9

Semantic Change and Lexical Change

> They that dally [= converse idly] nicely [= foolishly] with words may quickly make them wanton [= unmanageable].
>
> (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* III, 1)

9.1 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 *blǭdsian*), 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 *christiānum* 'Christian'. In Romance languages, 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 young people's all-too-limited vocabulary into nothing but slang (so they claim), holding up writers of famous literature 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 both 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 and calques (semantic borrowing) in Chapter 3; we will consider grammaticalization in Chapter 10.

9.2 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 organizing kinds of semantic change, but with no pretensions of being particularly complete or adequate, only (it is hoped) useful.

9.2.1 Widening (generalization, 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. Changes from more concrete to more abstract meanings fit here.

(1) *Dog*. English *dog* first appeared with the more specific meaning of 'a (specific) powerful breed of dog', which generalized 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 present-day 'clothes closet, cupboard'. French *armoire* 'wardrobe, locker, cabinet' (also borrowed into English form 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).

9.2.2 Narrowing (specialization, 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. Changes of more abstract meanings to more concrete ones fit this category.

(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 will be seen in Chapter 10, many examples of grammaticalization involve semantic narrowing, from a broader lexical meaning to a narrower grammatical function.

9.2.3 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: that is, A is like B. 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. Metaphor is considered a major factor in semantic change. It has been likened to analogy where one thing is conceptualized in terms of another, with a leap across semantic domains. The semantic change of *grasp* 'seize' to 'understand', thus can be seen as such a leap across semantic domains, from the physical domain ('seizing') to the mental domain ('comprehension') (see Traugott and Dasher 2002: 28). 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 *beode*, *gebed* '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').

(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 *firmar* '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'.

(11) English *thrill*, whose original meaning was 'to make a hole in, to pierce', shifted metaphorically to 'to pierce with emotion', later 'to fill with pleasure'.

9.2.4 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: that is, A is associated with B, but need not be like B. Metonymy traditionally was held to be an important factor in semantic change, though less important than metaphor. Metonymy might be thought to be conceptual shifts within the same semantic domain (Traugott and Dasher 2002: 28–9). That is, 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*.

Traugott and Dasher (2002) give metonymy a more important role in

semantic change than is traditionally the case. They do not believe that metaphor and metonymy in principle exclude each other, since easily understood metaphors can also be seen as typical associations – in some instances the notion of a leap across semantic domains (metaphor) and change within the same domain (metonymy) may not be clear or even relevant. Traugott and Dasher believe that it must be possible for the target (the semantic concept after the change) and/or the source (before the change) of a potential metaphor to be understood or conceptualized metonymically for metaphor to be possible (p. 29).

Some examples of metonymy are:

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

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

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

(4) Spanish *plata* 'silver' has been extended to mean also 'money'.

(5) Spanish *acera* 'sidewalk' < Old Spanish *façera* 'façade, front of buildings on a 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 placed 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) 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.

(8) English *elope* originally applied to a married woman running off with a lover, and later shifted to apply to a couple running away from home to get married without a parent's permission (related etymologically to *leap*).

A common sort of metonymy, sometimes thought to be connected with *clipping* or *ellipsis* (see Section 9.4.9), 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 sections 9.2.6 and 9.4.9.)

9.2.5 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'.

(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).

(4) English *mail*, originally 'bag, pouch', underwent a series of shifts; borrowed from Old French with the meaning 'bag, pouch' (see modern French *malle* 'bag'), it shifted to 'bag for carrying letters', then to 'letters carried in that way' and to 'mail' generally; *email* is a step further removed from the original 'bag' meaning.

9.2.6 Displacement (ellipsis)

Displacement (also called *ellipsis*) involves changes 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). Displacement is sometimes considered a special kind of synecdoche. (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 *succēdere* '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.

9.2.7 Degeneration (pejoration)

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 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' (the English cognate *wife* also 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 title of courtesy used as a polite form of address to a woman' (from *Madame*, originally borrowed from Old French *ma dame* 'my lady').
harlot was originally 'tramp, beggar' (borrowed from Old French *harlot, herlot* 'vagabond').
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 *sǣlig* '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 into English, from Latin *amator* '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).

(7) English *evil* had the original sense of 'uppity, exceeding due limits', related etymologically to *up* and *over*.

9.2.8 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) English *nice* originally meant 'foolish, stupid, senseless', borrowed from Old French *ni(s)ce* 'foolish, stupid' (from Latin *nescius* 'ignorant, unaware'; compare Spanish *necio* 'foolish, imprudent', from the same Latin source).

9.2.9 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 realization 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 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*, *washroom*, *commode*, *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 13.)

9.2.10 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 *$*k^{w}aljan$* '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'.

9.2.11 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'.

9.2.12 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) Spanish *pavo* originally meant 'peacock'; however, when the Spanish came to the New World, the newly discovered turkey was also called *pavo*,

and eventually to distinguish the two birds, *pavo* remained for 'turkey', while 'peacock' became *pavo real*, literally 'real turkey' (also 'royal turkey').

(2) In K'iche' (Mayan), *kye:x* originally meant 'deer'; however, with the introduction of horses with European contact, *kye:x* came to mean 'horse'. Eventually, to distinguish 'deer' from 'horse', the term for 'deer' became *k'iče' kye:x*, literally 'forest horse'. (NOTE: *y* = IPA [j], [kje:x].)

(3) 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 unchristianized Indians) (Callaghan and Gamble 1997: 112). See also calques, in Chapter 3 (3.7.7).)

9.2.13 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 emphasize 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 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'.

9.3 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 generalizations 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 generalizations 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 grammaticalization; see Chapter

11), discourse analysis, pragmatics and social history. Because sociocultural historical facts are often relevant, some insist that it is useless to seek generalizations to explain semantic change, although most would admit that some general statements about how and why meanings change may be possible even if not all semantic changes are regular or predictable.

Earlier work on semantic change was not totally without attempts at generalization. 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 emphasized 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 recognize 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 *ríta* 'to scratch, to write'). This stage is attested in Old English *wrītan* '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 *qāḍī* 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 recognizes (at least implicitly, and often explicitly) an intervening stage of polysemy as necessary in semantic changes. Others do not emphasize this view so much; rather, they recognize that lexical 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 emphasizing 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 (a Miwok-Costanoan language of California) example mentioned above, *kó:no* 'gun' originally meant 'bow'. The word for 'blowgun' in K'iche' (Mayan), *uɓ*, 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 utilized 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 North America, in the UK and in Australia 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 generalize about semantic change. Since changes in society and technology are for the most part unpredictable, their affects 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 Dasher 2002, Traugott and Heine 1991, and Traugott and König 1991; see also Hopper and Traugott 2003). 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', as with Old English *swifte* 'rapidly' and *georne* 'rapidly, eagerly', both of which changed the meaning to 'immediately' in about 1300 (Traugott and Dasher 2002: 67).
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 *lie/lay* and *sit/set*.
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 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*, *hot* ('spicy').

(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 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 *þa 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 '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, to find out' < Latin *sapere* 'to know').

(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* originally meaning only 'head' (body part, concrete), which was later extended to mean 'main' or 'principal', as in *Hauptstadt* 'capital' (*Haupt* 'head' + *Stadt* 'town, city'), *Hauptbahnhof* 'central station' ((*Haupt* 'head' + *Bahnhof* 'railway station'), and then later *Haupt* lost its primary original meaning of 'head' in most contexts. While this is an interesting and important claim, a 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.

In their explanatory treatment of semantic change, Traugott and Dasher (2002) emphasize the typical direction of certain kinds of semantic change. They identify 'regular' tendencies in semantic change, that is changes that are encountered frequently across languages and also repeatedly within single languages. They propose an 'Invited Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change'. Polysemy is central in this theory, and it typically arises out of the pragmatic forces of *invited inferences* and *subjectification*. *Invited inferences* arise in the pragmatic use of language in given contexts. For example, *as long as* and *so long as* formerly had only spatial and temporal meanings, as in *King Alfred's long ships were almost twice* ***as long as*** *the other ships* (spatial) and *Squeeze the medication through a linen cloth onto the eye* ***as long as*** *he needs* (temporal). But such temporal sentences could invite the inference that *as/so long as* might also mean conditional ('provided that'), 'squeeze the medication on the eye for the length of time that he needs it' or 'if/on the condition that he still needs it'. Later, in some contexts the conditional sense became the only one possible, as in *He told the jury that it is proper for police to question a juvenile without a parent present* ***so long as*** *they made a reasonable effort to notify the parent*. In *subjectification*, speakers come to develop meanings for words 'that encode or externalize their perspectives and attitudes as constrained by the communicative world of the speech event, rather than by the so-called "real-world" characteristics of the event or situation referred to' (Traugott and Dasher 2002: 30). For example, an increase in subjectivity is seen in semantic changes involving *indeed*: first as *in dede* 'in action', then 'certainly, in actuality'; second, *indeed* changed to include 'in truth' (subjective, reflecting speaker's attitude) in its meaning; third, *indeed* changed to add 'what's more', 'adding to that' (a discourse marker). Another example is the verb *promise*. Its original sense was as 'a directive imposing obligation on oneself as speaker', as in *I promise to do my*

best. Semantic change added later the sense 'speaker's high degree of certainty' (more subjective, internalizing the speaker's perspective/attitude), as in *She promises to be an outstanding student*.

9.4 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.

9.4.1 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 Karl Reichenbach in 1830, based on Latin *parum* 'too little, barely' + *affīnis* '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* utilized pieces from Latin. Probably better examples of creations from nothing could be found in certain slang terms (*zilch*, *pizzazz*) 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*).
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.

9.4.2 From personal names and names of peoples

From names of individuals we have examples such as:

1. *guillotine* borrowed from French *guillotin*, 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);
cannibal, first recorded by Christopher Columbus, as *caniba*, a name of the feared Carib Indians, who, Columbus reports, were called *Carib* on Hispaniola. English borrowed the word from Spanish *canibal* 'cannibal'.
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, vandalize from the Vandals (another Germanic tribe);
welch, welsh 'to cheat by avoiding payment of bets', said to be from 'Welsh'.

5. Other examples derived from names of persons or peoples – some mythical or fictional – include:

cereal from Latin *cereālis* 'of grain', derived from *Ceres*, the Roman goddess of agriculture;
chauvinism from Nicholas Chauvin of Rochefort, French soldier (possibly legendary) known for excessive patriotic zeal;
lynch from William Lynch of Virginia, who set up unofficial tribunals to try suspects;
mesmerize from Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), whose experiments induced trance-like states in his subjects;
nicotene from Jean Nicot, French ambassador in Lisbon, who sent samples of a new 'tobacco' to the French queen Catherine de Medici in 1560 (in his honour, plants of the genus are all called *nicotiana*); nicotene, the addictive alkaloid, comes from *nicotiana* plants;
panic from the Greek god *Pan*;
quixotic from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

9.4.3 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 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.
9. *turkey* < Turkey (shortened from *turkeycock*, *turkeyhen*, originally a guinea-fowl imported through Turkey, later applied erroneously to the bird of American origin).
10. Other examples derived from place names include:

champagne from *Champagne*, the name of a province in northern France for which the wine produced there is named;
frank from the Franks, Germanic conquerors of Gaul, whose name is seen in the name *France*;
meander from the river Maeander, Turkey (through Greek *maíandros*, which came to mean 'winding course');
muslin from Mosul, Iraq, where fine cotton fabric was made (< Arabic *mūslin*);
pheasant named for the river Phasis in the Caucusus, where in legend pheasants come from.

9.4.4 From brand (trade) 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.
7. *hoover* (vacuum cleaner) < Hoover.
8. *to google* < Google.

9.4.5 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'; *FYI* < 'for your information'; *Gestapo* < from German *Geheime Staatspolizei* 'secret state's police', borrowed into English; *Hummer* < HMMWV 'High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle', an abbreviation of which was pronounced *Humvee*, which General Motors changed to *hummer* when it bought the rights to make the vehicle, in order to market it better; *lol* (*LOL*) < 'laughing out loud'; *MD* < 'medical doctor'; *MP* < 'military police', *MP* < 'member of parliament'; *OJ* < slang for 'orange juice'; *OMG* < 'oh my God' (or 'oh my goodness' for some); *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'; *TMJ* 'temporomandibular-joint disorder'; *UK*; *USA*; *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.

9.4.6 Compounding

Compounds are words (or better said, lexical items) formed from pieces or units that are (or were) themselves distinct words. Compounding is a productive process in English and many other languages. A number of examples of compounds that are relatively new in English include the following: *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, unable to think'; *buttload*; *cash-flow*; *couch potato* 'lazy person, someone who just lies around'; *cyberbullying*; *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*; *meltdown*; *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*; *waterboarding*; and so on.

In the case of older compounds, later changes often make the original components of the compound no longer recognizable, 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 *godsībb* (*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*.

9.4.7 Other productive word-formation and derivational 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 are: *-able* (*bankable*, *billable*, *bloggable*, *doable*, *getatable* (*get-at-able*), *microwav(e)able*); *auto-* (*autopilot*, *auto-suggestion*); *-belt* (*banana belt*, *bible belt*, *cow belt*); *mega-* (*mega-sound*, *mega-show*, *mega-event*); *micro-* (*microenvironment*, *microbiotic*, *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-*: *biodegradable*, *biodiversity*, *biosphere*; and *eco-* (< *ecology*, *ecological*): *ecotourism*, *eco-friendly*, *ecofreak*.

9.4.8 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*), *alot* for *a lot* meaning 'many, much', and *no-one* for *no one*.

(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) English *don* < *do on*; *doff* < *do off*.

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

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

(5) 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'.

(6) 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').

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

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

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

(10) 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 *grammaticalization* (see Chapter 11) are instances of amalgamation, where formerly independent words are amalgamated with the result that one becomes a grammatical affix.

(11) 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* > *cantarías* 'you would sing' (*habías* 'you had').

(12) In another example, *mente* 'in mind' (from the ablative of Latin *mens* 'mind') was grammaticalized 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 11.)

Blending (contamination), included with analogy (see Chapter 4), is sometimes also considered a kind of lexical change, sometimes linked loosely with amalgamation.

9.4.9 Clipping (compression, shortening)

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, *app* < application, *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, *fridge* < refrigerator, *gas* < gasoline, *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, *phone* < telephone, *prep* < prepare, preparation, *pro* < professional, *psycho* < psychotic, *pub* < public house, *rad* < radical, *schizo* [skɪtso] < 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.

9.4.10 Expressive creations

Onomatopoeia is another source of new words, creations with only sounds in 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.

9.4.11 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 society of the thing they refer 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. A few examples of older words now essentially lost to modern English vocabulary are the following (though some are occasionally resurrected for special purposes in fantasy literature and games reflecting medieval themes):

dorbel: a dull-witted pedant, a foolish pretender to learning; from Nicholas Dorbellus, a fifteenth-century professor of scholastic philosophy at Poitiers and follower of Duns Scotus, whose name gave us *dunce*.

dousabell: a common name in sixteenth-century poetry for a sweetheart, especially an unsophisticated country girl < French *douce et belle* 'sweet and beautiful'.

fribbler: a trifler; one who professes rapture for a woman yet dreads her consent.

jarkman: he that can write and read, and sometimes speak, Latin and uses these skills to make counterfeit licences, which they call *gybes*, and sets to seals, in their language falsified documents called *jarks*; sixteenth-century slang for an educated beggar able to forge passes, licences, etc. *Jark* was rogues' cant for a seal, whence also a licence of the Bethlehem Hospital ('Bedlam') to beg.

kelchyn: a fine paid by one guilty of manslaughter, generally to the kindred of the person killed.

kexy: dry, brittle, withered.

mulligrubs: a twisting of the guts, so called from the symptomatic fever attending it.

palliard: a vagabond who slept on the straw in barns, hence a dissolute rascal, a lecher, a debauchee < French *paille* 'straw'.
parnel: a punk, a slut; the diminutive of Italian *petronalla*; a priest's mistress.
rogitate: to ask frequently.
thural: of or pertaining to incense.
towrus: among hunters a roebuck eager for copulation is said to 'go to his towrus'.
tyromancy: divining by the coagulation of cheese.
wittol: a husband who knows of and endures his wife's unfaithfulness; a contented cuckold; from *woodwale*, a bird whose nest is invaded by the cuckoo, and so has the offspring of another palmed off on it for its own.
yelve: dung-fork; garden-fork; to use a garden fork.

9.5 Exercises

Exercise 9.1

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. Try to name or identify the categories involved. 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 9.2 Lexical change

The following are a few of the many new words (neologisms) that have been added to English recently. 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 the creation of these new words? (You may need to look some of these up to find their meanings, or ask your friends who might know what they mean.)

blogosphere, bridezilla, buzzword, de-friend/unfriend, emoticon, guesstimate, mouse, peops, tweet, wiki, WMD.

Exercise 9.3 Semantic change

Look up the following words in a dictionary which provides basic etymologies for words. (*The Oxford English Dictionary* is generally recognized 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).

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 9.4

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 *dēnāriu* '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'.
5. Old Spanish *cuñado* 'relation by marriage' shifted to 'brother-in-law' in Modern Spanish. (This Spanish word comes ultimately from Latin *cognātus* '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 *depender* 'to depend' < Latin *dēpendere* 'to hang'.
15. English *lousy* 'worthless, bad' < 'infested with lice'.