

# Lecture 1 LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION. LANGUAGE SYSTEM AND WORLD

## PLAN

1. Language and extralinguistic world.
2. Language system: paradigms and syntagmas.
3. Language as a means of communication.

### Language and extralinguistic world

It is worthwhile to begin lectures on translation with a short introduction to the phenomenon of language, since not knowing the relationship between language and extralinguistic world one can hardly properly understand translation.

The relation of language to the extralinguistic world involves three basic sets of elements: *language signs*, *mental concepts* and parts of the extralinguistic world (not necessarily material or physically really existing) which are usually called *denotata*.

The *language sign* is a sequence of sounds (in spoken language) or symbols (in written language) which is associated with a single concept in the minds of speakers of that or another language.

The signs of language are associated with particular mental concepts only in the minds of the speakers of this language. Thus, *vrouw*, *Frau*, *femeie*, *kobieta* are the language signs related to the concept of *a woman* in Dutch, German, Romanian and Polish, respectively. It is important to note that one can relate these signs to the concept of *a woman* if and only if he or she is a speaker of the relevant language or knows these words.

Language signs are a kind of construction elements of which a language is built. The *mental concept* is an array of mental images and associations related to a particular part of the extralinguistic world (both really existing and imaginary), on the one hand, and connected with a particular language sign, on the other.

The relationship between a language sign and a concept is ambiguous: it is often different even in the minds of different people, speaking the same language, though it has much in common and, hence, is recognizable by all the members of the language speakers' community.

The relationship between similar concepts and their relevant language signs may be different also in different languages. This difference may explain many of the translation difficulties.

The **mental concept of a word** (and word-combination) usually consists of *lexical meanings*, *connotations*, *associations* and *grammatical meanings*. The lexical meanings, connotations and associations relate a word to the extralinguistic world, whereas the grammatical meanings relate it to the system of language.

Thus, a **lexical meaning** is the general mental concept corresponding to a word or a combination of words.

A **connotation** is an additional, contrastive value of the basic usually designative function of the lexical meaning. As an example, let us compare the words *to die* and *to peg out*. It is easily to note that the former has no connotation, whereas the latter has a definite connotation of vulgarity.

An **association** is a more or less regular connection between the given and other mental concepts in the minds of the language speakers. As an evident example, one may choose *red* which is usually associated with *revolution*, *communism* and the like. The relatively regular set of associations is sometimes different in different languages. This fact might affect the choice of translation equivalents.

The most important fact, however, to be always born in mind in translation is that the relation between words (language signs) and parts of the extralinguistic world (denotata) is only indirect and going through the mental concepts.

The concepts being strongly subjective and largely different in different languages for similar denotata give rise to one of the most difficult problem of **ambiguity of translation equivalents**.

Another source of translation ambiguity is the **polysemantic nature of the language signs**: the relationship between the signs and concepts is very seldom one-to-one, most frequently it is one-to-many or many-to-one, i.e. one word has several meanings or several words have similar meanings. These relations are called **polysemy (homonymy)** and **synonymy**, accordingly.

The peculiarities of conceptual fragmentation of the world by the language speakers are manifested by the **range of application of the lexical meanings** (reflected in limitations in the combination of words and stylistic peculiarities). This is yet another problem having direct relation to translation – *a translator is to observe the compatibility rules of the language signs* (e.g. **make mistakes**, but **do business**).

The relationship of language signs with the well-organized material world and mostly logically arranged mental images suggests that a language is an orderly system rather than a disarray of random objects. The language system and its basic rules are the subject of the next item.

## **2. Language system: paradigms and syntagmas**

There is a system underlying seemingly random sign of a language. One may note, for instance, that not all the words are compatible with each other; their range of application has certain limitations, and through their lexical meanings and associations they may be united into individual groups.

For example, to take an extreme case, in English speech one will never find two articles in a row or in an official obituary an English speaker will never say that *the minister pegged out*. An evident example of grouping by meaning and association

gives the group of *colors* in which even a little child will easily include *black, red, blue, etc.*

Thus, there is some order organizing hundreds of thousands of words making it easier to memorize and properly use them in speech. This order is called the *system of a language*. Any system is an organized set of objects and relations between them, but before discussing objects and relations in the system of a language it is worthwhile to describe the traditional approach to language system descriptions.

In any language system two general planes are usually distinguished: the **formal** plane, comprising spoken or written language signs (words and word combinations as well as minor elements, morphemes) and the **semantic**, comprising mental concepts (meanings) the language signs stand for.

A language system is traditionally divided into three basic levels: **morphological** (including morphs and morphemes as objects), **lexical** (including words as objects) and **syntactic** (comprising such objects as elements of the sentence syntax such as Subject, Predicate, etc.).

For example, *-tion, -sion* are the English word-building morphemes and belong to objects of the morphological level, *book, student, desk* as well as any other word belong to objects of the lexical level, and the same words (nouns) *book, student, desk* in a sentence may become Subjects or Objects and thus belong to the set of syntactic level objects of the language.

At each language level its objects may be grouped according to their meaning or function. Such groups are called **paradigms**.

For example, the English morphemes *s* and *es* enter the paradigm of Number (Plural). Words *spring, summer, autumn* and *winter* enter the lexico-semantic paradigm of *seasons*. All verbs may be grouped into the syntactic (functional) paradigm of Predicates.

One may note that one and the same word may belong to different levels and different paradigms, i.e. *the language paradigms are fuzzy sets with common elements*. As an example, consider the lexico-semantic paradigm of *colors* the elements of which (*black, white, etc.*) also belong to the syntactic paradigms of Attributes and Nouns.

It's worth mentioning that *the elements of language paradigms are united and organized according to their potential roles in speech (text) formation*. These roles are called **valences**. Thus, words *black, white, red, etc.* have a potential to define colors of the objects (**semantic valence**) and a potential capacity to serve as Attributes in a sentence (**syntactic valence**).

The paradigms of the language brought together form the **system of the language** which may be regarded as a kind of construction material to build sentences and texts. **Language paradigms** are *virtual* elements of the language which are activated in syntactically interdependent groups of sentence elements called **syntagmas**.

In simple language a syntagma is a pair of words connected by the master-servant relationship (This is an approach typical of Immediate Constituent (IC) Grammar).

The following paradigms were used to form these sentences and the following paradigm elements were activated in syntagmas during their formation:

Thus, a language may be regarded as a specific code intended for information exchange between its users. Indeed, *any language resembles a code being a system of interrelated material signs (sounds or letters), various combinations of which stand for various **messages***. Language grammars and dictionaries may be considered as a kind of Code Books, indicating both the meaningful combinations of signs for a particular language and their meanings.

The process of language communication involves sending a message by a **message sender** to a **message recipient** – the sender encodes his mental message into the code of a particular language and the recipient decodes it using the same code (language).

The communication variety with one common language is called the **monolingual communication**.

If, however, the communication process involves two languages (codes) this variety is called the **bilingual communication**.

Bilingual communication is a rather typical occurrence in countries with two languages in use (e.g. in Ukraine or Canada). In Ukraine one may rather often observe a conversation where one speaker speaks Ukrainian and another one speaks Russian. The peculiarity of this communication type lies in the fact that decoding and encoding of mental messages is performed simultaneously in two different codes. For example, in a Ukrainian-Russian pair one speaker encodes his message in Ukrainian and decodes the message he received in Russian.

Translation is a **specific type of bilingual communication** since (as opposed to bilingual communication proper) it obligatory involves a third actor (translator) and for the message sender and recipient the communication is, in fact, monolingual.

Thus, a language is a code used by language speakers for communication. However, a language is a specific code unlike any other and its peculiarity as a code lies in its ambiguity – *as opposed to a code proper a language produces originally ambiguous messages which are specified against **context, situation and background information***.

Let us take an example. Let the original message in English be an instruction or order *Book!* It is evidently ambiguous having at least two grammatical meanings (a noun and a verb) and many lexical ones (e.g., *the Bible, a code, a book*, etc. as a noun) but one will easily and without any doubt understand this message:

1. as *Book tickets* in a *situation* involving reservation of tickets or

2. as *Give that book!* in a *situation* involving sudden and urgent necessity to be given the book in question.

So, one of the means clarifying the meaning of ambiguous messages is the fragment of the real world that surrounds the speaker which is usually called extralinguistic situation.

Another possibility to clarify the meaning of the word *book* is provided by the *context* which may be as short as one more word *a (a book)* or several words (e.g., *the book I gave you*).

In simple words *a context may be defined as a length of speech (text) necessary to clarify the meaning of a given word.*

The ambiguity of a language makes it necessary to use situation and context to properly generate and understand a message (i.e. encode and decode it). Since translation according to communicational approach is decoding and encoding in two languages the significance of situation and context for translation cannot be overestimated.

There is another factor also to be taken into account in communication and, naturally, in translation. This factor is background information, i.e. general awareness of the subject of communication.

To take an example the word combination *Electoral College* will mean unless one is aware of the presidential election system in the USA.

Apart from being a code strongly dependent on the context, situation and background information a language is also a code of codes. There are codes within codes in specific areas of communication (scientific, technical, military, etc.) and so called sub-languages (of professional, age groups, etc.). This applies mostly to specific vocabulary used by these groups though there are differences in grammar rules as well.

As example of the elements of such in-house languages one may take words and word combinations from financial sphere (*chart of accounts, value added, listing*), diplomatic practice (*credentials, charge d'affaires, framework agreement*) or legal language (*bail, disbar, plaintiff*).

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