

## Translation and the Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction

The paper considers the problem of the semantics/pragmatics distinction, through the analysis of two main senses of equivalence used in analytical philosophy to define translation: *semantic equivalence* and *functional equivalence*. On one hand, given two sentences  $S$  and  $S^1$ , belonging respectively to natural languages  $L$  and  $L^1$ ,  $S$  is the translation of  $S^1$ , if  $S$  and  $S^1$  have *the same meaning*, or, in other words, if there is a relation of *semantic* equivalence between  $S$  and  $S^1$ . On the other hand,  $S$  is the translation of  $S^1$ , if  $S$  and  $S^1$  have *the same function* or they play *the same role* in  $L$  and  $L^1$ , or, in other words, if there is a relation of *functional* equivalence between  $S$  and  $S^1$ . Drawing the distinction between these two kinds of equivalence is a way to understand the distinction between different levels or aspects of meaning.

The concept of semantic equivalence proposed by Frege (Frege 1892), was based on the fact that there were differences in communicative content or effect that were not to be categorized as differences of meaning, but as differences of *tone*. All these differences, which nowadays are most often conceived as *pragmatic* differences, were expunged from what was considered as the sentence meaning. Later, Davidson used this concept of equivalence, by applying Tarskian theory of truth to natural languages:  $S$  translates  $S^1$  if  $S$  and  $S^1$  have *the same truth conditions* (Davidson 1984).

The paper argues that this notion of equivalence faces serious difficulties, because it does not successfully explain why some biconditionals are simply true and why others, besides being true, offer the real translation of the source sentence (Ervas 2008). This limit is partially overcome by the second sense of equivalence, used by Sellars (Sellars 1963) and, later, by Davidson himself (Davidson 1986). The concept of functional equivalence allows us to get rid of the notion of meaning ( $S$  and  $S^1$  can play the same role respectively in  $L$  and  $L^1$ , without having the same meaning) and it preserves the communicative content. Anyway, the notion of functional equivalence remains desperately vague: it is difficult that two sentences  $S$  and  $S^1$  play the same, identical role in two different linguistic systems (Marconi 2007).

Nevertheless, this paper would show that this statement of fact is not so negative as it may seem, because translation itself could paradoxically guide the translator's choice of the better kind of translation equivalence required by the original text. In fact, translation could work as a test in order to understand, among all phenomena that contribute to sentence meaning, which are the genuinely semantic ones (Voltolini 2009). In accordance with Kripke's criterion for the semantics/pragmatics distinction (Kripke 1979), a linguistic phenomenon in the original text would be genuinely *pragmatic* if it cannot be eliminated by translation and so it would require a pragmatic equivalence, while it would be genuinely *semantic* if it can be solved through translation and so it would require a specific semantic equivalence.

### References

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