

## **The semantics of 'migrants', 'immigrants', 'refugees':**

### **A cross-linguistic perspective**

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#### **I. 'What's in a noun?'**

**1. "Nouns refer and categorise at the same time" (Wierzbicka 1986: 365)**

**2. Description vs. categorisation (ibid: 358)**

A description implies the presence of a number of characteristics, all on the same level of importance. Thus, one might describe a person as tall, thin, blond, freckled, and so on. But if one categorizes a person as a hunchback, a cripple, a leper, a virgin, or a teenager, one is not mentioning one characteristic among many; rather, one is putting that person into a certain category, seen at the moment as "unique". One is putting a label on that person, as one might put a label on a jar of preserves. One might say that a noun is comparable to an identifying construction: "that's the kind of person that this person is." An adjective, on the other hand, is comparable to a simple predicate compatible with many other such predicates: "this person is X, Y, Z".

**3. Nouns vs. adjectives**

**4. Nouns for salient categories**

"In language after language we can find nouns for such important and conceptually rich categories of human beings as 'men' and 'women', or 'boys' and 'girls', or 'babies'; whereas adjectives for 'babies' seem to be non-existent, and adjectives for 'boys' and 'girls', and especially for 'men' and 'women' seem rare and euphemistic." (Wierzbicka 1986: 369)

#### **II. Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) as a tool for meaning description and as a basis for cross-linguistic comparison**

**1. Semantic Primes (Wierzbicka 1972, 1996; Goddard 2001; Goddard and Wierzbicka (1994, 2002, 2014)**

**Table of the English and French exponents of semantic primes (Peeters 2006, forthcoming)**

I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, <b>PEOPLE</b> , BODY	substantifs
JE, TU, QUELQU'UN, QUELQUE CHOSE~CHOSE, <b>GENS-ON</b> , CORPS	
<b>KINDS</b> , PARTS	substantifs relationnels
<b>TYPES</b> , PARTIES	
<b>THIS</b> , <b>THE SAME</b> , <b>OTHER~ELSE</b>	déterminants
<b>CE~ÇA~CELA</b> , <b>LE MÊME</b> , <b>AUTRE</b>	
ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW	quantificateurs
UN~UN SEUL, DEUX, CERTAINS, TOUS, BEAUCOUP, PEU	
GOOD, BAD	évaluateurs
BIEN, MAL	
BIG, SMALL	descripteurs
GRAND, PETIT	
KNOW, <b>THINK</b> , <b>WANT</b> , <b>DON'T WANT</b> , FEEL, SEE, HEAR	prédicats mentaux
SAVOIR, <b>PENSER</b> , <b>VOULOIR</b> , <b>NE PAS VOULOIR</b> , SENTIR, VOIR, ENTENDRE	
<b>SAY</b> , WORDS, TRUE	discours
DIRE, MOTS, VRAI	
<b>DO</b> , <b>HAPPEN</b> , <b>MOVE</b>	actions, événements, mouvement
FAIRE, ARRIVER, BOUGER	
<b>BE (SOMEWHERE)</b> , THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE / SOMETHING)	emplacement, existence, spécification
<b>ÊTRE (QUELQUE PART)</b> , IL Y A, ÊTRE (QUELQU'UN / QUELQUE CHOSE)	
(IS) MINE	possession
(EST) À MOI	
LIVE, DIE	vie et mort
VIVRE, MOURIR	
TIME~WHEN, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	temps
MOMENT~QUAND~FOIS, MAINTENANT, AVANT, APRÈS, LONGTEMPS, PEU DE TEMPS, POUR QUELQUE TEMPS, INSTANT	
<b>PLACE~WHERE</b> , <b>HERE</b> , ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCH	espace
ENDROIT~OÙ, ICI, AU-DESSUS, AU-DESSOUS, LOIN, PRÈS, CÔTÉ, DANS, TOUCHER	
NOT, MAYBE, <b>CAN</b> , <b>BECAUSE</b> , <b>IF</b>	concepts logiques
NE ... PAS, PEUT-ÊTRE, POUVOIR, À CAUSE DE, SI	
VERY, MORE	intensificateur et augmentateur
TRÈS, PLUS	
LIKE~AS~WAY	similarité
COMME~FAÇON	

Le lexique de la MSN, disposé en catégories apparentées ou classes conceptuelles

## 2. Semantic Molecules (Wierzbicka 1996; Goddard 2016, 2017)

'Biosocial': **be born**

'PlacePee where people live': **country**

## 3. Useful words for Minimal English (Wierzbicka 2014, Goddard 2017)

'Country': **government**

'Fields': **the law**

## 4. The complexity of the semantics of nouns (Wierzbicka 1985; Ye 2017b)

### **III. Considerations in Semantic Analysis of Social Categories**

1. 'Objective' and 'subjective' elements embedded in social categories
2. Semantic relations
3. Semantic structure and semantic template

### **IV. NSM-based Semantic explications of nouns designating people:**

#### **1. Kinship terms** (Wierzbicka 1980, 1996, 2013, 2016, 2017; Xue 2016)

*his mummy* (adult's meaning, Australian usage) (Wierzbicka 2017: 43; cf. *his mum* in Australian usage and *sa maman* (adult speaking); *ibid*: 43)

- a. a woman [m] , he can say about this woman: "this is my mummy"
- b. a small child can say it about a woman if this woman is this child's mother
- c. when a child say it about a woman, this child is saying at the same time:
- d. "I feel something good towards this someone, I know that this someone feels something good towards me"

#### **2. Terms denoting social categories** (Wierzbicka 1986, Roberts 2010, Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014)

*women* (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014: Ch 2)

- a. people of one kind
- b. people of this kind are not children
- c. people of this kind have bodies of one kind
- d. the bodies of people of this kind are like this:
- e. inside the body of someone of this kind there can be for some time a living body of a child

#### **3. Social relation nouns** (Wierzbicka 1997; Ye 2004, 2013, 2016 2017a)

*zijǐrén* ('insiders/members of the in-group') (cf. *wāirén*: 'outsider/members of the out-group'; Ye 2017a:77)

- a. one of two kinds of people
- b. people of this kind are called *zijǐrén* (people of the other kind are called *wāirén*)
- c. if someone thinks about some people like this: "these people are people of this kind"  
this someone can think like this at the same time:  
"I am one of these people  
These people can know many things about me  
I can say many things to these people  
I can't say all these things to other people  
I feel something good when I think about these people  
when these people want me to do good things for them, I will do them"
- d. people can't think about all people like this  
people can't think about people of the other kind in this way  
people can think about people of the other kind in another way

#### **4. Demonyms** (Wierzbicka 1986, Roberts 2017)

*Germans* (Danes, Russians, etc.) (Roberts 2017: 215)

- a. people of one kind
- b. many people of this kind live in one country [m] at some time
- c. this country is called [m] *German* (*Denmark, Russia, etc.*)
- d. his part of this country [m] is called Queensland (California, et.)
- e. many people of this kind lived in this place for a long time before
- f. because of this, people can think like this: people of this kind are like part of this place

## V Semantic Explications of *migrate*

### 1. *migrate*<sub>1</sub> (v) (birds, whales, geese etc.)

- Group-oriented concept
- From one place to another place of another kind
- Movement en mass
- Distance
- Seasonal
- 'want to' (from the human perspective)

#### *migrate*<sub>1</sub> (v) (as in '*Birds migrate every year.*')

- every year, at some time, something like this happens in some places:
- many creatures [m] of one kind do something of one kind at the same time  
when they do it, it happens like this:
- at some time, they are somewhere for some time  
after some time, they don't want to be there anymore, they want to be somewhere else, **in a place of another kind**
- because of this, they move in one way for a long time, all at the same time, in the same way**  
**after some time they are in another place of another kind, not like the place where they were before**  
**in this place they can do some things not like in the place where they were before**

### 2. *migrate*<sub>2</sub> (v) (people)

(a) People in Eastern Europe have also been receiving hard currency from their friends and relatives who **migrated** many years ago **to** western democracies. (WordBanks)

(b) People **migrate to cities** like Jakarta in search of work. (Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2003) (cf. **Migration to the cities**)

- People
- Purpose
- Movement en mass
- Destination ('place of another kind'; the notion of 'country' is not essential to the meaning of *migrate*<sub>2</sub>)

#### *migrate*<sub>2</sub>

- at that time, something happened in that place, because many people did something there for some time,
- it happened when many people in a place do something at the same time, because they think like this:  
**"we live here now, in a place of one kind**  
**we want to live somewhere else, in a place of another kind**  
we can live there not like we live here, we can do many things there not as here  
because of this, it will be good for us if we live in this other place now"
- before these people did this, they lived somewhere, in a place of one kind
- afterwards, these people lived somewhere else, in a place of another kind, as they wanted**

## VI. Migrants and immigrants in Australian English

Table: Frequency data in Collins WordBanks of English (occurrences)

Word	Australian English (Oznews)	Across varieties of English (Br, Can, Ind, NZ, OZ, Safrica, US)
<b>migrant(s)</b>	<b>443</b>	3,693
<b>migrants</b>	<b>256</b>	2,302
<b>immigrant(s)</b>	397	<b>13,892</b>
<b>immigrants</b>	256	<b>9,684</b>
refugee(s)	1,361	21,167
refugees	858	12,848

### 1. *migrants*<sub>1</sub>

Table: Collocations of *migrant*<sub>1</sub> in Wordbanks\_OZ

a new generation of migrants from continental Europe; waves of migrants	<b>Group concept</b>
African/Asian/European/German/Maltese/Yungaba/Italian/Solevanian/Greek/Britis/ Zulu/Lithuanian/Dnaish/English/Macedonian/Indian/Lebanese	<b>Country of origin</b>
the daughter of Slovenian migrants; her father a German migrant a 34 year-old South African migrant to Australia	
Non-English speaking; accent	<b>Language ability</b>
young migrants living in Australia; young/elderly Asian migrants	<b>Age</b>
-welcoming refugees and new migrants; welcome migrants to our shores -Migrant Resource Centres (Migrants and refugee Settlement Services) -assist new migrants - (the Women's and Children's Hospital) to help migrants and refugee women -to create a migrant friendly community -voluntary work teaching English to Vietnamese migrants and illiterate adults	<b>Sympathetic attitudes towards migrants</b>
settle; call Australia home	<b>Migrants' attitudes</b>
-Government's plan for migrant intakes; intake of skilled migrants -to attract skilled migrants	<b>Government planning</b>

**migrants<sub>1</sub> (n. Australian usage)**

a. <b>people of one kind</b>	CATEGORY
b. <b>people can know that it is like this:</b> people of this kind were not born [m] in Australia, they were born in another country [m] after they lived for some time in that country where they were born, <b>they wanted to live in Australia</b> because of this, sometime after this, they lived in Australia, not in that country where they were born –	KNOWLEDGE -STATUS CHANGING PLACES
c. <b>people in Australian can think about people of this kind like this:</b> “they wanted to live here, because at some time they thought like this: ‘if we live in Australia, very good things can happen to us, we want this’ because they thought like this, they did many things after this, they could live in Australia because Australian government said so	PERCEPTION  - MOTIVATION - ACTION - PERMISSION
d. <b>many people in Australia think about people of this kind like this:</b> “many people of this kind can’t speak English well, many people of this kind can’t do much it is good if other people do many good things for them”	ATTITUDES

Examples from WordBanks\_Oz:

- 1) The year was 1998 and **the migrant who came to Australia for a better life** had found it.
- 2) Jan Bassett's collection draws the distinction between visitors who came to Australia and **migrants who intended to stay**
- 3) yet a **migrant from** Beijing such as Guan Wei, who has **settled in Sydney** with his wife and small daughter, is a latecomer in the short history of European Australia
- 4) Like many **new migrants**, she felt lonely and isolated, unable to speak English and communicate with her new neighbours.
- 5) Many of the thousands of migrants who came to this country after World War II **thrived despite not being able to speak English ...**

**2. migrants<sub>2</sub> (noun, Australian usage)**

Collocations: interstate migrants; Queensland’s migrants; retirement; seeking job

Examples from WordBanks\_OZ:

- The Australian context

- 6) No longer is Queensland attracting mainly elderly people escaping the bustling capital cities of NSW and Victoria, but **Queensland’s migrants** are likely to be young and from regional areas.
- 7) The biggest proportion were **interstate migrants**, overwhelmingly from Sydney fleeing soaring housing prices for southeast Queensland’s relative affordability and better lifestyle.

**migrants**<sub>2</sub> (n. Australian usage, as in 'Queensland's migrants')

a.	people of one kind	CATEGORY
b.	<b>people can know that it is like this:</b> <b>people of this kind lived in one place for some time, that place was one part of Australia</b> <b>afterwards, they wanted to live in another place, that other place was another part of Australia</b> because of this, sometime after this, they lived in another place	KNOWLEDGE  - CHANGING PLACES
c.	<b>people in Australian can think about people of this kind like this:</b> "they wanted to live in another place, because at some time, they thought like this: 'this place is not like the place we live now, it is <b>a place of another kind</b> ' if we live there, it will be good for us' because they thought like this, they did many things because of this, they now live in this place, as they wanted, not in the place where they lived before	PERCEPTION  - MOTIVATION  - ACTION

### 3. *migrant* (used as a modifier)

- 8) Ewa finds work as a **seasonal labourer** in Germany, as one of the many **migrant workers** helping with the annual asparagus harvest.
- 9) a group of 60 **migrant** workers from Sichuan province

### 4. *immigrants* (noun, Australian usage)

- Largely used in negative contexts (only 2 positive examples)
- high frequencies of 'illegal immigrant(s)' (134 occurrences, out of a total of 397 occurrences of 'immigrant(s)')
- Collocate with negative terms: e.g. 'unlawful'
- Focusing on illegal means of entering a specific country ('boat', 'truck', 'cargo ship', 'bribing') and actions taken by the government ('send back', 'interviewed by customs officers')
- no collocations with 'settle', 'help' (cf. '*migrant*<sub>2</sub>')
- Many examples are about immigrants in other countries (outside Australia) (largely in negative contexts)

- The Australian context

- 10) The youth survey (July 25) indicates more than half the kids think there are **too many immigrants** entering Australia.
- 11) Send the Sudanese immigrant to jail; two illegal Vietnamese immigrants
- 12) A boat believed to be carrying more than 100 **illegal immigrants** has been seized off Sydney.
- 13) "The men and women that patrol here are literally at the front line when it comes to protecting our country from **drug runners, illegal immigrants and potential terrorists**," Seven said.

- Non-Australian context/outside Australia

- 14) an **Indian immigrant** who runs a spice shop in California
- 15) The **illegal immigrant** surrendered on Tuesday to a Texas Ranger in El Paso.

- 16) A **Laotian immigrant** was charged yesterday [USA]  
 17) **Turkish immigrant** in London [UK]  
 18) After hate attacks against the 4.5 million **West African immigrants** in Ivory Coast.

<b><i>immigrants</i> (n. Australian usage)</b>	
a. <b>people of one kind</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>
b. <b>people can know that it is like this:</b> people of this kind lived for some time in the country [m] where they were born [m], after they lived in that country for some time, they wanted to live in another country because of this, sometime after this, they lived in another country, not in that country where they were born	<b>KNOWLEDGE</b> – STATUS -- CHANGING PLACES
c. <b>people in Australian can think about people of this kind like this:</b> “they wanted to live in another country, not in the country where they were born, because at some time they thought like this: ‘if we live in another country, very good things can happen to us, we want this’	<b>PERCEPTION</b> - MOTIVATION
d. <b>often, people in Australia <u>think bad things</u> about people of this kind</b>	<b>ATTITUDES</b>

**5. illegal immigrant (Australian usage)**

Examples from WordBanks\_Oz

- 19) Okwe is an **illegal immigrant from** Nigeria trying to stay under the radar in the back streets of London.  
 20) **Illegal immigrants caught in Indonesia** could also face jail for up to three years and fines of around \$A75,000.  
 21) About a week ago, **54 illegal immigrants** from the Middle East were found stranded **on a reef 200km from the Australian coast.**  
 22) The Prime Minister would say we’re safe and secure, that he has been tough on **illegal immigrants** and border protection.

<b><i>illegal immigrants</i> (Australian usage)</b>	
a. <b>people of one kind</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>
b. <b>people can know that it is like this:</b> people of this kind were not born [m] in the country [m] <b>they wanted to live</b> after they lived in that country for some time, <b>they did not want to live there any more</b> they wanted to live in another country	<b>KNOWLEDGE</b> - STATUS
c. <b>people in Australian can think about people of this kind like this:</b>	<b>PERCEPTION</b>

“they wanted to live in another country, because at some time they thought like this: ‘we don’t want to live here, good things will not happen to us if we live here if we live in another country, very good things can happen to us, we want this’ because they thought like this, they knew they had to do something <b>they didn’t want to do what the law of that other country says</b> because of this, the government of that other country has to do something	- MOTIVATION  - ACTION  - PERMISSION
d. <b>many people in Australia think about people of this kind like this:</b> “it is very bad when these people do something like this many of them can do bad things when they are in another country”	ATTITUDES

23) Seeking asylum are not ‘illegals’] REFER to “lone child still detained (The Advertiser, 6/7/04). The opening sentence reads: “**only one child of illegal boat immigrants remains.**” The word “illegal” is also used when referring to asylum seekers in the article. If, as the article suggests, the term “illegal” refers to asylum seekers, then the use of the term “illegal immigrants” is both inaccurate and a form of vilification. I have attached rulings from the Australia Press Council on this issue.

## VII. Immigrants in British English

Corpus: British National Corpus (BNC)

Table: Frequency data in BNC

migrant (s)	681	<b>immigrant</b>	<b>1,158</b>	refugee(s)	2,579
migrants	400	<b>immigrants</b>	<b>819</b>	refugees	1,884

<b>immigrants (British usage)</b>	
a. <b>people of one kind</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>
b. <b>people can know that it is like this:</b> people of this kind lived for some time in the country [m] where they were born [m], after they lived in that country for some time, they wanted to live in another country because of this, sometime after this, they lived in another country, not in that country where they were born	<b>KNOWLEDGE</b> - STATUS -CHANGING PLACES
c. <b>people in Britain can think about people of this kind like this:</b> “they wanted to live in another country, not in the country where they were born, because at some time they thought like this: ‘if we live in that other country, very good things can happen to us, we want this’ because they thought like this, they did many things after this, <b>they were in that other country</b> <b>many people of this kind can</b> live in that country because the government of that country says so”	<b>PERCEPTION</b>  - MOTIVATION - ACTION - PERMISSION
d. <b>many people in Britain think about people of this kind like this:</b> “many people of this kind don’t have much many people of this kind can’t do much”	<b>ATTITUDES</b>

## VIII Migrants and Immigrants in American English

Corpus: Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

Frequency Data in COCA (occurrences)

<b>migrant</b>	<b>3084</b>	<b>immigrant</b>	<b>10,790</b>	refugee	6,264
migrants	4442	<b>immigrants</b>	<b>21,962</b>	refugees	12,100

### 1. *migrant* (sg. used as a modifier American English)

### 2. *immigrants* (American English)

24) in Washington, where people have a disconnect with what the American people are upset about. They're not upset that **immigrants** are coming. They realize this is a nation of immigrants. People thank god they live in a country people are wanting to break into, not break out of. They just want to do it legally and orderly. (Spoken)

25) As the 20th century draws to a close, immigration levels are higher than they've been since the century began. **Nearly 1.2 million immigrants are arriving in the USA every year, about 900,000 legally and an estimated 275,000 illegally.** At the century's start, the **immigrants** was largely European. Now **immigrants** are more likely to be from India and the Philippines, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. (News)

26) But, La Shawn, there's a difference between what people think about and the numbers. **I mean, most immigrants are not entering the country without papers.** Ms-BARBER: Well, yeah, there are some that are overstaying their visas but still, whether you're jumping over a border or you're in the United States legally and then overstay your visa, thereby rendering your status illegal. People are upset about it. (Spoken)

#### *immigrants* (American English)

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| a. | <b>people of one kind</b>   | <b>CATEGORY</b>                                   |
| b. | <b>people can know that it is like this:</b><br>people of this kind lived for some time in the country [m] where they were born [m],<br>after they lived in that country for some time, they wanted to live in another country<br>because of this, sometime after this, they lived in another country, not in that country where they were born   | <b>KNOWLEDGE</b><br>– STATUS<br>– CHANGING PLACES |
| c. | <b>people in American can think about people of this kind like this:</b><br>“they wanted to live in another country, not in the country where they were born, because at some time they thought like this: ‘if we live in that other country, very good things can happen to us, we want this’<br>because they thought like this, they did many things<br>after this, <b>they lived in that other country</b> | <b>PERCEPTION</b><br>– MOTIVATION<br>- ACTION     |
| d. | <b>many people in America think about people of this kind like this</b><br>“if they lived in that other country because they did what the law says, this is good<br>if they lived in that other country not because they did what the law says, this is bad”  | <b>ATTITUDES</b>                                  |

### 3. *illegal immigrants* (American English; cf. Australian English)

- |    |  |                                   |
|----|--|-----------------------------------|
| c. | <b>people in America can think about people of this kind like this:</b><br>“they wanted to live in another country, because at some time they thought like this:<br>‘we don’t want to live here, good things will not happen to us if we live here | <b>PERCEPTION</b><br>- MOTIVATION |
|----|--|-----------------------------------|

if we live in another country, very good things can happen to us, we want this'  
 because they thought like this, they knew they had to do something - ACTION  
 afterwards, **they lived in that other country, not because they did what the law of that other country says so**  
 - PERMISSION

## IX. Yímín in Chinese

### 1. yímín:

- a) (verb) emigrate (in most cases from China)
- b) (noun) migration, immigration
- c) (noun designating people) immigrant(s), emigrant(s)

*yímín* (as in 'xīn yímín', 'new yímín')

- |    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| a. | <b>people of one kind</b>  | <b>CATEGORY</b>   |
| b. | <b>people can know that it is like this:</b><br>people of this kind lived for some time in the country [m] where they were born [m],<br>after they lived in that country for some time, they wanted to live in another country<br>because of this, sometime after this, they lived in another country, not in the country where they were born   | <b>KNOWLEDGE</b><br><br>- STATUS<br>- CHANGING PLACES             |
| c. | <b>people can think about people of this kind like this:</b><br>"they wanted to live in another country, because at some time they thought like this:<br>'if we live in that country, very good things can happen to us, we want this'<br>because they thought like this, they did many things<br>after this, they could live in that other country because the government of that country says so | <b>PERCEPTION</b><br><br>- MOTIVATION<br>- ACTION<br>- PERMISSION |

**2. qiānxīzhě (lit. 'those who migrate<sub>1</sub>): new term used to translate 'migrants' in the institutional sense and is used only in that context**

## X. Nànmín in Chinese (cf. refugees in English)

- *nànmín*: victims of social-political catastrophes; *zāimín*: victims of natural disasters

*Nànmín*

- |    |   |                   |
|----|---|-------------------|
| a. | <b>people of one kind</b>   | <b>CATEGORY</b>   |
| b. | <b>people can know that it is like this:</b><br>people of this kind lived in some place,<br>at some time, something very bad happened in that place for some time,<br>because some people did something very bad in that place<br>because of this, <b>people of this kind could die if they lived in that place</b><br>because of this, people of this kind could not live in that place at that time, they <b>had to</b> live in another place | <b>KNOWLEDGE</b>  |
| c. | <b>people can think about people of this kind like this:</b><br>"they didn't want to live in where they lived at some time, because at that time they thought like this:  | <b>PERCEPTION</b> |

	‘if we live where we live now, we could die, we don’t want this we can’t live in this place now, we had to live in another place ’ because they thought like this, they had to do many things	- MOTIVATION  - ACTION
d.	<b>people think something about people of this kind like this</b> “many people feel something bad when they think of people of this kind because of what happened to them”	ATTITUDES

## **XI. Migrants, immigrants and refugiés in French**

## **XII. Implications**

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