Experience, Evidence, & Sense

The Hidden Cultural Legacy of English

ANNA WIERZBICKA

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

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Making the Familiar Look Foreign

1.1. Mere Words or Keys to a Cultural World?

In his tribute to Clifford Geertz the teacher, his colleague Robert Darnton (2007, 32) writes that Geertz "tried to make the distant seem familiar and the familiar look foreign—as in *Gulliver's Travels*, one of his favorite books."

The present book, which focuses on English as a cultural universe, shares the second of these two aspirations: to make the familiar look foreign. Darnton says further that Geertz wanted to help his students break "through the barrier of culture-bound thinking" (ibid.). This is also the ambition of *Experience, Evidence, and Sense*.

According to Darnton, Geertz's main objective was to show "how people construe the world through signs, not merely by means of verbal clues but also by reference to objects from everyday life" (ibid.). Like its predecessor, *English: Meaning and Culture*, this book shows the ways in which "verbal cues" (and especially certain keywords) define the conceptual world inhabited by speakers of what I call "Anglo English" (see section 1.2). It shows that new techniques developed in linguistic semantics can help both outsiders and insiders penetrate this world better than has heretofore been possible. It also demonstrates that these techniques can help native speakers of Anglo English break through the barriers of culture-bound thinking, barriers that are often invisible even to Anglo anthropologists and linguists (who are professional students of "otherness"), let alone other scholars.

Geertz was rather exceptional in that effort, and he understood the pivotal role of languages in the construction of cultural worlds. His main goal, however, was to make the distant seem familiar rather than the familiar look foreign, and,

as an anthropologist rather than a linguist, he understandably did not see the semantic analysis of English as one of his main priorities.

For me as a linguist, however, this *is* a priority. It is the task of this book to "other" or "denaturalize" English or at least one important aspect of English. Darnton (2007, 33) says in his tribute that Geertz worked hard to get across the notion that "symbolic systems . . . hold together with a power of their own . . . and that the interpretation of them requires rigorous empirical study as well as conceptual clarity." This also applies to the systems of meanings encoded in language: They, too, hold together with a power of their own, and their interpretation also requires rigorous empirical study, as well as conceptual clarity.

This book demonstrates that certain culture-specific keywords can act as linchpins for whole networks of meanings and that to penetrate their meanings is to gain entry into a whole cultural world. To paraphrase Darnton, "the game is difficult, but anyone can play." Darnton applied these words to anthropology as practiced and taught by Geertz, but they can also be applied to cultural semantics as understood in this book. The game is difficult to the extent that it is unfamiliar and requires a degree of concentration, but it does not involve any technical apparatus whatsoever. Meanings are explored here through the prism of simple words like *do, happen, know, want,* and *think* (see section 1.6), and any mentally alert person who speaks and reads English can participate in this exploration.

1.2. The Cultural and Historical Baggage of English

In his book *English as a Global Language* David Crystal (2003, 20) states that "Language is the repository of the history of a people. It is its identity." This statement echoes the deep insight of the founder of general linguistics, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1988, 60), who affirmed, two centuries ago, that "there resides in every language a characteristic world-view . . . every language contains the whole conceptual fabric and mode of presentation of a portion of mankind."

Although some culture-blind theories of language and cognition, developed in the twentieth century, have at various times attracted a great deal of attention, empirical "language-and-culture" studies have not undermined Humboldt's view but on the contrary supported it with extensive evidence. (For references and discussion see, e.g., Wierzbicka [1992, 1997]; see also Shweder [1991] and Pavlenko [2005].)

But given the fact that English has now become (or is quickly becoming) a global language,[1] there is a widespread temptation today to modify Humboldt and to say that, while his proposition may apply to all other languages, it does not apply to English. English (so the argument goes), unlike other languages, is "neutral"—a purely functional, international language that is free from the baggage of any particular history and tradition; furthermore, English is so diversified that, although dozens of different traditions may be reflected in it, no one tradition provides a shared "conceptual fabric" (in Humboldt's sense).

With the ever-increasing dominance of English in the contemporary world (cf., e.g., Graddol 2006), there is a growing urgency to the question of whether an

irreconcilable conflict exists between the view that English is shared by people from many different cultural traditions and the notion that English itself—like any other language—has certain cultural assumptions and values embedded in it.

The position I take here—as in my 2006 book, *English: Meaning and Culture*—is that even though there are many "Englishes" around the world (all of them worthy of recognition, appreciation, and study), there is also an Anglo English; moreover, this Anglo English is not a cultural tabula rasa, a blank slate. Anglo English is what the Indian American linguist Braj Kachru (1985, 1992) calls the English of the "inner circle" and includes, as David Crystal (2003, 60) puts it, "the traditional bases of English, where it is the primary language: . . . the USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand." This book, like my 2006 *English*, describes the cultural content—or cultural baggage—of this Anglo English.

It goes without saying that Anglo English is neither homogeneous nor unchanging and that, for example, Australian English differs in many ways from British English. I have studied such differences in numerous publications (Wierzbicka 1986, 1992, 1997, 2002a, 2003a [1991]), as have others (see, e.g., Goddard [2006, in press]). There are also profound semantic and cultural differences between British English and American English (see, e.g., Kövecses 2000; Malouf 2003). At the same time, to adequately characterize what Kachru calls "Englishes of the outer circle" (such as Singapore English) and to fully understand them as expressions of local cultures, it is eminently useful to be able to compare them with Anglo English. The concept of Anglo culture, which, of course, is also an abstraction, can be particularly useful to millions of immigrants to Anglophone countries like Britain, the United States, and Australia. To deny the validity of this concept is to deny immigrants the cultural training that is essential to their social advancement. Anglo English is an essential part of Anglo culture.

Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975, 11) writes that "if we are not to accept language automatically, but to strive for a reasoned historical understanding, we must face a whole host of questions of verbal and conceptual history." Both my 2006 *English* and the present book address such questions of "verbal and conceptual history" and explore English as a vehicle of cultures. In particular, they investigate the links between aspects of English and aspects of Anglo culture.

As I have demonstrated in *English: Meaning and Culture,* everyday English words like *right, wrong, reasonable,* and *fair* (among many others) are important instances of words that are used automatically and yet contain a wealth of history and pass on a great deal of cultural heritage. Words of this kind may be "invisible" to native speakers, who simply take them for granted and assume that their equivalents exist in other languages. By analyzing such "invisible" words, their history, and their current use, including the conversational routines and discourse patterns associated with them, I have shown from a linguistic point of view the extent to which, as literary scholar David Parker (2001, 4) puts it, "cultural knowledge constitutes a shared social space" that is handed down through and embedded in the English language itself.

Rather than denying the existence of the cultural baggage embedded in Anglo English, I believe it is important to explore the contents of that baggage—important for practical, as well as intellectual, reasons: for language teaching, "cultural literacy" teaching, cross-cultural training, international communication, and so on.

In addition, this book extends the exploration of the hidden cultural legacy of English and focuses in particular on some of the most basic "Anglo" assumptions about ways of knowing—assumptions that English carries with it, imperceptibly, in its spectacular expansion in the modern world.

1.3. The Legacy of "British Empiricism"

English is saturated with "British empiricism". The phrase "British empiricism" is often dismissed as a cliché, but linguistic evidence shows that this cliché carries with it a great deal of truth. The contrast between "British empiricism" and "continental rationalism" is also often dismissed as a cliché, but again, linguistic evidence shows that there is a great deal of truth in it. A century ago Bertrand Russell (1943[1912], 114) wrote in *The Problems of Philosophy:*

> One of the great historic controversies in philosophy is the controversy between the two schools called respectively "empiricists" and "rationalists." The empiricists—who are best represented by the British philosophers, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume—maintained that all our knowledge is derived from experience; the rationalists—who are represented by the Continental philosophers of the seventeenth century, especially Descartes and Leibniz—maintained that, in addition to what we know by experience, there are certain "innate ideas" and "innate principles," which we know independently of experience.

Commenting on this passage, British philosopher Roger Woolhouse undermines this contrast between British empiricists and continental rationalists as simplistic:

> The idea that the English Channel has intellectual significance was perhaps shared by Voltaire, who saw European and British philosophers as having temperamentally different styles. But the philosophers Russell mentions would not have accepted it. Berkeley and Hume were indeed both British, but they would not have seen themselves as falling, along with Locke, into a school diametrically opposed to Descartes and Leibniz on the Continent. Though Locke undoubtedly set many of the parameters of their thought, Berkeley and Hume are as often critical of him as they are in agreement with Nicolas Malebranche, a French Cartesian. Pierre Gassendi was French too, but Locke's philosophy shows marked similarities with his. Nor would these philosophers have characterized themselves or others primarily by these labels. (Woolhouse 1988, 1)

But linguistic evidence is, in an important sense, on Russell's side. Whatever view one takes of the history of European philosophy, a great cultural divide

exists between the "empiricism" of the English language and the absence of such a stance in other European languages. The point is that Locke, whose *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* "may have been the most widely read book apart from the Bible in eighteenth-century England" (Wood 1991, 140), set many parameters not only for the thought of Berkeley and Hume but also for the prevailing ways of thinking of educated seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English speakers in general; moreover, these parameters became so entrenched in English that to this day they shape some aspects of Anglo-English discourse and set it apart from that of the Francophone descendants of Descartes, Malebranche, and Gassendi.

Woolhouse (1988, 1–2) emphasizes that "the systematic use of the labels 'empiricist' and 'rationalist' is a product of nineteenth-century histories of philosophy" and that those histories of philosophy "saw seventeenth- (and eighteenth-) century philosophy in idealized terms, as a conflict between two opposing schools which reached some sort of resolution in the philosophy of Kant" (see also Van Fraassen 2002, 202). In fact, Russell (1943[1912]), too, came to see the great historical controversy between 'empiricists' and 'rationalists' as something that was later resolved ("It has now become possible to decide with some confidence as to the truth or falsehood of these opposing schools" [115]).

Nonetheless, whatever philosophers such as Russell may have decided about empiricism and rationalism, the modern English language, shaped to a significant degree by the writings of British empiricists, decided in its own way, and the glowing aura of the word *empirical* in today's English sends its own message to the increasingly English-speaking globe.

To see how important the word *empirical* is in modern English—in contrast, for example, to the French *empirique*—compare, to begin with, their respective frequencies in modern corpora such as COBUILD.[2] Thus, there are forty-seven instances of *empirical* per 10 million words in the English COBUILD and only twenty-five instances of *empirique* in the French COBUILD. More importantly, however, the two words do not mean the same thing; furthermore, *empirical* has positive connotations, whereas *empirique* often has negative ones (except, it seems, in translations from English, where it is calqued from the English *empirical*).

For example, in the French COBUILD one finds collocations like *naïf et empirique,* whereas one could not say *naive and empirical* in English. In different contexts, *empirique* can be translated into English as *ad hoc, anecdotal, haphazard, based on rule of thumb, groping*, and the like. As such glosses intimate, the French word—which in context is often opposed to *raison* ('reason'), *scientifique* ('scientific'), and *méthode* ('method')—implies a lack of method, a lack of planning, a lack of thought, and a lack of a rational or logical basis. These facts show that the words *empirique* and *empirical* are not just slightly different in their meanings but reflect very different concerns, attitudes, priorities, and values.

A comparison of the relevant entries in French and English dictionaries points in the same direction. French dictionaries describe *empirique* in somewhat pejorative terms and contrast it with *rationnel* ('rational'), whereas English dictionaries tend to describe *empirical* in positive terms and contrast it (as a preferred alternative) with 'theories'. For example, the monumental *Dictionnaire*

historique de la langue française (1995, vol. 1, 682) defines the word *empirique* as follows: "*Empirique* qualifie aujourd'hui ce qui reste au niveau de l'expérience commune et n'a rien de rationnel" ('*empirique* today describes what remains on the level of common experience and has nothing rational [about it]'). The flavor of the definition of the word *empirical* offered, for example, by the *Collins* COBUILD *English Language Dictionary* (1991) is very different: "*Empirical*: empirical knowledge, study, etc.; relies on practical experience rather than on theories."

This contrast between the words *empirique* and *empirical* is particularly illuminating given that they both originated from an ancient school of physicians (Empirici, as opposed to Dogmatici or Methodici), who, as Van Fraassen (2002, 202) puts it in his *Empirical Stance,* "preferred to base their practice entirely on experience (that is, on the accumulated experience of the medical profession) and not on theories drawn from more general philosophies or cosmologies." As van Fraassen also notes, in English the term *empiric(k)* acquired a pejorative sense early on, as is evident in Shakespeare's reference to quacks in *All's Well That Ends Well* (II, i): "We must not corrupt our hope, To prostitute our past-cure malladie to Empiricks." (In this passage, the king, who is regarded by his learned physicians as terminally ill, rejects an offer of cure from an "empirick.")

For a long time, the words *empirical* and *empiricism* could also be used in English in a negative sense. For example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) includes the following quotations:

The Chymistry of the Galenical Tribe is a ridiculous...and...dangerous **Empericism** [*sic*]. (1659)
The art became debased with **empiricism**. (1756)
Mere observation and **empiricism**, not even the commencement of science. (1817)
The application of hasty and **empirical** measures. (1861)
The great majority of accidents are...the results of **empirical** management. (1872)
By an **empirical** formula is meant one that is conceived or invented without any analysis or demonstration. (1829)

Gradually, however, first a neutral and then a positive meaning of *empirical* appeared in English usage and supplanted the negative one, as the following nineteenth-century examples from the OED illustrate:

An **empirical** law observed by Baron Bode, in the mean distances of the planet. (1834)
An **empirical** law then, is an observed uniformity, presumed to be resolvable into simpler laws, but not yet resolved into them. (Mill 1846)
The **empirical** corroboration of his doctrine by direct experiment. (Buckle 1869)

Thus, in the course of the nineteenth century the word *empirical* started being used without any negative connotations, as in the following collocations: *empirical generalizations* (1843), *empirical methods* (1862), *empirical corroboration* (1869), and indeed, *empirical evidence*. For example, the brother of scientist John

Dalton wrote this about him after his death in 1844: "In 1810, he published Part II of his New System [of chemical philosophy], giving more empirical evidence for it" (quoted in Moody and Bridges 1992).

The following late-nineteenth-century quote from the OED's entry for *nature* records a semantic, as well as a scientific, change in progress:

The **empiricism** of today is more scientific than it was in former days. (1880)

The triumph of the new meaning of *empiricism* is reflected in Huxley's statement, also in the entry for *nature:*

All true science begins with **empiricism**. (1881)

As for the word *empiricist*, it, too, was used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a pejorative sense, as in the following quote from Shaftesbury (1698–1712) cited in the OED:

The prescriptions of the vulgar-wise, like those of the **Empiricists**. (1698–1712)

Francis Bacon, who later came to be seen as the great forerunner of British empiricism, dissociated himself from 'empiricists' in a famous passage in *Novum Organum,* in which he represents them as too simplistic in their reliance on observation and experience:

> Those who have practiced the sciences have been either empiricists or dogmatists. The empiricists, like ants, merely collect and use: the rationalists, like spiders, spin webs out of themselves. But the way of the bee lies in between: she gathers materials from the flowers of the garden and the field and then by her own powers transforms and digests them; and the real work of [science] is similar. (Bacon 1994 [1620], book 1, aphorism XCV)

As van Fraassen (2002, 33) notes, even John Stuart Mill, "the last great representative of British empiricism," repudiated the term *empiricism* (in Bacon's sense): "When this time shall come [when the right method is followed in all areas of inquiry], no important branch of human affairs will be any longer abandoned to empiricism and unscientific surmise" (Mill 1974, vol. 8, 930; quoted in Van Fraassen 2002).

Yet, as the history of the word *empirical* reveals, whatever happened to British empiricism in academic philosophy, with time, aspects of it became firmly entrenched in the English language.

As the semantic history of the French word *empirique* illustrates, in the French cultural thought world, the rationalist web spinners gradually achieved a greater and more enduring prestige than either the data-gathering ants (who "merely collect and use") or the bees, with their middle way. But in the "Anglosphere," the distrust of rationalist spiders proved greater and more enduring, and

the preferred middle option—the way of the bee—became firmly associated with the term *empirical* (that is, with a term previously linked with the antitheoretical ants). In the end, the word *empirical* acquired enormous prestige in English, as did also its conceptual partners *evidence, experience*, and *sense*.

The idea articulated and defended at length by Locke that "knowledge is ultimately dependent on the senses" (Woolhouse 1988, 73) lives on in Anglo culture and in the English language. To be sure, in the eighteenth century this idea also influenced a number of French philosophers, in particular La Mettrie and Condillac. La Mettrie, for example, wrote the following in his *Traité de l'âme* [1745]: "Il n'est point de plus sûrs guides que les sens. Voilà mes Philosophes. Quelque mal qu'on en dise, eux seuls peuvent éclairer la raison dans la recherche de la vérité" (There are no guides surer than the senses. They are my Philosophes. Despite the bad things that are said about them, they alone can illuminate reason in the search for truth) (in La Mettrie 1970, 54). Condillac (1947, 8) deplored the Cartesians, who "decry them as errors and illusion" ("les Cartesiens . . . crient si fort contre les sens. Ils répètent si souvent qu'ils ne sont qu'erreurs et illusions"). Yet the semantic history of French shows that in the sphere of the French language it was the Cartesians who had the last word.[3]

Not so in the sphere of the English language, however. Here, Locke's idea that "knowledge is ultimately dependent on the senses" has been so widely accepted that it is often presented as a scientific truism, as in the following characteristic passage from a university textbook on psychology: "All knowledge, as the Sophists of ancient Greece knew, comes only through the senses and those who would 'know how they know' turn quite naturally to the contemplation of the senses as the originators of experience" (Geldard 1972, v). As philosopher and historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto (1998, 121) notes somewhat wistfully, "dependence on the evidence of our senses seems ineluctable to modern westerners."

But while assertions such as Geldard's could in principle be disputed, the meanings of words cannot be because native speakers simply take them for granted, and so 'British empiricism' lives on in the English language.

In the preface to his book *Englishness and National Culture*, literary scholar Antony Easthope (1999, ix) writes:

> *Englishness and National Culture* aims to demonstrate a profound and hardly acknowledged continuity between the seventeenth century and today. This means that often when English people (journalists, historians, novelists, poets, comic writers and others) think they are speaking in their own voices, in fact the discourse of an empiricist tradition is speaking for them.

I agree with Easthope on this point, but I believe that the influence of the empiricist tradition goes even deeper and reaches even more widely than this quote (or Easthope's book as a whole) suggests. According to Easthope, "beyond questions of language it is the discursive formation that matters" (ibid., 76).

However, the English language is larger than any particular "discursive forma-tion." It carries with it habits of the heart and the mind that are both far less visible to its speakers and writers than particular discourse strategies and also less open to conscious manipulation and choice. For example, words like *experience, evidence*, and *sense* are taken for granted and treated as basic mental tools by *all* speakers of Anglo English (including those who, like Easthope, look at the British empiricist tradition from a distance).

1.4. The English Word *Empirical* and the French Word *Empirique*: A Closer Look

The differences between contemporary English *empirical* (always positive) and contemporary French *empirique* (often negative) are so illuminating as to deserve a number of examples. First, here are five excerpts from the French COBUILD (in the English glosses, *empirique* is rendered as "empirical," but the context shows that this is not exactly what *empirique* means):

A. L'astrologie est un rapport naïf et **empirique** au cosmos (Astrology is a naïve and empirical relationship with the cosmos).

B. En résumé, l'automatisation s'impose lorsque les échanges d'information . . . sont trop importants pour être organisés de façon **empirique**, voire pas organisés du tout (In sum, automatization imposes itself when exchanges of information . . . are too important to be organized in an empirical fashion, or even not organized at all).

C. Dans ce métier, à défaut de doctrine, la rumeur et le ragot tiennent lieu de pensée: ils accrochent le geste quotidien à un semblant de logique. Et ce "corpus" là ne s'apprend guère à l'école. Ce savoir interne est au contraire totalement **empirique** (In this profession [police], which lacks a doctrine, rumor and gossip take the place of thought: They attach everyday gestures to a semblance of logic. And that "corpus" is not learned at school. On the contrary, this internal knowledge is totally empirical).

D. [C'est] un type qui fuit la vie et dérive sur une mer démontée. Un parano consentant qui obéit à un besoin confus, déraisonnable et **empirique** de son ego, de ses glandes, de son ventre ([He is] a type who flees from life and drifts about on a stormy sea. A consenting paranoiac who obeys the confused, irrational and empirical needs of his ego, of his glands, of his stomach).

E. Ces épisodes lui valent de farouches inimitiés. Les pages que l'auteur consacre à la "méthode Soros" sont parmi les plus intéressantes. "Réflexive," moins "cartésienne" que psychologisante, franchement **empirique** pour certains, "elle relève plus de l'art que de la science" (Such episodes earn him fierce hostility from various quarters. The pages that the author devotes to the "Soros method" are among the most interesting ones. "Reflexive," psychologizing rather than "Cartesian," downright empirical, according to some, "more art than science").

The cultural image of empiricism that emerges from COBUILD's Bank of English could hardly be more different. Here common collocations prominently include unquestionably good things such as *empirical reality, empirical validity, empirical evidence, empirical data, empirical tests, empirical research*, and *empirical facts.* Moreover, in contrastive contexts in which *empirical* is opposed to something else, this something else is viewed negatively, whereas *empirical* is always and unquestionably seen as something good. Here are some examples:

Efforts are being made to research it scientifically on the basis of **empirical evidence** instead of **philosophical logic and reasoning**.

In the absence of proper **empirical** astronomical **research**, Greek speculations about extraterrestrial systems rested almost entirely on **philosophical debate** . . . .

I have been forced by the logic of events to abandon this ultimatist **Utopian** perspective and to think in much more limited, **empirical**, here-and-now terms.

Rather than rely wholly on **empirical evidence** of damage done to the twelve target sets, they began offering subjective estimates based partly on **intuition** of how effectively the Iraqis could function.

Following the correct political **ideology** was apparently more important than **empirical evidence** and careful academic inquiry, and to agree with the World Bank on anything was to betray the cause.

Above all, the word *empirical* is repeatedly contrasted with the words *theory, theoretical, theoretically*, and *theorizing*, as in the following example:

True, there are no "facts" independent of "theory," but there should be constraints on the way we indulge in **theorizing**. It all becomes quite futile if we allow the **theoretical** tail to wag the **empirical** dog.

In striking contrast, the material in the French COBUILD suggests, rather, a fear that the "empirical tail" might be allowed to wag the "theoretical dog."

Interestingly, in official European Union documents that are required to have both an English and a French version, the French word *empirique* is sometimes rendered in English as *empirical* (and vice versa)—translations that are inaccurate and misleading and sometimes make little sense. For example, the following sentence from a report by the Court of Justice of the European Communities sounds bizarre because it opposes to one another two words, *scientific* and *empirical*, which in English go hand in hand:

At first, their curative effects had no scientific basis[;] purely empirical criteria prevailed. (opinion of Advocate General Ruiz-Jarabo Colomer, July 10, 2003)

(The French version reads: "Au début, leur vertus thérapeutiques n'avaient aucun fondement scientifique, des critères purement empiriques primaient.")

1.5. 'Theory', 'Common Sense', and the Reliability of the Senses

The superior position of the empirical dog in relation to the theoretical tail is reflected in a number of ways in modern English, none of them matched in French. The most obvious example, perhaps, is the word *theorize* (usually used as the gerund *theorizing,* as in an earlier example). The pejorative implications of this word in many contexts are evident in one of the following definitions in the *Collins* COBUILD (1991):

1. If you theorize about something . . . you develop an abstract idea or set of ideas about something in order to explain it.
2. If you theorize, you think in an abstract way about things instead of doing something practical or useful.

Those pejorative implications of *theorize* (at least in one of its uses) are clearly reflected in the collocations included in the COBUILD corpus, where this word tends to co-occur with adjectives like *obscure, fanciful, endless, pure, random, abstruse*, and *fatuous* (as well as simply *abstract*).

Another linguistic reflex of what is known in English as the "horror of theory" (and the existence of this expression speaks for itself) can be found in the expression *in theory*, which is often followed in English discourse (either directly or at some distance) by *but* or *however.* Judging by the material in COBUILD, expressions like *great in theory but in practice* . . . are extremely common in contemporary English discourse:

All well and good **in theory**, but . . .
. . . **in theory** . . . but actually . . .
. . . **in theory** that sounds very good, but in practice . . .
. . . noble and . . . terrific **in theory**. However, in practice . . .
. . . **in theory**, yeah, it's a very good idea, but . . .
That's great **in theory**, but try to put it into practice.
Fine and noble in theory . . . but not so easily put into practice.
This is all fine—**in theory**. However, in practice . . .
In theory . . . In practice, however . . .
In theory . . . However, in reality nothing could be further from the truth.
In theory, they are no longer at war, but in fact . . .

While the French corpus also presents examples where *en théorie* ('in theory') is followed by *mais en pratique* ('but in practice'), it is unusual for *en théorie* to be ironically combined with words of positive evaluation like *good, great, terrific,* or *fine*, as is the case in the English examples cited earlier.

Another feature that is characteristic of modern English discourse is the use of the expression *in theory* in combination with modal verbs (e.g., *should, could, would),* as in the following examples from COBUILD:

In theory, we **could** decide . . . In practice . . .
In theory, you **would** be a tradesperson . . .
In theory, this is what you **should** be doing, but let's face it . . .
In theory you know the model **should** produce . . .
In theory it **should** be possible . . .
I suppose in theory you **could** . . . but . . .
In theory that **shouldn't** be a problem . . .

The combination of the expression *in theory* with modal verbs like *should, could*, and *would* emphasizes the gap between theory and reality. Without too much exaggeration one could say that *in theory* has evolved in modern English into what linguists might call "a marker of irrealis."

Thus, the data from the two corpora confirm, in a striking way, that two quite different cultural attitudes toward experience and reason are embedded in French and English. The advent of modern corpora (large, electronically searchable databases such as COBUILD's Bank of English and COBUILD's French corpus) allows us to explore such differences in a new way. The differences in meaning between *empirical* and *empirique* brought to light through a systematic study of their collocations and their use in context confirm that British empiricism has become ingrained in the English language.

This empiricism is not a mere cliché, a groundless stereotype, a historical fiction, or a ripple in the history of European philosophy. Rather, it is an enduring feature of the modern English language, a feature that British, American, and other long-established varieties of English share with the international and global varieties: the English of international academic journals and conferences, air traffic control, the Internet, international organizations, international law, business, trade, and so on.

This book focuses on three aspects of this enduring heritage of British empiricism linked with three key English words: *experience, evidence*, and *sense* (all of which have, as it happens, false friends, *des faux amis*, in French: *expérience, evidence*, and *sens*).

In his classic text, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense,* Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid wrote: "Wise men now agree, or ought to agree in this, that there is but one way to the knowledge of nature's works; the way of observation and experiment" (Reid 1997 [1764], 11). Reid expressed profound confidence in the basic reliability of the senses: "Our Senses are given us by nature not to deceive but to give us true information of things within their Reach" (quoted in Brookes 1997, xxi). This trust in the senses was accompanied in Reid's work by a pronounced distrust of "conjectures and theories," which "are the creatures of men, and will always be found very unlike the creatures of God" (1997, 12).

Reid makes no bones about targeting Descartes ("the great Des Cartes") as one of the archenemies of 'common sense':

> Des Cartes . . . resolved not to believe his own existence till he should be able to give a good reason for it. . . . A man that disbelieves his own existence, is surely as unfit to be reasoned with as a man that believes he is made of glass. There may be disorders in the human frame that may produce such extravagances, but they will never be cured by reasoning. Des Cartes indeed would make us believe that he got out of this delirium by this logical argument, *Cogito ergo sum*. But it is evident he was in his senses all the time, and never seriously doubted of his existence. For he takes it for granted in this argument, and proves nothing at all. (ibid., 16)

Thomas Reid was an enormously popular writer in the English-speaking world, as the forty editions of his *Inquiry into the Human Mind* testify, and there can be little doubt that his writings and their great popularity have contributed to the subsequent career of the expression *common sense* in English and of the corresponding value in Anglo culture (see chapter 8 on *common sense*). What is most relevant in the present context is Reid's commonsensical, anti-Cartesian defense of the senses, observation, and experiment as the foundation of knowledge. When one considers the different semantic fates of the twin words *empirique* and *empirical* in French and English, one must conclude that the different stances taken by key British and Continental philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had far-reaching linguistic and cultural ramifications for modern English and the increasingly English-speaking world.

In Britain, the seventeenth century was not only the century of Francis Bacon, John Locke, and the rise of British empiricism in philosophy but also the century of the Newtonian revolution and the birth of experimental science. Empirical philosophy and experimental science were closely allied in Britain at that time.

The 'natural philosophers' who came together in Gresham College in London in 1660 to found the Royal Society wanted, as Gribbin (2005, xii) puts it, to "form themselves into a society which would promote the use of experiments to probe nature and unlock its secrets." It is significant that their presiding spirit was philosopher Francis Bacon. As Gribbin (ibid.) comments:

> Individual scientists . . . had already realized the importance of the experimental method in science and had achieved isolated successes through its application. But this was a bold new proposal for a concerted attack, on a broad front, to find out how the world worked. In making this proposal, the Gresham group were consciously following the teaching (but not the practice) of the philosopher Francis Bacon, who was no experimental scientist himself but had written influential books promoting the idea of experimental science earlier in the seventeenth century.

Locke, who was a close friend of Newton, had extensive medical knowledge and worked with prominent scientists such as Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke,

was also closely associated with the Royal Society and was elected a member in 1668.

Gribbin (2001, 149) notes in his *Science, a History, 1543–2001* that "The three people who between them established both the scientific method itself and the preeminence of British science at the end of the seventeenth century were Robert Hooke, Edmund Halley and Isaac Newton" and that "the Newton bandwagon . . . has now been rolling for 300 years." One might add that the rise of concepts like empirical science and empirical evidence in modern English is inextricably linked to this "rolling of the Newton bandwagon."

1.6. Natural Semantic Metalanguage as an Effective Methodology for Cultural Semantics

The lexicon of a language is a treasury of meanings. If these meanings can be revealed—accurately, precisely, and in a way that makes them transparent to both insiders and outsiders—much can be learned about the entrenched ways of thinking characteristic of a given society or cultural sphere and about their cultural and historical underpinnings. Given the significance of English in the contemporary world, it is particularly important that the hidden cultural and historical baggage of English be well understood.

As I have argued in *English: Meaning and Culture* (2006), the task of revealing that hidden baggage of English requires a suitable methodology. As I have demonstrated there and show again here, such a methodology is based on a small set of simple, intelligible, and universally available words, that is, words with semantic equivalents in all languages. This small set of universal words (that is, universal word meanings) provides a "natural semantic metalanguage" (NSM) for exploring languages, cultures, and ways of thinking.

Those semanticists (formal or generativist) who see detailed attention to the meanings of words as something of little importance or interest and prefer instead to develop abstract systems of semantic representation (see, e.g., Jackendoff 2006) are like Francis Bacon's spiders spinning webs out of themselves. Lexicographers, on the other hand, have traditionally followed the way of the ant. For example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* has accumulated a great mass of valuable data but presents it in an entirely atheoretical manner, producing a jungle with no paths leading from A to B, no clear signposts, and no consistent system of semantic analysis that would allow either insiders or outsiders to find their way.

By contrast, the approach taken in this book follows the way of the bee in that it gives close attention to the meanings of words gathered from the gardens of literature and modern linguistic corpora and then transforms them by means of a coherent semantic methodology—NSM.

In this section I illustrate the use of this methodology by analyzing the meanings of the modern English word *empirical* and, for comparison, that of the French word *empirique*. By using the NSM analytical framework, we can extend our exploration of the concepts associated with these words and arrive at an analysis that is both more precise and more illuminating. To be able to

present this analysis, however, I first need to give an overview of the methodology itself.

The NSM approach to linguistic description is based on two fundamental assumptions: first, that every language has an irreducible core that enables its speakers to understand all complex thoughts and utterances; second, that the irreducible cores of all natural languages match, so that we can speak, in effect, of the irreducible core of all languages, which in turn reflects the irreducible core of human thought.

As Leibniz argued eloquently three centuries ago, not everything can be explained. At some point, all explanations must come to an end, for a *regressus ad infinitum* explains nothing. Some things must be self-explanatory (intuitively clear), or we could never understand anything. The explanatory power of any explanation depends therefore on the intuitive clarity of the indefinable conceptual primes that constitute its ultimate foundation.

A natural language is a powerful system in which very complex and diverse meanings can be formulated and conveyed to other people. The NSM theory of language and thought assumes that the intelligibility of all such meanings depends on the existence of a basic set of conceptual primes that are intuitively clear (and presumably innate), require no explanations, and constitute the bedrock of human communication and cognition. Cross-linguistic empirical work undertaken within the NSM framework suggests the existence of sixty-three universal conceptual primes.[4] Table 1.1 presents them in two versions, English and French.

The first hypothesis, which NSM researchers have pursued for more than three decades by means of extensive empirical investigations, is that all languages have lexical exponents for each of the conceptual primes (words, bound morphemes, or fixed expressions). The second hypothesis, which has also long been pursued in wide-ranging empirical investigations, is that in all languages conceptual primes can enter into the same combinations. Of course, the word order and the morphosyntactic trappings may differ from language to language, but the hypothesis is that the elements, their combinations, and their meanings will be the same (cf. Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002; cf. also Peeters 2006; Goddard 2008).

This means that, just as we can have a rudimentary universal lexicon of indefinable concepts, we can also have a rudimentary universal grammar of such concepts. Furthermore, if we have a minilexicon and a minigrammar, then we can have a minilanguage, one that is carved out of natural languages and can be used for the description and comparison of languages, their lexicons, grammars, and discourse practices: in short, a natural semantic metalanguage.

Since this metalanguage is carved out of any natural language, the semantic explications constructed in it are intuitively meaningful and have psychological reality. Consequently, unlike semantic formulae based on various artificial formalisms, NSM formulae are open to verification (they can be tested against native speakers' intuitions). Because it is based on the shared core of all languages, the NSM can serve as a "cultural notation" (Hall 1976) for the comparison of cultural values, assumptions, norms, and ways of speaking across the boundaries between societies, communities, subcultures, and epochs.

In some situations, an English version of the NSM can also serve as a simple lingua franca for basic communication between speakers of different languages

TABLE 1.1. Table of Semantic Primes: English and French Versions

English Version	French Version	
I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING/THING, PEOPLE, BODY	MOI, TOI, QUELQU'UN, QUELQUE CHOSE/CHOSE, GENS, CORPS	substantives
KIND, PART	TYPE DE, PARTIE	relational substantives
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER/ELSE	CE, LE MÊME, AUTRE	determiners
ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH/MANY	UN, DEUX, IL Y A...QUI, TOUT, BEAUCOUP	quantifiers
GOOD, BAD	BON/BIEN, MAUVAIS/MAL	evaluators
BIG, SMALL	GRAND, PETIT	descriptors
THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	PENSER, SAVOIR, VOULOUR, SENTIR, VOIR, ENTENDRE	mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	DIRE, MOTS, VRAI	speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH	FAIRE, ARRIVER, BOUGER, TOUCHER	action, events, movement, contact
TO BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS/THERE ARE, TO HAVE, TO BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)	ÊTRE (QUELQUE PART), IL Y A, AVOIR, ÊTRE (QUELQU'UN, QUELQUE CHOSE)	location, existence, possession, specification
LIVE, DIE	VIVRE, MOURIR	life and death
WHEN/TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, IN A MOMENT	QUAND, MAINTENANT, AVANT, APRÈS, LONGTEMPS, PEU DE TEMPS, POUR UN TEMPS, EN UN MOMENT	time
WHERE/PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE	OÙ, ICI, AU-DESSUS, AU-DESSOUS, LOIN, PRÈS, CÔTÉ, DANS	space
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	NE...PAS, PEUT-ÊTRE, POUVOIR, À CAUSE DE, SI	logical concepts
VERY, MORE	TRÈS, PLUS	intensifier, augmentor
LIKE	COMME	similarity

- Primes exist as the meanings of lexical units (not necessarily as distinct lexemes).
- Exponents of primes may be words, bound morphemes, or phrasemes.
- They can be formally complex.
- They can have different morphosyntactic properties, including word class, in different languages.
- They can have combinatorial variants (allolexes).
- Each prime has well-specified syntactic (combinatorial) properties.

who do not speak English well. In this respect it can be compared with practically oriented minilanguages such as "Globish" (Nerrière 2006).

"Globish" is an English-based minilanguage that purports to be free of the historical and cultural baggage of English. In fact, however, many words that are paramount carriers of this baggage—for example, *fair, right, wrong*, and *mind*—are included in the lexicon. In particular, *experience, evidence*, and *sense,* the three English keywords studied in this book, which, as I have demonstrated, are saturated with British empiricism, have all made it onto the list of fifteen hundred words that constitute the lexicon of "Globish." This shows that "Globish" is in fact "Glenglish."

The inventor of Globish, Jean-Paul Nerrière, says that "It is not a language, it is a tool. A language is the vehicle of a culture. Globish doesn't want to be that at all. It is a means of communication" (quoted in Blume 2005). In many situations Globish may be a more feasible communication tool than normal English, but it is still, to some extent, a vehicle of culture—in particular, Anglo culture. The invisible cultural legacy of English is hidden in the meaning of many Globish words. By contrast, the NSM minilexicon of sixty-three words that have matching semantic counterparts in all languages is independent of any one specific culture.

To demonstrate NSM methodology, I propose two explications: one of the French word *empirique* and one of the English word *empirical* (in the English version of NSM, which closely matches the French version).

Reading these explications, one should bear in mind that they are minitexts written not in English but in NSM-English and that, on first encounter, such texts are bound to seem strange. The words are familiar, the syntax is easy, the ideas expressed in the individual lines are clear, and the overall style is so simple as to seem childish. Yet to take in the full meaning of each minitext and to spot the places where the two minitexts differ from one another requires some effort on the reader's part:

empirique (e.g., *approach*)

a. someone thinks like this (about something):
b.   "I want to know some things about this
c.   maybe I can know these things if I do some things
d.   because of this, I want to do some things
e.   I don't know well what I can do
f.   I don't want to think about it for a long time
g.   I know that before, when people did some things
                they could know some things about things like this because of this
h.   maybe the same will happen to me now"
i. it can be bad if someone thinks like this

empirical (e.g., *approach*)

a. someone thinks like this (about something):
b.   "I want to know some things about this
c.   I know that people can't know things like this about something
                if they don't do things of some kinds to some things

d.   if people do things of these kinds to some things, they can see
          some things because of this
e.   at the same time some parts of their bodies can touch some things
f.   after this, they can know some things because they have done these
          things
g.   I want to do some things like this now"
h. it is good if someone thinks like this

The French concept as explicated here suggests, above all, a lack of method: There is an element of groping here, of haphazardness, and of reliance on collective and hearsay experience (rather than on one's own sensory experience), as well as on luck ("maybe"). The explication does not explicitly say, "I don't want to think about it," which would imply that the word *empirique* can never be used in neutral contexts, but it does exclude extended reflection as a way to proceed ("I don't know well what I can do; I don't want to think about it for a long time").

The English concept, on the other hand, suggests a conscious acceptance of a methodical approach that involves doing "certain things to some things" and is based on personal sensory experience (defined via seeing and touching). This positive emphasis on the senses and on the experimental method based on them links the modern English concept of the empirical with the revolution in thinking set in motion by early British empiricists like Francis Bacon and John Locke and scientists like Newton, Halley, Hooke, and Boyle. The NSM methodology offers a framework within which such differences can be explored and elucidated.

In a recent discussion of my work, semanticist Ray Jackendoff (2006, 356), who works in the generativist (Chomskyan) tradition and advocates a variety of semantics that he calls "conceptual semantics," has written the following: "Conceptual semantics begins to offer a theoretical approach to language processing that fits together with findings in psycholinguistics . . . and lends itself to plausible speculations behind the evolution of the language capacity . . . Wierzbicka, by contrast, stays very close to the linguistic ground."

This book, too, stays "very close to the linguistic ground"—it explores materials found "on the ground" through the prism of a coherent semantic theory whose basic assumptions have remained stable for more than three decades of testing, during which the hypotheses in question were continually revised in response to the data. As more and more scholars became involved in this enterprise, the testing was applied to more and more languages, and as the advent of modern corpora radically increased the scope of data available for many languages (including English, French, and Russian), the empirical basis for collecting and testing data has also radically expanded.[5]

The belief in the value of introspection and disciplined semantic intuition that I defend in my 1972 book, *Semantic Primitives*, is a constant in the semantic explorations in the NSM framework. Objective data, such as those that occur in contemporary linguistic corpora, cannot interpret themselves, and to make sense of them one still needs to consult one's semantic intuitions. At the same time, to reject these enormously rich new sources of data and to continue to rely on analyses of one's own invented examples (as Chomsky did in the 1960s and as

those working in the Chomskyan tradition continue to do in the twenty-first century)—is to show a commitment to the way of the spider so extreme and so single-minded that those who are interested not only in theories but also in empirical reality can only marvel at it.

Jackendoff is by no means the only prominent exponent of such an attitude in contemporary semantics or even the most extreme one. So-called formal semanticists are equally remote from and apparently not interested in empirical data. For example, Ruth Kempson's (1996, 561) statements that "natural languages can be analyzed as formal inference systems in like manner to familiar logical inference systems such as predicate calculus" and that "these logic systems are set up to model truth-preserving relations" can give a flavor of what formal semanticists are and are not interested in.

To borrow the words of distinguished French typologist Claude Hagège (1985, 67), the artificial formalisms and abstract models favored by many linguists "can tell us something about . . . the cleverness of those who fashion them, but not about the languages themselves." Inventors of such formalisms and models can spin formal webs with considerable artfulness and virtuosity, but they are not interested in exploring language-specific meanings shaped by history and culture.[6]

Jackendoff (2006) contrasts NSM methodology unfavorably with his own approach, arguing, first, that it is too empirical ("stays very close to the linguistic ground") and, second, that it avoids formalisms: "Wierzbicka, by contrast . . . analyzes words simply in terms of other words" (356). However, staying very close to the linguistic ground means being able to see what those with their eyes high above that ground are likely to miss. As for the charge that I analyze words simply in terms of other words, I believe that this is the only way to analyze them intelligibly. Moreover, NSM explications, which comprise simple everyday words, can achieve a degree of intuitive clarity and accessibility that is not possible with more technical modes of semantic description.

For example, Jackendoff's analysis of the meaning of the words *rights* and *obligations* in terms of artificial formulae includes brackets, indices, Greek letters, and abbreviations like "RT" (for "rights") and "OB" (for "obligations"). Following this method, one could analyze the meaning of the English word *empirical* as EMP and then suggest that EMP is universal, as RT and OB are (supposedly) universal. Proceeding in this way, one can indeed avoid the charge of analyzing words in terms of other words, but it is not clear how one could *explain* anything to anyone or verify one's claims.

Symbols like RT, OB, or EMP are not self-explanatory, and the concepts encoded in the English words *right, obligation*, and *empirical* are not universal. To find out what these concepts are and how they differ from those encoded in other languages (e.g., from the French words *droit* and *empirique* or the German words *Pflicht* and *Verpflichtung),* we indeed need to analyze them using other words—as is normally done in dictionaries, which also endeavor to be intelligible and useful. In NSM work, however, the other words in terms of which explanations are couched are not chosen at random, as is usually done in dictionaries, but are drawn from a highly constrained list of simple words that, as decades of

cross-linguistic investigations undertaken by many scholars have shown, appear to have their semantic counterparts in all languages.

The English word *empirical* does not have an exact semantic equivalent in French, but *want, do, someone, something, maybe*, and *before* do in *vouloir, faire, quelqu'un, quelque chose, peut-être*, and *avant,* respectively. Such matching word meanings give us a shared conceptual currency in terms of which all meanings can be intelligibly described and compared across cultures, languages, and epochs. They also give us a tool that enables us to explore the cultural baggage of modern English and its implications for the world at large.

PART II

EXPERIENCE AND EVIDENCE

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Experience: An English Keyword and a Key Cultural Theme

EXPERIENCE. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself.

—John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*

Science aims to understand the world of experience.

—*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1995

2.1. The Uniqueness of the English Concept of 'Experience'

In Ian McEwan's acclaimed recent novel, *Saturday*, the protagonist, a neurosurgeon, meditates on the human brain:

> For all the recent advances, it's still not known how this well-protected one kilogram or so of cells actually encodes information, how it holds experiences, memories, dreams and intentions. He doesn't doubt that in years to come, the coding mechanism will be known, though it might not be in his lifetime. Just like the digital codes of replicating life within DNA, the brain's fundamental secret will be laid open one day. (McEwan 2005, 254)

Does the human brain really hold within its cells "experiences, memories, dreams and intentions"? To an English neurosurgeon like Henry Perowne

(McEwan's hero) it may seem obvious that it does and that all that needs to be discovered is "the coding mechanism." Neither Perowne nor his creator seems to be aware that a non-English-speaking neurosurgeon would not be making the same assumptions about the human brain. Words like *experiences, memories, dreams*, and *intentions* are not language-independent (and readily translatable) labels for some objective realities but artifacts of the English language and the Anglo culture. For example, without a change in their meaning, neither *experiences* nor *memories* could be translated into German or Russian, and it would not occur to a (monolingual) German or Russian neurosurgeon to think about the human brain in those terms.

In a Russian dictionary, the equivalent of *experience* is *opyt*, a word that has no plural form (except when it is used in the sense of 'experiment') and could not possibly be used to translate the Anglo neurosurgeon's *experiences*. The *Oxford English-Russian Dictionary* (1984) assigns to *experience* two Russian glosses: 1. (process of gaining knowledge, etc.)—*opyt;* 2. (event)—*slučaj;* an unpleasant experience—*neprijatnyj slučaj*. The Russian word *slučaj* simply means something like 'case' or 'event', and this is how it is glossed in the *Oxford Russian-English Dictionary* (1978). These glosses make it clear that there is really no way to render *an unpleasant experience* in Russian without a serious loss in meaning: *An unpleasant experience* is clearly a far cry from *an unpleasant event*.

The corresponding situation in German is not as bad as it is in Russian, but it is still very problematic. I illustrate this with a reference to Wittgenstein's work *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (1980) and its English translation. When Wittgenstein speculated about the traces that some "experiences" may leave in a person's brain, he used the German word *Erlebnis*. The English translator (Elizabeth Anscombe) rendered *Erlebnis* as "experience," but she acknowledged that *experience* does not mean the same as *Erlebnis*, as it translates two German words, *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, which do not mean the same. Wittgenstein himself claimed that, for example, "emotions" *(Gemütsbewegungen)* like sadness, joy, grief, and delight are *Erlebnisse* (plural), whereas "impressions" *(Eindrücke)* like smells, colors, and sounds are *Erfahrungen* (plural). Not surprisingly, Anscombe found the passage in which Wittgenstein discusses the differences between *Erlebnisse* and *Erfahrungen* (ibid., vol. 1, 836) virtually impossible to translate into English:

> This passage presents severe problems of translation, because quite ordinary German has two words, "Erlebnis" and "Erfahrung," both of which are regularly translated 'experience.' I was not willing either simply to use the German words or to say, e.g., 'experience₁' and 'experience₂.' I have therefore kept 'experience' for 'Erlebnis' and used 'undergoing' for 'Erfahrung.' I apologize for the air of philosophical technicality and the unnaturalness that is forced upon me by having to find two words where common or garden[-variety] English has only one. (ibid., 148, translator's note)

The fact that "ordinary German" has two words where "common or garden[-variety] English" has only one indicates that the conceptual category of

"experiences," lexicalized in English, is different from its two nearest counter-
parts in German.

It is interesting to note that in the index to Wittgenstein's *Remarks* (vol. 1),
experience [Erfahrung] appears 34 times, and *experience [Erlebnis]* 126 times.
The fact that *Erlebnis* is normally a count noun, whereas *Erfahrung* can be either
a count noun (typically, plural) or a mass noun, suggests that the former may be a
better match for the "experiences" of Anglophone scientists than the latter. It is
worth noting, therefore, that *Erlebnis* (from *erleben* 'to live through', from *leben*
'to live') is a relatively recent word in German and that its historical and cultural
roots and conceptual associations are quite different from those of modern
English *experiences*. To quote philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer:

> It is surprising to find that, unlike Erleben, the word Erlebnis became common only
> in the 1870s. In the eighteenth century it is not found at all, and even Schiller and
> Goethe do not know it. Its first appearance, seemingly, is in one of Hegel's letters.
> But even in the thirties and forties I know of only occasional instances (in Tieck,
> Alexis, and Gutzkow). The word appears equally seldom in the fifties and sixties
> and appears suddenly with some frequency in the seventies. The word comes into
> general use at the same time as it begins to be used in biographical writing.
> (Gadamer 1975, 55)

According to Gadamer, the fact that the word *Erlebnis* has its roots in
biographical literature is highly relevant to its meaning. (In the following quote
I have replaced the translator's word *experience* with the original words, *Erlebnis*
and *erleben*. The "two meanings" to which the quote refers are the "immediacy"
and the "lasting residue" of what one has lived through.):

> The essence of biography, especially the nineteenth-century biographies of artists
> and poets, is to understand the works from the life. Their achievement consists
> precisely in communicating the two meanings that we have distinguished in *Erleb-
> nis* and in seeing these meanings as a productive union: something became an
> *Erlebnis* inasmuch as it is not only *erlebt* ('lived through'), but inasmuch as its
> having been lived through *(Erlebtsein)* has a particular emphasis that gives it lasting
> importance. An *Erlebnis* of this kind gains a wholly new quality of being an artistic
> expression. Dilthey's famous title *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung (Experience and
> Poetry)* succinctly formulates the association. (ibid., 56; the original: Gadamer
> 1972, 57)

In fact, from the way Gadamer describes *Erlebnis* (in both a historical and a
synchronic perspective), any scientific and empirical connotations appear to be
alien to it:

> The coined word *Erlebnis*, of course, expresses the criticism of the rationalism of
> the Enlightenment, which, following Rousseau, emphasized the concept of life
> (Leben). It was probably Rousseau's influence on German classicism which intro-
> duced the criterion of Erlebtsein (being experienced) and hence made possible the
> formation of the word *Erlebnis*. But the concept of life is also the metaphysical

background for the speculative thought of German idealism and plays a fundamen-
tal role in Fichte, Hegel and even Schleiermacher. As against the abstraction of the
understanding and the particularity of perception or representation, this concept
implies the connection with totality, with infinity. This is clearly audible in the tone
which the word *Erlebnis* has even today. (Gadamer 1972, 57)

Gadamer's comments on *Erlebnis* and Anscombe's on the difficulty of
translating *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* into English should serve as food for
thought to all those who assume that 'experience' is either a universal human
concept or a conceptual category based on nature itself rather than on one
language- and culture-specific interpretation of reality (and, of course, so
should the dictionary data on Russian). I hope to provide more such food for
thought in the following sections of this chapter. For the moment, let me note
that, in Anglophone cognitive science, as well as in neuroscience and neuro-
psychology, *experience* and *experiences* are among the most fundamental tools
of the trade. For example, a typical abstract of the journal *Cognitive Science*
might look like this:

We propose a vision of the structure of knowledge and processes of learning based
upon the particularity of **experience**. Highly specific cognitive structures are con-
strued through activities in limited domains of **experience**. . . . Applying this vi-
sion . . . [we] . . . trace the interplay of specific **experiences** with the interactions of
ascribed, disparate structures. The interpretive focus is on learning processes
through which a broadly applicable skill emerges from the interaction and integra-
tion of knowledge based on specific, particular **experiences**. (Lawler 1981, 1)

Two key subjects of cognitive science, neuroscience, and neuropsychology
are memory and consciousness, and the literature on both relies crucially on the
term *experience*. For example, the *Handbook of Cognitive Neuropsychology*, in a
section titled "Retaining Experiences in Memory," presents two alternative
theories of memory, both based on the (unexamined) term *experience:*

What is it that is retained in our cognitive system as a result of having **experiences**?
The essential idea of a record-keeping theory is that a record of each **experience** is
put into a kind of storage bin. . . . In contrast, the essential idea of a constructionist
approach is that the various cognitive systems (e.g., the visual system, the language
system) are changed by **experiences**, but no record-by-record accounts of **experi-
ences** are stored anywhere. (Rapp 2001, 119)

The literature on consciousness is similarly dependent on the term *experi-
ence* and on its plural form, *experiences*. For example, David Chalmers, in his
renowned book, *The Conscious Mind* (1996, 3), states that "What is central to
consciousness, at least in the most interesting sense, is **experience**."
Experience in what sense? There is no definition, but there is an indication of
the range: "Conscious **experiences** range from vivid colour sensations to **experi-
ences** of the faintest background aromas; from hard-edged pains to the elusive
experience of thoughts on the tip of one's tongue; from mundane sounds and

smells to the encompassing grandeur of musical **experience**; from the triviality of a nagging itch to the weight of a deep existential angst" (ibid.).

Similarly, Benjamin Libet (1987, 271), in the *Encyclopedia of Neuroscience*, defines *consciousness* as "conscious, subjective **experience**" and characterizes it further as "subjective awareness and **experience**, whether it be sensory **experiences** of our environment, external and internal, or subjective **experience** of our feelings and thoughts, or simply awareness of our own existing self and presence in the world."

There is simply no way to translate such ideas (without distortion) into, for example, Russian because Russian has no word with a range corresponding to that described by Chalmers or Libet. A number of words could be tried, in particular *vpečatlenija* ('impressions'), *vosprijatija* ('perceptions'), *oščuščenija* ('sensations'), *pereživanija* (roughly, 'prolonged strong emotions due to living through a difficult time'), and *opyt* (roughly, 'accumulated life experience'), but none of them would make sense in a putative Russian translation of Chalmers's or Libet's sentences. In the *Oxford Russian-English Dictionary*, the word *pereživanie* (sg.) (from *perežit'* 'to go through', and *žit'* 'to live') is glossed as 'experience', but in fact, it is even further from *experience* than the German *Erlebnis*.

Chalmers (1996), who strongly argues that "consciousness exists," that it is important "to take consciousness seriously" (xii), and that a "reductive explanation of consciousness is impossible" (xiv), also says that "conscious experience is part of the natural world" (5), that "trying to define conscious experience in terms of more primitive notions is fruitless" (4), and that any characterizations of it that can be given "cannot qualify as true definitions, due to their implicitly circular nature" (4).

I fully agree that consciousness exists and needs to be taken seriously and also that neither concepts like 'think' and 'feel' nor their combinations like "I think" and "I feel" can be defined (without circularity) in terms of any more primitive notions (cf. Wierzbicka 1996, chapter 8; Goddard 2003). But is it true that concepts like 'experience' (and 'consciousness') cannot be defined either?

To say this would be to privilege English over all other languages and to privilege the speakers of English over the speakers of other languages. For example, since Russian does not have the concept of 'experience', the only way this concept can be explained to Russians and introduced into their conceptual world is through more elementary concepts (such as 'think', 'feel', and 'I'), which are lexicalized in Russian and in all other languages of the world (see Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002).

It would be more justified, then, to say that "thinking" and "feeling" are "part of the natural world," whereas "experiences," while real, are filtered through the prism of the English language. *Erlebnisse* and *pereživanija* are also real, but they are filtered through the prism of German and Russian. Thus, the concept of experience (what Chalmers calls 'conscious experience') needs to be denaturalized. To do this, we need to define the concept in terms of more "primitive" notions (such as 'think', 'feel', 'happen', and 'I'). As I demonstrate, this can be done without any implicit or explicit circularity.

In his book *In the Theater of Consciousness* (1997, 14), Bernard J. Baars states that "coming back to consciousness in the morning, we humans report a rich and varied array of experiences: colors and sounds, feelings and smells, images and dreams, the rich pageant of everyday reality . . . Our brains begin with a whole new mode of functioning." In fact, however, it is not "we humans" who report such a "rich and varied array of experiences" but rather "we Anglos." Russians, for example, can report seeing "colors and sounds, feelings and smells, images and dreams" but not "experiences" of all of these: They simply do not think in such terms and do not have a similarly stretchy concept that could cover such a wide range of psychological phenomena.

The human brain as such should not be confused with the human brain as seen through the prism of the Anglo mind. English words like *experiences* and *memories* are not neutral, culture-free analytical tools suitable for discussing human brains but constructs of the English language and Anglo culture. Given the central role of English in today's science, including psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience, it is particularly important that such culture-specific constructs not be absolutized and also that they be well understood.

I have discussed the English word *memory* and its meanings elsewhere (Wierzbicka 2007). Here I focus on the word *experience* and its semantic history in a broad outline. My main point is that this word plays an extremely important role in the thought world associated with the English language and that the changes in its use and meanings reflect and provide evidence for important cultural developments.

To put it bluntly, to understand Anglo culture and to see it in a historical comparative perspective, we need to understand the meanings, the history, and the cultural underpinnings of the English keyword *experience*.

For example, the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Honderich 1995) not only defines "science" as an endeavor aimed at "understanding the world of experience" but also defines another key English term, *empirical*, as "based on experience" (taking the word *experience* for granted). "A statement, proposition or judgment is empirical," it adds, "if we can only know its truth or falsity by appealing to experience" (226). English dictionaries, too, define *empirical* in terms of *experience*. For example, in the *Collins* COBUILD *English Language Dictionary* (1991), the entry in question reads: "*empirical:* Empirical knowledge, study, etc.; relies on practical experience rather than theories, e.g., . . . the empirical study of anatomy." Similarly, in the *Longman Dictionary of the English Language* (1984) one reads this definition: "*empirical*—originating in, based on, or relying on observation or experience rather than theory."

As discussed in the introduction, the word *empirical* is now used extensively in the language of science and philosophy, including popular science and popular philosophy. It is a buzzword in the language of the media, as well as the discourse of various bureaucracies, government institutions, universities, and so on. Empirical studies and empirical results are crucial to funding decisions in Anglophone countries, and *empirical* can be a helpful word to use in grant applications of any kind. However, what does *empirical* really mean? To say that it means "based on experience" explains little if the different senses of the word *experience* are neither sorted out nor defined.

My general argument is that the word *experience* has several different meanings in English. Some of them go back to at least the sixteenth century, while some are more recent, and the semantic history of *experience* is linked with important developments in Anglo culture and Anglo ways of thinking. The account given here is by no means exhaustive, but it captures the most important developments in the history of Anglo thinking about the concept of 'experience'. In what follows, I discuss in some detail seven distinct senses of the word, which fall into two broad groups. One of these groups, which includes older meanings, involves past experience and knowledge accumulated over time; the other includes more recent meanings and has to do with current experience. Thus, the semantic history of *experience* can be summarized as follows:

Experience: An Overview

A. Past experience, accumulated knowledge
1. a doer's accumulated knowledge
2. an undergoer's accumulated knowledge
3. an observer's accumulated knowledge

B. Current experience, sensory or sensory-like
4. an observer's and an undergoer's current perception or series of perceptions
5. an observer's and a participant's records of their perceptions
6. an experiencer's current awareness-cum-feeling
7. an experiencer's limited but reliable knowledge of a place and time

My main point is this: The word *experience* plays a vital role in English speakers' ways of thinking and provides a prism through which they interpret the world. While its range of use is broad and includes a number of distinct senses, several of these senses have a common theme that reflects a characteristically Anglo perspective on the world and on human life. This is why the word *experience* is often untranslatable (without distortion) into other languages, even European languages. I illustrate this with two preliminary examples.

In 2000 British novelist Martin Amis published his autobiography, titled *Experience*. The perspective on his own life reflected in this title would be impossible to capture in one word or even a short phrase in my native Polish (or in Russian or even French): The French word *expérience* has different implications. In fact, Amis's book *was* published in a French translation (in 2003, by Gallimard) under the title *Expérience*—plausible enough, and yet I would say misleading. The closest one could get to the meaning of Martin Amis's title in other European languages would probably be to use a phrase meaning "my life," as in Marcel Reich-Ranicki's German memoir, *Mein Leben* (1999; the English translation is titled *The Author of Himself: The Life of Marcel Reich-Ranicki*, 2001). However, such a translation would lose Amis's perspective on life (roughly, "my life, seen as what I have experienced").

In German, one could also use the word *Erfahrung* as a title (one of the two dictionary equivalents of *experience* mentioned earlier), but this would imply something about learning from what had happened to one in the course of one's life. According to *Langenscheidts Grosswörterbuch Deutsch als Fremdsprache* (1997), *Erfahrung* means "Wissen oder Können, das man nicht theoretisch aus Büchern, sondern in der Praxis (durch eigene Erlebnisse) bekommt" ('knowledge or skills that one has gained not theoretically, from books, but from practice [through one's own "experiences"]'). The word *Erlebnisse*, as used in this definition (which I have translated here as *experiences)*, is, as mentioned earlier, the plural of *Erlebnis*, a word that the same dictionary defines as "etwas das einem passiert" ('something that happens to someone'). A second meaning attributed by the same dictionary to *Erfahrung* (in the plural) is "Erlebnisse, aus denen man etwas lernt" ('"experiences" from which one learns something'). Thus, it is impossible to translate the title of Martin Amis's memoir into German without changing both its meaning and the perspective on life reflected in it; the same also applies to other European languages (Amis's title refers not so much to learning from his past as to the sum total of what he has experienced).

Turning to my second preliminary example, in an article about Iraq in the *Times Literary Supplement* titled "From Bell to Bush" the author writes: "The best present-day accounts are those written from a single angle and directly from experience. *The Fall of Baghdad* by Jon Lee Anderson . . . is an invaluable eyewitness report for posterity" (R. Fox 2005). The phrase "directly from experience" refers here (as emphasized in the next sentence) to an eyewitness report, but again, it has multiple implications that would be impossible to capture in a short phrase in other languages. In Polish and in Russian, respectively, the phrases *z własnego doświadczenia* and *iz sobstvennogo opyta* ('from one's own "experience" ') suggest a reflection on and learning from "what happened to me in the past" rather than on "what I observed happening in the place where I was at the time," and, arguably, so would the German phrase *aus eigener Erfahrung*. As one perceptive native speaker commented to me, *aus dem Erlebten* (lit. 'from what [one] has lived through') would be closer to the reporter's eye-witness perspective (combined with personal involvement), but both phrases—*aus eigener Erfahrung* and *aus dem Erlebten*—would distort the perspective of the English version in different ways. For French, native speakers reject *expérience* in this context and suggest *témoignage* (lit. personal testimony) as the best French rendering, but this loses the participant perspective of the English phrase *directly from experience*, which combines as it were objective witnessing with personal involvement and subjective impact (I return to this example from the *Times Literary Supplement* in section 2.9).

These are just two preliminary observations on the uses of *experience* in modern English. The main claim is that behind this word is a family of interrelated concepts that reflect a unique, language- and culture-specific perspective on the world.

Significantly, the word *experience* is also a word frequently used in advertising in Anglophone countries. For example, in tourism, people are urged to visit

this or that place and to have a "unique experience" in zoos, aquariums, national parks, and so on. Here are several examples from the Internet (www.australia. com):

Australia is a land full of powerful **experiences** just waiting to be discovered.
The **experience** of seeing these gigantic creatures rising from the ocean is unforgettable.
An encounter with these captivating seabirds is among Australia's most magical wildlife **experiences**.
One of the most memorable **experiences** you can have is to cuddle a koala.
Swimming with wild dolphins in their natural environment is a rare and exhilarating **experience**.

Phrases like *enjoyable experience, thrilling experience, exciting experience*, and *unforgettable experience* are the stock-in-trade of the entertainment industry, emphasizing both the subjective delight in what is being offered and its potential cognitive value. Similarly, the phrase *first-hand experience* (very common in present-day English) is prominent in educational and professional advertising:

The full-time course of study incorporates a six-month housing practice placement, designed to provide students with **firsthand experience** of various aspects of housing policy and practice under supervised conditions.
Through Local Partnerships you have something no one can teach—**experience**. It takes time to gain the necessary skills and **experience** to achieve success. No matter what theory you learn, there's no substitute for **firsthand experience**.
This course will be run via the Stanford Instructional Television Network. Students will have **firsthand experience** working on projects that transcend cultural, time-zone, language, and country boundaries.

At the same time, reporting that is based on experience is praised as the best possible source of knowledge about what happens in the world—a *limited* source but the most reliable of all. Again, one does not think or speak like this in other languages.

The uniqueness of the theme of experience in Anglo culture has not been recognized in the vast literature linked with this key English word. For example, the chapter devoted to experience in Martin Jay's book *Cultural Semantics* (1998, 47) opens with the following words: "'However paradoxical it may seem,' Hans-Georg Gadamer writes in *Truth and Method*, 'the concept of experience seems to me one of the most obscure that we have.' 'Of all the words in the philosophical vocabulary,' Michael Oakeshott agrees in *Experience and Its Modes*, 'it is the most difficult to manage.'" But the term discussed by Oakeshott was *experience*, whereas that discussed by Gadamer was *Erfahrung*, and since the two words do not mean the same, it is hard to see how the two authors can agree or disagree in these passages. *Erfahrung* may be the most obscure word in the German, and *experience*, in the English philosophical vocabulary, but the two words do not stand for the same concept.

Jay is not unaware that *experience* and *Erfahrung* differ in meaning, but he chooses to treat this fact as if it were a minor detail. This is even more striking in his more recent book, devoted entirely to experience and titled *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (2005). While the book's scope is restricted to American and European variations on the theme of experience, this theme—identified by the English word *experience*—is seen, as the title emphasizes, as universal and as equally relevant to Japan, India, or ancient Greece as it is to the modern Anglosphere:

> Not only is "experience" a term of everyday language, but it has also played a role in virtually every systematic body of thought, providing a rich vein of philosophical inquiry ever since the Greeks . . . .
>
> It might be tempting to provide a comparative analysis of the way the term has functioned in the vocabularies of non-Western thinkers. Attention has recently been drawn, for example, to its importance in the work of the great twentieth-century Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida, who explicitly called "pure experience" the "foundation of my thought." Scholars of Indian thought have probed its dimensions in their indigenous traditions. But it will demand enough of the author to try to explicate its role in thinkers closest to home, whose languages he can read. Our scope therefore will be confined to British, French, German, and American thinkers from many disciplines for whom "experience" has been an especially potent term. (ibid., 3–4)

The repeated use of the phrase *the term* in these passages is striking. Which term? The modern English term *experience*?

It is not my purpose here to criticize Jay's *Songs of Experience*, which is a valuable and well-researched book. However, it is important to recognize the culture-specific character of the Anglo theme of experience, as well as the cultural importance of the word *experience* in modern Anglo culture. To treat this theme as universal is both Anglocentric and unfair to Anglo culture itself. It may become universal through the global use of English, but even then its historical roots and culture-specific slant needs to be borne in mind.

Above all, however, the present confusion surrounding the word *experience* needs to be cleared up. This can be done only through precise semantic analysis of the cluster of meanings linked with this highly polysemous English word.

2.2. Experience as the Mother of Wisdom: Shakespeare's Sapiential Perspective

I start my historical exploration of *experience* with Shakespeare. According to the concordances, there are twenty examples of *experience* and (one of *experiences*) in Shakespeare's works. Here is a selection:

1. Experience is by industry achieved
     And perfected by the swift course of time.
     (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, act 1, scene 3)

2. Go, then, my mother, to thy daughter go
   Make bold her bashful years with your experience.
   (*King Richard III*, act 4, scene 4)
3. His years but young, but his experience old.
   (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, act 1, scene 3)
4. Yes, I have gained my experience.
   (*As You Like It*, act 4, scene 1)
5. I have then sinned against his experience and
   transgressed against his valour.
   (*All's Well That Ends Well*, act 2, scene 5)
6. Peace, peace, and give experience tongue.
   (*Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, act 1, scene 2)
7. Experience, manhood, honour, ne'er before
   Did violate so itself.
   (*Antony and Cleopatra*, act 3, scene 10)

As far as one can tell, most, if not all, of these examples refer to knowledge accumulated over time by doing things and presumably by reflecting on them—knowledge seen as a gain (something good) and associated with advanced age. As example 3 illustrates, *experience* in the sense under discussion (*experience*$_1$) does not, strictly speaking, require old age ("His years but young, but his experience old"), but it implies knowledge of the kind that normally can be acquired only with age. This leads us to the following explication of what I call *experience*$_1$, that is, *experience* that refers to "a doer's accumulated knowledge" (cf. example 1: "experience is by industry achieved"):

experience$_1$ (a doer's accumulated knowledge)
(e.g., "experience is by industry achieved")

a. this someone did many things at many times
b. many things happened to this someone because of this
c. this someone thought about these things at many times
d. because of this, afterward this someone knew many things
e.   like people can know many things if they have lived for a long time
f. it is good if someone is like this

The "like" component of this explication (component e) points to a prototype of knowledge linked with *experience*$_1$: Roughly speaking, *experience*$_1$ is associated with the kind of knowledge that normally only those people who have lived for a long time can have. However, "like" is vaguer than "kind of": Strictly speaking, *experience*$_1$ is not identified as necessarily a distinct kind of knowledge. "Like" has a wider range of interpretations than "kind of," and it is this wider range that is relevant here. The term *prototype* is more helpful here than terms like 'kind' or 'variety.'

It appears that, at one time, English shared the meaning portrayed in this explication with French. For example, Furetière's (1978) seventeenth-century dictionary of French defines the phrase *un homme d'expérience* ('a man of

experience') as follows: "On appelle un homme d' **expérience**, celuy qui a vescu et raisonné long-temps, qui a veu et leu beaucoup de choses et d'affaires, qui connoist le monde par sa propre **expérience**" ('One calls a man of experience someone who has lived and reflected for a long time, who has seen and read many things and goings-on, who knows the world by his own **experience**').[1]

This definition, which explicitly mentions "living and thinking for a long time," also corresponds quite well to the predominant use of *experience* in Shakespeare and captures some aspects of this meaning better than any of the OED definitions. On the other hand, there is no reference in this definition to "practice" (doing things), an element recognized in the OED entry for *experience* and in Dr. Johnson's (1755) two definitions of it: "1. Practice; frequent trial. 2. Knowledge gained by trial and practice." The explication of *experience*$_1$ proposed here takes into account all these key aspects of the Shakespearean meaning: doing, happening, thinking, knowing, living, and a long time.

The meaning of *experience* explicated here is very much in evidence from the sixteenth century on. Remarkably, however, in the course of the seventeenth century a very different meaning came to the fore—one closer to a category described by the OED as follows: "The fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition, or of being consciously affected by an event" (I discuss this shift later). Here let me simply note that the Shakespearean meaning of *experience* is still in use in present-day English, alongside a related meaning that is linked with a particular kind of activity, which can be regarded as an offshoot of that earlier Shakespearean meaning.

This other, more recent meaning is also associated with the adjective *experienced;* for example, an *experienced* driver has a great deal of experience in driving, and an experienced teacher, in teaching. There are no *experienced* teachers or the like in Shakespeare's language, and *experience* was linked at the time with living in general rather than with doing any particular kind of work. Nonetheless, it is easy to see the path between Shakespeare's meaning and the twentieth-century one defined by the *Collins* COBUILD *Dictionary of English* (1991) as "knowledge or skill in a particular job which you have gained because you have worked at the job for a long time." Such a specialization of experience in a particular kind of work is no doubt linked with the emergence of work as a conceptual category in modern life and modern English and also with the specialization of knowledge (with the idea of expertise) and so on. Most of Shakespeare's heroes and heroines did not have work in the modern sense of the word, and their experience was life experience in general rather than experience in any particular job.

The present meaning of *experience* as specialized practice, so to speak (e.g., teaching experience) (*experience*$_{1A}$), can be portrayed as follows:[2]

experience$_{1A}$ (a doer's specialized skill)
(e.g., she has a lot of experience [doing this kind of thing], as in "she has a lot of teaching experience")

a. this someone did things of this kind for a long time
b. many things happened to this someone because of it
c. this someone thought about these things at many times
d. because of this, afterward this someone knew many things about things of this kind
e.   like people can know many things about something
        if they have done many things of the same kind before
f. this someone could do things of this kind well because of it
g. it is good if someone is like this

Apart from the modern meaning designated here as *experience*$_{1A}$ (a doer's specialized skill), we have identified so far one old (i.e., Shakespearean) meaning of *experience* that can be conveniently labeled "a doer's accumulated knowledge" (*experience*$_1$). We might then ask whether there was also in Shakespeare's time a meaning that could be labeled as an undergoer's accumulated knowledge? If we conjecture that such a meaning might indeed have existed, we can portray this hypothetical meaning as follows:

experience$_2$ (an undergoer's accumulated knowledge)

a. many things happened to this someone at many times
b. this someone thought about these things at many times
c. because of this, afterward this someone knew many things about some things

This explication differs from that of *experience* as "practice" in the absence of the first component ("this someone did many things at many times") and the last one ("it is good if someone is like this"). While I have not found any clear examples of such a hypothetical meaning in Shakespeare's works, I have found some such examples (often with the plural form *experiences*) in other sixteenth-century authors (accessible through *Literature Online*).[3] Here are two such examples, both with the plural form *experiences* and both from Roger Ascham's work *The Scholemaster* (Ascham 1968 [1570]):

A Father, that doth let loose his son to all **experiences**, is most like a fond Hunter, that letteth slip a whelp to the whole herd. Twenty to one he shall fall upon a rascal, and let go the fair game.
The youth in England . . . should be by good bringing up so grounded in judgment of learning . . . as when they should be called forth to the execution of great affairs, in service of their prince and country, they might be able to use and to order all **experiences**, were they good, were they bad, and that according to the square, rule, and line, of wisdom, learning, and virtue.

There are also many similar examples in seventeenth-century literature—in John Bunyan's and George Fox's autobiographical writings, for example (see section 2.7).

In addition to the meanings of *experience* labeled here as "a doer's accumulated experience" and "an undergoer's accumulated knowledge," there are also

sixteenth-century uses that can be interpreted as "an observer's accumulated knowledge." For example, in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* Imogen observes the behavior of courtiers at court and notes (in an aside) that it disproves reports that she heard earlier:

> [Aside] These are kind creatures. Gods, what lies I have heard!
>   Our courtiers say all's savage but at court:
>   Experience, O, thou disprovest report!

This meaning (*experience₃*)—an observer's rather than a doer's or an undergoer's *experience*—can be explicated as follows:

experience₃ (an observer's accumulated knowledge)
(e.g., "Experience, O, thou disprovest report!")

a. some things were happening for some time somewhere where this someone was
b. because of it, this someone knew what was happening in this place at this time
c. this someone often thought about it
d. because of this, this someone knows some things about it
e.   like someone can know what is happening somewhere if this someone sees it

The assumption behind this meaning is that, if a person is in a place where something is happening, this person can know a good deal about it because this person can see what is happening. However, as the word *observer* suggests, this person does not have to actually *see* what is happening; one can acquire knowledge that is *comparable* to seeing (*like* seeing). The basis of comparison lies in coming to know something about something not because someone else said something about it. Seeing something with one's eyes is a good example of such a path to the acquisition of knowledge, indeed a prototypical one (at least for the speakers of European languages; cf. Classen 1993).

2.3. "A Frightening Experience": From a Retrospective to an Introspective Perspective

As we have seen, the Shakespearean (so to speak) conviction that we can grow in knowledge by living and doing things is still present as a theme in contemporary (twentieth- and twenty-first-century) English. At the same time, however, the word *experience* has developed in English a new meaning far removed from anything that we find in the language and thought world of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. It is also a meaning that has no equivalents in other European languages and appears to have spread widely in English only in the nineteenth century. Some examples from *Literature Online*:

Romola for the first time felt this questioning need like a sudden uneasy dizziness and want of something to grasp; it was an **experience** hardly longer than a sigh, for the eager theorizing of ages is compressed, as in a seed, in the momentary want of a single mind. (George Eliot, 1863)

I had quite forgotten that mornings in the country were so fine! One might enjoy an **experience** of this kind once or twice a year very well indeed. (J. T. Trowbridge, 1873)

As we drew near to Jaffa, the boys spurred up the horses and indulged in the excitement of an actual race—an **experience** we hardly had since we raced on donkeys in the Azores. (Mark Twain, 1869)

Then you know nothing of what such an **experience** is like and Heaven forbid that you ever should. (Thomas Hardy, 1874)

As the first of these examples illustrates, *experience* in this new, peculiarly English sense can be very short—"hardly longer than a sigh"—and so it has nothing to do with an accumulation of knowledge over time. This is related to grammatical features of *experience* in this new sense: It is always countable (*an experience* rather than *experience)*.

Such a brief and transient experience is always linked with an event some aspects of which are known only to the person to whom this event happens. For example, the exciting experience of horseback riding is not open to inspection by those observing the race, and no one other than the experiencers themselves can know whether or not this event really was exciting. As the last of the examples emphasizes, no one other than the experiencers themselves can know what the experience in the relevant sense of the word is like: By definition, as it were, *experience* in this sense refers to an event seen from within.

Roughly speaking, the earlier (Shakespearean) sense of *experience* refers to an objective fact about a person: the fact that this person has gradually accumu- lated a certain amount of knowledge (chiefly by doing things). By contrast, the new, post-seventeenth- and largely post-eighteenth-century meaning refers to people's subjective awareness of something that is happening to them: Like a feeling, an *experience* in this new sense of the word cannot be gleaned from outside. In a sense, an experience is even more subjective and unknowable to other people than a feeling: Feelings can sometime show in a person's face, movements, or tone of voice, but experiences do not similarly show—presumably because they can involve not only feelings but also some accompanying thoughts. This new, subjective sense of *experience* should be distinguished from superfi- cially similar ones like that in the following quote from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe:*

Thus my tears banished all my religious hope, all that former confidence in God, which was founded upon such wonderful experience as I had had of His goodness. (Defoe 1719, 184)

The rise of this new meaning of *experience* in English can be traced to some extent by searching for the frame "it was a/an (adjective) experience" at *Litera- ture Online*. No occurrences of this frame are found before 1850, but numerous examples appear in the 1850–1899 period, in most cases with the adjective *new:*

All are in motion, and the throngs of well-dressed people moving to and fro, on horse-back, and in carriages, together with the gay assemblages crowded upon the piazzas of the hotels, constitute a lively and festive scene. . . . It was **a** wholly **new experience** to Gertrude. (1854)

Mliss warmed at once to these free-spoken, open-hearted girls. It was **a new and pleasant experience**. (1873)

For when Angie lifted her eyes, not only had she read the unutterable in his, but he also had looked far down into the depths of her soul, and seen something he did not quite dare to put into words, but in the light of which his whole life now seemed transfigured. It was **a new and amazing experience** to Mr. St. John, and he felt strangely happy. (1875)

It was **a new and disagreeable experience** for Joseph to appear in the character of a borrower. (1870)

Robinson Crusoe's "wonderful experience" of God's goodness was not *a* wonderful experience: it was experience in a cumulative sense, appreciated as it were from outside rather than felt from within. The fact that in Defoe's use *experience* was uncountable (no indefinite article) is consistent with this cumulative and postfactum sense of the word. (It was not *experience* in the sense of a doer's accumulated knowledge but rather *experience* in the sense of an undergoer's accumulated knowledge.)

The emergence of the subjective sense of the noun *experience* was, I suggest, closely related to the rise of the verb *to experience* in a sense that appears to have entered the English language in the course of the eighteenth century and expanded during the nineteenth and is richly represented in present-day usage (see section 2.5).

A Dictionary of Selected Collocations (Hill and Lewis 1977) includes the following adjectives among those commonly collocating with the word *experience: alarming, appalling, bitter, delightful, disconcerting, distressing, disturbing, electrifying, exciting, fascinating, frustrating, grueling, harrowing, horrible, horrifying, interesting, moving, nerve wracking, painful, (un)pleasant, poignant, sad, shattering, sickening, thrilling, unnerving*, and *upsetting*. This suggests that the most common collocations with *experience* describe the experience in question in terms of accompanying emotions. The emphasis tends to be, therefore, not so much on the knowledge acquired through such episodes as on their impact. The experiencers know, above all, how they felt. This is certainly different from the Shakespearean experience as accumulated wisdom. An exploration of the frame "it was a/an (adjective) experience" in COBUILD confirms this emphasis on feeling and also on the unusual (typically, novel) character of what one is going through. Here is a selection of typical present-day examples from COBUILD:

We had a water birth. . . . It was **a great experience** and no problem.

When the group emerged from the long corridor out of the pyramid, their faces were flushed with pleasure. It was **a marvelous experience**, spiritual, as well as cultural.

It was **a lovely experience** teaching him.

Domestic/food prep in a five-star hotel in Lake Louise, Alberta. It was **a fantastic experience**.

I in fact enjoyed going to Oxford. . . . I mean, it was **a wonderful experience** even if I didn't do very well on the exams.

It was **a curious experience**, meeting this man who had spent his childhood in our house and garden.

It was **a terrific experience** to play on the same field as Ryan Giggs.

The cows started shunting [pushing] me against the post, and I had to grab onto it to keep [stay on] my feet. It was **a terrifying experience** as they pressed against me with their angry eyes glaring menacingly.

It was **an exhilarating experience** to be with so many knowledgeable, interesting people. Elma was so cold that she was unable to speak for almost half an hour. . . . It was **an horrendous experience**.

As these typical examples illustrate, references to a particular experience that was happening to someone at a particular time often imply that it was something unusual (not like at other times), and adjectives like *new, unusual, interesting, amazing*, and *weird* are common in such sentences in COBUILD. At the same time, the unusual event affecting the person is accompanied by a feeling ("when it was happening, this person felt something because of it"). The event (linked with a feeling) is arresting: The person going through the episode in question pays attention to what is happening and thinks something like "this is happening to me now." Since the person is taking notice of what is happening, that person knows what it is like. As a result, this person can subsequently remember what it was like and thus has certain qualitative (experiential) knowledge.

An experience in the sense under discussion does not have to be unique, of course (although a *unique experience* is also a common collocation), but it has to be seen as sufficiently different from the normal state to attract the person's attention and also to be linked with some noticeable feeling. The person who is going through the episode in question is aware of what is happening to him or her, takes note of how it feels, and as a result acquires some knowledge—knowledge that other people cannot have (unless the same things happened to them, too).

To account for the combination of components linked with this modern experiential sense of the noun *experience* (conscious, subjective, and qualitative), I posit for it the following explication:

experience$_4$ (an experiencer's current, subjective awareness-cum-feeling)
(e.g., "it was a frightening experience")

a. something was happening to this someone at that time
b. when it was happening, this someone felt something because of it
c. at the same time, this someone thought about it like this:
        "this is happening to me now"
d. this someone knew at that time what it was like at that time
e. because of this, when this someone thought about it afterward,
        this someone could think about it like this:

f.   "I know what it was like when it was happening
g.   I know it like I know what I feel when I feel something
h.   I know it like I know what I see when I see something"

The most remarkable features of this new, peculiarly English sense of the noun *experience* is its subjective and contemporaneous perspective, that is, the fact that the speaker is entering as it were the mind of those to whom something is happening at the time when it is happening and is grasping their awareness of what is happening to them ("this is happening to me now")—an awareness that gives the undergoer a special, subjective knowledge of a particular event that is not accessible to other people.

In the *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience* the authors (Bennett and Hacker 2003, 282) write: "It is striking that it is natural to try to refer to the specific quality of a given experience by means of an indexical expression, such as 'this' or 'that.' So we find David Chalmers asking, 'Why do conscious experiences have their specific character?' and in particular, 'Why is seeing red like *this* rather than like *that?*' And it seems evident that the 'like this' and the 'like that' are intended to be ways of referring to the specific qualities that experiences are alleged to have."

The observation that it is natural to speak about experiences in terms of "this" is consistent with the semantic analysis developed here. In fact, this analysis answers the question raised by Chalmers (and various other philosophers writing about conscious experiences): It is natural to speak about experiences in terms of "this" because "this" is part of the meaning of the English word *experience* (in the relevant sense). What Chalmers calls "a conscious experience" is called simply *an experience* in ordinary English—and this word (in the relevant sense) stands for a construct that includes as a component someone's thought: "this is happening to me now."

Thus, there is, so to speak, an indexical and a first-person perspective encoded in the meaning of *experience* in this modern sense of the word—a perspective that was absent from the meanings of this word as used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries and is absent from the meaning of its closest counterparts in many other European languages. Consider, for example, the following glosses in the *Collins-Robert French-English, English-French Dictionary* (1996):

I had a pleasant/frightening experience.
'Il m'est arrivé une chose . . . agréable/effrayante.'
(lit. something pleasant/frightening happened to me)
She went through some terrible experiences.
'Elle est passée par de rudes épreuves.'
(lit. she's gone through some terrible hardships/ordeals)
We had many unforgettable experiences there.
'Nous y avons vécu (passé) bien de moments inoubliables.'
(lit. we had passed there [or lived through] many unforgettable moments)
She swam in the nude, and it was an agreeable experience.
'Elle a nagé toute nue et a trouvé cela agréable.'

(lit. she swam in the nude and found it pleasant.)
It wasn't an experience I'd care to repeat.
(Ce n'est pas une aventure que je tiens à recommencer.)
(lit. It was not an adventure that I'd like to repeat.)

One key feature of the all these English sentences that is absent in their French translations is a thought that (according to the speaker) the experiencer had at the time of the event in question: "this is happening to me now." Another key feature is a link (implied in the word *experience* itself) between this thought and an accompanying feeling and also between this thought and this feeling and some resulting knowledge: Because the experiencer thought and felt like this at the relevant time, he or she knew something in a special, experiential way—like one knows what one feels when one feels something or what one sees when one sees something.[4]

How reliable is such experiential knowledge according to the folk epistemology embedded in the word *experience* (in the relevant sense)? The explication does not claim that *after the event* the person knew what it was like when it was happening; it claims only that *at the time when it was happening* the person knew what it was like. At the same time, it claims that because the person had that knowledge at that time, afterward, when thinking about it, this person could say (with some justification), "I know what it was like," vouching for this affirmation with an appeal to the senses: "I know it like I know what I feel when I feel something in my body," "I know it like I know what I see when I see something." (For further discussion and justification of these two components see section 2.10.)

Thus, I am suggesting that in the semantic history of *experience* there occurred (between the sixteenth and the nineteenth century) an important shift from a long-term and retrospective view, which was also an objective, external one, to one that was subjective and internal, as well as short term and introspective (introspective and yet, as it were, empirical).

Among all of the commentaries on experience that I have come across in the literature, only one comes close to recognizing this shift: Raymond Williams's entry on "Experience" in his *Keywords* (1983, 126–29), which explicitly distinguishes between "experience past" and "experience present." Williams links the first sense of *experience* with the word *lessons* and the second, with the word *consciousness*, and he describes the two senses as follows: "(1) knowledge gathered from past events, whether by conscious observation or by consideration and reflection; (2) a particular kind of consciousness, which can in some contexts be distinguished from 'reason' or 'knowledge'" (126). Discussing these two senses, Williams notes that experience has for some time been the subject of "a fundamental controversy," and he suggests that "much of the controversy is confused, from the beginning, by the complex and often alternative senses of *experience* itself" (128).

It is the purpose of this chapter to clear up that confusion. To do so, we need to recognize and try to understand the shift from the retrospective to the introspective perspective that occurred in the semantic history of English.

How and why did this shift occur? To answer this question we need to turn our minds to the new ideas and new ways of thinking that arose in seventeenth-century England and Scotland and became entrenched in both modern Anglo culture and the English language. I discuss these new ways of thinking in the next section.

2.4. Sensory Experience as a Basis for Empirical Knowledge: A Lockean Perspective

As mentioned earlier, in his dictionary published in 1755, Dr. Johnson assigned to *experience* two meanings: "1. Practice, frequent trial; 2. Knowledge gained by trial and practice." The first of these is illustrated with the phrase "with experience taught" (from Milton), and the second, with a quote from Shakespeare and the following one from Pope: "Mark what I advise, whom age and long experience render wise."

Whether *experience* as "practice" should indeed be distinguished as a separate meaning from *experience* as "knowledge (gained from practice)" is an open question. What is more important in the present context is that the phrase "knowledge gained by . . . " blurs a very important difference in ways of thinking: that between knowledge accumulated over a long period of time (in the course of living) and knowledge found by observing what is happening to us at a particular time and making as it were a contemporaneous note of it.

Earlier I quoted the OED's formula that describes one meaning of *experience* as "the fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition, or of being consciously affected by an event." This formula, too, blurs an important difference: that between reflecting on what happened to us in the past and being aware of what is happening to us in the present. For example, the OED places a sentence by Chaucer in this category—"Experience . . . were enough for me to speak of woe that is in marriage" (1386)—and also this nineteenth-century sentence: "Another unlooked for experience was in store for us" (1878). Between these two sentences, however, lies a great divide due to a radically new idea that entered the collective consciousness of English speakers in the seventeenth century: roughly speaking, the idea of a particular, individual experience (episode) of which a person is conscious at the time it occurs. A key component of this idea is a thought that occurs to a person at a particular time: "This is happening to me now. (In the earlier example from 1878, such an experience is anticipated rather than actually present, but it is anticipated as present—something to consciously live through at a particular time).

This new attention to "what is happening to me now" is closely related to the focus on the senses, characteristic of the seventeenth-century discourse of experience. For example, Locke (1975[1690], 546, *Essay* 4.3.14)[5] wrote: "Our knowledge in all these inquiries reaches very little further than our *experience*. . . . For all the qualities that are co-existent in any subject, without the dependence and evident connexion of their ideas one with another, we cannot know certainly any two to coexist any farther than *experience, by our senses, informs us*" (emphasis added).

As this quote illustrates, for Locke, 'experience' is very much a matter of *sense* experience. As Shapin (1994, 75) notes in his *Social History of Truth*, "appeals to experience . . . run throughout the *Essay* on a number of different topics. Locke's general programme in that work was to substitute for the claims of the innate ideas and truths an experience-generated alternative, an alternative which followed in the footsteps of the Royal Society and Bacon." But *experience* in what sense (or in what senses)?[6]

The reference to what "experience, by our senses, informs us [of]" links experience with the current perceptions. Of what kinds of things could "experience, by our senses, inform us"? Presumably, only those that are happening right now in the place where we are. When 'experience' becomes largely a matter of sense experience, it can no longer have the retrospective perspective that it had, for example, in Shakespeare's works but can have only a contemporaneous perspective (our senses cannot inform us of something that happened to us in the past). Furthermore, since it is now linked with a particular time and place, it is no longer cumulative. It can, on the other hand, be repetitive, and indeed, collocations like *daily experience* and *constant experience* become quite frequent in the seventeenth-century philosophical discourse. It is no longer a question of many things done over a long period of time but of the same thing happening at many particular times.

Indeed, from the point of view of the seventeenth-century experimental science, this is what matters most: a particular sense experience, replicable and repeated by others.

Consider, for example, the following sentences from Locke's "Examination of P. Malebranche's Opinion of Seeing All Things in God": "Show me one who has not got **by experience, i.e., by seeing or feeling**, the idea of space or motion, and I will as soon by words make one who never felt what that is, have a conception of heat, as he, that has not by his sense perceived what space or motion is, can by words be made to conceive either of them" (Locke 1824 [1706], vol. 8, 249).

Locke virtually defines "experience" here in terms of seeing or feeling, and by "feeling" he clearly means bodily feeling (sensations) rather than feelings based on thoughts (emotions). When we consider this sentence in context, however, we understand that seeing and (bodily) feeling are for Locke two prototypes of experience rather than its defining features: *Experience* can for him also refer to what happens in the mind and can be analyzed by introspection. In a prototypical case, people repeatedly see or feel something (by touching), take note of what they see or feel, and as a result know something—to the extent to which sight and touch are trustworthy. In a nonprototypical case (such as mental experience), people take note of what is happening in their own mind and as a result know something—with the same immediacy and the same degree of epistemological security that knowledge based on sight or touch makes possible.

Presumably, *experience* could have been for Locke auditory or olfactory, as well as visual or tactile, but his choice of the prototypes—seeing or feeling—is noteworthy. These correspond to two keywords of seventeenth-century scientific discourse, often combined in one phrase: "eye and hand" or "hand and eye." For example, in the preface to his famous work, *Micrographia*, naturalist Robert Hooke contrasted a philosophy based on "discourse and disputation," which