



Addressing God in European Languages: Different Meanings, Different Cultural Attitudes

Tuesday 19 September 2017, 5 – 6pm

Speaker

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Chair

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Location

The Nye Hughes Room

ANU Centre for European Studies
The Australian National University
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Registration required

<https://wierzbicka.eventbrite.com.au>

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Speakers of different European languages tend to address God in different ways – and consequently, they relate to God in different ways. For example, addressing God in German as “Herr” is different from addressing God in English as “Lord” or in Russian, as “Gospodi”.

Even terms of address based on the word meaning “God” carry with them different attitudes. For example, “Mon Dieu” in French is very different in tone from “My God” in English, and is used very differently.

Such words and phrases, which both reflect and shape the speakers’ habitual ways of thinking about God and talking to God, often reflect other aspects of cultural memory and historical experience. Examining the meanings

of such terms allows us to look at European societies from a new point of view, and can give us some fresh insights into their languages and cultures.

To compare meanings, however, we need a common measure. Such a common measure is available in the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), developed by the author and colleagues; see e.g. Wierzbicka 2014, *Imprisoned in English* (OUP); Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014, *Words and Meanings* (OUP); Peeters ed. 2006, *Semantic Primes and Universal Grammar: Empirical Evidence from Romance Languages* (Benjamins). This is the framework in which ways of addressing God will be examined in this talk.

Emeritus Professor Anna Wierzbicka has published over twenty books and edited or co-edited several others. Her latest book is *What Christians Believe: The Story of God and People*, published in Cracow, Poland in 2017 by Znak. Her work spans a number of disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, cognitive science, philosophy and religious studies, and linguistics, and has been published in many journals across these disciplines. Professor Wierzbicka is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, the Australian Academy of Social Sciences, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. She is the winner of the Dobrushin Prize for 2010 and the Polish Science Foundation’s 2010 prize for the humanities and social sciences.

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