

## Semantic typology: a view from Mainland Southeast Asia

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With the establishment of the discipline of semantic typology, the past two decades have seen a tremendous surge in the investigation of patterns of meaning across the world's languages. New methods of elicitation and analysis, applied in numerous and typically lesser-known language settings, have revealed an astonishing diversity in how languages delimit, carve up and label fundamental domains, thus setting a new tone for cross-linguistic inquiry and theorisation. Such domains include space (Levinson 2003; Levinson & Wilkins 2006), body (Majid et al. 2006), landscape (Burenhult 2008), reciprocity (Evans et al. 2011), perception (Majid & Levinson 2011), and caused motion (Kopecka & Narasimhan 2012), among others.

The languages of Mainland Southeast Asia have so far been underrepresented in this new typological enterprise. This is in spite of the fact that this culturally and genealogically diverse, fragmented and intermingled region shows all the signs of harbouring phenomena of great significance to the typologising of meaning. Not least, the dynamic and heterogeneous situation itself provides an intriguing environment for exploring the formation, maintenance, change and demise of semantic categories.

In this talk I will first provide an overview of Mainland Southeast Asian materials in existing semantic typologies and point to the gaps in our knowledge as to what characterises the region's languages semantically. I will then move on to illustrate some of the most significant phenomena and patterns discovered so far, which in my view make Mainland Southeast Asian languages intriguing—and often urgent—targets of in-depth semantic investigation. For example, one such semantic phenomenon is a type of lexical configuration of harmonised semantics across form classes which we have recently labelled 'semplate' (Levinson & Burenhult 2009). This and other examples will be drawn from the domains of space, ethnobiology, and perception, with a particular focus on the languages of the Austroasiatic stock. The data at hand sometimes point to considerable diversity in categorisation strategies, even among closely related languages.

### References

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