
SEMANTIC MAPS

— presented by Daniel Boucník —

Why are semantic maps useful?

Grammatical items are **multifunctional**

Semantic maps help us:

- define **functions** of a grammatical item
- reach **universal** conceptual space
- compare **different languages** easily

Multifunctionality of grammar

(1) English preposition *on*

a. *a cup **on** the table*

b. *a fly **on** the wall*

c. *keys **on** a hook*

d. *leaves **on** a tree*

- Monosemy?
- Polysemy?
- Homonymy?

—

Zoom in: Functions

(1) English preposition *on*

a. *a cup **on** the table*

b. *a fly **on** the wall*

c. *keys **on** a hook*

d. *leaves **on** a tree*

Functions:

(support/vertical)

(support/horizontal)

(attachment/non-part)

(attachment/part)

...How do we tell?

The answer: SEMANTIC MAPS

SEMANTIC MAPS

How to describe
functions of words
without
polysemy/homonymy

What is the terminology of semantic maps?

Does everyone understand these terms?

- ❑ Grams
 - = grammatical morphemes
- ❑ Functions
 - = the senses and uses of a gram
- ❑ Multifunctionality
 - = the many functions of one gram
- ❑ Conceptual space
 - = the result of comparing functions across Ls

How S.M. work:

- ❑ Find a gram which is multifunctional



- ❑ Define distinct functions (at least 1)



- ❑ Cross-linguistic comparison

Example: Indefinite pronouns

- ❑ *Some-series*

- ❑ *someone, something, somewhere, ...*

- ❑ *Any-series*

- ❑ *anyone, anything, anywhere, ...*

- ❑ *No-series*

- ❑ *no one, nothing, nowhere, ...*

Grams = *some/any/no*

How S.M. work:

~~☐ Find a multifunctional gram~~



☐ Define distinct functions



☐ Cross-linguistic comparison

How do *some*-indefinites and *any*-indefinites differ?

1. Assertiveness (English)
2. Specificity (Russian X English)
3. Specific known/specific unknown (German X English)
4. ...
...

Function No.1 – Assertiveness (English)

Some-indefinite – assertive contexts (5a-b)

Any-indefinites – non-assertive contexts (6a-c)

- (5) a. *Yesterday Mariamu met **someone** (/ *anyone) from Botswana.*
 b. *At the DGfS conference I always meet **someone** (/ *anyone) I know.*
- (6) a. *Has **anything** happened while I was away? (a question)*
 b. *If I can help you in **any** way, please tell me. (a conditional protasis)*
 c. *I didn't notice **anything** suspicious. (a negative sentence)*

Many functions still unexplored

Any-indefinites – not (normally) possible in imperatives (7a)

Some-indefinites – possible in questions and conditionals (7b-c)

(7) a. Please buy **something** (/??anything) for our son when you go to town.

b. Has **something** happened while I was away?

c. If I can help you in **some way**, please tell me.

How S.M. work:

~~☐ Find a multifunctional gram~~



~~☐ Define distinct functions~~



☐ Cross-linguistic comparison

Cross-linguistic comparison (En X Ru)

Russian grams:

- *-to*
 - *Kto-to* "someone"
 - *Čto-to* "something"
 - *Gde-to* "somewhere"
- *-nibud*
 - *Kto-nibud* "anyone"
 - *Čto-nibud* "anything"
 - *Gde-nibud* "anywhere"

New functions to the map

... Russian distinguishes something that is ambiguous in English

(9) a. *On xočet ženitsja na **kom-to** iz Botsvany.*

“He wants to marry **someone** [specific] from Botswana.”

b. *On xočet ženitsja na **kom-nibud** iz Botsvany.*

“He wants to marry **someone** [non-specific] from Botswana.”

How S.M. work:

~~☐ Find a multifunctional gram~~



~~☐ Define distinct functions~~



~~☐ Cross-linguistic comparison~~

...What is next?

Repeat for multiple Ls

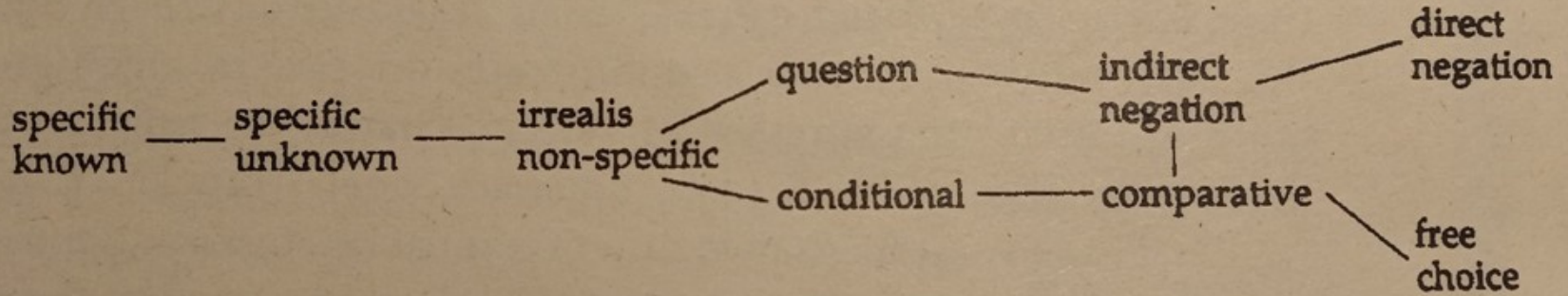


FIG. 8.6. A semantic map for indefinite pronoun functions.

... in this case, 40 languages

For more info see Haspelmath, M. (1997) *Indefinite pronouns*. Oxford: Oxford University Press)

One more L – German:

Eng: “someone”

Ger:

Jemand or *Irgendjemand*?

Specific known or specific unknown?

... *Irgendjemand* cannot be used when the referent’s identity is known to the speaker.

(12) a. *Mein Handy ist weg, (irgend)jemand muss es gestohlen haben.*

“My cell phone is gone, **someone** must have stolen it.”

b. *Jemand* / **irgendjemand* *hat angerufen – rate mal wer.*

“**Someone** called — guess who.”

A SEMANTIC MAP

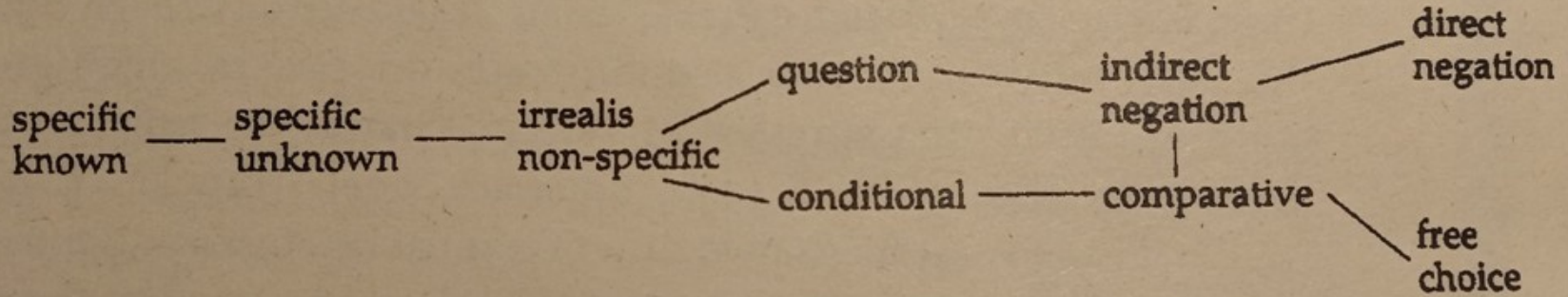
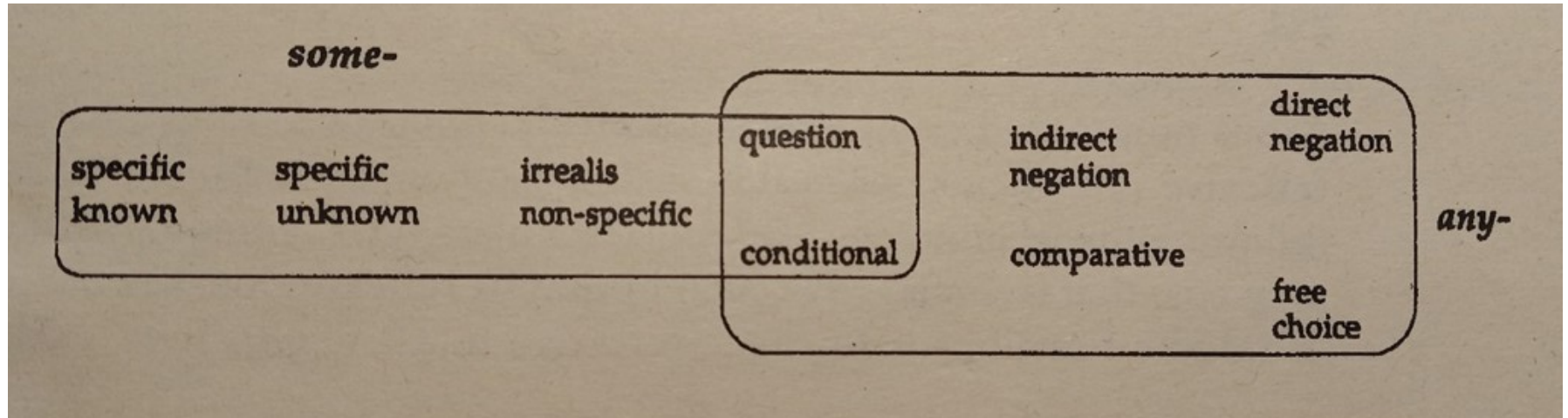


FIG. 8.6. A semantic map for indefinite pronoun functions.

A SEMANTIC MAP – the English grams

Some-indefinites – assertive contexts (5a-b)

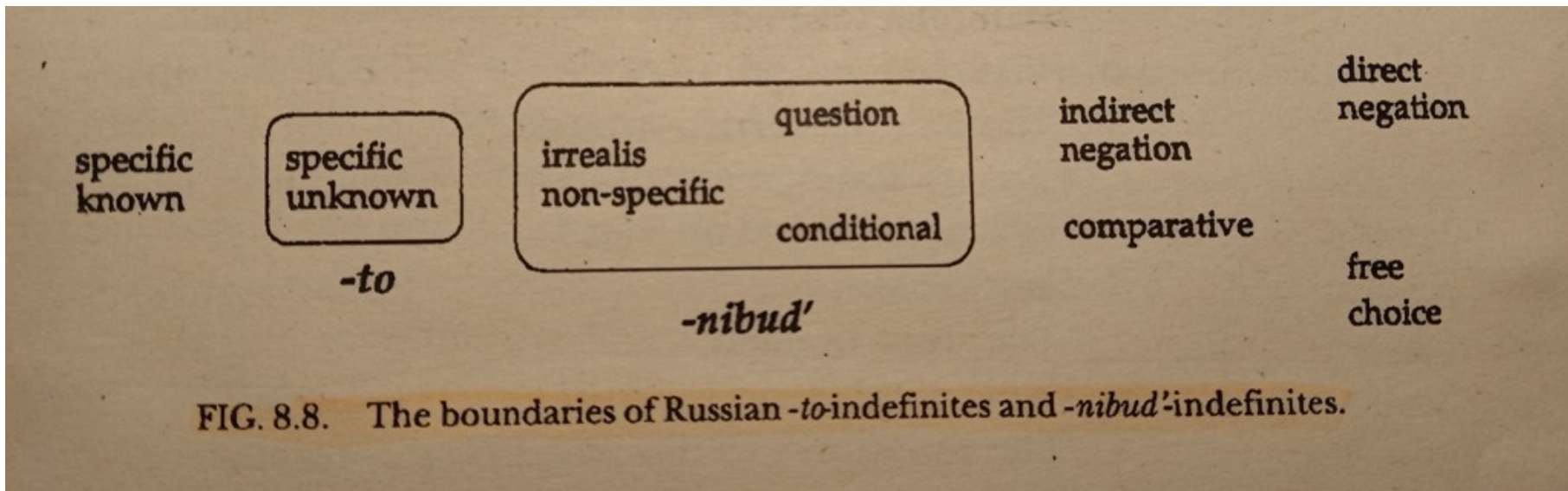
Any-indefinites – non-assertive contexts (6a-c)



A SEMANTIC MAP – the Russian grams

-nibud-indefinites – non-specific reference

-to-indefinites – specific reference



What is this good for?

in Leipzig VS *in* February

- ❑ Two uses of **one morpheme** for different contexts?
- ❑ Two clearly distinct **different morphemes**?

SEMANTIC MAPS allow us to explore a cross-linguistic reality while avoiding hasty conclusions

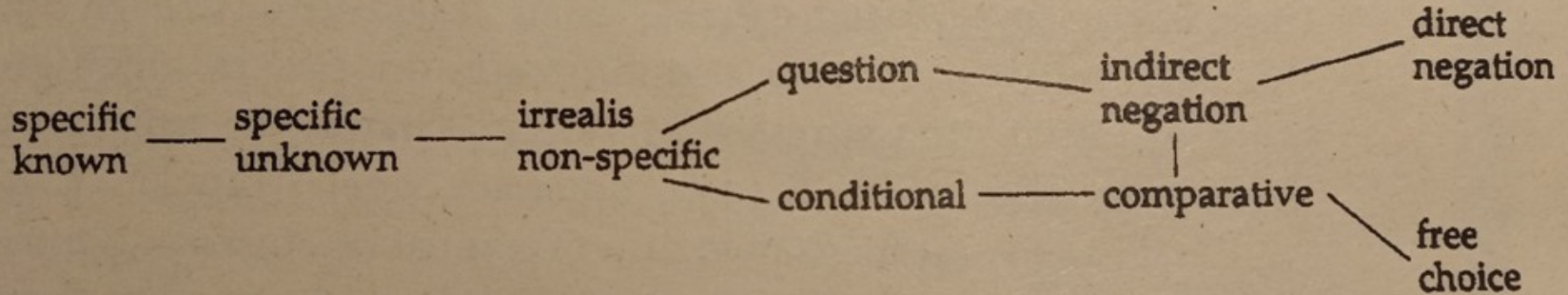


FIG. 8.6. A semantic map for indefinite pronoun functions.

Haspelmath, M. (2003) "The Geometry of Grammatical Meaning: Semantic Maps and Cross-Linguistic Comparison" in: Tomasello, Michael (ed.) 2003. *The New Psychology of Language*, vol.2. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, pp. 211-242