REGULATIONS ON USE

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Background
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SEMPLATES:
A GUIDE TO IDENTIFICATION AND ELICITATION
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Project   Categories across language and cognition
Task   Lexical identification, elicitation
Goal of task To find new kinds of macrostructure in the lexicon, with a view to cross-linguistic comparison (but eminently publishable on their own)
Prerequisites Good control of the lexicon of the object language

Background

Semplates are a new descriptive and theoretical concept in lexical semantics, borne out of recent L&C work on several domains, e.g. in the 'Landscape' and 'Put & Take' subprojects (Levinson & Burenhult 2009). A semplate can be defined as a configuration consisting of distinct layers of lexemes, each layer drawn from a different form class, mapped onto the same abstract semantic template. Within such a lexical layer, the sense relations between the lexical items are inherited from the underlying template. Thus, the whole set of lexical layers and the underlying template form a cross-categorial configuration in the lexicon. Figure 1 shows a straightforward example from Tzeltal, with three different word classes (abstract nouns, relational nominals, and verbs of motion) hooked to the same underlying configuration of semantic oppositions.

The lexicon taking part in semplates usually does not display any overt formal indication of its participation in the semplate, and semplates are therefore not always easy to spot. Once identified, however, they can unlock a wealth of semantic and cultural information. While they seem to have escaped descriptive and theoretical attention until now, semplates may in fact be quite common, perhaps especially in lesser-known languages spoken in small-scale, traditional settings. The semplates we have found to date structure lexicon in the domains of landscape and space (with examples from Jahai, Tongan, Tzeltal, and Yélî Dnye), ethnobiology (Jahai and Kuninjku), and caused motion (Yélî Dnye). Figures 2 and 3 show the foraging semplate from Jahai. Here the underlying template is a taxonomy, which is only partly filled by lexical nouns, the empty top two nodes being picked up by classifiers (Figure 2). The whole is reinforced by (somewhat patchy) distribution of foraging verbs, and then the third row of the taxonomy is exactly matched by contrasting eating verbs (for four categories of edibles foraged, Figure 3). Thus the taxonomy is not fully expressed in any one word class, only by the overlay.

These examples and domains are probably only the tip of the iceberg, and we are interested in getting a more complete picture of the nature, frequency and extent of semplates within and across languages. This guide is designed to help you identify semplates in your language of study and to elicit their participating lexicon.

Research questions

- How common are semplates cross-linguistically?
- Which semantic domains can be structured by semplates?
- Which are the sociolinguistic and cultural prerequisites of semplates? For example, is it the case (as suggested by Levinson & Burenhult 2009) that they might be restricted to languages spoken in small-scale traditional settings without an elaborate division of labour?
- To what degree can semplates be formally overt?
- Are particular form classes more likely than others to participate in semplates?

Task & analysis
The following sections are designed to help you identify and investigate semplates and their lexicon. These are general guidelines which do not detail a specific methodology of elicitation but are merely intended to help you spot the phenomenon and direct your attention to domains, relations and classes which are likely to be relevant.

Semplate diagnosis
The overall diagnostic and defining feature of a semplate is that one and the same semantic distinction can be observed in lexicon from more than one form class. To take a simple example, a lexical distinction between male and female in nouns referring to a particular animal species can have a parallel semantic (but lexically and formally unrelated) distinction in verbs denoting the motion of males and females of the species in question (cf. Evans 2005). Another example would be if distinctions in the nominal lexicon referring to various landforms (ridge, river etc.) are paralleled by distinctions in the verbal lexicon (e.g. move-along-ridge, move-along-river) (cf. Levinson & Burenhult 2009).

When collecting and exploring the lexicon in our languages, we typically do so on a form class basis, so that we, for example, place emphasis on the lexical relations between nouns or verbs of a particular domain. Detailed mapping of semantic relations within domains and form classes forms the groundwork also for the identification of semplates. But spotting them requires parallel investigation of more than one form class, and careful comparison across these form classes. So a general first recommendation is simply to be attentive to such cross-categorial parallels in the lexicon.

Promising domains
One of the goals of this task is to get an idea of which domains are most likely to contain semplates, so we do not wish to give detailed instructions as to specific domains to be explored. However, we hypothesise that good breeding grounds for semplates are domains which are fundamental and central to the way of life of the language community. Thus, the semplates we have identified to date structure lexicon in the following domains:

Space and landscape: Our examples here (from Jahai, Tongan, Tzeltal, and Yélî Dnye) typically draw on a set of spatial oppositions to structure e.g. landscape nouns, relational nouns, place names, and motion verbs.

Subsistence and life forms:	In Jahai, a taxonomy of foraging links food nouns with classifiers, verbs of foraging, and verbs of eating; Kuninjku has distinct nouns for male and female of a particular wallaby species and corresponding male and female 'hopping' verbs.
Caused position and motion:	In Yélî Dnye, a three-way distinction of object position structures intransitive positional verbs as well as two sets of causative transitive verbs (placement and removal).

These domains may be fruitful areas in which to start looking, but please also consider which other domains may be relevant in your particular cultural context. Anatomy, kinship, perception, emotion, material culture, art, structural design, religion, warfare...?

Sense relations structuring the template

The set of distinctions forming the underlying template of semplates may take a variety of forms. Sometimes they represent the sense relations of traditional lexical semantics, like antonymies, partonymies, and taxonomies. Often, however, they are more complex, with e.g. interlocked axes of distinctions (e.g. a three-way system of spatial vectors, as in Tzeltal and Yélî Dnye).

Different lexical layers of the same semplate may in fact represent different sense relations, so that, say, one nominal layer can express a taxonomy whereas another one expresses a partonymy or antonymy. (Thus, the Jahai landscape semplate contains two alternative systems of nominal labels given to watercourses and their tributaries: one is partonymical and expressed with a body metaphor, the other one is size-taxonomical and expressed with a kinship – mother-child – metaphor).

Coming to understand the nature of the underlying set of distinctions is likely to make your cross-categorial probing of the participating lexicon a lot easier. Also, if you already happen to know of sets of well-defined and fundamental oppositions in your language (e.g. spatial vectors), these might be good starting points for probing across form classes.

Participating form classes

The examples we have at hand suggest considerable variation as to which form classes may take part and form lexical layers in semplates. Classes identified to date include common nouns, proper nouns, relational nouns, classifiers, adpositions, adverbs, directionals, intransitive verbs, and transitive verbs (including causatives). We expect that this list can be made longer. If you identify a semplate-like connection between two or more form classes, it is worth probing exhaustively for the same distinction across other form classes of the language as well. For indications as to which form classes are likely to co-occur in semplates, see the examples in the appendicized graphs.

Overtness vs. covertness

As noted, lexicon taking part in semplates typically doesn't display overt formal clues. That is, there are seldom signs of phonological or derivational connections within or across the lexical layers of a semplate. But there may be some connection: occasionally phonologically identical or similar forms occur in the same position of more than one

lexical layer, and we also have examples of nominal compounds which provide indications of lexical relations within a layer. These examples hint at some wider structure but don't in themselves reveal the whole configuration. If you identify a semplate, please pay close attention to which formal clues exist, if any. Also, we cannot rule out that semplates can be entirely (or predominantly) overt, with formal indications of participation for each position in the structure.
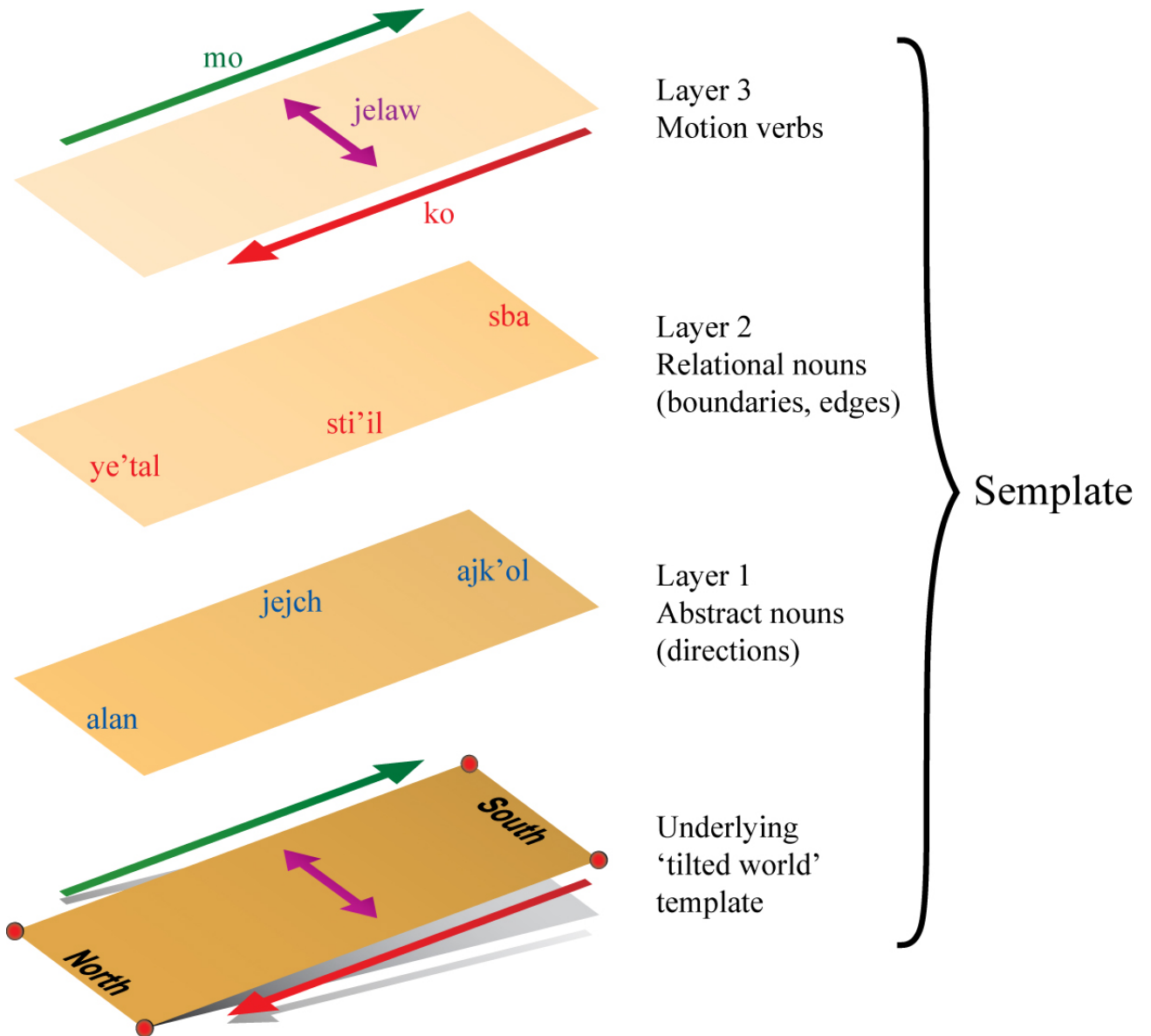
Delimiting semplates

Once you have identified a semplate, it's a good idea to go out of your way to envision other subdomains and classes which could potentially be part of it and probe these too, if nothing else to rule them out. While we are obviously primarily concerned with which domains and form classes are structured by semplates in a given language, we are also interested to know what domains are *not* structured by semplates. So far semplates seem to have fairly limited application, involving small sets of vocabulary mapped onto some well-defined domain, and we are interested to know why. (For example, as noted, the Jahai foraging semplate structures food nouns, food classifiers, foraging verbs, and eating verbs, but it doesn't in any way organise, say, verbs of carrying, cutting or distributing the foraged booty).
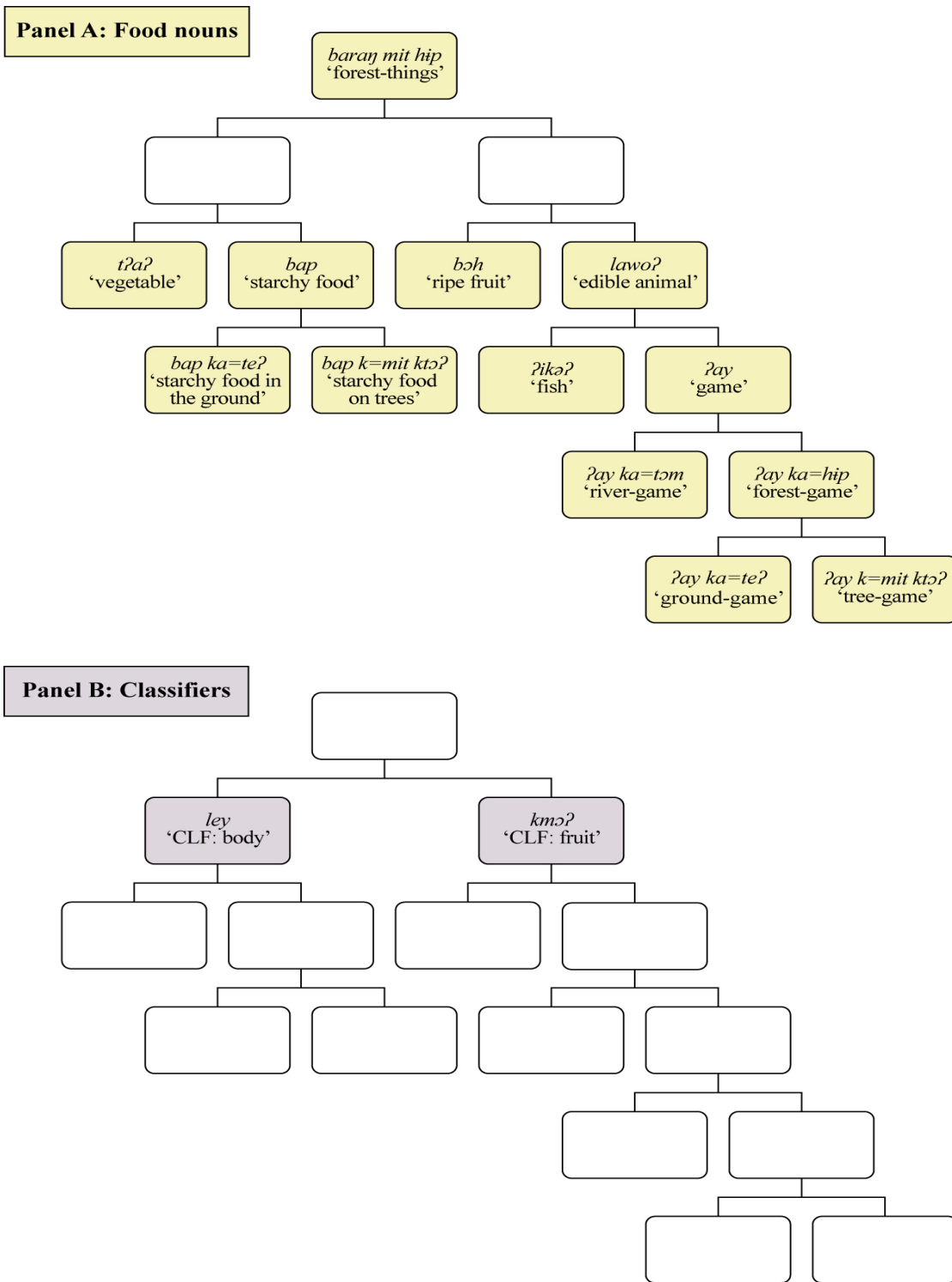
Outcome

Results will be compared and discussed within the Categories project. If there is enough interest, a special issue may result.
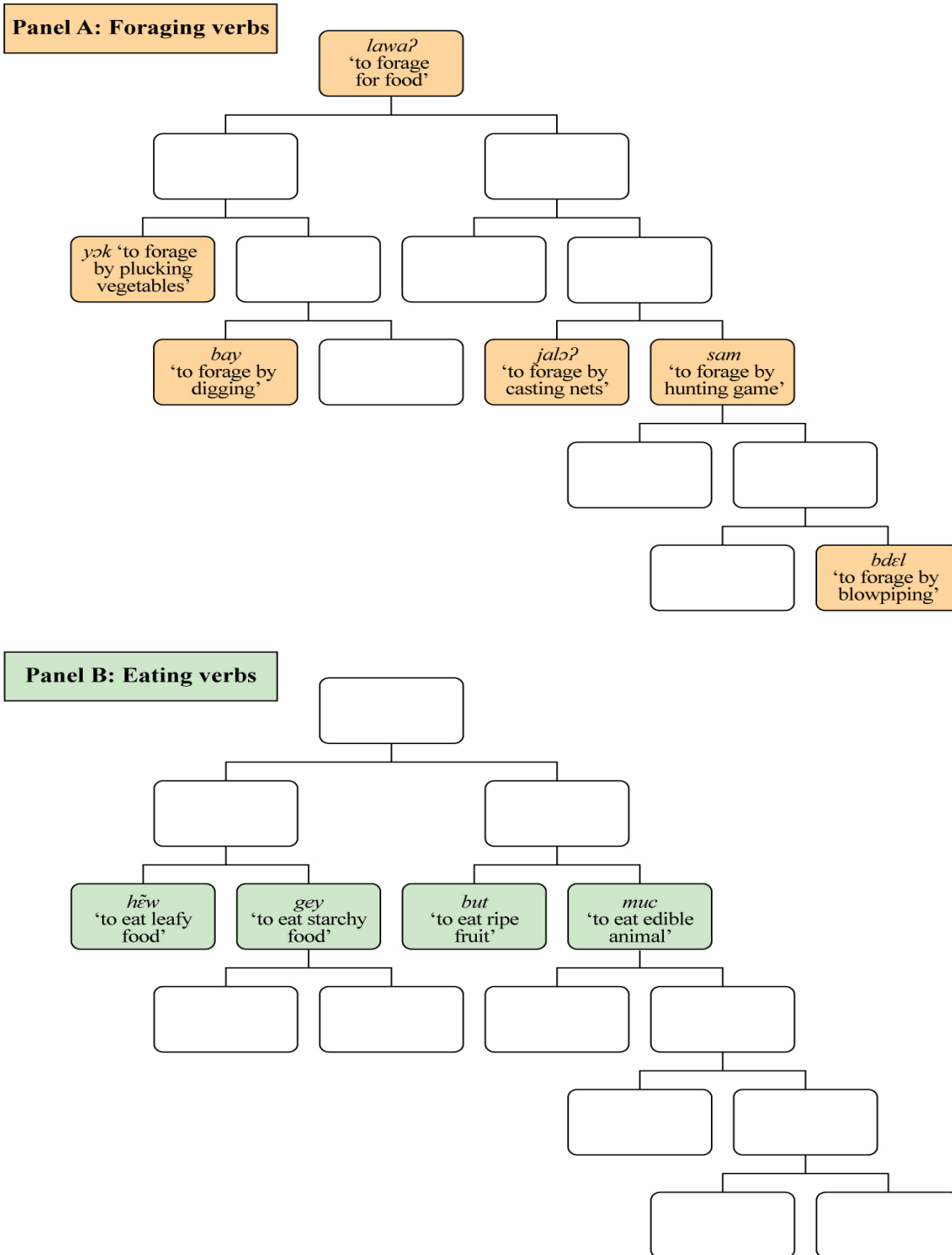
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Figure 1. Tzeltal semplate of Tilted World and its expression in three form classes.

Panel A: Food nouns

baraŋ mit hip
'forest-things'

tʔaʔ
'vegetable'

bap
'starchy food'

bɔh
'ripe fruit'

lawoʔ
'edible animal'

bap ka=teʔ
'starchy food in
the ground'

bap k=mit ktɔʔ
'starchy food
on trees'

ʔikəʔ
'fish'

ʔay
'game'

ʔay ka=tɔm
'river-game'

ʔay ka=hip
'forest-game'

ʔay ka=teʔ
'ground-game'

ʔay k=mit ktɔʔ
'tree-game'

Panel B: Classifiers

ley
'CLF: body'

kmɔʔ
'CLF: fruit'

Figure 2. First two word sets involved in the Jahai foraging semplate

Panel A: Foraging verbs

lawaʔ
'to forage
for food'

yɔk 'to forage
by plucking
vegetables'

bay
'to forage by
digging'

jalɔʔ
'to forage by
casting nets'

sam
'to forage by
hunting game'

bdɛl
'to forage by
blowpiping'

Panel B: Eating verbs

hẽw
'to eat leafy
food'

gey
'to eat starchy
food'

but
'to eat ripe
fruit'

muc
'to eat edible
animal'

Figure 3. Second two word sets involved in the Jahai foraging semplate