

Expression of *kawaii* ('cute'): gender reinforcement of young Japanese female school children

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Abstract

This paper examines the Japanese word *kawaii* 'cute'. Teachers frequently use *kawaii* to show positive feelings toward objects in the classroom. Female children also are primary users of the word, which suggests that they are acquiring *kawaii* as an index of female gender identity. From a linguistic perspective, *kawaii* is not lexicalised in other languages. While English speakers may say *cute* for various social actions, scholars suggest that *kawaii* is tied to empathy and relationships. Although the *kawaii* phenomenon has been discussed by many scholars, there has been no rigorous semantic analysis, particularly in its use by parents, students and teachers.

The framework of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach was applied to explicate the exact meaning of *kawaii* for non-Japanese speakers. The corpus was information about the paraphernalia provided for Japanese female students.

The analysis indicates that the core meaning of *kawaii* is linked to a notion of a 'child', and the emotion is explained as 'when I see this, I can't not feel something good'. The *kawaii* syndrome reveals a Japanese cultural characteristic which puts much emphasis on being 'gender appropriate' in society and schools. The analysis has implications for understanding gender construction and expression in non-western cultures.

Introduction

Kawaii is a frequently used word to describe attributes of Japanese female students and schooling experiences. Simplistically, it describes something which is small, delicate, and immature (Allison, 2006; Burdelski & Matsumoto, 2010; Kawamura, 2006; McVeigh, 1996, 2000). A reason for the frequent use is the clear and emphatic differences between gender roles in Japan (Nakamura, 2001; Sugimoto, 2010; Yukawa & Saito 2004). These roles are reinforced by media and advertising material which advises young women on how to dress and behave *kawaii*, and encourages them to buy *kawaii* goods (Skov & Moeran, 1995). The *kawaii* syndrome can be found in schools. For instance, some high schools attract student enrolments by their uniforms being *kawaii*. School bags and stationery are also

designed to be *kawaii*. Japanese mothers have recipe books explaining how to prepare *kawaii* lunches for their daughter to take to school. Also the stylistic modification of written characters using *maru moji* 'round letters' is popular among school girls wishing to be *kawaii* in their writing (Kataoka, 1997; Miller, 2004). As many scholars suggest, *kawaii* is a central aspect of Japanese material and popular culture in schools. For Western scholars seeking understanding of this phenomenon, direct translation of *kawaii* into English is not possible or semantically appropriate. There is a need for a semantic analysis of *kawaii* based on its usage by Japanese speakers and writers. This is the purpose of the following paper.

Background

Language plays an important role in the socialisation of children into competent members of their social group (Cook, 1999; Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). A significant aspect of socialisation for young Japanese children is the acquisition of gender-appropriate language and terminology such as *kawaii* (Burdelski & Matsumoto, 2010; Ide, 1990; Inoue, 2004; Miller, 2004; Nakamura, 2001; Shibamoto, 1985). *Kawaii* is a versatile concept which describes not only things, but people, their behaviour and their attitudes (McVeigh, 1996, p. 293). *Kawaii* is especially associated with femininity (Kinsella 1995). One does not have to stay long in Japan to hear female high school students screaming *kawaii* at shops, train stations, schools, everywhere they go. Scholars suggest that *kawaii* has ambiguity in its meaning and it is difficult to define precisely (Kawamura, 2006; McVeigh, 1996). Yano (2011) observes that nowadays even the price of goods is described as *kawaii* (*kawaii nedan* 'cute price'). Nevertheless, the term itself has a core meaning shared by Japanese speakers. In other words, although *kawaii* is such a ubiquitous concept, it has an invariant meaning which is generally understood by ordinary Japanese speakers.

Studies show that mothers and pre-school teachers frequently say the word *kawaii* while touching, gazing at, or pointing towards objects, in particular, to express positive feelings towards an object (Clancy, 1999; Burdelski & Mitsunashi, 2010). Teachers use the word *kawaii* in making assessments of particular things in the classroom, and in glossing children's affectionate actions toward younger peers.¹ Burdelski and Mitsunashi (2010, p. 78) point out that "the teachers gloss the actions as an indirect display of affect through *kawaii* rather than a direct display of affect through a word such as *suki* 'like'". Indirectness is an important aspect of Japanese communicative style and is socialised from a young age. Research also suggests that female children are the primary users of the word *kawaii* in relation to themselves and female peers. In other words, young female children are acquiring *kawaii* as an index of female gender identity.²

The Problem and Research Objectives

Cross-cultural psychologists point out that one language may have a word for an emotion that is not lexicalised in other languages (Kitayama & Matsuda, 1995; Russell & Sato, 1995; Wierzbicka, 1994). Namely, lexicons of emotions are culture-specific folk taxonomies (Wierzbicka, 1992, 1999). In fact, *kawaii* is more amplified in Japan in comparison to *cute* in English-speaking societies. While English speakers may use the word *cute* as a compliment and for other social actions, scholars suggest that in Japan *kawaii* is tied to empathy and relationships (Burdelski & Mitsuhashi, 2010). Sakurai (2009) observes that *kawaii* is currently being used in western countries without translation as there is no exact equivalent expression in other languages. The question arises as to what characteristics *kawaii* represents, particularly those that are different from English *cute*. Although the *kawaii* phenomenon has been thoroughly discussed by many scholars, a rigorous semantic analysis has not been conducted. In this paper, I will focus on the basic meaning of *kawaii* and identify what qualities and features *kawaii* represents.

Methodology

The corpus comprises publicly available information about school paraphernalia including uniforms, bags, stationery, and supplies. The design and marketing of the paraphernalia are primarily targeted at schoolgirls and their mothers. The content of the media and advertisements expresses much of the meaning and significance of *kawaii* in Japanese schooling.

The analysis adopts the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach to explicate the meaning (Goddard, 1998; Goddard (ed.), 2008; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 1994, 2002, 2010, in press; Peeters (ed.), 2006; Wierzbicka, 1996, 2006, 2010). The framework is based on the assumption that fundamental human concepts are innate and therefore they should not differ from one language to another. Otherwise, speakers of different languages would not fully understand each other, being restricted to different and incommensurable conceptual systems. Assuming that languages all have irreducible semantic cores, it follows that we should be able to describe complex meanings in terms of simpler ones. That is to say, lexical semantic analysis can be made by means of an exact paraphrase composed of simpler words than the original. This method of semantic description is called reductive paraphrase. It solves the problems of circularity and terminological obscurity, which are often

observed in conventional dictionaries, language textbooks and in approaches to linguistic semantics. Nearly 40 years of cross-linguistic semantic research have led Wierzbicka and colleagues to propose a set of 64 universal and culture-independent concepts such as I, YOU, KNOW, THINK, SEE, WHEN, and BECAUSE. These concepts are called “semantic primes” because they represent innate meanings that are fundamental to human thought. They are indefinable, their meanings so basic that they cannot be broken down any further.^{3 4}

One of the main tenets of the NSM approach is that the primes are lexicalized in all the languages of the world. They are sometimes referred to as ‘lexical universals’.⁵ In some languages, there are primitive meanings expressed by means of fixed phrases composed of several words. For example, the English expression A LONG TIME cannot be broken down into the words *a*, *long*, and *time* in their ordinary senses, while in other languages such as Malay, the meaning A LONG TIME is conveyed by a single word, *lama* (Goddard, 1998, p. 59). Also, it is not a requirement for exponents of the same prime in different languages to belong to the same part of speech.⁶

Although meanings are described solely by use of semantic primes, NSM researchers recognise that some explications necessarily incorporate certain complex semantic units. These are termed ‘semantic molecules’ which are ultimately decomposable into semantic primes (Goddard, 2012; Wierzbicka & Goddard, in press). For instance, semantic explications for words like ‘sparrow’ and ‘eagle’ include ‘bird’ as a semantic molecule. The cognitive claim is that the concept of ‘sparrow’ includes and depends on the concept of ‘bird’. In this case, the relationship is taxonomic: ‘sparrows’ and ‘eagles’ are both ‘birds [m] of one kind’ (molecules are marked in explications with the notation [m]).^{7 8}

The NSM approach provides syntactic rules for combining primes. NSM hypothesizes that certain patterns of combination of primes are found universally. For instance, given the primes SOMEONE, SOMETHING, SAY, BAD, and YOU, it is assumed that in any language one can put them together to express the meaning “Someone said something bad about you”. That is, the resulting sentences have the form of simple clauses which have equivalents in all other languages; the same is not true of language-specific, complex sentences such as participial constructions, relative clauses, or nominalizations. The following are examples of basic sentences (Goddard, 1998; Peeters (ed.), 2006):

Maybe something bad happened

I want to do this

These people lived for a long time

I did it like this

That place is far from here

This thing has two parts

If you do this, people can think something bad about you

Using simple syntactic patterns such as these, it is possible, within the framework of the NSM approach, to define words and identify the meanings encoded in them. The method has applications in intercultural communication, lexicography (dictionary making), language teaching, studies of child language acquisition, legal semantics, and other areas.

In the following section, previous explications of *kawaii* are presented and illustrated by text from the corpora. These are the subject of the analysis process.

The Analysis and Results

There is agreement among scholars that originally, *kawaii* was used to describe things which are 'small' (Allison, 2006; Burdelski & Mitsuhashi, 2010; Madge, 1997; Yano, 2011; Yomota, 2006). As Yomota (2006) says, *kawaii* is deeply rooted in Japanese traditional aesthetic which appreciated the beauty of small things. A renowned writer in the late 990s to early 1000s, Sei Shonagon described that 'all small things are most adorable' (Morris, 1991, p. 168). Yano (2011, p. 26) also says 'smallness carries significant cultural weight as direct link to *kawaii*'. There is a linguistic evidence to illustrate this point. See the following advertisement from an on-line school bag shop (Rakuten Ishiba 2012a):

(1) *Ooki-sugiru randoseru tte **kawaiku**-nai!! to omoi-masen ka?*

'Don't you think that a school bag which is too big is not *kawaii*?

As demonstrated in (1), if the size of the school bag is too big, it is not considered *kawaii* and accordingly does not attract customers.

However, most importantly, for something to be described *kawaii*, the thing needs to have a character of being 'like a child'. Madge (1997, p. 170) points out that *kawaii* images are associated with the notion of a child, which includes the characteristics of 'innocence', 'irresponsibility', and a non-threatening atmosphere. Alison (2006, p. 40) also states that "*kawaii* connotes sweetness, dependence, and gentleness — qualities they associated with comfort and warmth, and also with something loosely connected to their childhood". Thus *kawaii* is not something artificial, but it has a natural quality to be adored like an innocent child. This aspect of being like a child can be observed in the following comments from young mothers who are considering of purchasing a school bag for their daughters (Rakuten Ichiba 2012a; livedoor 2012):^{9 10}

- (2) *Sengetsu, Rakuten-nai no randoseru o iroiro mi-te-ita toki ni tamatama mi-te kawaii na to omoi, musume nimo gazoo o mise-te-mimashita. Suruto 'Kawaii! Kore ni shi-tai!' to mono-sugoku kiniit-ta yoosu. Mita-me kawaiku, demo kodomo-ppoku-nai.*

'The other day when I was looking at various school bags on Rakuten's website, I found this bag by chance and thought it was *kawaii*. When I showed the photo to my daughter, she said '*Kawaii!* I want this!' She obviously liked it. *The bag looks kawaii, but it is not childish.*

- (3) *Mezzo-piano no randoseru wa kawaii shi, sore ni kime-yoo to omou n desu ga, randoseru tte 6 nen-kan tsukau wake desu yone. Mezo-piano no pinku no randoseru wa tee-gakunen de karada mo chiisai toki wa niau to omo un desu ga, 5, 6-nen-see ni naru to chotto kodomo-ppoi kamoshirenai-desu yone...*

'Because Mezzo Piano's school bags are *kawaii*, I am going to purchase one. But school bags are used for 6 years. Mezzo Piano's pink school bag might be all right when my daughter is still in the first or second year grade and being small. I'm concerned if the bag looks childish when she becomes a year 5 or 6 student.

In (2), the mother is pleased with the school bag since it looks *kawaii*, but not too childish. On the other hand, in (3), the mother is concerned if the bag is too *kawaii* and therefore looks childish when her daughter is grown up. These examples support the claim that *kawaii* associates with a notion of being like a child. Based on these observations, the first components of *kawaii* can be paraphrased as 'this thing is something small', and 'people can think about it like this: this thing is like a child'.

Next, for things to be called *kawaii*, they should be unique and different from other items or products. Kawamura (2006) points out that when young Japanese girls see something that is *kawaii*, there is an immediate reaction and the *kawaii* products sell well. Obviously *kawaii* items stand out. This is the reason why some high schools advertise their *kawaii* uniform. Consider the following example from a Japanese Catholic high school website (Institut St. Dominique Lycée 2012):

- (4) *Ninki no seefuku: 'Mainichi mi ni tsukeru mono dakara, yappari kawaii hoo ga ii!'*

Joohin-san ni kuwae-te, kawairashi-sa nimo kodawatta seefuku desu. Dominiko-see dake dewa-naku, hoka no gakkoo no seito kara mo 'kawaii!' to dai-ninki! Aru zasshi dewa 'kawaii seefuku zenkoku besuto 100' ni toriage-rare-ta hodo desu.

Popular uniform: As we wear the uniform every day, it is better to be *kawaii!*

In addition to elegance, this uniform has made no compromise with its *kawaii* design. The uniform is very popular among not only our St. Dominique students, but also among other school students who describe our uniform '*kawaii!*' One magazine says that our uniform was even ranked within top 100 as the most *kawaii* nationally.

That is, *kawaii* should be something which is unusual and special. It has a characteristic which is different from other ordinary objects or things. Otherwise it does not appeal to high school students or other buyers. This aspect can be paraphrased as 'this thing is not like many other things'.

The next point to be discussed is the emotions which *kawaii* signifies. It has been noted that *kawaii* is linked to the positive emotion of affection (Allison, 2006; Burdelski & Mitsunashi, 2010; Hjorth, 2005; Madge, 1997; McVeigh, 1996). McVeigh (1996, p. 291) states that *kawaii* "merges meekness, admiration, and attachment with benevolence, tenderness, and sympathy". McVeigh also notes that to be *kawaii* "triggers a sympathetic response in another, leading to an emotional involvement and perhaps an attachment" (1996, p. 300-301). That is, *kawaii* needs to have a visual impact which causes a favourable emotion to the person who saw it. The emotion is quite strong as one often can't help uttering '*kawaii*'. Consider the following advertisement for stationery for students (Yamada Stationery 2012):

(5) *Omowazu 'kawaii' to it-te-shimai-taku naru bungu bakari o serekuto shi-mashi-ta. Tentoo ni naran-de-ite-mo, tokuni ninki no 'kawaii' aitemu bakari o erabi-mashi-ta. Zehi, gifuto nado no sankoo ni shi-te-mi-te-kudasai.*

'We've selected the stationery which you can't help saying '*kawaii*'. We've especially chosen the most popular *kawaii* items. Consider these products as gifts as well.'

As shown in (5), the expression *omowazu* ('spontaneously', 'involuntarily', or 'unconsciously') is often used in seeing or finding *kawaii* items. *Kawaii* products automatically trigger favourable emotions on the person who sees them. Thus this emotional state can be explained as "when I see this thing, I can't not feel something good".

In addition, presumably, the person who sees a *kawaii* thing may wish to possess it and even try to touch it if possible. Stevens (2011, p. 2) says that "touch sets off a process of desire for knowing, and pleasure in its outcome". Unlike English *cute*, *kawaii* makes one feel like reaching it out and touch it if it is allowed. The desire to touch the object can be observed in the following advertisement for stationery (Rakuten Ichiba 2012b):

(6) ***Kawaii!** Iyashi-kee bungu 'Suingu baado'
5mm haba shuusee-teepu kookan kaatorijji-shiki
Yoo mo nai noni sawaritai!*

Kawaii! Healing stationery "Swing bird"
Correction tape with cartridge (5mm)
You feel like touching it even when you are not using it!

As shown in (6), *kawaii* items cause the desire to touch. Alison (2006) observes that 'healing' is a commonly used word in Japan these days. She notes that *kawaii* play goods are popular as they are seen as having the power to reduce daily stress. Yano (2011, p. 25) also states that purchasing a *kawaii* item as a gift for a friend "addresses a national need to assert and sustain touch-based emotional ties between people". There is an example which illustrates this point. The following is the advertisement for Hello Kitty's soft toy which is popular among young girls and female students (Amazon 2012):

(7) *Yasashii iro-ai to choo-kawaii poozu de, konna kitty ni mitsume-rare-tara omowazu dakishime-taku-nacchau ne.*

"If Hello Kitty looks at you with this gentle colour and super *kawaii* pause, you can't help hugging her, can you?"

The advertisement refers to the spontaneous desire of touch. However, it is not a strong and direct emotion of 'I want my hands to touch this', but rather it is a wish to extend one's hand and experience how it feels. Madge (1997, p. 165) also argues that *kawaii* has a nuance of pathos, which conveys "the meaning not only of desirability but also regrettable unavailability". Thus these emotions *kawaii* triggers can be explained as 'I want to have this thing if I can', and 'I want my hands to touch this thing if I can'.

Another significant characteristic of *kawaii* lies in its delicacy. For a thing to be described *kawaii*, it has to be small and childlike, and thus it cannot be hard or tough. The typical *kawaii* item is usually soft, round, or pastel colour, such as pink (Madge, 1997, p. 158, 169). Madge (1997, p. 169) says that one of the archetypal characteristics of *kawaii* good has roundness, which "has no corners and therefore do not arouse anger but instead keep the peace". Although a *kawaii* thing does not have to be necessarily soft, round or pink colour, it certainly has a quality of gentleness, weakness or 'powerlessness' (McVeigh 1996, p. 296). This is presumably the reason why *kawaii* products are healing Japan and have enormous popularity. The following is the advertisement for children's reading glasses (Paris Miki 2012):¹¹

(8) *O-ko-sama demo kawaiiku-nakucha iya! Demo, koware-nikui fureemu ga hoshii! Sonna oyako no 'hoshii!' to kanaeru fureemu toojoo!*

Some parents say "even though the reading glasses are for our child, they should be *kawaii*. But we need a frame which is not easily broken!"

To fulfil these parents' needs, we've just produced a new frame!

As suggested in (8), *kawaii* has a quality of being soft and fragile. In other words, *kawaii* has a feature of being easily broken or disfigured if someone is not careful, or overuses the item. This feature can be

explained as 'if my hands touch this thing at many times, after this it can be not like it is now, I don't want this'.

Finally, when one thinks about or imagines something *kawaii*, one naturally evokes positive feelings. What has been discussed in previous studies is not only the physical attraction of *kawaii* characters, but also the relationships people form with them (Allison, 2006; Burdelski & Mitsuhashi, 2010). The followings are the voice from the mothers who bought a *kawaii* school bag for their daughters (Rakuten Ichiba 2012a):

(9) *Taiboo no randoseru ga todoi-te-miru to, amari no kawai-sa, suteki-sa ni bikkuri!.... Mata naka o akeru to kawaii gara ga waku-waku suru yoona kibun o moriage-te-kure-te-i-masu.*

'When the long awaited school bag finally arrived, we were surprised as the bag was so *kawaii* and wonderful. When we opened the bag, the *kawaii* design even raised our excited mood.'

(10) *Itaru tokoro ni kawaii shishuu ya haato no kurinuki ya ookan nado gat sui-te-ite oya no hoo mo kodomo no yooni uki-uki shi-te-shimai-mashi-ta.*

'The school bag has *kawaii* embroidery, heart shaped marks and crown symbols everywhere, which made even parents cheerful and happy like a child.'

Both mothers describe the design of the school bag makes the child and the mother herself feel happy and excited. Obviously the thought about something *kawaii* brings positive feelings. Burdelski and Mitsuhashi (2010, p. 39) also point out that preschool teachers use *kawaii* in glossing children's actions as thoughts and feelings to others to train empathy among children. That is, *kawaii* is linked to the positive thoughts towards things in the social world. These observations indicate that mere thoughts about *kawaii* objects also arouse affect emotions. Thus *kawaii* includes the meaning of 'when I think about this thing, I feel something good'. Viewed in this light, the complete meaning of *kawaii* can be portrayed as follows:¹²

THIS SOMETHING IS *KAWAII*.

- (a) this something is something small
- (b) people can think about it like this: "this thing is like a child_[m]"
- (c) this thing is not like many other things
- (d) when I see this thing, I can't not feel something good
- (e) I want to have this thing if I can
- (f) I want my hands to touch this thing if I can
- (g) at the same time, I think about it like this:
- (h) "if my hands touch this thing at many times,
- (i) after this it can be not like it is now
- (j) I don't want this"
- (k) when I think about this thing, I feel something good

Components (a), (b), and (c) show the external feature of *kawaii*. Component (d) indicates the strong positive feelings which a *kawaii* item evokes. Components (e) and (f) express one's desire to possess and touch the *kawaii* object if allowed. Components (g), (h), (i), and (j) mean that *kawaii* has a characteristics of being fragile. Component (k) shows that *kawaii* is related to positive thoughts. The above semantic formula demonstrates that the core meaning of *kawaii* is linked to a notion of a 'child' and being 'small', and the emotion is explained as 'when I see this thing, I can't not feel something good'.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The resultant explication is useful for capturing the precise meaning of *kawaii* when used by mothers, female students and teachers. *Kawaii* syndrome reveals an aspect of the Japanese culture which put great emphasis on being 'gender appropriate' in society. McVeigh (1996, p. 300) says that by being *kawaii*, young women are able to occupy their 'proper place' in society. Also, Burdelski and Mitsuhashi (2010) argue that learning to use *kawaii* is part of learning a preferred indirect communicative style in classroom as *kawaii* expresses one's underlying likes and desires. In other words, being *kawaii* is considered desirable in every aspect not only in young female school students' fashion, hair styles, manners, but also in communication.

The analysis has implications for other *kawaii* related concepts which are new and unique to Japanese youth culture. For instance, too much *kawaii* is considered 'inappropriate'. A new word *ita-kawaii* is currently used among high school students to describe people who dress or make-up in an overly *kawaii* way. Especially when older women try to look *kawaii*, they are criticised as *ita-kawaii*. Thus older women are advised to look *otona-kawaii* 'adult cute', which has some dichotomous features in its meaning (both being like a child and like an adult). Namely, people are constantly aware of what is being 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' when they observe same sex members in society. Furthermore, a new word *kimo-kawaii* is frequently used among high school students in describing something repellent but *kawaii* at the same time. It is natural for young Japanese speakers to create and use a word which involves two opposing characteristics. This is another aspect of Japanese youth culture which needs further rigorous analysis.

Acknowledgements

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¹ Burdelski and Mitsuhashi (2010, p. 70) found that *kawaii* is the most frequently used word among pre-school teachers compared with other positive expressions such as *kakkoi* 'cool', *ii* 'good', *joozu* 'skillful', *subarashii* 'wonderful', *sugoi* 'terrific', *suteki* 'lovely', and *yasashii* 'kind'.

² Burdelski and Mitsuhashi (2010) observe that by the age of five, boys are no longer expected to think of themselves as *kawaii*. Boys are encouraged to distinguish girls as *kawaii* and themselves and other boys as *kakkoi* 'cool'.

³ The semantic primes (in their English versions) are listed below (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 130):

Table 1

Semantic Primes	English exponents
Substantives	I, YOU, SOMEONE, PEOPLE, SOMETHING~THING, BODY
Relational substantives	KIND, PART
Determiners	THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE
Quantifiers	ONE, TWO, MUCH~MANY, SOME, ALL, LITTLE~FEW
Evaluators	GOOD, BAD
Descriptors	BIG, SMALL
Mental predicates	THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
Speech	SAY, WORDS, TRUE
Actions, events, movements, contact	DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH
Location, existence, possession, specification	BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, HAVE, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)
Life and death	LIVE, DIE
Time	WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT
Space	WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, NEAR, FAR, SIDE, INSIDE
Logical concepts	NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
Intensifier, augmentor	VERY, MORE
Similarity	LIKE~AS~WAY

⁴ NSM studies have been carried out in a wide range of languages, including English, Russian, French, Spanish, Polish, Danish, Italian, Ewe, Amharic, Malay, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Mbula (PNG), East Cree, Yankunytjatjara, Arrernte, and Maori, among others (Goddard, 1998; Goddard (ed.), 2008; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 1994, 2002, 2010, in press; Peeters (ed.), 2006; Wierzbicka, 1996, 2006, 2010).

⁵ The term 'lexical' in this context is used in a broad sense to include not only words, but also bound morphemes and fixed phrases.

⁶ For example, the exponent of WANT in English and in many other languages is a verb but it is an adjective in Japanese.

⁷ Whether or not a given word-meaning is a semantic molecule is an empirical issue, and it is not arbitrary or a matter of convenience. The sole criterion is semantic necessity, and this can only be determined by detailed semantic analysis.

⁸ Many semantic molecules are language-specific, but a limited number, perhaps 20 or so, may be universal or near-universal (Goddard & Wierzbicka, in press). These include some body-part words, such as 'hands', some environmental terms, such as 'sky' and 'ground', and some basic social

categories, such as 'children', 'women', and 'men'. Semantic molecules be "nested", enabling a great compression of semantic complexity. Research into semantic molecules is still at a relatively early stage, with many interesting research questions as yet unanswered.

⁹ Although school bags are purchased for both sexes, the website is primarily targeted at young girls. The catch phrase says 'Girls are always dreaming. They are the princesses who are lost in a wonderland.'

¹⁰ A particular combination of color and design makes the bag *kawaii*.

¹¹ The frames on the website are specially designed for young girls. These are decorated with flowers, and labeled 'models for young girls'.

¹² In Goddard and Wierzbicka (in press), 'children' is defined as follows:

CHILDREN

- (a) people of one kind
- (b) people of this kind have lived for a short time, not a long time
- (c) because of this, their bodies are small
- (d) when people are like this, they can do some things, they can't do many other things
- (e) because of this, if other people don't do some good things for them, bad things can happen to them
- (f) all people are like this for some time before they can be not like this

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