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# The problem of synonyms in the translation

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The main aim of translation is to serve as a cross-cultural bilingual communication vehicle among peoples. In addition to reading comprehension ability, the knowledge of specialized subjects derived from specialized training and a wide cultural background, and the global vision of cross-cultural and interlingual communication, it is a must to learn how to handle the strategic and tactical tools for a good translating performance.

One of the difficulties of translation is to choose proper synonyms. Synonyms are different words with similar or identical meanings and are interchangeable. Native speakers feel that some pairs of synonyms are more synonymous than others. This gives us the idea of a scale of synonymy. Obviously, the idea behind synonymy is that of sharing meaning that is that two words share (part of) their meaning. It has become a problem to establish how much overlapping do we need for two words for being considered synonyms.

Cruse asserts that there is “no neat way of characterising synonyms”. He says that “synonyms must not only manifest a high degree of semantic overlap, they must also have a low degree of implicit contrastiveness”. Synonyms are those lexical items “whose senses are identical in respect of ‘central’ semantic traits, but differ, if at all, only in respect of what we may provisionally describe as ‘minor’ or ‘peripheral’ traits”. Cruse also notices that synonyms occur together in certain types of expression. “A synonym is often employed as an explanation, or clarification, of meaning of another word” When synonyms are used contrastively, the difference is signalled by expressions such as *truthful* or *honest*. Ex: *truthful*: *honest* they are synonyms although they share only part of their meaning; *truthful*: *purple* they are not at all synonyms. Cruse says that an important thing here is contrast.

Sometimes the feature is objective (**denotative**), referring to some actual, real world difference in the referents: *purple* and *red*. Sometimes the feature

is subjective (**connotative**), referring to how the speaker feels about the referent rather than any real difference in the referent itself: *purple* and *red*. There tend

to be very few absolute synonyms in a language. Example *seep* and *rip* are nearly complete synonyms, yet they differ in collocability in at least one way: one may say *seeped*, but not *ripped*. Here are some examples of near-synonymic variation: *seep* - *rip* (abstract dimension), *enemy* — *foe* (emphasis), *error* - *mistake* (denotational, indirect), *pissed-drunk* — *inebriated* (stylistic, formality), *skinny* : *thin*: *slim*, *slender* (expressed attitude), *daddy*: *dad*: *father* (emotive).

Usually, words that are close in meaning are near-synonyms (or plesionyms) almost synonyms, but not quite; very similar, but not identical, in meaning; not fully intersubstitutable, but instead varying in their shades of denotation, connotation, implicature, emphasis.

In addition, many groups of words are plesionyms that is, nearly synonymous; *forest* and *woods*, for example, or *stared* and *gazed*. The notions of synonymy and plesionymy can be made more precise by means of a notion of semantic distance but this is troublesome to formalize satisfactorily. If two words differ semantically (e.g., *mist* *fog*), then substituting one for the other in a sentence or discourse will not necessarily preserve truth conditions; the denotations are not identical. If two words differ (solely) in stylistic features (e.g., *frugal*, *stingy*), then intersubstitution does preserve truth conditions, but the connotation is changed. One should understand both semantics and stylistics have a large role in order to be able

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to deal with translation without any problems and in order to understand the way translation goes on it is of a great importance to know more information about semantics as well as stylistics because they are considered as the basics of a better translation.

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