Linguacultural Worldviews in a Postcolonial Context. Reflections on Carsten Levisen's *Postcolonial Semantics: Meaning and Metalanguage in a Multipolar World*[1]

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Abstract

Carsten Levisen's book *Postcolonial Semantics*[2] offers a rare and an innovative glimpse into the linguistic and social reality of the speakers of Bislama in Vanuatu. The author inquires into the linguacultural sphere of Bislama (as well as the uncapitalized *bislama* as a "way of speaking") through what he calls "the semantics of listening and understanding." This fundamentally emic approach links words (including keywords) with people and places. Levisen's methodology and insights are inspiring and innovative, yet the present review article takes issue with some of his assumptions and/or proposals, inviting further discussion within the realm of linguaculture, worldview, linguistic semantics, and postcolonial reality.

Le livre de Carsten Levisen, *Postcolonial Semantics (Sémantique poscoloniale)*, offre un aperçu rare et innovant de la réalité linguistique et sociale des locuteurs du bislama au Vanuatu. L'auteur examine la sphère linguaculturelle du *B*islama (ainsi que le *bislama* « sans B majuscule » en tant que « manière de parler ») à travers ce qu'il appelle « la sémantique de l'écoute et de la compréhension ». Cette approche fondamentalement émique relie les mots (y compris les mots-clés) aux personnes et aux lieux. La méthodologie et les analyses de Levisen sont stimulantes et novatrices, néanmoins le présent article de recension interroge certaines de ses hypothèses et/ou propositions, et invite à davantage de discussions dans le domaine de la linguaculture, la vision du monde, la sémantique linguistique et la réalité postcoloniale.

Keywords

postcolonial semantics, worldview, cultural keywords, way of speaking, Bislama, emic
sémantique postcoloniale, vision du monde, mots-clés culturels, manière de parler, bislama, approche émique

Levisen's Postcolonial Semantics Approach: An Overview

Carsten Levisen's *Postcolonial Semantics* is a monograph-length, full-fledged presentation of his approach to semantics in postcolonial contexts that he had been developing over a period of time (see e.g. Levisen, "From Basic," "Postcolonial Lexicography," "Postcolonial Prepositions"; Levisen and Sippola). This is a radical approach, perhaps revolutionary in many respects, even if Levisen draws on and references the work of other authors extensively. The volume offers a manageable, coherent presentation of the theoretical tenets of Postcolonial Semantics and its application to Bislama, a language spoken in Vanuatu.

The overall framework presented in the book can be located within three areas of research: Cognitive Cultural Semantics, Linguistic Worldview Studies, and Postcolonial Semantics. By capitalizing these terms, Levisen makes it clear that within each line of inquiry he is following a certain model, a possible manifestation of a broader field (216). And so, the focus of Cognitive Cultural Semantics (see Levisen et al.) is "the entanglement between ways of thinking, ways of living, and ways of meaning" (Levisen, *Postcolonial Semantics* 219), where cognition is socio-cultural in nature, rather than an activity of an individual mind or brain.[3]

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[1] DOI: 10.61736/alizes.620
[2] De Gruyter, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111337432
[3] Independently of Levisen, I have proposed the term *cognitive cultural linguistics* (Głaz, "Cultural Linguistics").

In Linguistic Worldview Studies, the focus is on the relationship between language and worldview (or between languages and worldviews), with respect to a few key questions. Does a language *reflect* or *produce* the worldview of the people who speak it? How do the different worldviews relate to linguistic diversity and intralinguistic variation? Given that we express ourselves *in* language, is it fair to say that any kind of worldview is by definition a linguistic construct? Levisen's stance is that "there are multiple ways of viewing the world, because there are multiple linguistic worldviews" (*Postcolonial Semantics* 217; note also the term *multipolarity* in the book's title). At this point, I would like to sound my first mildly critical note in relation to Carsten Levisen's work for what appears to be insufficient precision: how is his use of "because" to be understood? Is it the case that there exist multiple worldviews because they emerge from multiple linguistic worldviews (the ontological sense), or rather, do we *know* there are many worldviews because we can recognize the existence of a variety of linguistic worldviews (the epistemological sense)? A discussion on this matter might be fruitful.

Next, Postcolonial Studies for Levisen does not simply refer to an era or a period in the history of humanity but represents a critical methodological perspective: he wants to do "a culturally oriented […] semantics of 'understanding' with an explicitly postcolonial scope" (2). For this, the author refuses to subscribe to the well-established notions of fieldwork and data elicitation – instead, his methods are those of conversation and understanding (rather than "objective" description of "data"), participation, and reflection.[4] Additionally, Levisen's focus on Bislama means that he assumes a *specific* postcolonial perspective, one that values *Amerika* for its power, affluence, and kindness, without the stigma of colonialism that the people of Vanuatu associate with Great Britain or France.

Levisen also debunks what he calls an "Anglo-for-human-fallacy" (216), questioning some of the fundamental notions within the field of linguistics, such as *language*, *dialect*, *accent*, *variety*, *creole*, *native speaker*, or *mother tongue*. Those, says the author, are Anglo (or more broadly, Western) concepts that have made an international academic career but are far from universal – in other words, they are eticized emic notions.[5] Instead, he prefers to talk about "ways of speaking," characteristic of a certain people in a certain place. This is thus a linguistics of "people in places."[6] His many and detailed explications of the Bislama keywords, exemplified below, are not supposed to reflect what those words simply mean but what they mean for the people who live and use them in Vanuatu.[7] But it seems that the status of the notion of *language*, as it is presented in Levisen's work, is unclear. For the author, it "forms a part of an areal metalinguistic cluster of words with equivalent, or near-equivalent meanings across Europe, such as German *Sprache*, French *langage*, Dutch *taal*, Danish *sprog*, etc." (79). This, in fact, is debatable, and one can sense that Levisen would not be averse to engaging in some discussion, given that he formulates the following thought about dialects:

> The English metalinguistic construct of *dialect* is a part of a European family of *dialect*-related words […]. Across Europe, these *dialect*-related words have developed

[4] Participation in everyday conversations and interaction with people is an echo of the anthropology of Bronislaw Malinowski; the importance of critical reflection and intuition comes from Anna Wierzbicka (whose Natural Semantic Metalanguage Levisen uses to propose explications of Bislama word meanings).

[5] The terms *etic* and *emic* are inventions of Kenneth L. Pike, coined by analogy to the distinction between *phonetic* and *phonemic*. In anthropology and anthropological linguistics, they came to designate "the level of things which may be observed by an 'objective' observer" (*etic*) vs. "the level of meaningful contrasts within a particular language or culture" (*emic*) (Barnard 114).

[6] The book is also very idiosyncratically dedicated to a place, the Vanuatu town of Port Villa.

[7] This of course applies to all words in any language: see the explication of *English* in English English (81), or what *English* means to the speakers of English in England.

> semantically in different directions […]: the everyday semantics of, say, English *dialect,* the Italian *dialetto,* and German *Dialekt* are not identical. (83)

It is somewhat surprising that he stresses the semantic near-equivalence of language-related words but the diversity of dialect-related words.

But even with his critical stance on the notion of language, Levisen does not reject it altogether; in fact, he finds it useful in distinguishing between *bislama* and *Bislama*. The uncapitalized *bislama* is a way of speaking used for inter-group communication that forms an oppositional "discursive pair" with *lanwis*, the latter signifying intra-group communication that connects people to a place and its characteristic ancestral logic (97). The capitalized *Bislama*, in turn, is "a named language, spoken in Vanuatu" (92), i.e., it lies within the Anglo/Western "'language' template" (93). Would it thus be fair to say that even a radical attempt at decolonizing linguistics such as Levisen's finds some of the well-entrenched Western (colonial) academic notions at least useful, though perhaps not indispensable?[8]

Against this backdrop, the essence of Levisen's book is to offer profoundly emic descriptions of Bislama keywords that can be expressed in Bislama with the same degree of precision as in English. This "principle of paraphrase," whereby each and every linguaculture is equally adequate as a metalanguage (see Goddard), might be "the most sacred for Postcolonial Semantics" (Levisen, *Postcolonial Semantics* 219).

Keywords for Postcolonial Semantics

With the general background to Levisen's approach spelled out above, we can now inquire deeper into it by identifying the keywords (or key concepts) that can be used as guidelines for navigating the area. Those will need to be more specific than the ones provided on the publisher's website: *cultural semantics*, *cognitive semantics*, *postcolonial linguistics*, *discourse studies*.[9]

Those key concepts certainly include some that have already been introduced above, such as *multipolarity* (as the umbrella "philosophical" perspective for the approach), *way of speaking*, or *linguistic worldview*. Here, let me add the following ones:

- semantics of listening and understanding;
- meanings;
- words – people – places;
- emic;
- knowledges;
- prototypes and exemplars;
- linguaculture.

As much as possible, they will be discussed in relation to one another, as they form a polycentric network, within which one might also be able to identify micro-hierarchies.

Semantics of listening and understanding. The idea of a semantics of listening and understanding (or U-semantics) comes with a shift away from the desire to achieve academic explanatory neutrality (Warnke). Both Warnke and Levisen suggest that the very idea of explanation, with its sanctioned tradition and high status in linguistics, can be misleading. I take this as a claim that a full, objective, and unquestionable explanation of meaning (as when

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[8] Also, it is not certain how *bislama* (small *b*) as "a means of interethnic communication" (94) is different from a *lingua franca*, another Western concept.

[9] https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783111337432/html?lang=en&srsltid=AfmBOop0d76DchaZjFiJXKvu1rgCQCvZlP49D_aby4zExacDMnS1-UEQ#bibliographicData; accessed 17 July, 2025.

meaning is "explained away") does not leave room for any "residue" that comes with linguacultural fluidity, contextual modulation, and discourse dynamics. Above all, it may be (and has been) abused as a tool of colonial dominance, whereby the more powerful and "knowledgeable" community "explains" the nature of things about the less powerful and knowledgeable community. Such seems to have been the rationale for Bronislaw Malinowski's limited trust in what people say and his focus on participant observation.[10] Of course, participant observation has its place in anthropology and anthropological linguistics, but how about participating in a conversation with the intention to grasp what and how words mean to people taking part? If, then, the goal is to arrive at an understanding, Warnke and Levisen seem to be saying, it is the understanding that can be located with the people engaged in a given way of speaking.

Meanings. If in the previous section I referred to an "explanation of meaning," it is not only the first element of that expression that needs to change (from "explanation" to "understanding") but also the second one: from "meaning" to "meanings." In Levisen's *Postcolonial Semantics*, polysemy is taken to be natural and omnipresent;[11] word meanings – which lie "below the threshold of awareness" (40) – can only be accounted for within their rich and dynamic cultural reality. Therefore, the author's explications of Bislama keywords are proposed as a "cultural dictionary" (107).

Words – people – places. But cultural in what sense? Even if Levisen does not seem to define culture, nor is the term *culture* listed in the Index (I consider both decisions to be right), his entire argumentation rests of three cultural (or linguacultural) notions of words, people, and places. Postcolonial Semantics is a "semantics of words and people" (3), of what words mean to people living in, and being mentally shaped by, a specific place. This misleadingly simple formula is in fact pregnant with several connotations, which I will discuss in two steps: "words" and "people in places."

Levisen's focus is on words – and although he also analyzes what he calls constructions, those in fact are culturally rich expressions like *yu blo wea* 'where are you from?' or *kobak lo aelan blehem* 'go back to his/her island' and can be considered complex units of the lexicon. Inspiration by Sapir's view of vocabulary as "a very sensitive index of the culture of a people" (Sapir, "Language" 166), although not expressed overtly, is clear.[12] Certainly, Hamlet's somewhat dismissive "Words, words, words" as his response to Polonius's "What do you read, my lord?" (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene ii) did not land on fertile ground here. For Levisen, words are crucial: they are like "drops" of condensed meanings (217), they have agency (see also Levisen and Waters), perhaps not to the extent of "language speaking us" (as this would deprive speakers of any agency with respect to language) but just enough to shake humans off the position of omnipotent masters.

Levisen acknowledges the agency of speakers. Words function in discourses and discourses are after all produced by people: there is a close connection between meanings as semantic habits and cultural scripts as discourse habits. The author points to the importance of known and influential individuals who leave their "footprints in the vocabulary and the social cognition of generations of speakers" (215), citing the case of the first president of Vanuatu Father Walter Lini and the expression *rispek hemi honorabel* 'respect is honourable' that he used in a speech and that became a slogan of the variety of urban life. An example in the European context is the German ex-chancellor Angela Merkel's *wir schaffen das* 'we can manage that' as a stance

[10] Malinowski did not in fact reject people's views on what they say altogether; rather, he "found that reality was located somewhere in the gap between ideal and real, between what people say they do and what they actually do" (Baker 21). Baker's wording here is interesting: it is the doing, not the saying, that she considers real.

[11] Goddard and Wierzbicka talk about "rampant" polysemy.

[12] Similarly in Cognitive Ethnolinguistics, lexis holds "[a] privileged position" as "a classifier of social experience" (Bartmiński 17).

on immigration (211-212).[13] Levisen thus draws our attention to the intricate relationship between words, discourse, and social life: "The rise and fall of words are indicative of change, and changes in metalinguistic vocabulary bear witness to changes in the way people experience social and linguistic reality. At the same time, realities are shaped and framed through the available words, their meanings and discourses" (104).

Within this carefully crafted model, however, there do remain a few questions or controversies that beg deeper reflection. Let me point out two of them.

First, when the author argues so vociferously for the centrality of words (and keywords),[14] one wonders whether he wants to suggest that words are the central (and privileged) area of ethnolinguistic inquiry or in fact the only area worthy of systematic investigation. Intuitively, the latter option stands very little chance of being taken seriously (and I do not believe that that is in fact Levisen's position) – but precisely for this reason I daresay the tone of the "words-are-key" argumentation might be somewhat softened so as to make room for other aspects of linguaculture. If, as Levisen himself suggests, we want to see how human lives are shaped, changed, or "translated" in dynamic linguacultural contexts (such as migration, see Besemeres and Wierzbicka), this certainly takes much more than words and word meanings.[15]

Second, Levisen's stance is on the whole spectacularly consistent: the author identifies words with knowledges ("Word meanings are not just a window into popular knowledge, they *are* knowledges and views of the world," p. 75), treats them as agents within social change ("word meanings conceptualize and construe the social world," 106), and looks at meanings as "conceptual configurations that evolve over time, and as invisible linguaculture" (216). It is therefore all the more surprising to come across, every now and then, statements like the one on p. 26: "words are labels for socially-shared concepts." I may have misunderstood the author's intention here but my reaction is a rather emphatic "no": it does not move us forward to see words as labels for concepts; in fact, this view is incompatible with the words-as-knowledges approach (see the example of *plen* and *bot* below). Perhaps this is just a matter of unfortunate phrasing.

The second major aspect of Levisen's focus on words in that they function (or activate meanings) for *people* in *places*. It is in this spirit that, with his explications of Bislama keywords, he offers people-centred semantic portraits of words (24) that intimately connect with Vanuatu as a place. Therefore, it is "place" rather than "space" that is the fundamental category linking people with meanings of words. And again, let me mention two non-obvious points to consider at this juncture.

First, on p. 50 Levisen supports his argument for "place" in Bislama by quoting Edward S. Casey: "[t]o be at all – to exist in any way – is to be somewhere" (Casey ix). This idea can be traced back to Ancient Greece, specifically to Aristotle. For the Greek philosopher, the idea of existence as such was unfathomable and only made sense if located in a place: the Ancient Greek *einai* encapsulated within itself the locative and existential sense as an indivisible whole (Kahn). The non-locative or "pure" existence was "extracted" from it several centuries later as

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[13] One can add here John F. Kennedy's *Ich bin ein Berliner* and many other cases, but also extend Levisen's observation onto a more widespread influence of individual speakers on lexicogrammar – see Łozowski for an inquiry into King Alfred's role in the development of English modality.

[14] Let us provide a few extra quotes: "Semantic consultations are collaborative explorations, where speakers in small groups reflect on the meaning of words, and the practices, feelings, narratives, and knowledges associated with these words" (10); "*Cultural keywords* is a conversation about the centrality of words and meanings, and the special capacity of some words to shed light on cultural cognition and (post)colonial discourse" (12); "Words are the guardians of the invisibilized orders of knowledge and as such they provide a vast, multifaceted, and often contradictory story – or rather, stories" (223); etc.

[15] Levisen is definitely wary of Sapir's sobering warning not to make "the mistake of identifying a language with its dictionary" (Sapir, *Language. An Introduction* 234). A discussion of what types of data are relevant in ethnolinguistic inquiry is offered in Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska ("What Data").

a result of abstract reasoning but also perhaps under the pressure of other languages.[16] Although I am very far from suggesting any serious affinity between one of the cornerstones of European (Western) thought and Bislama, there may be a more intimate connection between the two than strikes the eye. Whether that connection is a matter of the psychic unity of humankind, accident, or a colonial influence of English and French is yet to be explored.

Second, the idea of meanings of words for people in places is inherently relational: words, meanings, people, and places form a network. Therefore, it is unclear how this view can be reconciled with a rather large degree of autonomy that Levisen assigns to word meanings. Consider: "In Bislama, *nakaemas* is a cultural keyword with a wide scope. It is a concept of sociality, of spirituality, and of morality… It is an axiological concept with a negative valence built into its very semantics" (Levisen, *Postcolonial Semantics* 201). This nearly sounds like a reification of the word's semantics. Would this mean that within the words-meanings-people-places network, it is the first two elements that stand out as more salient, and if so, how can this be reconciled with the people-centred approach? On a more general level, does this not invite us into the discussion on the category of "word," its volatile status as a linguistic unit, Greco-Roman origin, and greater applicability to Indo-European than non-Indo-European languages?[17] Yes, words are certainly applicable to the English-based Bislama – but what steps would be necessary to move from there into a non-Indo-European territory?

Emic. As indicated above, Levisen's ambition is to provide insider-perspective or emic descriptions of Bislama keywords in the form of what he calls a "cultural dictionary" (*Postcolonial Semantics* 107). At the same time, he strives to avoid "emic isolationism," i.e. "the idea that linguacultural worldviews are radically incommensurable" (21), hence the focus on metalanguage and paraphrase.

The emic uniqueness of words is intimately linked with the cultural history of the place, which Levisen illustrates with Bislama words for a plane and a boat, both borrowings from English. And yet, if *plen* is basically translatable as *plane*, *bot* is not translatable as *boat*, because there is a distinction between *ol turis* 'tourists' who arrive by *plen* vs. those who arrive by *bot* – and only the former boost Vanuatu's economy (124–125). In this way, the two words are not just labels for objects but tell a story of the place where they are used.

Another relevant example is the relative scarceness of Bislama emotion terms when compared with English:

> English words like *sad*, *depressed*, *anxious*, *disappointed*, *frustrated*, all without semantic counterparts in Bislama are likely to be rendered as *harem nogud* 'feel bad'. Likewise, words such as *excited*, *happy*, *satisfied*, *pleased*, and *delighted* have no equivalents, but will most likely be rendered in Bislama via *harem gud* 'feel good'. (p. 163)

Bislama discourse, explains Levisen, is emically characterized by deliberate vagueness, social orientation of discourse, and high context-dependency, which contrasts with the Anglo desire for academic precision, Western individualism, and low-context semantics. True, the more general expressions like *feel good* and *feel bad* also have a legitimate place in English usage (in fact, they are quite frequent) but speakers of English also can and do resort to the more specific options, which speakers of Bislama do not.

Knowledges. Words are knowledges, or ways of knowing, that encapsulate cultural cognitions.

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[16] As Kahn suggests, it is fair to assume that Greek philosophy as a whole became what it was as a result of its grounding in the Ancient Greek language. Interestingly, the remnants of the locative-existential singularity of *einai* can still be found in European languages, consider the English existential *there is*, Italian *c'è* and *ci sono*, or the German philosophical *dasein*.

[17] Baratin et al. discuss in detail the non-universal nature of the category of "word," stating that "it is not in fact certain that in all languages there is a signifying unit perceived as autonomous by its speakers" (1243).

Carsten Levisen takes us through a rich array of Bislama words and expressions, articulating in detail their semantics and discourse patterns. To mention just a few, those range from kinship terms (*bubu* 'ancestry,' 'grandparent,' or 'grandchild'; *brata*/*sista blo mi* 'my non-consanguineal brother/sister'), through racialized social categories (*blakman* 'black people'; *waetman* 'white people'), markers of social position and status (*bigman* 'male leader, a man of importance and authority'), to religious denominations (*ol sabat kipa* 'the Sabbath keepers,' or the Seventh Day Adventists). By diving into their linguacultural portraits, the reader becomes progressively more aware of their idiosyncrasies, but also (by way of comparison and contrast) of the equally emic Anglo concepts that through academia and scholarship have been (erroneously) eticized. In other words, if Bislama words are ways of knowing and living in Bislama, so are the English words *identity*, *communication*, *information*, *emotion*, *relevance*, *violence*, *rights*, *mind*, *country*, *land*, or *nation* ways of knowing and living in the (globalized) Anglo world. However, in order to realize that this is the case, the English speaker needs the mirror of other-than-English linguacultural semantics as a frame of reference. It is exactly that kind of reference frame that Levisen's book provides for us.

Prototypes and exemplars. By focusing on prototypicality and exemplarity, Levisen's study actualizes the cognitive linguistic model of prototype-based categorization and usage-based semantics. It seeks to "locate prototypical examples from discourse" (*Postcolonial Semantics* 9) and construct hypotheses on word meanings in this way.

However, the author's theoretical stance that "the line between prototype and stereotype is fine" (143) begs a commentary. Perhaps that line can be drawn with a somewhat thicker marker if Postcolonial Semantics were to make some use of the distinction between them proposed in Cognitive Ethnolinguistics (Bartmiński; Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, "Stereotypes"). In the latter model, stereotypes certainly exhibit prototype effects. But if prototypicality is the way categories are mentally organized with respect to centrality and membership, stereotypes are axiologically rich (positive or negative) cultural concepts that people "live by." Prototypes represent people's judgements as to "typical" exemplars, whereas stereotypes are mental representations of "true" exemplars – and the two need not coincide (see the discussion in Bartmiński 138–139). Against this backdrop, it would be instructive to compare three kinds of semantic analysis: (i) Levisen's account of *ol woman* 'women' as elaborated into *ol mama* 'women,' where *mama* means 'mother' but *ol mama* is a collective social concept that includes non-mothers along the lines of English "sisterhood" (p. 130); (ii) Lakoff's now classic radial model of the concept of "mother"; and (iii) Bartmiński's stereotype of "typical" vs. "true" mother. All three lines of inquiry, Postcolonial Semantics, Cognitive Linguistics, and Cognitive Ethnolinguistics, have a lot to gain through this kind of informed dialogue.

Linguaculture. Finally, Levisen rightly puts the notion of linguaculture in the centre of his inquiry, reminding us (with a reference to Friedrich) that "the fusion of 'language' and 'culture' into a unitary concept of 'linguaculture' solves some of the many problems surrounding 'culture' and 'language'" (17). However, I suggest that "fusion" be understood here in the terminological, rather than the ontological sense. That is, I suggest that it is better to treat linguaculture as ontologically holistic (not as something that emerges through a fusion or connection of language and culture) so that we only need to adapt our terminology (from *language-and-culture* to *linguaculture*) to give it due justice.[18]

[18] As a marginal comment, let me point out that the idea of "linguacultural worldview" that Levisen proposes in order to "bring together in one terminological phrase the entanglement of ways of speaking, living, and thinking" (222) has in fact been extensively used in Slavic ethnolinguistics for some time. In my native Polish, this is usually called *językowo-kulturowy obraz świata* (e.g. Abramowicz et al.). For more insight into relevant publications on things Slavic but in English see the English version of volume 29 of the journal *Etnolingwistyka* at https://journals.umcs.pl/et/issue/view/304/showToc; for some translational contexts see Głaz ("Languages"). Recently, inspired by the natureculture conception, I have also proposed to incorporate the rather cumbersome

One More Inspiration

Before we conclude, let me offer a very brief reaction, to be developed into an extended discussion, to one more idea from Levisen's book. It specifically concerns the semantics of place-related words but can also be taken as a more general comment on the nature of linguacultural emic understanding of reality:

> Only a radically emic approach can help us to research a semantics of understanding where keywords of place and other place-related words are accounted for in a way that is faithful to the way in which speakers themselves conceptualize place. For all elaborations of 'somewheres' are linguacultural constructs and concepts, equally imaginary and equally real. They are real insofar as they exist in speakers' discourse; they are imaginary insofar as they are the product of a shared history of world-conceiving activities. (Levisen, *Postcolonial Semantics* 54)

To address what Levisen is saying here I would like to resort to the concept of *real virtuality* (Deleuze, *Slavoj Žižek*; Žižek 3–8), not to be confused with virtual reality. If virtual reality is an "almost" reality that stands in contrast to reality or functions as a substitute for it, in real virtuality meanings are real *because* they are virtual, cultural, and symbolic. Culture is real to people: it builds a space for us to "live by" semiotic symbolism thanks to which we make sense of the reality both around and inside us.[19] One can perhaps re-read in this key Levisen's statement that "the non-consanguineal *brata* and *sista* are just as 'real' as their consanguineal counterparts" (*Postcolonial Semantics* 115) – exactly, they are real *because* they function within the culturally symbolic space of real virtuality. A convincing argumentation for this idea, however, requires much more space than this study allows – and I hope it will be pursued and developed beyond the rather preliminary stage that I present in Głaz (*Linguistic Worldview(s)* 205–207).

Conclusion

In some sense, I have tried to play the devil's advocate here by picking holes in Levisen's book, which presents a solid, coherent, and innovative approach to semantics in a postcolonial context. Many of my critical comments may be misguided or result from misinterpretation of the author's ideas. I daresay, however, that even if this is the case, no harm has been done – indeed, should the author wish to respond (perhaps in print) to my divagations and/or put me right, the discussion may fruitfully continue. After all, Carsten Levisen is an expert ethnolinguist and a seasoned fieldwork practitioner (even if he does not hold the notion of fieldwork, as usually understood, in high regard). He is also very familiar with the Bislama linguaculture through personal exposure and engagement in the Vanuatu social life. I only hope he will find the comments from someone who is not at least useful and maybe inspiring. Linguaculture, worldview, and postcolonialism are broad and complex notions – there is much to explore and discuss.

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term *linguanatureculture* into the discussion (Głaz, "How Cultural Linguistics"). Precise justification for this is yet to be developed.

[19] Let me quote Enrique Bernárdez: "language emerges through a several-thousand-year-long cooperation between people, driven by the needs and contexts of real life, and especially by that which is the most real thing in life: culture" (Bernárdez 21; trans. A.G.).

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