

# Systematicities in Semantic Change of Arabic Words in Urdu

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## Abstract

In the last few decades there has been growing interest in exploring systematicities in semantic change from a number of perspectives including theories of metaphor, pragmatic inferencing, and grammaticalization. As in earlier studies, these have for the most part been based on data taken out of context. This paper is the first detailed examination of semantic change from the perspective of historical pragmatics and discourse analysis. Drawing on extensive corpus data from Urdu and Arabic texts and attempts to show that most changes in meaning originate in and are motivated by the associative flow of speech.

The present paper investigates meaning change under reanalysis in the paradigm of truth conditional semantics. The paper defends the claim that this combination of framework and subject is a fruitful one and can help us to gain a better understanding of the meaning shifts and changes that occur in structural reanalysis. Importantly, detailed semantic representations can offer an explanation for historical data that were viewed as unexplainable accidents by earlier approaches. The fact that all competent speakers seem to be able to perform the necessary semantic operations does, however, not imply that we need not investigate what they do, and how they do it. In fact, the great ease and reliability with which semantic changes under reanalysis occur should have far-reaching repercussions on our conception of semantic processing. The semantic side of reanalysis witnesses the great analytical potential and logical systematicity of human speakers, as well as the ingenious way in which natural languages combine reliable stability and flexible elements, allowing adaptation to new communicative needs in reliable ways without disturbing the function of language as a tool for communication. The present paper aims at contributing to our understanding of meaning change under reanalysis.

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## Some Background

The investigation of meaning change dates back to at least the work of Hermann Paul, who himself could draw on the wealth of material that was collected to fill the first volumes of the largest etymological dictionary in German, the *Deutsche Wörterbuch* of Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm. Paul proposed the four-way distinction of meaning change through *generalization*, *specification*, *metaphor*, and *metonymy* as the basic categories of meaning change (Paul 1880). More elaborate theories followed, e.g. in Stern (1931), Ullmann (1957), or more recently Blank (1999). Apart from these comprehensive studies in meaning change, some visibly productive modes of meaning change have also inspired scholarly investigation, notably meaning change by metaphor (Indurkha 1992, Lakoff and Johnson 1980), metonymy (e.g. Panther 1999), and via prototype shifts (Dik 1977, Geeraerts 1997).

This does not exclude the possibility, however, that there are subfields of meaning change that are driven by linguistic factors. The present study addresses meaning change in a more limited sense, namely, as it occurs in language change by reanalysis. This might offer a more interesting field for linguistic research.

First, the words, phrases, or morphemes under change hold different structural positions in the sentence before and after reanalysis. It is commonly assumed that the semantic evaluation of a sentence is driven by the semantic content of the parts of the sentence and the way in which they are composed. Consequently, if an item changes its structural relation to other material in the sentence, we will necessarily witness some meaning changes that are driven by, or reflect, these structural changes. The item may have to combine with new arguments, be modified by new operators, or in the extreme case changes its status entirely from functor to argument or vice versa. Meaning changes in reanalysis are driven by the requirements of the syntax–semantics interface.

Secondly, research over the past twenty years suggests that meaning change in reanalysis is driven by a uniform pragmatic process: pragmatic inferencing and subsequent semanticization of the originally inferred information (e.g. Hopper and Traugott 1993, Levinson 2000). This confirms the traditional view that grammaticalization requires a uniform mechanism of semantic change, and yet our understanding of the nature of this process has changed considerably since the early work on grammaticalization. While Meillet or von der Gabelentz refer to it as ‘weakening’ or ‘bleaching’ (Meillet 1912). It has become

increasingly clear that semantic change in reanalysis is more than a mere speculative loss in content. Building on pragmatics, semantic change in reanalysis has been described as a gain of meaning by pragmatic inferencing accompanied by a loss of meaning at other ends. It will be one of the aims of the paper to achieve a more detailed understanding of exactly this process.

Finally, meaning change in reanalysis is suspected to be the driving factor in the process rather than just one aspect involved (see Auwera 2002: 23 who quotes more proponents of this position). We can therefore investigate the amazing process in which particular communicative interactions between speakers lay the seeds of change in structure as well as meaning. Importantly, the new expressive possibilities that emerge in the process can have repercussions on language as a whole.

### **Truth and Falsity**

In the present study, meaning change is approached with the tools of truth value based semantics in the tradition of Montague (1974). This combination seems promising in order to address the following questions:

- What is the combinatorial potential of a word or construction?
- Does it combine with other expressions?
- What kinds of expressions?
- What is the result of the semantic combinations?
- How can the semantic content of a complex expression determine the content of its parts?
- What does a word exactly contribute to the overall information conveyed by a sentence?
- What parameters are specified by context, which underspecified aspects can only become instantiated after evaluation of literal contents?
- How do literal content of a sentence and its implications divert in status, and what happens if inferred contents are reanalyzed as literal contents, or vice versa?

## The Aims of This Paper

The aims of this paper are threefold. First, it wants to recapitulate and motivate some basic assumptions in truth conditional semantics. It will focus on those aspects that have evoked criticism by alternative semantic paradigms like conceptual and cognitive semantics. This is a vital precondition because some of these criticisms amount to the claim that truth conditional semantics by definition has nothing substantial to contribute to the investigation of meaning change. Secondly, It will introduce some terms and notations on the basis of examples. This will later allow us to concentrate on matters of content without being too much concerned with formulae. Finally, it will briefly summarize the relation between literal meanings, implications, default inferences, and conversational implicatures.

Logical semantics rests on the idea that truth and falsity, ‘yes’ and ‘no’, accepting and rejecting, form the basis of semantic theory. In particular, sentences can be true or false in a given situation, and likewise properties can hold true or not of a given object. Logical semantics has extended and generalized this elementary observation in a way that covers large portions of natural language. Truth and falsity can, of course, be considered as abstract philosophical entities, and logical semantics may often be presented as if this were the correct way to perceive it. In fact, however, the approach is much more down to earth. It can be related to empirically testable facts about language use of speakers:

- Knowing the meaning of a sentence is knowing under which circumstances it is true/false.

Is it reasonable to claim that a person knows the meaning of a word like **kitab** if and only if she knows its extension? Of course, we do not want to claim that a speaker of URDU who masters the meaning of the Arabic word KITAB literally has a large set of KITAB somewhere stored in her brain. Yet undeniably this speaker has something in her brain which enables her to perform, for arbitrary objects she might encounter, the KITAB test: look at the object and say ‘yes’ if it is a KITAB and ‘no’ if it isn’t. The following, slightly reformulated versions of the above slogans stress this empirical perspective:

- Someone who knows the meaning of a sentence has something in her mind/brain that enables her to accept or reject the sentence under given circumstances, depending on whether it is true or false.

These reformulations however seem to evidence a blind spot of the approach. Natural languages, one might object, are basically social objects. There is no divine authority who would define the meaning of *kitab, qalam, jism, jasim, qal, and saghir* in an independent way such that speakers can acquire the ability to grasp this predetermined meaning and say 'yes' or 'no' on the correct occasions.

Back in 1933, Bloomfield rightly noted that ". . . the meaning of a form may be due to situations that we cannot reconstruct and can only know if historical tradition is kind to us." Of all linguistic domains, semantics are perhaps the most elusive, prompting Anttila to state that: "The formal apparatus of language is much more conservative than changes in culture or human experience, which expands constantly and necessitates new semantic division." Very often, it is indeed very difficult to interpret certain semantic developments, and speculative subjective arguments are almost unavoidable. There are hardly any means at our disposal which allow us to know the exact meaning of ancient words. Undoubtedly, the accuracy of comparative semantic observations greatly depends on the availability of cognate lexical evidence. The occurrence of a particular sense in a number of languages could be indicative of that sense's originality, since an identical semantic shift simultaneously affecting a considerable number of languages is not very likely. Moreover, lexical evidence from a single marginal area could attest to the semantic retention of an original meaning, but it could also be the result of semantic restriction or generalization.

The examples given below are from Quranic Arabic and provides example of meaning change.

1. *jism* –( *The holy Quran* -2: 247) "Allah hath chosen him above you, and hath gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess."
  - a. 'a body' ;
  - b. *jasim* 'great, large' 'massive constructions'
2. *sagir* –(*The holy Quran* -54: 53) "Every matter, small and great, is on record."
  - a. 'small'
3. *qala-* (*The Holy Quran-* 2: 30) "Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create."
  - a. 'to say, speak' (P): CS 'voice; sound';

b. Arab, *qayl, miqwal* 'chief, lord, master', that is the 'spokesman' of one's people'

### Semantic Change

On the other hand most of the Arabic loan words have accommodated a broader; extensive meaning in Urdu language and culture than they have in their language of origin. The given below are most commonly used loan words which have integrated different meanings and cultural contexts.

For example, the Arabic word /bukhar / (vapour/ gas) has been borrowed by Indian physicians to mean fever. As it is caused by gases which rise up from the stomach towards brain. In Arabic the word for fever is /sukhnat/

The word /amir/ originally it means chiefs and commanders in Arabic but in urdu culture it means rich and well to do person because chiefs and commanders are regarded as rich elite. The word for rich in Arabic is /ghani/. However, the loan is generalized in the sense of wealth but not in status.

The word /asar/ originally it means a mark made on the side of feet of camels. By which they can be traced in desert. While in Urdu this word is used in the sense of impression, influence and result.

Arabic	Urdu
/āsār/ mark on the feet of camel	Influence/result

The word /a:da:b/ means manifestation of good manners since in Urdu. It is used as greeting (a sentence like salam) as well as in the former meaning.

The word /afvāh/, originally it means many mouths (a plural of word /fuh/ means mouth). While in Urdu it is regarded as a singular noun to mean rumour. The meaning has been intended as since many mouths collaborate in the circulation of rumour.

The word /ɔ:qāt/ (plural of /waqt/) means times, originally. However, in Urdu, it is used in the sense of status and position. Since, the status of a person is subject to changes with up and downs of the time.

The loan word /xarāb/ means ruined in whether in Urdu the word denotes something which is bad or useless.

The Arabic word /diqqat/ originally denotes narrowness in something, while in Urdu it means difficulty, since the narrowness of something makes it difficult to go through.

The word /raqam/ in Arab culture originally means the marking and linings on cloth but later on it was used in the sense of numbers, figure, digit and numbering too. However in indian culture it became current in the sense of cash since it is also number and counted. (Arabic word for cash is Naqdiyah)

The word /behas/ fundamentally denotes ‘search’ in Arabic while in Urdu it refers to discussion because a discussion is a search after truth.

The word /taqrīr/ originally denotes the meaning of confirming or establishing or delivering in Arabic language. But in Urdu, it is used to the sense of speech or reports aims at establishing some facts.

The word /taklīf/ originally means to entrust somebody with a thing or assign someone with or to change with. In Urdu, it means trouble as a duty involves in some trouble.

The word /tāhīn/ means to be or become weak or powerless. In Urdu it means insult because the pointing of weakness or laziness in a man is regarded as an insult by him.

The word /axbār/ (plural of /xabar/ news) is regarded as a singular noun in Urdu and denotes a newspaper which is collection of news.

The word /intqāl/ means to go one place to another, where as in Urdu it means to death. Because after death the soul passes from this world to the other one.

The word /buxār/ means vapour and gas. This word has been borrowed by Indian physician to mean fever as it is caused by gases which raises up from the stomach towards the brain.

The word /raīs/ a leader, in Urdu it means a rich man.

The word /riyāsat/ in arabic leadership, in Urdu it is used for a state/province. As it is obtained through leadership.

The word /zahmat/ , in Arabic crowd and mob, it means trouble or pain. As crowd causes problem/ trouble.

The word /sarāb/ in Arabic anything which is drunk, in Urdu the word is associated with wine.

The word /salāh/ in Arabic right-comers or goodness, in Urdu it denotes counsel as counsel is always righteous or good.

The word /sadā/ in Arabic echo, it denotes voice in Urdu as echo is also a kind of voice.

The word /sadāqat/ in Arabic true friendship, in Urdu it refers to truth simply.

The word /īmārat/ in Arabic inhabitation, in Urdu it is used in the sense of house or building.

The word /īlāqā/ in Arabic relation, connection or belonging, in Urdu it denotes a land or holding belonging to a person.

## Conclusion

To conclude we can say that we may able to provide solid grounds to the theories of semantic change if we are able to relate meaning with human cognition, truth conditional values and conversational implicatures in a logical framework.

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