of words whose meanings have changed due to sociocultural and technological change in the world around us, and several of the examples presented here in the classification of kinds of semantic changes are of this sort. For example, changes in religion and society are behind the shift from *blēdsian* 'to mark with blood in an act of consecration in pagan sacrifice' to modern *to bless*; and, as 'pelts' were replaced as a medium of exchange, Finnish *raha* shifted its meaning from 'pelt' to 'money'. In the historical events that brought English-speaking settlers to America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and so on, new plants and animals were encountered and sometimes native English words which originally referred to very different species were utilised for these new species, leading to semantic shifts in the meaning of these words. Thus, for example, *magpie* and *robin* refer to totally

different species of birds in the North America, the UK and New Zealand. *Magpie* in Europe is *Pica caudata* (of the family of *Corvidae*); the American magpie is *Pica pica hudsonia*; and the New Zealand and Australian magpie is *Gymnorhina tibicen* (of the *Cracticidae* family). *Robin* in England is of the genus *Erithacus*; in North America *robin* refers to *Turdus migratorius*; the New Zealand robin is *Petroica australis* (of the family *Muscicapidae*). The American *possum* (or *opossum*) (*Didelphis virginiana*) and Australian *possum* (*Trichosurus vulpecula*, and other species) are very different animals. Many Spanish words have undergone semantic changes as the result of similar historical events; for example, *gorrión* means a 'sparrow' in Spain, but shifted its meaning to 'hummingbird' in Central America; *tejón* means 'badger' in Spain, but 'coati-mundi' in Mexico; *león* refers to 'lion' in Spain, but has shifted to 'cougar, mountain lion' in many areas of Latin America; similarly, *tigre*, originally 'tiger', means 'jaguar' in much of Latin America. It is this sort of shift in meaning which makes it so difficult to generalise about semantic change. Since changes in society and technology are for the most part unpredictable, their effects on semantic change are also not predictable.

More recent work concentrates on the general directionality observed for some kinds of semantic changes, and attempts based on these are being made to elaborate a more explanatory approach, one which might predict possible and impossible changes or directions of change. Eve Sweetser's and Elizabeth Closs Traugott's work in this area has been the most influential (see Sweetser 1990, Traugott 1989, Traugott and Heine 1991, and Traugott and König 1991; see also Hopper and Traugott 1993: 68–93). Some general claims about semantic change which have been formulated are the following.

1. Semantically related words often undergo parallel semantic shifts. For example, various words which meant 'rapidly' in Old English and Middle English shifted their meaning to 'immediately'.
2. Phonetic similarity (especially cases of phonetic identity, homophony) can lead to shifts which leave the phonetically similar forms semantically more similar (sometimes identical). Note the confusion and lack of contrast in many English dialects for such sets of related words as *sit/set* and *lie/lay*.
3. Spatial/locative words may develop temporal senses: *before*, *after*, *behind*. Also, spatial terms often develop from body-part terms, as in *ahead of*, *in the back of*, *at the foot of*.
4. Some common semantic shifts typically (though not absolutely

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always) go in one direction and not the other; cases which recur and are found in numerous languages include the following.

(1) Words having to do with the sense of touch may typically develop meanings involving the sense of taste: *sharp, crisp*.

(2) Words involving the sense of taste may develop extended senses involving emotions in general: *bitter, sour, sweet*.

(3) Obligation > possibility/probability – more precisely, *root* senses of modals, also called *deontic* senses, by which is meant real-world forces, such as obligation, permission and ability, typically develop *epistemic* meanings (where epistemic means ‘speaker’s assessment’ and denotes necessity, probability and possibility involving reasoning). For example, in the history of *may*, the meaning was first physical ability (*Jane may come* = ‘Jane is able to come’); then the sense of social permission developed (‘Jane is allowed to come’); finally the epistemic, logical possibility sense came about (‘it is perhaps the case that Jane will come’). The history of *must* is similar: first, *Bess must sing* had the root meaning ‘it is a requirement in her family that Bess sing’); second, an epistemic sense was added, ‘that Bess must sing is a reasoned conclusion based on the evidence that her father and mother and brothers and sisters all sing, so it is likely that she, too, sings’. In these examples, the root senses are original and the epistemic senses developed later.

(4) Propositional > textual – things with propositional meanings tend to develop textual and later expressive meanings. For example, *while* in modern English means (1) ‘a period of time’ (propositional, a specific temporal situation), (2) ‘during the time that’ and (3) ‘although’ (textual, connecting clauses); however, *while* comes from Old English *pa hwīle þe* [that.Accusative while/time.Accusative Subordinate.particle] ‘at the time that’, which had only the propositional sense, not the later textual one. This phrase was reduced by late Old English times to *wile*, a simple conjunction (Traugott and König 1991: 85).

(5) ‘see’ > ‘know, understand’.

(6) ‘hear’ > ‘understand’, ‘obey’.

(7) Physical-action verbs (especially with hands) > mental-state verbs, speech-act verbs. For example, verbs such as ‘grasp’, ‘capture’, ‘get a hold on’, ‘get’, ‘catch on to’ very commonly come to mean ‘understand’; thus, *feel* goes from ‘touch, feel with hands’ to ‘feel, think, have sympathy or pity for’; Spanish *captar*, originally ‘capture, seize’, added the sense ‘to understand’; Finnish *käsittää* ‘to comprehend’ is derived from *käsi* ‘hand’; Spanish *pensar* ‘to think’ comes from Latin *pēnsāre* ‘to weigh’. English *fret* ‘worry, be distressed’ formerly meant

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'to eat, gnaw' (compare the German cognate *fressen* 'to eat, devour, consume (of animals, or rudely of people)').

(8) Mental-state verbs > speech-act verbs (*observe* 'to perceive, witness' > 'to state, remark').

(9) 'man' > 'husband' (German *Mann* 'man, husband' < 'man').

(10) 'woman' > 'wife'.

(11) 'body' > 'person' (compare *somebody*).

(12) 'finger' > 'hand'.

(13) 'left(-handed, left side)' > 'devious, evil, foreboding' (English *sinister*, ultimately from Latin *sinister* 'left').

(14) 'know' > 'find out', 'taste' (compare Spanish *saber* 'to know, to taste').

(15) animal names > inanimate objects. For example, Spanish *gato* 'jack (for raising cars)' < *gato* 'cat'; in Central American Spanish *mico* 'jack' < *mico* 'monkey'; Spanish *grúa* '(construction) crane' < Old Spanish *grúa* 'crane' (bird) (compare Modern Spanish *grulla*, *grúa* 'crane (bird)' (compare English *crane* '(bird) crane', 'building crane').

Traugott speaks of broad explanatory tendencies:

1. Meanings based on the external situation > meanings based on the internal situation (evaluative/perceptual/cognitive). This would cover, for example, the cases called degeneration and elevation, which involve value judgements on the part of the users of the language. It would also include many of the examples from (5-7) above.
2. Meanings based on external or internal situations > meanings based on textual or (meta)linguistic situations. This would include many instances from (4), (7) and (8) above.
3. Meanings tend to become increasingly based on speakers' subjective beliefs/states/attitudes towards the proposition. Instances of (1), (2) and especially (3) above illustrate the change of meaning involving increase in subjective reaction. Many metonymic semantic changes fall under this. (See Traugott 1989.)

It is frequently claimed that semantic shifts typically go from more *concrete* to more *abstract*. For example, there are many semantic changes which extend body-part notions to more abstract meanings, but not the other way around, as with German *Haupt* once meaning only 'head' (body part, concrete), but now limited mostly to the meaning 'main' or 'principal', as in *Hauptstadt* 'capital' (*Haupt* 'head' + *Stadt* 'town, city'), *Hauptbahnhof* 'central station' (*Haupt* 'head' + *Bahnhof* 'railway station'). While this is an interesting and important claim, a

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number of the traditional classes of semantic change, for example narrowing in particular, often involve change towards more concreteness, and therefore the claim needs to be understood as only a broad general tendency which can easily have exceptions.

10.4 Other Kinds of Lexical Change – New Words

There are many kinds of lexical change that are not limited to semantic change. Several sources of new vocabulary have already come up in the treatment of various kinds of analogy, borrowing and the semantic changes. We will not bring these up again here, but will concentrate on other sources of *neologisms* (new words in a language), presenting a more or less traditional classification of kinds of lexical change together with examples. Abundant examples involving the more productive sources of neologisms are found especially in slang, advertising and political discourse.

10.4.1 Creations from nothing (*root creations*)

Creations of new words from nothing, out of thin air, are rare, but putative examples exist. Examples that are often cited of this include:

1. *blurb* coined by Gelett Burgess (American humorist) in 1907.
2. *gas* coined by Dutch chemist J. B. van Helmont in 1632, inspired by Greek *khāos* 'chaos', where the letter g of Dutch is pronounced [x], corresponding to the pronunciation of the Greek letter χ, the first of the word for 'chaos'.
3. *paraffin* invented by Reichenbach in 1830, based on Latin *parum* 'too little, barely' + *affinis* 'having affinity'.

It might be objected that in most cases of this sort, the creation isn't really fully out of 'nothing'; for example, *gas* has Greek 'chaos' lying in some way behind it; the creation of *paraffin* utilised pieces from Latin. Probably better examples of creations from nothing could be found in certain slang terms (*zilch*, *bonking*) and product names (see below).

A related source of new words is *literary coinage*, new words created by (or at least attributed to) authors and famous people.

1. *blatant* < Edmund Spenser (between 1590 and 1596).
2. *boojum* < Lewis Carroll.
3. *chortle* < Lewis Carroll (a blend of *chuckle* + *snort*).

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4. *pandemonium* 'the abode of all the demons, the capital of Hell', from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 1667 (the pieces from which this was created are Greek).
5. *yahoo* < Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the name created for an imaginary race of brutes with human form.

10.4.2 From personal names

From names of individuals we have examples such as:

1. *guillotine* borrowed from French *guillotiner*, named after the French physician Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, who suggested that the instrument be used in executions in 1789.
2. *macadam* (*road*) named after John Loudon McAdam (1756–1836) for the kind of road he invented and the kind of material used in it.
3. *sandwich* said to be named after John Montagu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich (1718–92), who spent twenty-four hours gambling with no other food than slices of cold meat between slices of toast.
4. *volt* named after Alessandro Volta, Italian scientist and physician (1745–1827).

There are also words which originate from names of groups of people:

- gothic* from the Goths (Germanic tribes);
- to gyp* 'to cheat, swindle' from 'Gypsy' (today considered improper, racist);
- to jew* (a price down) from 'Jew' (now avoided because of its negative stereotype of an ethnic group);
- vandal*, *vandalise* from the Vandals (another Germanic tribe);
- welch*, *welsh* 'to cheat by avoiding payment of bets' said to be from 'Welsh'.

10.4.3 From place names

1. *canary* < Canary Islands.
2. *currant* ultimately from *Corinth*, a loan from Old French *raisins de Corauntz* (Modern French *raisins de Corinthe*) 'raisins of Corinth'.
3. *denim* ultimately from French *serge de Nîmes* 'serge (a woollen fabric) of Nîmes' (a manufacturing town in southern France).
4. *jeans* < Genoa (for a twilled cotton cloth associated with Genoa).
5. *peach* < Persia. English *peach* is a loan from French *pêche* which derives from Latin *malum persicum* 'Persian apple'; 'Persia' as the

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source of words for 'peach' is more visible in German *Pfirsich* and Finnish *persikka*.

6. *sherry* < Jerez (a place in Spain associated with this fortified Spanish wine).
7. *spa* < Spa (place in Belgium celebrated for the curative properties of its mineral water).
8. *tangerine* < Tangier, Morocco.

10.4.4 From brand (tradé) names

1. *coke, cola* (drink), *coca-cola* < Coca-Cola.
2. *frig, frigidaire* < Frigidaire (in the USA).
3. *jello* (jelly crystals, a gelatin dessert in North America) < Jell-O.
4. *kleenex* (tissue) < Kleenex.
5. *levis, levi jeans* < Levi Strauss.
6. *xerox* < Xerox.

10.4.5 Acronyms

Acronyms are words derived from the initial letters or syllables of each of the successive parts of a compound term or word: *ASAP* < 'as soon as possible'; *beemer* < 'BMW automobile'; *Benelux* < Belgium–Netherlands–Luxembourg; *BS* < 'bullshit'; *CD* < 'compact disc'; *CIA* < 'Central Intelligence Agency'; *DJ* < 'disc jockey'; *emcee* < 'master of ceremonies'; *Gestapo* < from German *Geheime Staatspolizei* 'secret state's police', borrowed into English; *MD* < 'medical doctor'; *MP* < 'military police', *MP* < 'member of parliament'; *OJ* < slang for 'orange juice'; *PDQ* 'fast' < 'pretty damned quick'; *radar* 'radio direction and ranging'; *RAM* < 'random access memory'; *ROM* < 'read-only memory'; *scuba* (diving) < 'self-contained underwater breathing apparatus'; *SNAG* < 'sensitive new-age guy'; *TMJ* 'temporomandibular-joint disorder'; *UK*; *USA*; *VCR* < 'video cassette recorder'; *yuppie* < 'young urban professional'; and many more.

Some forms are turned into acronym-like words even though they do not originate as such; these usually involve sequences of letters from principal syllables in the word, for example: *TV* < television; *PJs* < pyjamas.

10.4.6 Compounding

all-nighter (to pull an all-nighter 'to stay up all night long, usually to study for exams'); *bad(-)ass*; *bag lady*; *boombox*; *brain-dead* 'stupid,

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unable to think'; *cashflow*; *couch potato* 'lazy person, someone who just lies around'; *downmarket* 'less expensive, less sophisticated'; *downside*; *glass ceiling* 'hypothetical barrier which allows a goal to be viewed but denies access to it'; *-head* (as in *airhead*, *butthead*, *deadhead*, *dickhead*, *doughhead*); *knee-jerk* (adjective); *mad cow disease*; *melt-down*; *motormouth*; *-person* (as in *busperson*, *chairperson*, *clergyperson*, *minutepersons*); *red-eye* 'cheap whisky', *red-eye* 'early-morning or late-night flight'; *scumbucket* 'despicable person'; *shareware*; *slamdunk*; *stargaze*; *studmuffin* 'a muscular or attractive male'; *tummytuck*; *underhanded*; and so on.

In the case of older compounds, later changes often make the original components of the compound no longer recognisable, for example:

1. *elbow* < Proto-Germanic **alinō* 'forearm' + **bugōn* 'bend, bow' (compare Old English *eln* 'forearm, cubit').
2. *gamut* < *gamma*, the name of the Greek letter *G*, introduced in the Middle Ages to represent a note on the musical scale one note lower than *A*, which began the scale, + *ut*, the first of a series of six syllables used to name the six notes of a hexachord.
3. *gossip* < Old English *godsibb* (*God* + *sib* 'related') 'one who has contracted spiritual affinity with another by agreeing to act as sponsor at a baptism', which came to mean 'family acquaintance, friend' and 'a woman's female friends invited to be present at a birth', and to 'someone, usually a woman, of light and trifling character' to 'the conversation of such a person', 'idle talk'.
4. German *Elend* 'misery, miserable' < Old High German *elilenti* 'sojourn in a foreign land, exile' (compare Gothic *alja-* 'other' + *land* 'land').

In others, the source of the compounding is only partially perceived today: *cobweb* < Middle English *coppe* 'spider' + *web*; *nickname* < *an* + *eke* 'additional' + *name*; *werewolf* < Old English *wer* 'man' (cognate with Latin *vir* 'man') + *wolf*.

10.4.7 Other productive word-formation and derivation devices

In addition to compounding, new words are derived more or less productively through the employment of various derivational affixes in word-formation processes. Others involve what have been called 'neo-classical' compounds (involving elements from Greek or Latin (such as *auto-*, *trans-*, *bio-* and so on). A few examples illustrating these processes

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are: *auto-* (*autopilot, auto-suggestion*); *-belt* (*banana belt, bible belt, cow belt*); *mega-* (*mega-sound, mega-show, mega-event*); *micro-* (*microenvironment, micromini* 'very short skirt', *microcapsule, microprocessor, microsurgery*); *mini-* (*minibike, minicomputer, minimart, miniskirt, mini-series*); *pan-* (*pandemic, pan-galactic, pan-national*); *pre-* and *post-* (*pre-packaged, pre-washed, post-colonialist, post-structuralism*); *pseudo-* (*pseudo-friend, pseudo-psychological, pseudo-scholar, pseudo-Western*); *trans-* (*transmigration, transnationals, transpacific*); *ultra-* (*ultraliberal, ultramodern, ultraradical, ultrashort*); *-ism/-ist* (*racist, sexism, fattist, neologism*) among many others. Some of these overlap with blends, such as *bio-*: *biodiversity, biosphere*; and *eco-* (< *ecology, ecological*): *ecotourism, eco-friendly, ecofreak*.

10.4.8 Amalgamation

Amalgamations are forms which formerly were composed of more than one free-standing word (which occurred together in some phrase), which as a result of the change get bound together in a single word. For example, English *nevertheless* and *already* are now single words, but come from the amalgamation of separate words, of *never + the + less* and *all + ready*. English has many words of this sort in whose background lies the amalgamation of earlier separate words into a single lexical item. Amalgamation is often considered a kind of analogy. (Similarly, cases of blending and contamination are sometimes treated as kinds of lexical change, as discussed in Chapter 4 on analogy.) We can see amalgamation under way in the frequent (mis)spellings of *alright* for *all right* (probably influenced by analogy with *already*) and *alot* for *a lot* meaning 'many, much'.

(1) Some examples of amalgamations in English are: *almost* < *all most*, *alone* < *all one*, *altogether* < *all together*, *always* < *all ways*, *however* < *how ever*, *without* < *with out*.

(2) Spanish *usted* 'you (formal, polite)' < *vuestra merced* 'your grace'.

(3) Spanish *también* 'also' < *tan bene* 'as well', *todavía* 'still, yet' < *tota via* 'all way(s)'.

(4) Latin *dē mānē* (*dē* 'of' + *manus* 'good (ablative)'), meaning 'in good time', is behind amalgamated forms meaning 'morning, tomorrow' in some of the Romance languages, for example French *demain* 'tomorrow' and Italian *domani* 'morning, tomorrow'. Later, French underwent further amalgamations: *en demain* ('in' + 'tomorrow') > *l'endemain* (*l(e)* 'the' + *endemain*) > *le lendemain* 'tomorrow, the next day'.

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(5) Latin *hodie* 'today' should have ended up in French as *hui*, but this was further amalgamated, first to *jour d'hui* (from *jour* 'day' + *d(e)* 'of' + *hui* 'today') and then on to *aujourd'hui* 'today, nowadays' (from *au* 'to the' + *jour d'hui* – even *au* is an amalgam of *a* 'to' + *le* 'the').

(6) Spanish *hidalgo* 'noble', Old Spanish *fijodalgo*, come from *fijo* 'son' (Latin *filiu-*, compare Modern Spanish *hijo* 'son') + *d(e)* 'of' + *algo* 'something/wealth'.

(7) French *avec* 'with' comes from Latin *apud* 'with, by, beside' + *hoc* 'this, it', literally 'with/by this'.

(8) Spanish *nosotros* 'we' comes from *nos otros* 'we others', *vosotros* 'you (familiar plural)' from *vos otros* 'you others'.

(9) English *wannabe(e)* of slang origin ('someone who tries to be accepted by a group, adopting its appearance and manners') < *want to be*.

Note that many of the cases today called *grammaticalisation* (see Chapter 9) are instances of amalgamation, where formerly independent words are amalgamated with the result that one becomes a grammatical affix.

(10) For example, in Spanish and other Romance languages, forms of the verb *haber* 'have' (from Latin *habēre*) were amalgamated with infinitives to give the 'future' and 'conditional' morphological constructions of today, for example *cantar he* > *cantar-hé* > *cantaré* 'I will sing' (*he* 'first person singular' of *haber*), *cantar has* > *cantar-has* > *cantarás* 'you will sing' (*has* 'second person singular' of *haber*); *cantar habías* > *cantaría*s 'you would sing' (*habías* 'you had').

(11) In another example, *mente* 'in mind' (from the ablative of Latin *mens* 'mind') was grammaticalised in Romance languages as an adverbial clitic (in Spanish) or suffix (in French). From *absoluta mente* 'in absolute mind' we get Spanish *absolutamente* and French *absolument* 'absolutely'. (For discussion and other examples, see Chapter 9.)

10.4.9 Clipping (compression, shortening, ellipsis)

Often, new words or new forms of old words come from 'clipping', that is, from shortening longer words. The several examples from English which follow show this process: *ad* < advertisement, *bike* < bicycle, *bus* < Latin *omnibus* 'for everyone' (-*bus* dative plural case ending – this is a much-cited example), *condo* < condominium, *decaf* < decaffeinated coffee, *dis(s)* (*dissing*) < 'to be disrespectful towards someone', *fan* < fanatic, *gym* < gymnasium, *jock* ('athlete') < jockstrap, *limo* < limousine, *math/maths* < mathematics, *mod* < modern, *nuke* (*nukes*, *to nuke*) < nuclear weapons, *a perm*, *to perm* < permanent wave, *perp* < perpetrator,

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phone < telephone, *pro* < professional, *psycho* < psychotic, *pub* < public house, *rad* < radical, *schizo* [skitso] < schizophrenic, *stats* < statistics, *sub* < substitute ('a substitute, to substitute'), *telly* < television, *veg*, *to veg out* < vegetate. Popular on restaurant menus (in North America) is *shrooms*, a clipped form of *mushrooms*; it remains to be seen whether it will survive.

10.4.10 Expressive creations

Onomatopoeia is another source of new words, creations with only nature as a model, thought to be the source of words such as *buzz*, *gag* and so on. Interjections (ejaculations) are another source, exemplified by *ah*, *oh*, *wow*, *pow*, *whew*, *shush* and many others. Some expressive words seem to develop out of nothing, as for example *bodacious* 'remarkable, fabulous' and *humongous* (also spelled *humungous*) 'very large'. In most cases such as these, blending is involved, and while the origin of these two words is uncertain, it is possible that *bodacious* is connected in some way to *bold* and *audacious*, and that *humongous* perhaps involves *huge* in some way.

10.4.11 Obsolescence and loss of vocabulary

Those who work on lexical change are interested not only in the adoption of new vocabulary, but also in the question of why vocabulary items become archaic and sometimes disappear altogether from a language. While the use of particular words can fade for a number of social and stylistic reasons, the primary cause is the disappearance in common talk of a word because of the disappearance in society of the thing it refers to – that is, historical changes in society can lead to vocabulary loss as well as to semantic shifts (mentioned above). For example, there was a large range of vocabulary involving falconry, armour, feudal society and other institutions and technologies of the Middle Ages which in effect has become totally forgotten, as these things faded from modern life. Replacement of one word by another for the same meaning is another frequent means by which vocabulary is lost.

10.5 Exercises

Exercise 10.1

Attempt to find examples of your own of new vocabulary items which represent some of the categories of lexical and semantic change discussed in this chapter. You can do this by listening for words that you think are

new in the speech of your friends and family or by asking others if they can think of any examples. Slang is a fertile area for new vocabulary and semantic shifts.

Exercise 10.2 Lexical change

The *Longman Register of New Words* for 1990 (see Ayto 1990) lists, among hundreds of others, the following new English words which were first recorded after 1988. Can you determine where these come from, that is, how they came about? What processes of vocabulary creation, semantic change or other kinds of linguistic changes do you think lie behind these new words? (You may have to look some of these up, or ask your friends who might know what they mean.)

barbify; bimboy; birth-mother; bonk-happy; dweeb; geeky; karaoke; motormouth; sicko; soundbite

Exercise 10.3 Semantic change

Look up the following words in a dictionary which provides basic etymologies for words. (*The Oxford English Dictionary* is generally recognised as the primary authority in this area and is recommended here, although a number of other dictionaries also provide useful etymological information.) Determine what change in meaning has taken place in each word. State which type of semantic change is involved (from among the types defined in this chapter). What do you think caused the semantic change to come about in these words?

For example, if you were to see *villain* in the list, you would look it up and find out that it originally meant 'person of the villa/farm' but has changed its meaning to 'criminal, scoundrel', and you would state that this is an example of *degeneration* (or *pejoration*).

corpse; crafty; disease; fame; journey; officious; science; starve; thing; vulgar

Exercise 10.4

In the following examples of semantic change, identify the kind of semantic change involved (widening, narrowing, metonymy and so on).

1. Spanish *cosa* 'thing' < Latin *causa* 'matter, cause, question'.
2. Spanish *dinero* 'money' < Latin *dēnāriū* 'coin (of a particular denomination)'.
3. Spanish *pariente* 'relative' < Old Spanish *pariente* 'parent'.
4. Spanish *segar* 'to reap (to cut grain, grass with a scythe)' < Latin *secāre* 'to cut'.

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5. Old Spanish *cuñado* 'relation by marriage' shifted to 'brother-in-law' in Modern Spanish. (This Spanish word comes ultimately from Latin *cognātu* 'blood-relation'.)
6. Mexican Spanish *muchacha*, formerly only 'girl', now has a primary meaning 'maid, servant woman' in some contexts.
7. Modern Spanish *siesta* 'afternoon nap (rest period during the heat of the day)' < Old Spanish *siesta* 'midday heat' (ultimately from Latin *sexta* (*hōra*) 'sixth (hour)').
8. English *gay* 'homosexual' is the result of a recent semantic shift, where the original sense, 'cheerful, lively', has become secondary; the shift to the 'homosexual' sense perhaps came through other senses, 'given to social pleasures, licentious', which the word had.
9. English *to spill* formerly meant (from c. 1300 to 1600) 'to destroy by depriving of life, to put to death, to slay, to kill'.
10. French *cuisse* 'thigh' < Latin *coxa* 'hip' (Spanish *cojo* 'lame, crippled' is thought also to be from Latin *coxa* 'hip').
11. Spanish *cadera* 'hip' < Latin *cathedra* (from Greek) 'seat'.
12. Spanish *ciruela* 'plum' < Latin *prūna cēreola* 'waxy plum' (*prūna* 'plum' + *cēreola* 'of wax').
13. French *viande* 'meat' formerly meant 'food' in general. (This change parallels English *meat* which originally meant 'food'.)
14. Spanish *depende* 'to depend, to hang' < Latin *dēpendere* 'to hang'.
15. English *lousy* 'worthless, bad' < 'infested with lice'.

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These phonetic changes [in Grimm's Law] have, it is true, been brought about by the influence of climate, food, laziness or the reverse, analogy, and fashion; but we are still ignorant of the relative power of these causes, and the precise manner in which they affect the phonology of a language.

(Sayce 1874: 16)

11.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the explanation of linguistic change or, perhaps better said, with attempts that linguists have made towards explaining why languages change as they do. The explanation of linguistic change is a topic of much debate and considerable disagreement. In this chapter, we try to cut through the disagreements to see how linguists have attempted to explain linguistic change and to see whether the different kinds of explanations that are proposed provide a foundation for understanding why languages change. Until the early 1970s, it was common to find statements in historical linguistic works to the effect that we should be concerned with 'how' languages change, but that the question of 'why' languages change could not be answered and therefore should be avoided. For example, from Joos (1958: v) we read: 'If the facts have been fully stated, it is perverse or childish to demand an explanation into the bargain' (intended perhaps more of descriptive linguistics); in Lehmann's introduction to historical linguistics, we are told: 'A linguist establishes the facts of change, leaving its explanation to the anthropologist' (1962: 200, in a discussion of semantic change). What is behind the comment about leaving explanation to the anthropologist is the once widely shared notion that the reasons for linguistic