

words for semantic combinations such as ‘like this’, ‘do (it) like this’, and ‘say (it) like this’.

This concludes the present review of potential lexico-semantic universals.

3. Conclusions and discussion

As stated at the onset, it is impossible to proclaim with absolute certainty that any meaning is attested as the meaning of a lexical unit in all languages. The sample of languages for which we are able to obtain information and analysis of the necessary quality is too small. This does not mean, however, that we reach the end of our survey without any firm conclusions. First, we know that only a very small set of meanings have any chance at all of being universals. From even a small sample of languages it is clear that many impressionistically “basic” items of English vocabulary (such as *go*, *water*, and *eat*) lack exact equivalents in other languages.

Second, we may conclude that universality and semantic simplicity are closely linked. The best candidates for the status of universal meanings are overwhelmingly to be found within the set of proposed semantic primes. To see this, one needs only to consider the fact that of the 48 NON-prime candidates for universal status reviewed in this paper, only the following seem to have much hope: ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘child’, ‘mother’, ‘head’, ‘eye’, ‘ear’, ‘nose’, ‘hand’, ‘day’, ‘kill’, and ‘make’. In general, however, doubts remain about the universality of these non-prime meanings, doubts which are exacerbated by their semantic complexity. There is always the possibility that apparent equivalents in different languages may differ slightly in their underlying semantic configuration. Indeed, it might seem unlikely that ANY complex meaning configuration – no matter how solidly based in human experience – will be present in precisely the same shape (i.e., identical in every single detail) in all languages. On the other hand, of the 60 or so semantic primes proposed in the latest NSM work, at least 40 can be regarded as relatively secure candidates for universal status. (There is no definitive evidence against any of the other 20-odd proposed primes, but there has not been sufficient crosslinguistic work to establish their credibility either.)

Substantives:	I, you, someone, people, something/thing
Determiners and quantifiers:	this, the same, one, two, all, much/many
Attributes:	good, bad, big, small
Mental and speech predicates:	think, know, want, see, hear, say
Actions, events, states, existence:	do, happen, live, die, there is
Time:	when/time, now, before, after, a long time
Space:	where/place, here, above, below, inside
“Logical” concepts:	not, maybe, because, if
Other:	like, very