Meaning

In brief

POL *Znaczenie* SPA *Significado*

abstract

Translation is broadly defined as the rendering of meaning from one language into another. A crucial issue both in translation theory and in day-to-day translation practice is the interpretation of the notion of *meaning*. This entry presents a brief survey of approaches to meaning as related to translation and relevant to issues of translational equivalence between a source language and a target language text. Approaches to linguistic meaning such as o*bjectivism, invariantism semantics,* and *cognitive approaches to semantics* are discussed, together with the culture- and language-bound conditions foregrounded in the sections devoted to the universality of semantic concepts in different theories of meaning and to translatability as a test for semantic theories. The final section emphasizes the quantitative properties of texts and their probabilistic measures, which contribute to the modeling of linguistic meanings at present.

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🗨️ **POL** *Znaczenie* **SPA** *Significado*

contents

📖 Introduction

The study of meaning has traditionally been intimately linked with philosophical and metaphysical issues, although the answers to these questions have been, for a long time now, sought in linguistics. Jaszczolt (2016: 528) proposes that

> **the interface between linguistics and philosophy has benefited both parties. For linguistics, addressing the question of the nature of meaning gave rise to increasingly more adequate semantic and pragmatic theories. For philosophy, the pursuit of meaning gave rise to new ways to address metaphysical questions.**

Meaning in translation has been subject to scrutiny for years now as it is broadly assumed that the rendering of meaning from one language into another is the essence of translation (see Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2004a, 2004b, 2015 for a more extensive discussion). This entry aims to present a brief survey of approaches to meaning as related to translation and considered of primary relevance to issues of translational relationship between a Source Language (SL) and a Target Language (TL) text.

back to top

¶₊ Basic approaches to meaning

The main approaches to meaning revolve around the question of its location. *Objectivism* is a philosophical position that assumes the validity of objective phenomena over subjective experience. *Realism* proposes that meanings exist objectively in the real-world objects, outside human minds (Barwise & Perry 1983). This can be linked with the truth-conditional hypothesis of the stability of linguistic meaning and its universality *(formal theories of invariantism semantics),* while a contrasting

approach –*subjectivism*– assumes that meaning resides within a subject who imposes it on an object.

These mutually exclusive views are mediated by a third approach that considers the origin of linguistic meaning to be located in the human subject, rooted in human mind and mediated by cognitive processes and a common bodily basis shared by all mankind. However, although in consequence of the universality of the human body affordances the basic metaphors such as MORE IS UP, LESS IS DOWN might be universal across languages (Lakoff 1987), meanings in their broad sense would also be conditioned in an interplay between the human subject and the object, which is perceived on the one hand and cognized on the other in the context of (linguistic and extralinguistic) surrounding, formed in terms of social and cultural dimensions (e.g., preferences for particular conceptual domains as the Source Domains in metaphors).

This third trend, expounded by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) and developed in Lakoff (1987) in Cognitive Linguistics is referred to as *experientialism* or *experiential realism* and may be considered a response to the objectivist tradition of (transcendental) truth (Kant 1781). Experientialism assumes that there is not one, universal view of the world external to human thought, but that individual human experience streamlined through socialization (mainly, but not only through language) provides us with a certain degree of security on what is out there by means of shared outcomes of human activity and accumulated experiences. Such a view positions this trend as a middle point between the two extremes. However, as such processes and their outcomes are shaped by culture-specific social conditions as well as by typological language constraints, cognitivists consider semantic structures not universal but culture- and language-bound patterns.

back to top

ℿ↳ Semantic primes and effability

Semantic approaches operating within the universalist assumption accept the existence of a universal system of language-independent entities *(semantic primitives/primes, universal conceptual categories* or *universal preconceptual,* or else *universal prelinguistic structures)* or the existence of *universal cognitive abilities* shared by all human beings, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. They are perceived as a common point of reference pertaining (related) to the same fragment of outside reality and sharing identical meaning. They are also used as a *tertium comparationis* for language-specific items of different types which are considered translational equivalents by bilingually competent speakers. Such a universalist stance can combine either with realistic formal-semantics approaches to meaning or with the assumptions of the necessary mediation of the mind between language and the world, which gives rise to a number of mentalistic approaches to linguistic semantics.

Such an approach to translation is also represented in studies which posit, much in the spirit of generative linguists and philosophers (Katz & Fodor 1963), the existence of universal categories in syntax, semantics opposing the "(natural) logic of experience" (Wilss 1982: 49 with reference to Grice 1967). In this universalist approach, translatability is guaranteed by definition and stems from the *effability* of natural languages, first explicitly proposed by Katz (1971, 1978):

> ***Effability Hypothesis:* "Each proposition can be expressed by some sentence in any natural language" (Katz 1978:209)**

which would bring about a direct implication as formulated by Keenan (1978: 157):

> **Exact Translation Hypothesis:** **"Anything that can be said in one natural language can be translated exactly into any other language"**

Keenan (1978: 160) modified the Exact Translation Hypothesis by what he called the Efficiency Requirement, a concession towards mentalism.

> **Efficiency Requirement: A human language must permit the communication of thoughts in a way that is reasonably efficient relative to the life span and cognitive capabilities of human beings.**

The Efficiency Requirement is an attempt on the part of formal semantics models to conform to the cognitive and interactional conditioning of social encounters (Putnam 1975, 1978b on *stereotypes*) and can be considered a concession to some form of Whorfian Linguistic Relativity (Whorf 1940). It justifies the claim that human languages are, by nature, underdetermined and, consequently, speakers do not express their thoughts exactly, making them sensitive to independent background knowledge as well as to the ultimate goal of the interaction. The speaker, to quote Sperber & Wilson (1986: 231, 233), aims at optimal relevance, not at literal truth.

<div align="right">back to top</div>

¶ Meaning and translation

The objectivist approach to meaning assumes that the relationship between man and reality is based on objective criteria and exists independently of human mind. This entails a reification that leads directly to the hypotheses that meanings are stable and universal. In such models, translation is assumed to be a transposition of a meaning from a Source Language (SL) form, locating *the same* meaning in the linguistic form of a Target Language (TL). In experientialism, on the other hand, meanings are considered dynamic and live, thus offering numerous interpretations of linguistic forms which are subject to creative interpretation, so the concept of *the 'best' translation* loses much of its clout. The dynamicity of meanings would then reside in general social and cultural contexts concerning all the participants of the translation process as well as in the *type* of text translated (e.g., a fantasy novel, legal code or a construction manual). A fantasy novel would refer to a *created imagined world*, a construction manual typically indicates phases of construction referring to real-world parts and tools, while the legal code interprets and regulates conventional norms of social relations in the outside world. And although none is subject to a *unique* semantic interpretation, the novel offers relatively more creative space for meaning leaps and transformations than the codified law or construction manual.

<div align="right">back to top</div>

¶ Speech acts and the perlocutionary effect

Translations may change the *propositional content* (Searle 1969) of utterances by cutting down, narrowing, or adding information. The information processed in this way may thus change the truth conditions of the original *propositions* in the translated version. Propositions, first known from the writings of the Stoics, and used in contemporary philosophy and logic, are generally considered to

be the objects of the attitudes and the bearers of truth (McGrath & Frank 2020). In order to bring about similar cognitive effects with the reader of the original and the reader of the translation, the changes should not affect the basic message of the original, in particular its effects, *perlocutionary* force, as defined in the speech act theory (Austin 1955; Searle 1980, 1983). Particularly complex contexts in which to observe this principle are visible in the language of literature, in figurative language, jokes, irony, etc. and in all cases where the form of an utterance prevails over or is part of its content, on the one hand, or where the literal interpretation of language would lead to incomprehensible, unacceptable, etc., outcomes (Grice 1957) on the other. What matters in such cases is not primarily the logical truth-value basis of sentences but rather an interplay of the conventional and the creative, transcending their alleged unambiguous truth or falsity. Such an interplay stands a chance to capture the true nature of the original in the act of *semiotic meaning-making* (Peirce 1931-1958, CP 5.484; Gorlée 1994: 86).

Thus, pragmatics-oriented theories of meaning are attempts to understand it in terms of a combination of the speaker's intentions and beliefs as well as regularities or conventions in the linguistic behaviour of members of the same population (Lewis 1969). The concepts of intentionality and purposiveness of a linguistic utterance find their way to the *Skopos* thory of translation (Reiss & Vermeer 1984), whose central tenet is that a translation must depend on the individual function of the translated text.

back to top

¶ Semantics/pragmatics divide

The nature and scope of semantic representation differ also with respect to the approach to place and function of semantics and pragmatics. Linguistic approaches range from the separatist semantics-pragmatics models, where the propositional form of an utterance is the domain of semantics and all non-truth-conditional factors fall into the realm of pragmatics, to non-propositionally oriented models, which make no strict distinction between semantics and pragmatics. The truth-conditional models have their place also in the linguistic theory of *relevance* (Sperber & Wilson 1986) and attempts at their application to translation theory (Gutt 1991).

Another realm of semantics is the meanings of words, i.e., lexical semantics. The distinction between different kinds of lexical meaning – meaning expressed through a composition of sets of semantic properties of words (Katz & Fodor 1964) – and meaning resulting from a combination of lexical stimuli and a cognitive environment, makes it possible to identify distinct areas characterizing word meanings. While compositional semantics (Frege 1892) contributes to portray structural regularities in so-called lexical fields (Trier 1931), in cognitively-based approaches to meaning, a distinction between conventional language semantics and contextual pragmatics is dispensed with and holistic meaning of linguistic items is represented in terms of Idealized Cognitive Models (Fillmore 1977; Lakoff 1987), which give the representation of linguistic senses in the context of cognitive knowledge frames. The latter approaches allow to incorporate not only the basic semantic layer of meaning, but also speaker/author-intended meaning in their frameworks, which is vital for the interpretation of the original text and its translation into the target language.

The notion of intended meaning, as particularly elaborated on in basically non-cognitivist approaches, involves the speaker's preference for a state of affairs to which a sentence refers.

Some of the more recent theories of truth-conditional meaning also propose more contextualist models (Recanati 2012), relying on contextual clues to infer meanings or aiming to reconcile formal approaches of truth-conditional theories of meaning (Tarski 1944) with more cognitively oriented models such as Jaszczolt's *default semantics* (2005)*.

<div align="right">back to top</div>

¶ Iconicity

The concept of *iconicity,* i.e., the purported existence of a resemblance between meaning and the form in which it is expressed, as opposed to the Saussurian arbitrariness of linguistic form (Saussure 1916), continues to be an issue in cognitive linguistics (Haiman 1980) and in linguistic theory. Cognitive linguistics assumes the presence of such a close relationship in language and discusses its numerous manifestations. For example, the functioning of the *Proximity Principle* proposed by Givón (1984: 970) "Entities that are closer together functionally, conceptually, or cognitively will be placed closer together at the code level, i.e., temporally or spatially. Functional operators will be placed closest, temporally or spatially at the code level, to the conceptual unit to which they are most relevant", is observed in the case of the Article – Noun phrases in various languages, in which articles are used in the positions directly preceding or directly following relevant nouns. Although there are doubts voiced with regard to the existence of exceptionless form-meaning iconicity as e.g., with respect to iconicity of quantity, iconicity of complexity or iconicity of cohesion, accounted for rather in terms of frequencies of occurrences of particular forms as in Haspelmath (2008, 2020), this relationship is vital for translation practice, both in the case of a science paper and literary texts, most notably poetry, where both the sound and form are considered cognitively and aesthetically meaningful.

<div align="right">back to top</div>

¶ Translatability as a test for theories of meaning

The thesis of the indeterminacy of translation can be defended on philosophical, systemic, or conceptual grounds. Either languages of the world have such disparate systems that they do not fit one another, or human conceptual categories are so diverse that they cannot be 'calibrated', or else a foreign speaker can never be certain about the correspondences between the native interlocutor's and his/her own interpretations of the perceived reality, if we accept that perception is entirely mediated by language. Quine's celebrated thesis of the *indeterminacy of translation* is an instance of such scepticism. To demonstrate it, Quine (1964: 460-461) gives an example of *radical translation*, based entirely on perceptual observations with no prior knowledge of the target language, in the context of translation of the language of an unknown people. No sentence or phrase in such cases, Quine claims, such as the expression *gavagai* in the unknown language, uttered upon seeing a rabbit running, can be faithfully rendered with any degree of certainty. Davidson (1984) generalizes Quine's notion of *radical translation* to that of *radical interpretation* applicable also within the same language and proposes the solution posed by the radical interpretation problem through an appeal to Tarski's (1944) definition of *truth* as extended to natural language.

Conceptual indeterminacy, rooted in the lack of discrete boundaries between the categories, cuts the outer reality in a non-universalist mode. Although Eugene Nida, a proponent of the full

translatability hypothesis as in "Anything that can be said in one language, can be said in another unless the form is an essential part of the message" (Nida & Taber 1969: 4), is sympathetic to the semantic universalist assumptions about the existence of (prelinguistic) universal meanings components and possibly a common (propositional) basis (Nida 1975), he practically demonstrates that such meanings are realized in one language differently than in another. Nida's *dynamic equivalence* (1964) then paved the way to looking for (dynamic) language-specific meaning correspondences across language systems.

back to top

¶ Cognitivist turn, translation and understanding

Translation, as is the case with Quine's *gavagai,* has always been one of the major tests for any version of the Whorfian relativity hypothesis (1940). However, the impossibility of translation and the (im)possibility of understanding a text or an utterance are two different things. Lakoff (1987) argues that even if translation is impossible, it does not follow that understanding is impossible. Understanding is an ability to conceptualize on the basis of verbal and nonverbal clues and to match these conceptualizations to the person's own experience. Translation involves one additional dimension – it requires matching these mental products to expressions of the TL. Understanding of SL and TL texts does not necessarily entail the ability to translate.

The SL text does not have to be, and most frequently is not, in a one-to-one correspondence with the TL text. The semantic content of SL concepts may partly overlap with that of TL in translations and, as a rule, the lexical forms have wider or narrower content than the original ones. In the case of TL conceptual or lexical gaps, to achieve a similar effect translators look for comparable concepts from domains different than in the original or look for ideas in *clusters of meanings* in a similar conceptual domain.

Cognitive universals

Realist theorists of language (Katz 1981) postulate propositional universals in the form of universal semantic structures. Most cognitively oriented linguists, however, assume non-propositional prelinguistic image-schematic representations, basic level categories, and prototypical structures (Rosch 1975; Lakoff 1987) to function as *tertia comparationis* in cross-language comparisons, shaped and developed by the human cognitive system via universal mental processes, such as metaphor and metonymy. Prelinguistic or possibly preconceptual image-schemas are the first sensorimotor representations that develop in the new-born infants. They serve as the basis for the development of more complex representations and function as the 'anchoring point' or a cognitive *tertium comparationis* between pairs of languages. Image-schemas are structures which organize all our experience into concepts of physical and natural kinds, as well as abstract or mixed concepts. Both our cognition and abstract reasoning are taken to be rooted, embodied, in our physical bodily experience. Conceptualizations of abstract objects and conceptualizations of phenomena, not accessible to direct perception (emotions, sensations), even when physically or physiologically grounded, would be based on directly accessible meanings and construed by conceptualizing the less well known object or phenomenon in terms of better known ones via *metaphoric* links.

Mental models are structures based on image schemas and can have a dual character. One type of cognitive models are based on the decompositional or 'building-block' structure, familiar from the

classical theories of compositional meaning, in which '[t]he meaning of an expression is a function of the meanings of its parts and of the way they are syntactically combined" (Partee 1984: 153). The other kind are *Gestalt* structures, in which elements do not exist as independent units and whose meaning is not a function of the meanings of the parts. Lakoff (1987:284) gives an example of the CONTAINER schema, whose parts such as an INTERIOR, EXTERIOR, and BOUNDARY, do not exist independently of the CONTAINER schema.

Commensurability and translation

Semantic universals are those aspects of meaning that are represented in all human languages. In some language models they are often referred to as *semantic and lexical primitives* (*primes)* as they are considered non-decomposable into smaller meaning units (e.g., Wierzbicka 1972). In cognitive linguistic models they tend not to be of a strictly linguistic nature, but involve a more basic cognitive origin. Besides, languages vary and to render an SL message in a TL presupposes not only a *tertium comparationis* but also, in many cases, consideration of the roots and paths of linguistic diversification. For example, to appreciate the sense of the Biblical *Amen* and its distinct translations into national languages, e.g., Eng. *Verily* or *Truly*, the knowledge of its basic *semantic* and *lexical primitives (primes)* meaning derived from the Semitic root *firm*, *fixed*, *true* might be helpful. An interesting interlinguistic shift can be observed in the etymology of Proto-Slavic *věra* (Pol. *wiara* 'faith. belief', Russian *Bépa* ''= *Véra,* 'faith') from Proto-Indo-European *weh_1ros* in the sense of 'true', whence English verity, and historically, *very*, are derived. Differences between human conceptual systems and structures prove to be more varied from a typological point of view than those observed by Whorf (1940). Linguistic systems correspond to one another in different degrees. Their commensurability is dynamic.

Lakoff (1987) proposes four kinds of commensurability criteria: (1) truth-conditional criteria (classical translatability), (2) criteria of use, (3) framing criteria, (4) conceptual organization criteria. According to the truth criterion, the language user should be able to provide systematic rules for computing the truth conditions of a sentence by assigning a reference and a truth value to elements of the sentence in a Source Language and state whether they are identical to a construction considered equivalent in the Target Language. The criterion of use involves a distributional range of language elements, which is used to contrast degrees of equivalence. The framing criterion combines the linguistic knowledge with the knowledge of the outside world and imposes an object or event schemata on a particular language unit, which regulate a top-down perspective on individual meanings. Finally, the conceptual organizational criterion regulates the perspective of an object within a given category (polysemy, conceptual and lexical gaps in culture-specific terminology, division of superordinate categories into subcategorization patterns, etc.).

Two language systems which would be identical with respect to all of Lakoff's commensurability criteria, which is rather unlikely in the actual world, would be optimally commensurable. Systems which are only partly 'calibrated', a typical cross-language situation, are commensurable in different degrees and the translator's task is to ease or bridge the incommensurability between the two systems. The languages that would have none of the criteria satisfied, are incommensurable to the highest degree, and again present rather an extreme case, this time of the *gavagai* type.

The commensurability criteria involve the *content of a linguistic unit* but are also relevant to *constructional properties* which profile the meaning. They also express, e.g., *force dynamics* (Talmy

1988), which describes the ways entities interact in an event, and various processes of meaning-making such as *metaphorization* (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), a human universal cognitive ability which may serve as one of the frames of reference in looking for language similarities and contrasts.

Meaning equivalence – Meaning resemblance

The translator aims to achieve the closest resemblance in meaning between the SL verbal stimulus and the TL realization. Cases where the priority is not the meaning but the *way* the message was expressed include the 'phonemic translation' of poetry (Lefevere 1975). Faithfulness in semantic representation may be disregarded in favour of other factors such as constraints resulting from rhymes, puns or other kinds of wordplay (Gutt 1991:131). The constraints may also involve the lack of acceptability for ideological or genre-conventional reasons

Fig. 1. Thesaurus synonymy networks of Eng. offensive *and* insulting. Source Sketch Engine.

or cultural opacity or a substantial change of *skopos* or purpose, determined by a number of factors such as the target audience, cultural constraints, among others.
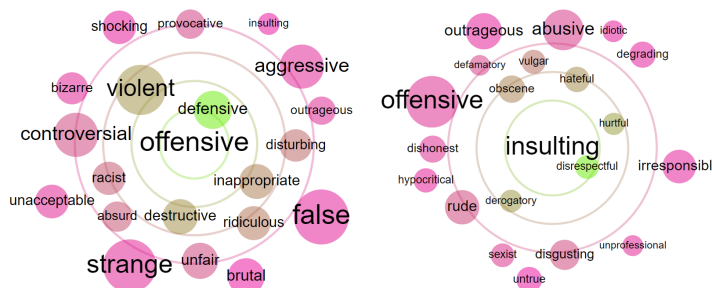
In fully objectivist realist theories, meaning equivalence across languages is presupposed. In contemporary cognitive terms, understood broadly and including also cognitive pragmatic approaches such as the Relevance Theory, equivalence is replaced by resemblance (Gutt 1991). It is considered graded and in some extreme cases - almost entirely losing the property of resemblance (Krzeszowski 2016).
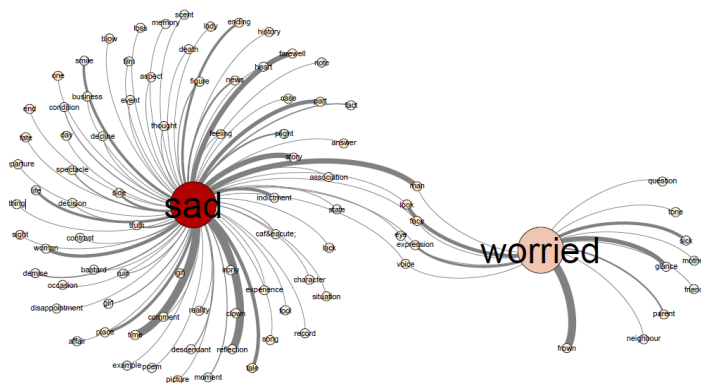

Fig. 2. Noun collocates of Eng. sad *vs* worried

Translation then can be considered to imply informed choices by translators from relevant *spaces of meaning*, or *networks of (partially) semantically overlapping concepts* e.g., when SL Eng. *fear* is translated into Polish not only as its direct lexicographic equivalent *strach* or even a selection of conceptual clusters from the same conceptual domain such as *obawa* 'apprehension', *niepokój* 'anxiety', *panika* 'panic', but also, as e.g., an implicational concept of *fear* such as *tchórzostwo*

'cowardice' (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2013, 2016, 2020). In some interesting sense then, contemporary interpretations of equivalence may share some common properties with Wittgenstein's *family resemblance* (1956) notion and Lakoff's *radial category* concept (1987) but at the same time, as in the case of synonymy networks (Fig. 1: *offensive/insulting* (*Sketch Engine* above; Fig. 2. of Eng. *sad* contrasted with *worried* Noun collocates (Pęzik 2014)), they can extend towards more and more distant cognitive semantic-pragmatic territories.

Reconceptualization theory of translation

Cognitive linguists argue for the universality of basic human abilities and experiences. Propositional universals, characteristic of the formal semantic approach are replaced in cognitive models by universal properties and processes of the human mind. Although for millennia, meaning in language and in translation has been studied by means of sums of meanings of individual lexical items, cognitive linguistics considers meanings not to be fully determinate in terms of separate units. They rather form clusters which can undergo processes of blending. They are *dynamic conceptualizations*, which are controlled by a system of *imagery* categories (Langacker 1987, 1991) and processes such as *objectification and subjectification*. Lexical meanings are *stimulators* (Seuren 1985), responsible for concept activation to different depth and range. They also encourage conceptual shifting, modify or defeat old and create new concepts in familiar or new mental spaces (Fauconnier & Turner 1998).

Translation involves a number of cycles of *reconceptualization* of an original SL message, expressed eventually in the TL (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2010). What translators do is to transduce or transform the mental SL model they develop on hearing or reading the SL text into one in the TL, which they consider most commensurable to the original, and suitable to the TL audience and, at the same time, most faithful, to the best of the translator's knowledge and professional expertise, to the original, intended meaning of the message. Meaning, in all the cycles, is constructed with the flow of discourse. Reconceptualization is not only possible but unavoidable in translation, as it is dictated partly by new construal parameters in the TL form, different context (author/speaker – i.e., translator, time, place, addressee – TL audience), but also brought about by subjective preferences of the translator in picking up or devising particular target language forms, which, however, do not profile the same entities.

As linguistic meanings are structured in terms of interrelated networks (Langacker 1987, 1991; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2007), meaning reconceptualization is brought about by the processes of *meaning displacement* (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1996), even in specialized languages and *terminology*, i.e., the body of words used in a particular research field, in a technical application in a profession, etc., as e.g., in the concepts of *law* and *legislation* in different cultures. This process epitomizes the subsequent movement away from the original meaning in a Source Language (SL) as each of the turns and each of the new lexicalized items in either language introduces a meaning displaced with reference to the original, not only with its own core semantic content but also with a range of (new, item-specific) connotational, interactional, affective, etc., attributes. Such displacement shifts, though, are not exclusively conditioned by the translator's intended *strategies,* they are rather insinuated or *imposed* by the Target Language (TL) categorization in terms of lexical or, in other cases, grammatical systems.

The process of displacement shows the absence of full synonymity in a language and the impossibility of full equivalence across different languages and underlies all reconceptualization cycles in language. Displacement of senses is clearly seen when one item in a SL has a cluster of equivalent items in a TL, all of which have their equivalents in the SL, semantically displaced – to varying degrees – when contrasted with the original lexical unit as exemplified in the Polish equivalents to Eng. *fear* presented above. The study of meaning in translation then involves a cognitive analysis of the processes of inter-linguistic meaning displacement, semantic (and cultural) approximation and reconceptualization operations in the TL as contrasted with the SL.

¶ Multimodality and translation

Multimodality, in the context of translation and interpreting studies, aims to investigate other kinds of meaning-making resources in communicative contexts, in addition to verbal messages. The contribution of such non-verbal semiotic codes to meaning creation and its re-creation in translation and interpreting involves both visual and aural signs in written and spoken language, images, music, voices or audio-visual materials. Apart from those signals, the semiotic system accommodates movement, gestures or gaze, as well as a holistic perception of behaviour, of the characters presented or described and - above all – of the interpreters themselves. The reconceptualization of such semiotic signs into semantic and pragmatic elements of implicit verbal messages such as e.g., metaphor, implicature, humour, etc., is another key focus in multimodal translation processes.

¶ Cluster equivalents and quantitative dimensions

The introduction of computers and large collections of language data in digital format –i.e., computerized language corpora, monolingual and parallel, made it possible to uncover cross-linguistic similarities and contrasts more easily and in large numbers (Sager 1986; Oakes & Meng 2012). It is now more evident that communication between a message sender and a receiver, either in the case of the same language or a translation, does not engage the use of identical *single* meanings but is based rather on semantic *clusters* (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1999), or mental areas, structured around *similar content*. *Similarity* is determined by a multi-peaked radial category space with a number of *tertia comparationis,* or points of reference, which serve as similarity conditioning parameters and can be considered, after Gärdenfors (2000), in terms of topological spaces as a mapping of physical distance on a cline between the speaker's and addressee's conceptual spaces, containing objects, relations and events.

Meaning similarities and differences can now be subjected to scrutiny in terms of a large group of, mostly corpus-based, parameters, *quantitative linguistic criteria*, that involve the following features (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2012):

1. frequencies of use of particular linguistic items in general language, and use of linguistic varieties and contexts;
2. quantitative distributional facts (collocations);
3. sentence length;
4. type/token ratio;
5. lexical density (low frequency-high frequency);
6. naturalness (frequency and contextual preferences).

Frequencies are quantitative data and in general language use they are often obtained by looking at the frequency ranks in large language corpora. Quantitative distributional facts related to contextual factors can provide new insights into contrastive language studies and open up new prospects in translation theory and practice. The frequency characteristics will also illuminate a qualitative factor with respect to the examined data, namely, the degree of *naturalness* associated with individual constructions. John Sinclair (1983) gives the example Eng. *Prince Charles is now a husband* as an

instance of low idiomaticity, low neutrality and high isolation, cumulated in the low naturalness of the sentence. Thus the concept of *naturalness* is understood as a system of the speaker's/writer's preferences of the use of a language unit, which is expressed via the frequency of its occurrence not in general language but in a specific, well-defined type of context (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2001: 178). A more natural unit/structure then will be the one used more frequently in a given context. The research task involving a *cross-linguistic comparison* is thus built around identifying similarity as *a dynamic notion,* represented as a cline exhibiting a gradual increase in diversification. The *degree of equivalence* between SL and TL structures can thus be measured in terms of the reference categories mentioned above, such as the typology of the category of *naturalness,* as well as categorization levels, prototypicality, image-schemata and their extensions, profiling and construal relations of various types.

Corpus linguistics aims to build large collections of language texts accessible in computer readable form and develop tools for their analysis. Piles of linguistic data unavailable before and ready to analyse at present contribute to a new outlook on meanings. They help discover their instability and dynamics and may be considered "an important framework for the study of the unstable and disputed nature of meaning" (Koteyko 2006: 11). More extensive uses of the quantitative turn in meaning and translation are connected with *deep learning* (Monroe 2017), statistically advanced neural network techniques, and the identification of reconceptualization variance as observed in the *localization* practice. The progress is afforded by improvements in hardware, the availability of massive amounts of data, domain ontologies, neural networks, and algorithmic upgrades.

<div align="right">

back to top

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⅏ Conclusions – The communicative turn

Language users structure reality and their experience in a number of ways. The differences are partly dependent on the culture in which they live (Sharifian 2017) and the language code they use. Hence they may be considered shared, transmitted from the older to the younger generation and kept repeated, i.e., *conventional*. In another part, the structuring of reality is constrained by discourse and context and, finally, it is subjective, depending on the speaker's own choices and preferences. This portrayal of a content the speaker conveys through language and communicates to others is their own *construal of the world* (Langacker 1987: 487-488), partly shared, partly subjective. Langacker proposes that the fundamental assumption of this approach is that the meaning of any linguistic unit is not an *objective structure of a conceived situation*, its conceptual content alone, but resides also in the way the content is construed and portrayed.

Two or more languages and their respective users perceive and structure the world in the particular culture and language-specific ways, so it comes as no surprise that the picture that evolves from descriptions of otherwise possibly identical scenes or events is typically different in different languages. Commensurability criteria make it possible to contrast languages and their meanings according to particular frames of reference. Language systems are partly commensurable, which constitutes a typical cross-linguistic situation and represent distinct *approximation* types which have their expression in the *content of a linguistic unit* but are also captured by relevant *constructional properties* which profile the meaning.

The search for the properties which would anchor down a cross-linguistic comparison is curbed by the fact that there is not much to be found in the world languages that could be considered substantially identical across a range of languages. Rather, what is observed is a contrastive skeleton, or frame, in which certain properties can be considered constant. What can be predominantly identified are *cognitive tertia comparationis* on the one hand and *structure-related universals* of different types on the other. Cognitive *tertia comparationis* in comparing languages involve a number of human cognitive abilities - analogy, abstraction, metaphorization, etc., as well as possibly their combinations. Nevertheless, not all phenomena claimed to be universal have proven to be so. E.g., Chomsky's renowned *recursion* properties of language, claimed universal (Hauser, Chomsky & Fitch 2002), have been questioned by Dan Everett in the *Pirahã* language of the Amazon, who argues rather for the mental location of recursion in the human being (Everett 2005).

The basic cognitive parameter subsumed under the human capacity of analogy and abstraction belongs to the ability of *categorizing objects* and phenomena and its main attributes, such as the representation in terms of basic image schemas, schematic category structures, comprising prototypical and peripheral category members, combined into larger idealized cognitive models, culturally and contextually bound (Lakoff 1987; Sharifian 2017) and, last but not least, in terms of the inventory of *pragmatic* and *interactional effects*. In other words, translation is not, or is not solely, a single word matter. It rather involves a whole *communicative event* which, to quote Pym (2016: 418) involves "both written and spoken language, cross-cultural mediation (in medical encounters, for example), localization (notably of software and websites) and machine translation (especially the systems based on statistics)."

Semantics, broadly speaking, is not restricted to narrowly conceived linguistic meanings. It involves both semasiological and onomasiological dimensions, reflecting meaning structures in language and their links with the external world (Grondelaers & Geeraerts 2003). Moving further, it is not restricted to formal meanings alone either. Contemporary cognitive cultural theories rely both on conceptual models of individuals, objects, and events, in their immediate linguistic contexts, as well as on their cultural and social embedding, but also on ways in which meanings are constructed. Meanings are then dynamic entities, which do possess their culture-specific cognitive core and regularities over shared prototypical and radial structures, but whose content is flexible and subject to discourse modifications. Therefore, a translation task is a series of constant processes of cognitive and cultural reconceptualization, in search of an effective cognitive stimulus conveyed in terms of symbolic units of language.

back to top

🗒 Research potential

The entry presents a survey of approaches to meaning and its most relevant issues from basic philosophical positions and discusses formal and cognitive semantics, pragmatics, speech act theory, and corpus linguistics, as related to translation studies. Cognitive studies supported by cultural data and quantitative corpus methodology in full semiotic contexts are considered a promising avenue in translation studies research.

back to top

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