

## Meaning in Translation

Words which are apparently cognate in different languages don't always carry the same meaning.

Ways of meaning can be different because:

- Technology, ideology, socialisation, customs, all affect what is significant to a culture.
- Objects which are significant to a culture affect the **nouns** and **adjectives** available to mean in that culture.
- Actions which are significant to a culture affect the **verbs** and **adverbs** available to mean in that culture.
- The ranges of meaning for particular **adpositions** are likely to be culturally constrained, which means there will be variation between different languages. For instance; does your language's word for *in* cover the same relationships as *in* in English? (e.g. *in the room, in a minute, in love, in arrears, in English, in a relationship*, etc.)
- The principles of pronominalisation are likely to be universal, because they are based upon the three persons in an utterance (the speaker, the listener, and the topic). However, it is very common for a language to be idiosyncratic about the set of possible **pronoun** forms it uses. Your language's set of pronouns and the English set may be differently subdivided (see week 5).

**Conjunctions** are a little different. Certain conjunctions seem to be universal, in that they represent logical relationships between pairs of things. These are:

- **AND**: C will occur if A occurs **AND** B occurs.
- **OR**: C will occur if A occurs **OR** B occurs **OR** both occur (inclusive OR); or C will occur if A occurs **OR** B occurs but not if both occur (exclusive OR). English does not differentiate between the inclusive and exclusive OR, which can create misunderstandings; Lojban does differentiate.
- **SO**: A has occurred **SO** B will occur.

However, other conjunctions are culturally generated, and need not be universal. For instance, does your language require both *therefore* and *because*? If A happens *before* B (A therefore B) then B happens *after* A (B because A), so do you need both?

Languages don't always order things in the same way.

Not just lexis, grammar can be a source of differences between languages. It can be a simple thing, like word order (e.g. FRENCH: *le ciel bleu* = *the sky blue* = *the blue sky*); or it can be a more complex grammatical difference (e.g. GERMAN: *Wenn du die Welt täuschen willst, sag die Wahrheit* = *when you the world to-deceive want, say the truth* = *when you would deceive the world, tell the truth*.)

Languages use different metaphors.

What may seem a common metaphor in one language may exist in a very different form in another language (e.g. FRENCH: *il pleut des cordes* = *It's raining ropes*; GERMAN: *Es schüttet wie aus Eimern* = *It showers as if from buckets*; ENGLISH: *It's raining cats and dogs*.)

Languages have different pragmatic traditions.

Not just languages, groups within languages have different traditions. For instance, rank is acknowledged in the British Armed Forces with a salute, which higher ranks then return; it is a specific form of greeting which perpetuates a social hierarchy – but only in the Armed Forces. Another example: in England we say, *How are you?* In Scotland the form is *How's it goin'?* Another type of greeting is the interruption: ENGLISH: *excuse me*; GERMAN: *entschuldigen sie* (*to apologise to you*); SPANISH: *disculpe me* (*forgive me*. Literally: *remove my error*). These pragmatic traditions can often act as shibboleths, but they can also encapsulate cultural differences. For instance, Protestant Germany uses the greeting *Guten Tag* (*good day*), but Catholic Austria uses *Grüß Gott* (*grace of God*). How does your language handle greetings and goodbyes?

As your language is a conlang, you can just create extra lexis to fill in any gaps in meaning when doing a translation; but before you do so, ask yourself if there could be a good reason why that gap exists in your language. If so, try to find an inventive way around the problem. A large vocabulary which removes any need for your language to be substantively different from English (or another real language) will earn less marks than an ingenious translation. Remember to discuss in your report or translation any unusual translation choices you make: don't just show ingenuity, show the workings of your ingenuity.

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## Negation

In English, negation is a complex system. There is the simple holistic negator, **no**, which refuses permission, disagrees, casts doubt, questions veracity, and generally acts to thwart the intentions of the listener. When using the word **no** to forbid, there has to be a level of sanction which the speaker can apply – even if it just the future threat of *I told you so*.

There is also the adverb **not**, which can precede many word types to indicate the absence of the effect or object or action of the word following. This is less pragmatically invasive than **no** because it directs attention at the event and not the perpetrator of the event.

In addition, English has negating prefixes, which are also known as privatives. These include:

- **a-, an-:** usually means **without**; *amoral* = without morals; *anaesthesia* = without the ability to sense.
- **anti-:** usually means **against, opposed to**; *antitoxin* = neutralises toxin; *antimagnetic* = cannot be magnetised.
- **de-:** usually indicates **removal** of something; *depose* = remove from position; *deface* = remove or spoil appearance.
- **dis-:** usually indicates **reversal** or **removal**; *disgrace* = remove honour (grace); *disable* = make ineffective.
- **il-, im-, in-, ir-:** usually means **not**; *il-* is used before words beginning with L, *im-* before words beginning with M or P; *ir-* before R-words, and *in-* before all the rest; *illegitimate* = not legitimate; *immature* = not mature; *impeccable* = without flaw (literally, cannot be made to sin); *involuntary* = not voluntary.
- **mis-:** usually means **wrong** or **bad**; *misdirect* = direct wrongly; *misunderstand* = understand incorrectly.
- **non-:** usually means **not**; *noncombatant* = not a member of the armed forces; *nonstarter* = not in the race.
- **un-:** usually means **without** or **not** or indicates **reversal**; *unarmed* = without weapons; *unalarmed* = not alarmed; *unpack* = reverse of pack.

### TYPES OF NEGATION

The English binary relationship of affirmation (unmarked) and negation (marked by **no**, **not** or a privative) is not the only way that negation can be managed in a language; it is possible to devise systems where the negativity can be less – or more – than the English system allows.

For instance, we can treat negation as happening on up to five levels:

- **The opposite:** English does not have a general oppositional negator, relying instead on different terms for opposites (e.g. *happy-sad*, *high-low*, *hope-despair*, etc.). However, it is possible to create a general oppositional negator in your language which is either a stand-alone word or an affix. Pravic does this with the prefix **mi-**.
- **Between opposite and null:** The reason to have this level of negation seems rather opaque; but English does have some constructs which seem to work at this level. The prefixes **un-** and **dis-**, can in some circumstances evoke a sense of negation (*unhappy*, *disallowed*) which is somewhere between full opposition (*sad*, *banned*) and the null case (*not happy*, *not allowed*).
- **The null case:** this does not indicate opposition, it merely indicates the absence of the effect being negated, e.g. *not happy*, *no hope*. It is called “the null case” because this is where most English negatives seem to operate, and because it negates without replacing.
- **No longer the case:** the reason for this type of negation is also rather opaque, but English does have the prefix **ex-**, which indicates a state which once, but no longer, obtains. Examples are *exfoliate* = strip away layers (literally, remove leaves); *expunge* = obliterate (literally, prick out).
- **Mitigated:** This is a negation which is less complete than the null case. This could be because it is a reduction rather than a complete negation, or because there is less certainty about the nature of the negation. English has words like *less* and *fewer* to indicate reduction, and Pravic has the prefix **ma-** to indicate reduced certainty.

Another option is to treat marked negatives as always marking the less good option. So *not happy* would be OK, but *not sad* would not; *not employed* would be OK, but *not out of work* would not. As these examples show, there is a hint that English may already have a tendency to do this. There is even the option of having no grammatical negation in your language: like *happy* and *sad*, each negative condition could have its own word.