Cultural Semantics and Social Cognition

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Cultural Semantics and Social Cognition

A Case Study on the
Danish Universe of Meaning

by

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For Christina

This is what semantics is very largely about:
the exploration of the depths of our consciousness
(Wierzbicka 1980:22)

Preface

Words and meanings do not emerge out of culturally neutral worlds. They are the conceptual products of emerging communities, and as such they reflect speakers' dominant cultural logics. Some word meanings have become pivotal for social interaction and societal life. This book is about such key words. In a sense, then, it is a word-based linguistic ethnography. My target of analysis is "The Danish Universe of Meaning" and my aim is to undertake a deep, semantics-driven exploration of the "emic realities" of Danish speakers, looking in detail at their words – indigenous social terms and value terms, such as *hygge* 'pleasant togetherness' and *tryg* 'safe, secure'. In another sense, linguistic typology is the main concern of the book. Using Danish as a case study, the aim is to break new ground into cross-linguistic semantics and lexical typology. Every page of the book has a global and comparative outlook, even in its most local and Danocentric moments.

Books don't emerge out of neutral worlds either – this one is, to a considerable degree, shaped and formed by events, people and place. It's the story of a Danish research student, trained in socially oriented linguistics, who took the Semantics Masterclass at the *Australian Linguistics Institute* in Brisbane in 2006. Anna Wierzbicka and Cliff Goddard were lecturing together every morning for a whole week. Deeply committed to finding out what words mean *to speakers*, they talked about 'semantic' in the same breath as 'conceptual'. And they spoke comfortably about both 'universal' and 'culture-specific'. The way they did linguistics was different – but highly appealing. I have since learnt that people are drawn to the Natural Semantic Meta-language approach for many different reasons: Its methodological rigor, its impressive number of empirical studies, or its practical relevance and applicability. What attracted me was simply: what a generous approach this is, it allows me to do all the linguistics that I want to do: Language and *culture*, language and *cognition*, language and *society*, language and *life*. Also, I was attracted to the deeply creative and explorative process of explicating, the collaborative aspect of analysis, and the emphasis on bridging the gulf between the linguist and ordinary speakers.

In 2007, I moved from Denmark to Australia to start a PhD project with Cliff Goddard as my supervisor. Now things unfolded in the stimulating linguistic environment at the *University of New England*. In the vibrant, international postgrad community at UNE, cross-linguistic semantics was an

integral part of our daily discussions, or, really, of everyday life. This time at UNE has achieved an almost legendary status for me, and I know that others feel the same. With a creative, crazy energy and a caring social atmosphere, life was beautiful, and I couldn't imagine a better place for thesis-writing. In Australia, I spent some of my most memorable days at the *Australian National University*, at half-yearly semantics workshops. I can only describe each and every workshop as a truly mind-expanding experience. It was a privilege for me to participate, and I received invaluable feedback and cross-semantic input, all crucial to my research.

In many ways, the physical and linguacultural transplantation from Denmark to Australia was a great advantage, not only for my intellectual formation but for the project as a whole. My Danish friends were sceptical – *but why would you move to the other side of the planet to study Danish?* I believe that it is a general fact, though often not recognized, that one's insider beliefs, concepts and worldviews need to be denaturalized before they can be identified and fully understood. Immersed in English, "that Danish something" underwent a profound illumination, as my semantic-conceptual awareness sharpened through everyday life and work. A research stay at the linguistics department at *Aarhus University* in early 2009 was also of great importance, as it allowed me to present my work and test my hypothesis on Danish speakers, and to engage in the deep collaborative reflections that are characteristic of NSM research.

This book is a revised version of my thesis, completed in 2011. It is my hope that it will inspire linguists and other students of language to take up semantics-driven cultural and typological studies in unstudied and under-studied languages. Also, I hope that learners of Danish and international scholars with an interest in Denmark will use this book as a resource for semantic-conceptual learning and understanding.

Carsten Levisen
Aarhus, September, 2012

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Conventions and symbols

1P	first person (pronoun)
2P	second person (pronoun)
ALI	Australian Linguistic Institute
ALS	Australian Linguistic Society
ANU	Australian National University
Berl	Berlingske Tidende (newspaper)
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CG	common gender (grammar)
CMT	Conceptual Metaphor Theory
COCA	Corpus of Contemporary American English
CuDA	Cultural Discourse Analysis
DDO	Den Danske Ordbog [The Danish Dictionary]
DSL	Det Danske Sprog- og Literaturselskab [The Danish Society for Language and Literature]
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ExB	Ekstra Bladet (Newspaper)
GRO	Gyldendals Røde Ordbøger [Gyldendal's Red Dictionaries]
HI	Horizontal individualism
I/C	Individualism/Collectivism
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
INF	Infinitive
lit.	literally
KD	Kristeligt Dagblad (newspaper)
LC	Left collocate
LCRC	Language and Cognition Research Centre (UNE)
LRP	Light reflexive particle (*sig*, *mig*, etc.)
[m]	Semantic molecule
m_1	First meaning/sense of of a word (lexical unit)
m_2	Second meaning/sense of of a word (lexical unit)
MI	Mutual Information (statistics)
n.	noun
NG	neuter gender (grammar)
NSM	Natural Semantic Metalanguage
ODC	Ordbogen.com [The Dictionary]
ODS	Ordbog over det Danske Sprog [Dictionary of the Danish language]

OFV	Ordbøgerne over Faste Vendinger [The Dictionaries of Fixed Phrases]
PAST	Past tense
p.c.	personal communication
pmw	per million words
p.n.	Person name
P1	Danmarks Radio P1 (radio channel)
Pol	Politiken (newspaper)
PPART	Past participle
PRES	Present tense
RC	Right collocate
SAE	Standard Average European
transl.	translated
UNE	University of New England
v.	verb
VI	vertical individualism
*	ungrammatical
?	questionable grammaticality
~	allolex

Chapter 1

Danish as a universe of meaning

Shared values, shared ideals, and shared attitudes
are reflected in shared language
Wierzbicka (1997: 200)

1.1. Introduction[1]

This book is the first to undertake a semantic analysis of Danish word meanings and ethnopragmatic analysis of Danish speech practices, values and attitudes, using the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) framework (Goddard and Wierzbicka 1994, 2002a; Wierzbicka 1996; Peeters 2006; Goddard 2008c).[2]

It is also the first linguistic work to systematically investigate the relationship between everyday Danish language and Danish cultural values, showing how the meanings of cultural keywords relate to tacit norms, attitudes, values and beliefs widely held in the Danish speech community. Along with leading scholars in cognitive and cultural linguistics (see e.g. Wierzbicka 2006a) this book argues that language is a key to unlocking "the universe of meaning" of any culture, and that linguistic semantics is of great importance for understanding everyday cognition in its cultural context. The aim of this book is to explore and explain salient aspects of the Danish universe of meaning as it has been captured in Danish language.

The insight that words can be indicative of speakers' value orientations is not altogether new in the Danish context. To exemplify, the American anthropologist and observer of Danish culture, Jonathan M. Schwartz, identified three words which he called the three Danish graces: "What is Danish in Denmark is so obvious to the foreigner there. *Hygge* (cozyness), *tryghed* (security) and *trivsel* (well-being) are the three graces of Danish culture and socialization" (Schwartz 1985a: 123).

By inserting Danish words into his English text, Schwartz seems to insist that there is something "special" about these Danish words, and that his English translations are only approximations. While Schwartz' insights are now commonly cited in non-linguistic literature on Denmark and the Danes (Le Bossé 2000: 213; Gundelach 2002b: 94; Østergård 2006: 92), linguists have not engaged with his claim. This is surprising, since the claim is of a fundamentally linguistic nature. Schwartz' observations are highly compatible with the notion of "cultural keywords" (Wierzbicka 1997), i.e. that words such as *hygge*, *tryghed* and *trivsel* are not culturally neutral, but culture-specific packages of meaning, which are intimately linked with Danish value orientations and cognitive styles.

Ethnographic description traditionally revolves around "remote Others" (Eriksen 2002: 96), and from an Anglo viewpoint, Danish culture does not look particularly remote. In fact, from a global perspective, it is tempting to gloss over the differences within the Western world and simply talk about Western values as a monolithic set of concepts and ideals. The danger of this approach is that cultural differences within the Western world are trivialized and downplayed, and practically, it often means mistaking the cultural values of the Anglosphere for the values of "the West".

To overcome the Anglocentric bias, we have to qualify that "Western" views of the world embrace a variety of construals, concepts and beliefs which do not automatically equal those of the Anglosphere. This book aims to go beyond highly ideologized and politicized Danish words such as *ytringsfrihed* 'freedom of speech', *ligestilling* '(gender) equality', and *menneskerettigheder* 'human rights', or beyond well-worn sociological descriptors such as "post-materialism", "post-modernism" and "secularization" (Bondeson 2003; Zuckerman 2008). By focusing on the semantics of everyday life, this work takes its starting point somewhere else – in "humble" and "trivial" words, such as cognitive verbs, emotion adjectives and value terminology. The study of everyday words allows us to tell a different story about the texture of Danish everyday life – the story about speakers' folk models of the world and the culture-specificity of everyday language and linguistic practices.

Serious scholarly literature seeking to understand the Danish cultural universe is rather sparse and far outnumbered by the "pop ethnography" and "pop semantics" of tourist publications.[3]

In the past, Danish society and culture have attracted the attention of international scholarship mainly for macro-societal reasons. The main research trends have been studies in "Danish welfare state democracy" with its peculiar blend of socialism and liberalism (e.g. Campbell, Hall and Pedersen 2006; Christiansen et al. 2006) and "Danish education", in particular the peculiar exam-free and degree-free "Danish Folk High School" tradition (e.g. Borish 1991).

On the whole, the story of Danish society emerging from scholarly Anglo-phone literature is that Denmark is an "extreme society"; Denmark is the nation where people pay the highest income taxes (Horn 2008), where fewest people are said to practice religion (Zuckerman 2008), and where more people than anywhere else believe that other people can be "trusted" (Levinsen 2004). International "happiness research" has time and again declared that Denmark is "the happiest country in the world" (see e.g. Biswas-Diener, Vittersø and Diener 2010). Danish society is also commonly referred to as a "classless" (Kristiansen and Jørgensen 2003: 2), as highly "egalitarian" (Hofstede 2001; Reddy 1992: 176) and as a "social laboratory" for humanistic and progressive values (Reddy 1998: 16). Observers have described Denmark (with Sweden and Norway) as an epicentre for "tender values" – highlighting both the distinct focus on societal care and the strong cultural aversion towards violence and aggressive behaviour (Hendin 1964; Daun 1989, 1996; Borish 1991; Mellon 1992; Hofstede 1998a).

Even though Danish society may be considered "extreme" from an outsider perspective on most sociological parameters, it is important to bear in mind that the cultural norms of this society are considered most natural and normal to members of the Danish speech community. From a Danish insider-perspective, there is nothing "extreme" about the Danish way of living, and certainly, Danes do not see themselves as "extremists". In fact, Danish culture has often been described as "anti-extremist" in its cultural orientation, discouraging extreme displays of emotions and the advancement of extreme viewpoints (Reddy 1992). Danes are said to value "balance" in all areas of life (Hansen 1980) and to sceptically evaluate things which deviate from *den gyldne middelvej* 'the golden middle road', a salient, conventional metaphor for "the optimality of compromise" (Østergård 2006: 82).

Paradoxically then, Danish society seems from the outside to be an "extreme society", but guided by cultural rules from the inside which actively discourage "extremism" of any kind.

This book seeks to make sense of this unusual society by undertaking detailed studies of Danish keywords and the Danish linguistic worldview. The aim is to contribute to the emergent linguistic disciplines of cultural semantics and ethnopragmatics. Danish, like many other national European languages, is well-studied in structuralist linguistic frameworks (for an overview, see Heltoft 2003),[4] but due to the hegemony of the structuralist paradigm, the study of Danish as a cultural universe has so far not been advanced in linguistics. In fact, it seems that sociologists, anthropologists and cultural psychologists, more often than linguistics, have contemplated the meaning of Danish words.

To a large extent, the wealth of information about Danish assumptions, values and attitudes hidden in Danish linguistic categories and speech practices is therefore still uncharted territory. This book will take the first steps into these new areas of linguistic research, tapping into the meanings of everyday life as they are encoded in Danish language.

By analysing words and linguistic practices, unwritten rules of Danish speech culture can be hypothesized and hidden value orientations can be brought to light. Through semantic techniques we can illuminate the meanings and attitudes which are obvious to the cultural insider but perplexing and puzzling to the outsider.

1.2.   Overview

The first chapter provides a big picture view on language and cultural values, situating the present work within previous studies and ongoing developments in culturally oriented linguistics. This is followed by an introduction to Danish identity, language and culture and an induction into commonly identified themes of Danish culture.

Calling for a new, linguistically grounded analysis of Danish social and cultural concepts, I will critically review previous studies and claims, and discuss important methodological issues for doing linguistically grounded cultural analysis.

The next chapter (chapter 2) will describe in detail the theory and analytical practice of NSM semantics, with an emphasis on perspectives and problems in Danish language. Having introduced the Danish speech community and described my methodological and theroretical framework, the core chapters 3–7 study Danish cultural keywords and Danish-specific lexical grids. These chapters all provide detailed semantic analyses and situate word meanings in their broader cultural contexts, and they all con-

tribute in various ways to the cultural-semantic and ethnopragmatic exploration of language. The overarching theme is Danish cultural values, with a particular focus on sociality, cognition and discourse.

Chapter 3 provides a semantic analysis of *hygge* 'pleasant together-ness', a widely recognized Danish cultural keyword and a national em-blem. It is argued that the culture-specific conceptual package of meaning captured in *hygge* ties together salient and distinctive aspects of Danish sociality, including ways of communicating and ways of thinking about others, and that the concept of *hygge* plays an important role for the interpretation of Danish symbols in everyday life.

Chapter 4 provides a semantic analysis of *tryghed* 'security', a cultural keyword which is highly revealing of social and psychological concerns in the Danish speech community. The chapter explores the relation between Danish society at large, socialization practices and Danish ethno-psychology. It argues that *tryghed* constitutes a powerful mental ontology in everyday Danish as an important discourse tool in a diverse range of cultural domains, from pedagogy to politics.

Chapter 5 studies *janteloven* 'the Jante Law', a much-cited but often misunderstood Danish cultural construct. The chapter explores the cultural semantics of *janteloven* and studies how the term functions in con-temporary Danish discourses. Through an original semantic exegesis, the chapter exposes stereotypes commonly associated with *janteloven*. It argues that the underlying values can be identified in accordance with, not in opposition to, dominant cultural discourses of "tender values" in Danish society.

Chapter 6 provides a semantic analysis of *synes* and *mener*, two im-portant verbs in the elaborate Danish lexical grid of cognitive verbs. The Danish-specificity of these verbs is explored in the context of intercultural communication and cross-cultural differences in cognitive styles. It is argued that *synes* and *mener* reflect aspects of a Danish democratic ethos and mindset, and that the peculiar semantics of the Danish cognitive verbs is culturally motivated. The chapter also advances the idea that the cog-nitive verbs in a given language can serve as a vantage point in the study of cognitive styles and language-internal themes and approaches to cog-nition.

Chapter 7 provides a semantic analysis of the lexical grid of good feelings by studying the three Danish "happy"-adjectives *lykkelig*, *glad* and *tilfreds*, none of which actually matches English 'happy'. This chapter criticizes Anglo-international "happiness research" for relying on English *happy* as a comparative concept in cross-national research. The story of

the Danes as "the happiest people on earth" is critically examined from a cross-semantic perspective.

Chapter 8 offers a conclusion, painting an integrated picture of the Danish universe of meaning which has emerged from semantic analysis of Danish keywords and culture-specific lexical grids. The final chapter also offers direction for further work on the Danish semantics and ethnopragmatics, reflects on theoretical impacts of this work and discusses practical applications.

1.3.   Language and cultural values

The study of the language-culture interface has had a turbulent history in linguistics. Very roughly, the language-culture question moved from the centre of linguistic inquiry (in the linguistics of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Franz Boas, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf), to the periphery in the second half of the 20th Century (in particular in Noam Chomsky's linguistics).[5] At the turn of the century, however, the question has made a vigorous comeback (cf. Evans 2010: 162). In this section, I want to briefly situate the present work by relating it to both early and recent insights into the language-culture relationship and by identifying the cultural-linguistic and intellectual schools of thought which have inspired and shaped the conception of this book. (On the general vindication and cautious reintroduction of Whorfian thinking in contemporary linguistics, see also Wierzbicka 1985, 1992; Lakoff 1987a; Lucy 1992; Gumperz and Levinson 1996; Lee 1996; Slobin 1996[6]; Niemeier and Dirven 2000; Pütz and Verspoor 2000; Boroditsky 2001, 2003; Goddard 2003b; Evans 2010).

First and foremost, this book is indebted to the groundbreaking empirical-analytical work on language and cultural values by the Australian semanticists, Anna Wierzbicka (ANU) and Cliff Goddard (UNE), and in particular by their work on cultural keywords and on the cultural "baggage" hidden in words (Goddard 1998, 2002a, 2006a, 2008a; Goddard and Wierzbicka 2004a; Wierzbicka 1985, 1992, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006a, 2010). Chapter 2 discusses in detail the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach, developed by Wierzbicka, Goddard and colleagues. Unlike many other linguistic approaches, which have tended to marginalize the lexicon, lexical semantics has always had a prominent place in NSM theory. Wierzbicka (1996) says: "Words are a society's most basic cultural artefact, and – properly understood – they provide the best key to a culture's values and assumptions" (p. 237).

Any speech community, be it a national, local or regional speech community, has words which are revealing of speakers' value orientations and assumptions. What assumptions and values are hidden in widely recognized cultural keywords such as Danish *hygge* (Hansen 1980; Schwartz 1985a), Swedish *lagom* (Daun 1989: 137), Finnish *sisu* (Lewis 2005: 59) or in characteristic regional words such as Viennese German *Schmäh* (Agar 2009: 112) or Jutlandic Danish *træls* (Skautrup 1968; Nielsen 2006)?

Despite stretching the boundaries of English, such keywords demonstrate the limitations of conventional translation. It is clear that translational attempts such as *hygge* 'cosy atmosphere', *lagom* 'exactly right, not too much, not too little', *sisu* 'persistence, resilience, inner strength', *Schmäh* 'ironic, misanthropic wit' or *træls* 'rather annoying, but unavoidable', do not do full justice to the indigenous meanings. As Wierzbicka (1996) remarks, it is only if words are "properly understood" that they can become the key to understanding the cultural values of a speech community, and to understand words properly, we must come as close as possible to modelling speakers' own perspectives. The important point here is that natural languages consist of experience-near concepts (Geertz 1984; Shweder and Sullivan 1993; Wierzbicka 1999: 10; Shweder 2003, 2004). Unlike experience-distant technical descriptors such as "post-materialism" or "egalitarianism", everyday words such as *hygge*, *lagom*, *sisu*, *Schmäh* and *træls*, are a part of speakers' everyday experience in their respective speech community. Also, experience-near concepts are much more language-specific than experience-distant constructs. If we want to understand cognition and cultural values "from the inside", we must study in detail the experience-near concepts of everyday language. Instead of asking "how does the value of post-materialism manifest itself in Danish words" or "how is the value of egalitarianism represented in Danish discourses", this book takes its point of departure in experience-near, ordinary words and illuminates cultural values and cognitive styles from the language-internal perspective.

Objecting to "truth-conditional" paradigms which dominated linguistic semantics before the 1990s, Wierzbicka envisioned a semantics which did not take its point of departure in external logic, but took seriously the internal, cultural construals of meaning: "In natural language, meaning consists in human interpretation of the world. It is subjective, it is anthropocentric, it reflects predominant cultural concerns and culture-specific modes of social interaction as much as any objective features of the world 'as such'" (Wierzbicka 1988: 2).

This book takes Wierzbicka's two central tenets, the anthropocentricity of meaning and the culture-specificity of natural languages, as fundamental. Because natural languages are culturally transmitted, words can be viewed as historically transmitted "cultural artefacts" (Hockett 1960; Wierzbicka 1997; Tomasello 1999: 164f), and Danish can therefore, like any other language, be viewed as a cultural universe inhabited by linguistic concepts which reflect the cultural history of the speech community. When communities of speakers pass on their language to the next generation, they simultaneously pass on knowledge, skills and values *in* and *with* language. Words have not emerged in a cultural vacuum, and languages differ widely in their semantic-conceptual construals. Applying Wierzbicka's general insights to the Danish context, we can say that "Danish values, Danish ideals and Danish attitudes are reflected in Danish language".

In a broader sense, this work also reflects the cognitive turn in linguistics (Senft 2009). At the turn of the century, cognitively-oriented linguists have brought the language-cognition question back to the centre of scholarly inquiry (cf. volumes such as Tomasello 1998; Niemeier and Dirven 2000; Harkins and Wierzbicka 2001; Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002a; Enfield 2002a; Cuyckens, Dirven and Taylor 2003; Achard and Niemeier 2004; Dirven and Verspoor 2004; Goddard 2006a, 2008b; Luchjenbroers 2006; Amberber 2007a; Schalley and Khlentzos 2007; Sharifian and Palmer 2007; Gómez-Gonzáles et al. 2008; Kristiansen and Dirven 2008; Sharifian et al. 2008; Pishwa 2009; Malt and Wolff 2010). Cognitive linguist Gilles Fauconnier (1999) sums up the the cognitive view of language as follows: "…language is in the service of constructing and communicating meaning, and it is for the linguist and the cognitive scientist a window into the mind" (p. 96).

The emphasis on words as *constructing* meaning, not merely *labeling* pre-existing concepts, has gained currency with the cognitive turn. As conceptualizations, words constitute and reflect culture-specific ways of "paying attention" to the world. The traditional fallacy of separating the semantic from the conceptual has been challenged and rejected by cognitive linguists. What follows from a cognitive understanding of language is that language *is* conceptualization. A number of American anthropologists have gone as far as to abandon the distinction between language and culture altogether, suggesting unifying terminologies such as "linguaculture" (Friedrich 1989) or "languaculture" (Agar 1994). (For an illuminating discussion, see Risager 2006). While partly sharing the concerns of these linguistic anthropologists, this work maintains that it is

possible and helpful to distinguish "linguistically encoded meanings" from "dominant cultural interpretative norms", or, roughly, "language" from "culture". In the NSM framework (see chapter 2), language and culture are viewed as intimately related, yet distinguishable social constructs. This view is reflected in NSM terminology and practices, where a distinction is maintained between semantic explications (representations of linguistically encoded meanings) and cultural scripts (representations of dominant cultural interpretative norms).

The cognitive turn is in some ways a "return" to the early cultural linguistics of scholars such as Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), Franz Boas (1858–1942), Edward Sapir (1884–1939) and Benjamin L. Whorf (1897–1941) (see Darnell 2009; Lee 2009; Nerlich and Clarke 2009; Vermeulen 2009). The intellectual roots of cultural and linguistic relativism can be traced back to the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt (cf. Humboldt 1988), whose studies led him to conclude that individual languages carry particular worldviews (Risager 2006: 59). He said: "The diversity [of language] is not a diversity of sounds and signs but a diversity of the views of the world" (von Humboldt, as quoted in Trabant 2000: 25).

In America, Edward Sapir (1949) came to similar conclusions:

> …the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached…We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation…From this standpoint we may think of language as the symbolic guide to culture. (p. 69-70)

Sapir (1949) also observed more than half a century ago, that the lexicon of abstract concepts differs just as much as words in the material, concrete domain: "Languages differ widely in the nature of their vocabularies. …Such differences of vocabulary go far beyond the names of cultural objects, such as arrow point, coat of armor or gunboat. They apply just as well to the mental world" (p. 27).

To exemplify Sapir's insight, English speakers would not expect to find universal counterparts of obviously culture-specific gastronomical terms, such as the Danish *øllebrød* 'rye bread-and-beer porridge' or *gløgg* 'warm Christmas drink of mulled wine with raisins, almonds and spices'.

On the other hand, English speaking scholars tend to take for granted that terms for sociality, emotion and cognition, such as *polite*, *happy* and *believe*, are human universals. Recent cross-semantic studies, however, have confirmed Sapir's observations that variety and difference are found in all semantic domains, including the abstract domains (Goddard forthcoming), such as sociality, emotion and cognition (Wierzbicka 1992; Goddard 2008a). Cross-semantic studies have also confirmed that languages share some concepts and functions. This shared side of languages has convinced some scholars of a "psychic unity of mankind" (cf. Boas 1911) and a common ground which can be utilized in our investigation into linguistic and cultural diversity. Franz Boas' insight that everyday language use is largely an unconscious activity is also of great theoretical importance.

The hidden aspect of everyday language use is exactly what makes linguistic conventions so valuable in the search for "unspoiled" information about everyday cognition, cultural values and the differences in human interpretations of the world. The culture-specificity of their words and linguistic routines is hidden to speakers, who tend to think of their own ways as natural and normal, even though they might be typologically highly unusual. By studying everyday Danish language, a Danish "folk model" of the world, including the social world, can be brought to light (cf. Holland and Quinn 1987). From the point of view of experience-near concepts of everyday language, I will explore how words capture human experience (cf. Malt and Wolff 2010).

To sum up, this book undertakes empirical-analytical studies of Danish language and culture using the NSM framework, in consideration of both the early insights from German-American cultural linguistics and of the general cognitive turn of contemporary linguistics.

In the following section, I will introduce Danish identity, culture and language through the lens of cultural history. The story of Denmark and the Danes serves as background for the semantic and ethnopragmatic analysis in chapters 3–7. Painting a portrait of the Danish speech community and the salience of *dansk* 'Danish' in contemporary Denmark, I will also reflect semantically on conceptual innovations in the Danish folk sociolinguistic vocabulary which charaterized Danish identity nationalism in the 19th Century.

1.4. Danish identity, culture and language

Present-day Denmark comprises three main areas: 1) The Isles (Danish: *Øerne*), including the m ain islands of Zealand (Danish: *Sjælland*) and Funen (Danish: *Fyn*), with the capital Copenhagen (Danish: *København*), located on Eastern Zealand; 2) to the west, Jutland (Danish: *Jylland*), a continental European peninsula bordering Germany, with the main city of Aarhus (Danish: *Århus* or *Aarhus*); 3) to the east, Bornholm, an island located in the Baltic Sea, geographically closer to both Sweden and Poland than to the rest of Denmark.

Figure 1.1 Map of Denmark

Contemporary Danish is spoken by approximately 5–6 million people, most of whom live in Denmark and the northern part of the German state Schleswig-Holstein (Danish: *Slesvig-Holsten*). Danish is an official language in the European Union, and the vitality of the Danish language is generally considered very high (Bakker and van der Voort 2003) even though some concerns about the "threat from English" occasionally are voiced, mainly by non-linguists.[7]

Much like modern Austria, which was formed after the disintegration of a much larger Austrian empire, modern Denmark emerged from the gradual disintegration of the historical Danish Empire, a multilingual and multiethnic composite-state that once stretched from Greenland and Iceland, over Norway, Southern Sweden, Northern Germany and present-day Denmark, to the Islands of the Baltic Sea (presently part of Sweden and Estonia). This history is still evident in North Atlantic language curricula. Danish was once the language of instruction in schools in Iceland, Norway, the Faroe Islands and Greenland, and it is still taught as a foreign language in Icelandic, Faroese and Greenlandic schools (Eriksen 2002; Vikør 2002, 2005; Jacobsen 2003).[8] By European standards, Danish stands out as an extraordinarily homogenous language in terms of its spoken standard (Pedersen 2005: 171). Traditional Danish dialects have virtually disappeared[9] due to a very powerful standardization ideology (Kristiansen 1998; Kristiansen and Jørgensen 2003: 2). By a very rapid dialect shift in the 20th Century the Copenhagen standard became the language of Denmark (Kristensen 2003; Pedersen 2003). This drastic linguistic change is closely linked to what has been called a "grand narrative of Danish identity" and the emergence of a national Danish speech community (Korsgaard 2006: 147). In Danish history the year 1864 is of great symbolic value because it came to symbolize a breakdown of the Danish Empire and at the same time a breakthrough for a new Danish national psyche (Monsson 2005: 1465). It marks the end of the *Second Schleswig War*, when the Danish Empire was forced to cede two fifths of its territory to Prussia. The military failure of the old Empire was subsequently "celebrated" through a positive spin known as the discourse of "the internal front" (Campbell and Hall 2006: 25). Under the motto "outward loss – inward gain"[10] (Borish 1991; Østergård 2006: 73), a new vision of Danishness was launched based on identity nationalism

and the ideology of Denmark as a "homogenous society". In the new, heavily "trimmed" Danish nation-state, language became the prime marker of identity. The standard language concept of *rigsdansk*, literally 'empire Danish', was re-invented as *the* language of the New Denmark. However, even within the tiny territory of the New Denmark, the linguistic and cultural situation was quite heterogenous and characterized by many distinctive *mål* 'local vernaculars' and local cultures, but this pre-national linguistic diversity has often been ignored in national accounts of Danish history (Frandsen 1996). With time the new ideology of homogeneity "successfully" suppressed and virtually annihilated the many *mål* (Kristiansen and Jørgensen 2003: 2).

1.4.1.   The new concepts *dansk* 'Danish' and *sprog* 'language'

To present-day speakers, the concept *dansk* 'Danish (language)' and the demonym *dansker* 'Dane' are entirely uncontroversial. If a person from Jutland were asked today whether he considered himself to be a *dansker* 'Dane' and a speaker of *dansk* 'Danish', he would look bewildered, or more likely, take it as a joke. Obviously he does! If a late 18th Century peasant in Jutland had been asked the same question, he would have looked bewildered too, but for a different reason; his identity would have been linked to his *stand* 'class', his *sogn* 'parish', his *mål* 'local verna-cular' and perhaps to the closest *købstad* 'market town', but not to any *dansk* identity as such (Feldbæk 1992: 58). At that time the concept of *dansk* was associated with the Danish Empire, the Danish King and the Danish Court (where German and French, by the way, were the dominant languages).

When a new Herder-inspired notion of "identity nationalism" reached Copenhagen in the 18th Century, this old world order began to change and a Danish national movement gained ground, mainly in opposition to the evolving German national identity (Østergård 2006: 71). (On language and nationalism in Northern Europe, see also Barbour and Carmichael 2000; Gregersen 2002). Danish historian Uffe Østergård (2006) classifies Denmark as an almost prototypical example of an ethnonational nation, in which language is a primary marker of national identity: "Ideologically, Danish identity belongs unequivocally to the family of the Germanic, Celtic and Slavic identities, where national identity, in the tradition of Herder, is conceived primarily in terms of language and culture

…Denmark belongs firmly in the group of ethnonational European nations for which culture has priority over state in defining the political nation" (p. 83, 85).

The Danish linguist Frans Gregersen sheds further light on Herder's influence. He says: "I think it is impossible to overestimate the influence of Herder's thought on contemporary ideas if only for the simple reason that it formed the basis for research and national language policies from then on. *The very idea of a language must have changed*" (Gregersen 2002: 373, my emphasis). The observation that "the very idea of a language must have changed" is crucial for understanding the emergence of *dansk* 'Danish' as a new concept. In line with Gregersen, I suggest that a "conceptual landslide" occured in which a new understanding and conceptualization of "ways of speaking" overwhelmed the past. Not only did the new language concept of *dansk* rely on the re-conceptualization of *Danmark* 'Denmark', *dansk* also came to exemplify the new ethnonational concept of *sprog*, roughly 'national language', as opposed to the old concept of *mål* 'local vernacular'.[11]

From a semantic-conceptual viewpoint, the language concept *dansk* must be considered an 18th Century invention. Needless to say, I am not denying the presence of some "Danishes" prior to this period; traditional lexicography talks about "stages of Danish", such as Old Danish, Middle Danish and Early Modern Danish. The problem with the "stage" metaphor, however, is that it assumes a continuity of the same thing. What is important to note is that something radically new happened with the conceptualization of a Danish speech community, with *dansk* 'Danish' as its shared *sprog* 'national language'. In the following, I will provide a sociohistorical overview of this new conceptual formation, which forms the basis for the contemporary Danish "universe of meaning".

Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744–1803) thoughts were adapted by Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872), who can be thought of as one of the main "architects of Danishness" in the New Denmark. The legacy of Grundtvig will be discussed in more detail in section 1.3.2, but to understand the primacy of language as a marker of national identity in the New Denmark, Grundtvig's views are indispensable. In one of his many nation-building songs, he wrote:

> They belong to a people / who count themselves as part thereof /
> who have an ear for the mother tongue / and a passion for the fatherland /
> The rest, like dragon dolls / exclude themselves from the people/
> banish themselves from descent/ refuse themselves a native's right.[12]
> N.F.S. Grundtvig (as quoted in Adriansen 2003: 29, my translation)

Grundtvig's view on national identity was in some ways more modern than many of his European contemporaries. In Grundtvig's thinking, national identity was not about "blood" but about "sense of belonging". The way to show one's national belonging and essential core identity became strongly linked with speaking and with the new national logic that "Germans speak German and Danes speak Danish." The discursive creation of a new distinct national psyche[13] went hand in hand with the construction of *dansk* as the national language of Denmark.[14] (On the discursive construction of a national consciousness, see also Anderson 1991; Berthele 2008; Goddard 2009a.)

In a semantic study of the "language" concepts in everyday English, Goddard (2009a, 2011) argues that the word *language* (in the cross-linguistic sense, e.g. *English language*, *French language*, *Chinese language*) captures the idea that different 'kinds of people' live in different places and say things with different 'kinds of words'. He concludes: "The *language* concept is essentializing, both in reifying word use and ways of speaking into something akin to natural kinds (*French*, *Spanish*, *Chinese*), and, perhaps more insidiously, in its implicit linkage between different ways of speaking and putatively different 'kinds of people' belonging in their different places" (Goddard 2009a: 23).

Arguably, Goddard's general insights are applicable to other European concepts, dominated by standardization and nationalism, including the Danish concept of *sprog* 'national language'. However, Herder's and Grundvig's legacy of "language-based identity nationalism" seems to have taken one step further in the Danish *sprog* concept. Historically, the semantics of *sprog* was greatly shaped by discourses in the formative years of the Danish speech community, and *sprog* became the single most debated issue in the discursive creation of a Danish ethnonational identity. The dominant (Grundtvigian) view in these discourses was that everyone who felt *dansk* and spoke *dansk* had the right to be part of the New Denmark. Those who did not feel *dansk* and did not "have an ear for the mother tongue" did not belong in the New Denmark (Adriansen 2003: 29). In this way *sprog* became the key to ethnonational inclusion or exclusion, and this aspect is reflected in the semantics of *sprog*.[15]

Table 1.1 The strata of *rigsdansk* (the Danish standard language)[16]

Strata	Lexical contribution
Copenhagen (North Zealand)	vernacular substratum
Low German varieties	radical influence[17]
High German	extensive lexical influence[18]
French	considerable lexical influence

The concept *sprog* emphasized the "contrastive" perspective. An individual's claim to national identity was grounded in his or her commitment to "using words of the right kind". Several authors have pointed out the irony, that the *dansk* which became the vehicle for Danish identity nationalism was based on numerous continental European words, in particular German and French words. The literary written standard which came to be the source of *rigsdansk* had evolved on the basis of different lexical and grammatical strata: a Copenhagen (or North Zealand) substratum, but with radical continental European influences, see Table 1.1.

From a semantic point of view, the etymological origin of vocabulary is in itself not particularly interesting. Essentially, Danish-specificity cannot be determined on the basis of the origin of word forms, but must be determined on the basis of meaning. Semantically, a Danish word with, say, a German origin, is not necessarily less "Danish" than a word with a distinctly Scandinavian origin.

Haugen (1976: 40) maintains that Danish is somehow "more European" than the other Scandinavian languages due to its intense and century long German influences. This, I believe, is true to some extent. However, the breakdown of the Danish Empire and the breakthrough of the Danish national psyche marked a turning away from Continental Europe and in particular German influences. New orientations towards *Norden* 'the North', and also towards the Anglosphere were established. As we will see shortly, the discourse of the "internal front" meant, above all, a re-orientation towards the New Denmark and the birth of a national Danish speech community.

At a most crucial state of Danish semantic development, the new-born Danish speech community turned around her own axis. In other words, this speech community was more Nordic than European, but more Danish than Nordic.