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Title: Semantic typology: Disentangling cognitive from functional explanations

Abstract: Human languages vary in terms of which meanings they lexicalize, but there are many constraints on this variation. For instance, while many languages have a lexical item whose meaning is every, no known language has a lexical item whose meaning is not every. One of the reasons why semanticists and cognitive scientists have been interested in these constraints is that some of them likely come from — and can therefore be instructive about — the cognitive system for representing meanings of language expressions: in other words, we may try to infer, or reverse-engineer, the nature and/or complexity of cognitive representations underlying meanings from constraints on possible lexical items. For instance, one may hypothesize that the reason why not every is never lexicalized is that this meaning is complex to cognitively represent. However, such a reverse-engineering project is complicated by the fact that functional pressures also influence which meanings are lexicalized. For instance, it may also be that the reason why not every is never lexicalized is that lexicalizing it wouldn't (significantly) contribute to ensuring successful communication. Importantly, the past decade has seen much progress in understanding how functional pressures shape languages' lexicons. This means that we are now in a better position to empirically evaluate which constraints on lexicalized meanings cannot be explained by functional pressures, and to ask what needs to be assumed about cognitive representations to explain them. In this talk, I will review these recent advances on how functional pressures shape lexicons, and discuss how we can build on these advances in future work to continue pursuing the reverse-engineering project.