Semantic and Lexical Universals: Theory and empirical findings (Studies in Language Companion Series)

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This set of papers represents a unique collection; it is the first attempt ever to empirically test a hypothetical set of semantic and lexical universals across a number of genetically and typologically diverse languages. In fact the word 'collection' is not fully appropriate in this case, since the papers report research undertaken specifically for the present volume, and shaped by the same guidelines. They constitute parallel and strictly comparable answers to the same set of questions, coordinated effort with a common aim, and a common methodology.The goal of identifying the universal human concepts found in all languages, is of fundamental importance, both from a theoretical and a practical point of view, since these concepts provide the basis of the "psychic unity of mankind", underlying the clearly visible diversity of human cultures. They also allow us to better understand that diversity itself, because they provide a common measure, without which no precise and meaningful comparisons are possible at all. A set of truly universal (or even near-universal) concepts can provide us with an invaluable tool for interpreting, and explaining all the culture-specific meanings encoded in the language-and-culture systems of the world. It can also provide us with a tool for explaining meanings across cultures ? in education, business, trade, international relations, and so on.
The book contains 13 chapters on individual languages including Japanese (by Masayuki Onishi), Chinese (by Hilary Chappel), Thai (by Anthony Diller), Ewe (Africa, by Felix Ameka), Miskitu languages of South America (by Kenneth Hall), Australian Aboriginal languages Aranda, Yankunytjatjara and Kayardild (by Jean Harkins & David Wilkins, Cliff Goddard, and Nicholas Evans), the Austronesian languages Samoan, Longgu, Acehnese and Mangap-Mbula (by Ulrike Mosel, Deborah Hill, Mark Durie and Robert Bugenhagen), the Papuan language Kalam (by Andrew Pawley), and, last but not least French (by Bert Peters).In addition to the chapters on individual languages the book includes three theoretical chapters; "Semantic theory and semantic universals" (by Goddard), "Introducing lexical primitives" (by Goddard and Wierzbicka), and "Semantic primitives across languages: a critical review" (by Wierzbicka).

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