South Asian Languages and Semantic Variation: A Cross-linguistic Study

This project investigates the possibility of variation in the semantic component, a new and dynamic area of study in formal approaches to semantics. Its particular focus is the effect on variation of language contact. The semantic status of classifier languages of South Asia, which have been described as marginal instances of this language type, is used to illustrate the nature of the investigation. Data from a small representative sample of such languages will be collected. The semantic system of these languages, which have been in contact with languages without classifiers, will be compared with the semantic system of core classifier languages such as Chinese and Japanese. The study will enrich the theoretical base for analyses of classifier systems by introducing the data from South Asian classifier languages, hitherto unknown in the semantic literature. It will shed light on current debates on the range of semantic variation permitted in natural language.