

II. RECENZJE I OMÓWIENIA

DOI: 10.17951/et.2026.38.381

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Ethnolinguistics Applied and Thriving

Lauren Sadow, Kerry Mullan, and Cliff Goddard (eds.). 2025. *Explorations in Applied Ethnolinguistics: Words, Cultures, and Global Perspectives*.

Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-81681-9>

Keywords: applied ethnolinguistics; Bert Peeters; Natural Semantic Metalanguage; Minimal Languages

Słowa kluczowe: etnolingwistyka stosowana; Bert Peeters; Naturalny Metajęzyk Semantyczny; Języki Minimalne

The volume *Explorations in Applied Ethnolinguistics: Words, Cultures and Global Perspectives*, edited by Lauren Sadow, Kerry Mullan and Cliff Goddard, is a substantial and conceptually coherent addition to the field. This tribute to Bert Peeters is both a scholarly collection and an intellectual homage to Peeters' contributions to the development of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach.

Bert Peeters was a prominent figure in applied ethnolinguistics and the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) research community, and a pioneer of the NSM approach in French. His work had a significant and lasting impact on the field, particularly through the development of the concept of *applied ethnolinguistics*. Beyond this scholarly contribution, Peeters played a key role in promoting the many applications of the NSM approach to a broad academic audience through prolific publications and long-standing dedication to maintaining the NSM Approach website (<https://nsm-approach.net>).

Pivotal to Bert's academic career was his close collaboration with his PhD supervisor, Anna Wierzbicka, as well as the inspiration he drew from the work of

Cliff Goddard, a fellow intellectual and friend. The three editors of the volume reviewed here had collaborated with Peeters on publications and other joint projects for many years. They are all NSM practitioners and/or French speakers — two defining aspects of Bert's career. Their last joint contribution is the three-volume set *Studies in Ethnopragmatics, Cultural Semantics, and Intercultural Communication* (Springer, 2020), co-edited by Peeters, Mullan, and Sadow, which celebrates the work of Cliff Goddard.

The title of the volume reviewed here, *Explorations in Applied Ethnolinguistics*, reflects the multiple and diverse applications of the NSM approach demonstrated in it. These encompass linguistic studies of semantics and culture, as well as cross-cultural studies, and extend into other fields of research such as psychology and child education. Building on previous studies of applied ethnolinguistics, this volume introduces a diversity of voices to the field, bringing together contributions from thirty-two scholars whose research is based on data from nineteen languages around the world.

The volume starts with an introductory section (Part I), opening with two chapters adapted from Bert Peeters' posthumous monograph, *Langue, culture et valeurs. Vers une ethnolinguistique appliquée et applicable* (2024). These chapters have been translated, condensed, and expanded by the editors to make his most recent work accessible to the English-speaking audience.

In the first chapter, "Language, Culture, and Values: Six Ways to See Them More Clearly", Bert Peeters, Lauren Sadow, Cliff Goddard, and Kerry Mullan address interrelated issues concerning the concepts of linguaculture, language, and culture, for which key definitions are provided. The four foundational postulates of intercultural communication, as set out by Wierzbicka (2003: 69), are summarised, with emphasis on the systematic and value-reflective nature of cross-linguistic differences in speech patterns.

Six research protocols for applied ethnolinguistics are then highlighted, namely ethnolexicology, ethnometaphorology, ethnopraxiology, ethnosyntax, ethnopragmatics, and ethnoaxiology. These protocols do not exclude but complement one another and, in some cases, partially overlap. Together, they constitute a coherent whole that can be described as applied ethnolinguistics. The authors of the chapter point out (p. 17) that the adjective *applied* emphasises the practical and educational focus of these protocols, and that the term *ethnolinguistics* links this approach to a broader field of enquiry (see Underhill 2012, Chapter 2; Głaz et al. 2013). The protocols offer a thorough methodological framework for investigating the relationship between language and cultural values. These range from the analysis of culturally significant lexical items, metaphors, phrases and syntactic patterns to the study of communicative behaviours and the corroboration of cultural values on the basis of linguistic and non-linguistic evidence. The overarching aim of these research protocols is to identify whether and how cultural values are encoded, paying particular attention to the distinction between established and hypothesised values that require further validation. Although ethnoaxiology is informed by the other protocols, it is also presented as an independent process for verifying cultural values, explicitly going back to Peeters' (2003) concept of (trans)cultural axiology.

Further on, the authors point out that applied ethnolinguistics shares affinities with other theoretical frameworks, namely Cultural Linguistics (upper-case, Farzad Sharifian), cognitive ethnolinguistics (Jerzy Bartmiński), and ethnopragmatics (Cliff Goddard).

Cultural Linguistics developed through the integration of North American Cognitive Linguistics with insights from anthropological linguistics. This approach engaged early with cognitive science, primarily due to the work of the Australia-based Iranian linguist Farzad Sharifian. Sharifian (2015) defined Cultural Linguistics as a “multidisciplinary area of research that explores the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualization”. Cultural Linguistics provides a variety of analytical tools, including metaphors, cultural categories, schemas, and models. These are all forms of cultural conceptualisation, a term that refers to both the process and the result of forming culturally shaped ideas.

The authors also note the similarities between applied ethnolinguistics and the Lublin Ethnolinguistic School, founded by Jerzy Bartmiński. The journal *Etnolingwistyka*, initiated by Lublin scholars, has been published annually since 1988; however, the school’s foundational work dates back to the early 1970s. Cognitive ethnolinguistics has become particularly prominent since the English translation of Bartmiński’s major work was published in 2009.

Around this time, the first draft of applied ethnolinguistics (Peeters 2009) was also made available online after circulating for several years. Thus, although the two forms of ethnolinguistics developed independently, the chapter authors emphasise (p. 31) that the two traditions share more than merely a common name: their underlying philosophies are also strikingly similar. Both aim to enhance understanding of the cultural values embedded in different linguacultures, beginning with Polish in the case of the Lublin School and French in the case of applied ethnolinguistics.

Finally, applied ethnolinguistics is closely connected with ethnopragmatics (pp. 34-35), a framework pioneered by Cliff Goddard. Initially, pragmatics as a linguistic discipline sought to achieve a better understanding of speakers’ communicative practices; however, it tended to underestimate the influence of culture and cultural differences on the way people speak. It placed greater emphasis on the features of communication that people have in common than on those that differentiate them. Cliff Goddard (2002) and Anna Wierzbicka (2003) present a radically different approach to pragmatics. In his book, Goddard coined the term *ethnopragmatics* to distinguish this relativist approach more clearly from universalising tendencies. Within a relatively short period of time, ethnopragmatics had established itself as a paradigm that assigns a central role to culture, cultural values, and differences between linguacultures in the study of interaction.

Chapter Three, “The Natural Semantic Metalanguage: Underlying Philosophy and Basic Principles”, by Bert Peeters, Lauren Sadow, Cliff Goddard and Kerry Mullan, is a translation and abridged version of the corresponding chapter from Bert Peeters’s (2024) monograph *Langue, culture et valeurs*, originally written in French. It presents and discusses the NSM approach in detail.

The chapter begins with an overview of the history of the NSM approach, in which the authors identify five distinct stages of development. The first of these, the early development period spanning from 1972 to the mid-1980s, was characterised by the identification of 13–14 semantic primitives (Wierzbicka 1972, 1980). This was followed by the “expanding set” period from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, when the number of semantic primitives increased to 37. During this stage, the first major survey of a variety of languages from around the world was conducted. This period was also characterised by a focus on translatability and the search for universals (Goddard and Wierzbicka 1994; Wierzbicka 1985).

From the mid-1990s to 2007, the inventory of primitives expanded from 37 to 62. During this period, researchers focused on the grammatical aspects of NSM and on developing NSM versions in other languages. Simultaneously, the theory of cultural scripts underwent further development (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002).

In the next stage, from 2008 to 2014, the number of primitives stabilised at 65. Researchers introduced new theoretical concepts, such as *semantic molecules* and *templates* (Goddard 2008 and other works; Wierzbicka 2009 and other works). Since 2014, only minor adjustments have been made to the inventory of primitives, with no change in their number. In addition, researchers have developed the theory of lexicosyntactic molecules (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014; Peeters 2016; Goddard and Ye 2015).

In conclusion, the authors argue that the NSM is a universal descriptive tool which explains meanings and culturally specific ways of thinking by means of a simple, empirically validated lexicon and grammar. They emphasise that its clarity, precision and transparency sets it apart from traditional linguistic descriptions, which are often filled with complex technical terminology. The NSM also helps to bridge the gap between linguists and native speakers by enabling the latter to evaluate and improve explanations. Finally, the authors argue that Minimal Languages, as adapted versions of the NSM for non-specialists, facilitate clearer and more accessible communication without altering the original meaning.

The rest of the book is divided into four sections, which reflect the diversity of NSM applications and the breadth of Bert Peeters research interests.

The second part, “Doing Things with Simpler Words”, illustrates some of the practical applications, with a particular focus on health and wellbeing, literacy, and translation. The chapter “How to Ask a Clearer Question (or What Questionnaires, Surveys, and Rating Scales Can Gain from a Minimal Language Approach)” (by Cliff Goddard, Helen Bromhead, Ida Stevia Diget, and Alena Kazmaly) offers the first systematic exploration of applying the Minimal Language approach to questionnaires, surveys, and rating scales. The authors consider four case studies that involve psychometric assessment: the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales, the “climate change distress” section of a national Climate Action Survey, personality assessment with reference to Big Five personality testing, and mother/infant emotional connection with reference to the Welch Emotional Connection Screen. The analysis demonstrates that implementing Minimal Language principles does not necessarily lead to a single, uniform style of wording. In certain circumstances, the selective use of language-specific expressions may be both necessary and

justifiable. Nevertheless, the authors show that NSM research findings and the Minimal Language approach make a solid theoretical, methodological, and empirical contribution to linguistics.

The following chapters illustrate more practical applications of the NSM and Minimal Language. These include the creation of a glossary of emotions for people with autistic spectrum disorders using literary texts and corpora of collocations (María Auxiliadora Barrios Rodríguez and Svetlana Antropova); analysing the use of the NSM terms *solo/sola* ‘alone’ and *perso/persa* ‘lost’ in depression narratives collected from Italian patients (Maria Giulia Marini and Paola Chesi); exploring how Minimal English can be used in early reading materials, even when the text deals with complex topics about the Christian faith (Anna Wierzbicka and Lauren Sadow); a reflective commentary on the experience of translating Anna Wierzbicka’s (2019) *What Christians Believe: The Story of God and People in Minimal English* from Minimal English into Minimal Russian (Anna Gladkova); and an initial exploration of language universals and semantic primes in Czech (Marie Pavlásková).

Part III, titled “What’s in a Word I: Europe and the Anglosphere”, brings together five chapters that apply one or more of the six applied ethnolinguistic research protocols to words or expressions in various European linguacultures. For example, Carsten Levisen explores “axiologies of speaking” through an analysis of basic Scandinavian speech-related verbs: *tale* and *snakke*. Felix K. Ameka and Froukje Krijtenburg examine the Dutch word *oranje* ‘orange’, which is widely regarded as a symbol of Dutch identity. They provide explications and cultural scripts in Minimal English and Minimal Dutch. In her ethnolexicological study of the expression “a normal life” in French, English, and Romanian, Olga Galatanu applies both Natural Semantic Metalanguage and the Semantics of Argumentative Possibilities. In the final chapter, Zhengdao Ye examines the social categories “stranger” and “acquaintance” as well as the interactional norms associated with them in Anglophone linguaculture.

The seven chapters in Part IV, “What’s in a Word II: Outside Europe”, take the same approach as the previous section, but this time it is applied to words and expressions from non-European linguacultures. In the first chapter, Reza Arab and Kerry Mullan present a contrastive semantic analysis of two similar-yet-different terms in French and Persian: *marrant* and *bāmaze*, both near equivalents to the English adjective *funny*. Yuko Asano-Cavanagh and Rob Cavanagh explain how the Japanese concept of aesthetics is encoded in the lexicon by explicating the phrase *mono no aware* ‘pathos of things’. However, the term also has universal aspects that can be understood by individuals facing unprecedented global uncertainties caused by recurring natural disasters, international conflicts, and the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter illustrates that the NSM approach enables us to explain the meaning of aesthetic terms that cannot be translated into other languages. In the chapter “Possibility, Obligation, and the Impersonal Construction in Amharic”, Mengistu Amberber explores the grammar and semantics of the verb *tfale* ‘can’ in Amharic (Ethiopia) and its uses relating to “ability”, “possibility”, and “permission”.

Helen Hue Lam Leung explores the combinations of certain Hong Kong Cantonese utterance particles. It had long been assumed that the meaning of these combinations was simply the sum of their parts. The author first examines the semantics of particle clusters, resulting in transparent polysyllabic combinations. Translatable and testable explanations of these particles are based on NSM analysis of corpus data. Rui Shen provides a semantic analysis of the Mandarin term 位格 (Romanized as *weige* and glossed simply as ‘person’), explaining why the missionaries and theologians who brought Christianity to China coined this new word. Javan Seow and Jock Wong use NSM to capture the meaning of the expressions of apology *duìbùqǐ* (对不起) and *bàoqiàn* (抱歉) phrases, often used in situations where an Anglo-English speaker might say *sorry*, to allow Mandarin learners to understand the different meanings involved. This section concludes with Rachel Thompson demonstrating another application of the NSM method: in her chapter, she focuses on the Akan interjection *apuu* and shows how it is used in various contexts in online discourse.

The chapters in Part V, “Enacting and Transmitting Culture”, apply ethnopragmatic and ethnoaxiological approaches to various cultural practices. The section opens with Sophia Waters’ chapter “The Meaning of ‘Table Manners’ in Australian English: A Lexical Semantic Study of Mealtime Behaviour”, based on data compiled from Google and etiquette literature. The chapter “Articulating the Unwritten Norms Behind Hugging, Kissing, and Shoulder Touches Between Friends in Australia” by Lauren Sadow is devoted to the use of physical greetings and affection by young Australian women from diverse backgrounds to navigate such interactions. Séverine Didier analyses a corpus of children’s intercultural narratives and indigenous picture books from Australia and New Caledonia to analyse the transmission of the cultural values of “home”, “fear”, and “safety” in French and English using Galatanu’s Semantics of Argumentative Possibilities theory. In the chapter “Conceptualisation of Silence in Oral Cultures: Cultural Scripts from the Yoruba and Punjabi Linguacultures”, Lubna Akhlaq Khan investigates the cultural notions of silence in proverbs. Finally, in the study “The Ethnolinguistics of Christian Death Practices in Jish (Northern Israel)”, Sandy Habib presents a detailed semantic and pragmatic analysis of key concepts, expressions, and cultural norms in the Jish linguaculture.

Drawing upon a diverse range of sources, such as literary works, spoken corpora, native-speaker data, questionnaires, interviews, social media, and print and online media, the contributions discussed above either develop ideas stemming from Bert’s extensive research or are inspired by projects carried out in collaboration with him. This volume acknowledges Bert’s extensive and significant contributions to advancing NSM theory and applied ethnolinguistics across his three languages: English, French, and Flemish.

Taken together, the contributions to this volume demonstrate the wide range of possibilities for using the NSM methodology to explore and interpret the cultural values embedded in different languages. As well as emphasising the relevance of the NSM approach to the study of intercultural communication, they also demonstrate its broader applicability to fields such as translation studies, advanced language education, and literacy education.

A notable strength of the volume is its empirical richness: the chapters draw on a variety of data sources, such as spoken corpora, literary texts, media discourse, questionnaires, interviews and social media. At the same time, all the contributions are united by a shared methodological foundation of the NSM approach, with many building on or being inspired by Bert Peeters' extensive research and collaboration.

Overall, the volume successfully combines theoretical depth with practical relevance and demonstrates the wide applicability of ethnolinguistic approaches. *Explorations in Applied Ethnolinguistics* stands as an important contribution to contemporary linguistics and will be of interest to researchers and practitioners working at the intersection of language, culture, and communication.

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