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La définition

Sous la direction d'Alain Polguère et Dorota Sikora



### Semantic Molecules and Their Role in NSM Lexical Definitions

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- **Author:** Goddard (Cliff)
- **Abstract:** The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach is well known for its use of reductive paraphrase as a mode of lexical definition (conceptual analysis) and for its claim to have discovered an inventory of irreducible lexical meanings—semantic primes—that are apparently universal in the world's languages. It is less well known that many NSM definitions rely crucially on “semantic molecules,” i.e. certain non primitive meanings that function alongside semantic primes as building blocks in the composition of yet more complex lexical meanings. This paper considers aspects of the NSM theory of semantic molecules, including: first, the notion of molecules within molecules (e.g. ‘mouth → ‘water’ → ‘drink’); second, the distribution of semantic molecules in the world's languages: some are universal or near-universal, e.g. ‘hands,’ ‘children,’ ‘water,’ others are widespread but not universal, e.g. ‘money,’ and still others are specific to particular languages or linguistic/cultural areas; third, the emerging notions of “small molecules” and lexicosyntactic molecules. The paper includes explications for about twenty-five semantic molecules that are posited to be universal or near-universal.
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