**Semantic fields and lexical sets -the segmentation of experience**

The words of a language often reflect not so much the reality of the world, but the interests of the people who speak it.

(Palmer 1976:21)

It’s sometimes useful to view the vocabulary of a language as a set of words that refer to a series of conceptual fields. These fields reflect the divisions and subdivisions 'imposed' by a give. In linguistics, the divisions are called linguistic community on the continuum of experience. Semantic fields. Fields are abstract concept. An example of a semantic field would be the field of SPEECH, or PLANTS or VEHICLES. A large number of **semantic fields** are common to all or most languages. Most, if not all, languages will have fields of DISTANCE, SIZE, SHAPE, TIME, EMOTION, BELIEFS, ACADEMIC SUBJECTS and NATURAL PHENOMENA. The actual words and expressions sets. Each semantic field will normally have several sub-divisions or **lexical** sets under it, and each sub-division will have further sub-divisions and lexical sets. So, the field of SPEECH in English has a sub-division of VERBS OF SPEECH which includes general verbs such as speak and say and more specific ones such as mumble, murmur, mutter and whisper. It seems reasonable to suggest that the more detailed a semantic field is in a given language, the more different it is likely to be from related semantic fields in other languages. There generally tends to be more agreement among languages on the larger headings of semantic fields and less agreement as the sub-fields become more finely differentiated. Most languages are likely to have equivalents for the more general verbs of speech such as say and speak, but many may not have equivalents for the more specific ones. Languages understandably tend to make only those distinctions in meaning which are relevant to their particular environment, be it physical, historical, political, religious, cultural, economic, legal, technological, social or otherwise under each field are sometimes called lexical Before we discuss how an understanding of the nature and organization of semantic fields might be useful in translation, let me first spell out the limitations of semantic fields as a concept. The idea of semantic fields is inapplicable in many cases and is an over-simplification of the way language actually works. A large number of words in any language defy being classified under any heading (Carter and McCarthy 1988, Lehrer 1974). Words like just, nevertheless and only, to name but a few, cannot be easily filed under any particular semantic field. The idea of semantic fields works well enough for words and expressions which have fairly well-defined propositional meanings, but not for all or even most of the words and expressions in a language. Limitations aside, there are two main areas in which an understanding of semantic fields and lexical sets can be useful to a translator:

(a) appreciating the 'value' that a word has in a given system, and

(b) Developing strategies for dealing with non-equivalence.