**MEANING**

**Propositional vs expressive meaning**

The **propositional meaning** of a word or an utterance arises from the relation between it and what it refers to or describes in a real or imaginary world, as conceived by the speakers of the particular language to which the word or utterance belongs. It is this type of meaning that provides the basis on which we can judge an utterance as true or false. For instance, the propositional meaning of shirt is 'a piece of clothing worn on the

upper part of the body'. It would be inaccurate to use shirt, under normal circumstances, to refer to a piece of clothing worn on the foot, such as socks. When a translation is described as 'inaccurate', it is often the propositional meaning that is being called into question.

**Expressive meaning** cannot be judged as true or false. This is because expressive meaning relates to the speaker's feelings or attitude rather than to what words and utterances refer to. The difference between Don't complain and Don't whinge does not lie in their propositional meanings but in the expressiveness of whinge, which suggests that the speaker finds the action annoying. Two or more words or utterances can therefore have the same propositional meaning but differ in their expressive meanings. This is true not only of words and utterances within the same language, where such words are often referred to as synonyms or near- synonyms, but also for words and utterances from different languages. The difference between famous in English and famous in French does not lie in their respective propositional meanings; both items basically mean 'well-known'. It lies in their expressive meanings. Famous is (normally) neutral in English: it has no inherent evaluative meaning or connotation. Fameux, on the other hand, is potentially evaluative and can be readily used in some contexts in a derogatory way (for example, une femme fameuse means, roughly, 'a woman of ill repute').

It is worth noting that differences between words in the area of expressive meaning are not simply a matter of whether an expression of a certain attitude or evaluation is inherently present or absent in the words in question. The same attitude or evaluation may be expressed in two words or utterances in widely differing degrees of forcefulness. Both unkind and cruel, for instance, are inherently expressive, showing the speaker's disapproval of someone's attitude. However, the element of disapproval in cruel is stronger than it is in unkind.

The meaning of a word or lexical unit can be both propositional and expressive as in whinge, propositional only, as in book, or expressive only, for example bloody and various other swear words and emphasizers. Words which contribute solely to expressive meaning can be removed from an utterance without affecting its information content. Consider, for instance, the word simply in the following text:

Whilst it stimulates your love of action, the MG also cares for your comfort. Hugging you on the bends with sports seats. Spoiling you with luxuries such as electric door mirrors, tinted glass and central locking. And entertaining you with a great music system as well as a simply masterful performance.

(Today’s Cars, Austin Rover brochure; my emphasis)

There are many highly expressive items in the above extract, but the word simply in the last sentence has a totally expressive function. Removing it would not alter the information content of the message but would, of course, tone its forcefulness down considerably.

**Presupposed meaning**

Presupposed meaning arises from co-occurrence restrictions, that is restrictions on  
what other words or expressions we expect to see before or after a particular lexical  
unit. These restrictions are of two types:

**1. Selectional restrictions:** these are a function of the propositional meaning of a word. We expect a human subject for the adjective studious and an inanimate one for geometrical. Selectional restrictions are deliberately violated in the case figurative language but are otherwise strictly observed.

**2. Collocational restrictions:** these are semantically arbitrary restrictions which do not follow logically from the propositional meaning of a word. For instance, laws are broken in English, but in Arabic they are contradicted'. In English, teeth are brushed, but in German and Italian they are 'polished', in Polish they are 'washed and in Russian they are 'cleaned'. Because they are arbitrary, collocations tend to show more variation across languages than do selectional restrictions. They are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, section 3.1.

The difference between selectional and collocational restrictions is not always as clear cut as the examples given above might imply. For example, in the following English translation of a German leaflet which accompanies Baumler products (men'ssuits), it is difficult to decide whether the awkwardness of the wording is a result of violating selectional or collocational restrictions:  
 Dear Sir  
 I am very pleased that you have selected one of our garments. You have  
 made a wise choice, as suits, jackets and trousers eminating from our  
 Company are amongst the finest products Europe has to offer.

Ideas, qualities and feelings typically emanate (misspelt as eminate in the above text) from a source, but objects such as trousers and jackets do not, at least not in English. The awkwardness of the wording can be explained in terms of selectional or collocational restrictions, depending on whether or not one sees the restriction involved as a function of the propositional meaning of emanate.

**Evoked meaning**

Evoked meaning arises from **dialect** and **register** variation. A **dialect** is a variety of language which has currency within a specific community or group of speakers it may be classified on one of the following bases:

1. Geographical (e.g. a Scottish dialect, or American as opposed to British English: cf. the difference between lift and elevator);

2. Temporal (e.g. words and structures used by members of different age groups  
 within a community, or words used at different periods in the history of  
 language: cf: verily and really);

3. Social (words and structures used by members of different social classes: cf.  
 scent and perfume, napkin and serviette).

**Register** is a variety of language that a language user considers appropriate to a  
specific situation. Register variation arises from variations along the following parameters:

1. **Field** of discourse: this is an abstract term for ‘what is going on’ that is relevant to the speaker's choice of linguistic items. Different linguistic choices are made by different speakers depending on what kind of action other than the immediate

Action of specking they see themselves as participating in. for example , linguistic choices will vary according to whether the speaker is taking part in a football match or discussing football; making love or discussing love; making a political speech or discussing politics; performing an operation or discussing medicine.

2. **Tenor** of discourse: an abstract term for the relationships between the people taking part in the discourse. Again, the language people use varies depending on such interpersonal relationships as mother/child, doctor/patient or superior/ inferior in status. A patient is unlikely to use swear words in addressing a doctor and a mother is unlikely to start a request to her child with / wonder if you could. Getting the tenor of discourse right in translation can be quite difficult. It depends on whether one sees a certain level of formality as 'right' from the perspective of the source culture or the target culture. For example, an American teenager may adopt a highly informal tenor with his or her parents by, among other things, using their first names instead of Mum/Mother and Dad/Father. This level of informality would be highly inappropriate in many other cultures. A translator has to choose between changing the tenor to suit the expectations of the target reader and transferring the informal tenor to give a flavour of the type of relationship that teenagers have with their parents in American society. What the translator opts for on any given occasion will of course depend on what he or she perceives to be the overall purpose of the translation.

3. **Mode** of discourse: an abstract term for the role that the language is playing  
(speech, essay, lecture, instructions) and for its medium of transmission  
(spoken, written) Linguistic choices are influenced by these dimensions. For  
example, a word such as re is perfectly appropriate in a business letter or as part  
of the subject line in an email communication, but it is rarely, if ever, used in spoken English.