Form and content

Unit 2

Outline

- The two-way relationship between the world and its representation
- The relationship between language and mind
  - Categories
  - Ideas
- Representing knowledge status
- Understanding and explaining by analogy: metaphor

The world and its representation

- Theirs is a two-way relationship
  - Discourse represents, describes, mirrors the world
    - It is ABOUT the world, a reflection of it
    - It exists after and because of it
  - But it also reflects and creates worldviews
    - Naming practices associated with entities/ concepts/ phenomena give rise to ideas and fights over them!
    - Ways of talking/writing about with entities/ concepts/ phenomena affect our perception of them

The world and its representation, cont. 1

- Examples
  - The terms *conflict, military action* and *war* may refer to one and the same phenomenon
    - However, the term *war* is used when the phenomenon
      - a) is given a proper name (and thus a unique identity),
      - b) is associated with a precise recognizable/acknowledged dated beginning and end and
      - c) is seen as endowed with historical significance

The world and its representation, cont. 2

- Examples, cont. 1
  - The terms *competence, effectiveness, mastery, facility, expertise* identify some/the goals of foreign language education
    - The very existence of the terms presents the relevant goals as discrete, testable activities, whether this is the case or not

The world and its representation, cont.3

- So,
  - Given that the world does not exist except in the way and to the extent that we make sense of it,
  - Then, depending on how we (un)consciously choose (not) to label it,
  - We effectively modify it
    - We hide/minimize vs highlight parts/aspects of it
      - Only what is explicitly labelled is recognized as existing
    - Its value and relevance depend on the degree of precision/vagueness, positivity/negativity, scope of applicability etc of its labels

Discussion

- Issues for you to consider
  - Would you tell a friend/yourself that he/she/you is/are fat or overweight, stingy or thrifty?
    - How does the world change – or fail to change – depending on the label you choose to describe your friend/yourself?
  - Is stalking been a crime in your country? (It is in Italy, and/but an English term is used for it: why?)
  - What are the pro-life and the pro-choice movements for and against? How come neither movement calls itself the *anti-X movement*?

Discussion, cont. 1

- Issues for you to consider, cont. 1
    - Why do the military use the terms *casualties* or *collateral damage* instead of *deaths*?
    - What's the difference between *genocide* and *ethnic cleansing*?
    - Why would a spokesperson say «Our president expressed his sorrow but did not apologise»?
    - Why is it common to hear/read in English *woman doctor* but *male model* rather than *man doctor* and *female model*?
    - How often are females vs males described in terms of their physical appearance vs social roles?

Discussion, cont. 2

- Examples, cont. 2
  - Do your teachers ever call *interesting* something that you would classify as *difficult*? If so, what does the choice of the term depend on, or at least correlate with?
  - Do you agree with the statement that every problem is an opportunity? Why or why not?
  - How do tests and examinations differ from evaluations and skills assessments? Do the terms stand for different concepts?

The world and its representation, cont. 4

- Alternative labels for the «same» phenomenon affect the way in which we understand – or fail to understand – it.
  - Indeed, it is as if we were wearing different pairs glasses when looking at it

The world and its representation, cont. 4

- Examples, cont. 3
  - In an experimental study (Clark, Clark 1977), two groups of subjects were assigned a manual task (fixing a candle to a wall in an upright position so that the wax would not drip). To be able to perform it, they were given some tools (a candle, tacks, matches, a box), which were explicitly named only to one group. This latter group took less time to perform the task.
  - Imagine that the tools had been named to both groups, and that one was told they had a «box» while the other «a box of matches». What different outcome, if any, would you have expected?

The world and its representation, cont. 2

- Examples, cont. 4
  - The initial foray into understanding the nature of leukemia happened when, in the 1840s, Virchow changed the name of the disease from «suppuration of blood» to «weisses Blut» ('white blood' > *leukemia*)
    - The former name had *preconceptions* built into it (it classified the disease by labelling its supposed origin: 'the formation/discharge of pus')
    - The latter was merely *descriptive* of its apparent characteristics, which cleared the field for humble, unbiased research
      - Research questions: why is it white? Why is it so white? Could it be because there are more and/or bigger white cells than there usually are?
  - (Discussion question: Why do you think 'white blood' was then renamed *leukemia*?)

A case in point

- Translation/ interpretation
- A language gives its speakers verbal categories that function as frames and boxes into which to fit entities and phenomena
  - So as to lump them together or differentiate them
- Moving from one language/variety to another, or even resorting to paraphrasing, means adding meanings that were not in the original and/or omitting something that was

Possible task (repeated from Unit 1)

- Ia) Consider the following statements and translate them into a language you are very proficient in
  - *All men are created equal.*
  - *Don't count your chickens before they hatch.*
- Ib) Keep track of the decisions you have to make and what motivates them. Does anything get lost? Is anything gained? Why or why not? And what for, if anything?

Discussion

- Have you ever been in a situation in which you didn't know the language of the people around you? How did that make you feel?

- Do bilinguals think, act, feel differently in their two languages?

- *Can* we conceive of things we cannot talk about?

Language and mind: categories

- When we have a name for a group/class of entities/phenomena
  - We tend to think of them as being similar
    - Either all sharing something
    - Or resembling each other like family members
  - Pairwork: Compare the terms and concepts HAIR, CARD, DRY, FRIEND, INFORMATION, CHILD with their «equivalents» in your language
    - How is «reality» segmented/perceived differently in English vs the other language?

Language and mind: categories, cont. 2

- Grammatical distinctions encourage us to think of entities/phenomena as having all-or-none properties
  - E.g. English nouns can be definite/indefinite, singular/plural, mass/count and their referents are conceived of as having, or not having, indeed their properties
  - But other languages favour, e.g., gender distinctions and/or use classifiers (cf. English *a loaf/ bunch/ piece/pair of… bread/ flowers/ advice/scissors*)

Language and mind: ideas

- The way we talk about entities/phenomena affects how we make sense of them
  - Compare
    - *I am married* (this is a quality that characterises me) vs
    - *I have a wife/husband* (I possess someone, who belongs to me)
    - *The baby is asleep* (that's his/her current state)
    - *The baby is sleeping* (that's what he/she is doing right now)
    - *I overreacted* (I am the agent responsible for what happened)
    - *You made me do it* (I ascribe to YOU responsibility for what happened)
    - *I'm sorry about that* (I feel sympathy towards you), *but I won't apologise for it* (I am not responsible for it)

Language and mind: ideas, cont. 2

- Every linguistic choice is never neutral, innocent or without consequences
  - It is an act of selection of an option among many, and thus also an act of omission/exclusion of the other options
  - It presents a «way of seeing/interpreting» as natural, as THE default/obvious – and thus invisible – way of seeing/interpreting
  - It helps create – or cannot but create – a favourite/prevalent point of view

An example in journalese

- «About half of our patients will see a long-term, possibly permanent response to these drugs while the other half may begin to exhibit disease progression again»
  - First clause: Patients represented as experiencers (visual perceivers of their disease), not people in charge/control of their lives or people in need of care
  - Second clause: the perspective adopted is that of the doctor looking at the patient, while this is represented as the sight/location of «disease progression»
  - «Disease progression»: disease represented as goal-oriented/driven or at least as possibly evolving over time

An example in journalese, cont. 1

- «About half of our patients […]»
  - The mini-report technically and accurately describes and accounts for a phenomenon
  - But how this phenomenon affects and/or is perceived by the participants involved is left out of the picture, as irrelevant.

An example from fiction

- Halliday (1978, 2002) analysed the so-called *system of transitivity* in Golding's *The inheritors*
  - The system of transitivity is the semantic-syntactic encoding of the type/degree of involvement of entities/participants in events/situations; e.g.
    - As agents, experiencers, patients, carriers of attributes
    - As subjects, direct objects, indirect objects, prepositional objects etc.
  - *The inheritors* is a novel describing and reporting the hypothetical and dangerous encounter between a Neanderthal tribe and a Home Sapiens tribe
    - (Evolutionarly-historical reminder: the Home Sapiens wiped out the Neanderthal species from the face of the earth)

An example from fiction, cont. 1

- Halliday on *The inheritors* , cont. 1
  - The representation of the worldview of Lok and his Neanderthal tribe is characterized by
    - Intransitive clauses with inanimate subjects and experiential predicates,
      - Projecting a world devoid of cause-effect relationships
  - This accounts for their vulnerability at the hand of their attackers/competitors, the Homo sapiens tribe,
    - Whose language has more transitive clauses with animate subjects and agentive predicates
      - Projecting a world of agents, actions and patients affected by such actions
    - (Semino & Culpeper (2011) «Stylistics» in Ola-Östman & Verschueren's *Pragmatics in Practice*, J. Benjamins, p. 297)

An example from fiction, cont. 2

- Halliday (1978, 2002) on *The inheritors*, cont. 2
  - Example: when Lok is first attacked by a Home Sapiens, he is not represented as thinking/understanding what «really» happens like this:
    - *Someone drew a bow and shot an arrow at me, which missed me by an inch and instead hit the dead tree by my side.*

An example from fiction, cont. 3

- Halliday (1978, 2002) on *The inheritor*s, cont. 3
  - Rather, Lok is represented as thinking this:
  - *The stick began to grow shorter at both ends. Then it shot out to full length again. The dead tree by Lok's ear acquired a voice. "Clop!" His ears twitched turned to the tree. By his face there had grown a twig: a twig that smelt of other, and of goose* …

Possible tasks

- Read section 4.3 («An example: Katherine Mansfield», pp. 126-133) in Leech & Short «Style in Fiction»

- Apply the principles of that semantic, syntactic, graphological and phonological analysis to another short text of your choice.

Possible tasks, cont. 1

- Compare and contrast the following sentences, and highlight what different viewpoints they project
  - by making reference to such grammatical concepts as agent, experencier and patient; subject and object; theme and rheme;
  - By pointing out what gets and what does not get mentioned
- Sentences
  - *In the US, a man rapes a woman every 6 minutes.*
  - *In the US, a woman is raped by a man every 6 minutes.*
  - *In the US, a woman is raped every 6 minutes.*
  - *In the US, a woman suffers a rape every 6 minutes.*
  - *In the US, a rape occurs every six minutes.*

Possible tasks, cont. 2

- Select a piece of scientific writing
  - How often do passive sentences occur? And are the agents mentioned?
    - When they are NOT mentioned, is it because they are obvious, unknown, unimportant or what else?
  - How often are events (e.g. analysing) represented as entities (e.g. analysis)? Why do you think this is the case?

Possible tasks, cont. 3

- Select the report of a conversation in a novel and one in a magazine/newspaper. What are their differences, if any?
  - Which reporting verbs are used? Neutral or descriptive/evaluative? If descriptive, which aspect of the utterance do they focus on (e.g. loudness, speed, clarity of enunciation…). If evaluative, are they positive or negative? Any instance of *be like; be all; go*?
  - Is speech reported verbatim or summarized? If verbatim, do any graphological features of the quoted speech evoke its phonetic qualities?

Representing knowledge status

- Certainty
  - Lack of modality; modality of certainty (e.g. *will*), adverbials of certainty (e.g. *without a doubt*); verbs of certainty (e.g. *know*); non-progressive aspect; simple present tense

- Uncertainty
  - Epistemic modality of uncertainty (e.g. *may*); adverbials of uncertainty (e.g. *possibly*); verbs of certainty (e.g. *claim, suspect*); progressive aspect; evasive, vague comments

Pairwork

- Which set of linguistic resources and communicative strategies do you expect to find in scientific articles vs coursebooks – those that convey certainty or uncertainty?
- Make a guess: how do you think Watson and Creek presented their theory about the DNA double helix in the scientific paper that earned them the Nobel prize vs in the book meant for the public at large?

Metaphor

- Establishing a CONCEPTUAL analogy between one source domain and one target domain
  - So that the latter is interpreted in terms of the former
    - Parallel components, characteristics, functioning
- The analogy highlights SOME aspects of the target domain and obscures others, with possibly negative consequences
  - E.g. to solve physics problems, sometimes you need to think of light as particles, and sometimes as waves!

Metaphor, cont. 1

- NB: Unlike what happens in literature, in (cognitive) linguistics, NO formal distinction is made between
  - A simile (e.g. *Your eyes are like blue lakes*) and
  - A metaphor (e.g. *Your eyes are blue lakes*)
- That is, the overt or covert marking of the analogy in its verbal encoding is irrelevant
  - As long as an analogy *is* established

Metaphor, cont. 2

- Interestingly,
  - Such implicit or explicit analogies are a pervasive phenomenon of everyday language
    - Indeed, they are so pervasive that we are hardly aware of them
  - Such analogies also account for the semantic evolution of many terms; e.g.
    - *Grasping an object □ grasping a concept*
- NB: in the linguistic representation/account of metaphors, the symbol '=' stands for
    - 'is interpreted as'
    - 'is understood as'
    - 'is likened to'

Metaphor, cont. 3

- ARGUMENT = WAR
  - *Your claims are <u>indefensible</u>.*
  - *He <u>attacked</u> every weak point in my argument.*
  - *His criticisms were right <u>on target</u>.*
- TIME = MONEY
  - *Don't <u>waste</u> my time.*
  - *How did you <u>spend</u> your holiday?*
  - *I <u>lost</u> a lot of time when I got sick.*

Metaphor, cont. 4

- THINGS = PEOPLE (cf. personification in poetry and scientific writing)
  - *This theory <u>explains</u> the behaviour of pets.*
  - *Life has <u>cheated</u> me.*
  - *The crisis <u>has given birth</u> to a money-worried generation.*
- LOVE = MAGIC
  - *She <u>cast her spell</u> over me.*
  - *He has me <u>in a trance</u>.*
  - *I'm <u>charmed</u> by her.*

Metaphor, cont. 5

- LOVE = WAR
  - *He's known for his many <u>conquests</u>.*
  - *She will <u>fight for </u>him.*
  - *She is <u>besieged</u> by suitors.*
- LOVE = PHYSICAL FORCE
  - *I could feel the <u>electricity</u> between us. There were <u>sparks</u>.*
  - *They <u>gravitated</u> to each other immediately.*
  - *I was <u>magnetically drawn </u>to him.*

Metaphor, cont. 6

- LIFE = JOURNEY
  - *He has <u>gone through </u>a lot in life.*
  - *I am <u>at a crossroads </u>in my life.*
  - *He's <u>without direction </u>in his life.*
  - *I <u>am where </u>I want to be in life.*
  - *He'll <u>go places</u> in life.*
  - *They won't let anyone <u>in their way</u>.*

Possible task

- 1a) Choose a text that matters to you, for whatever reason (e.g. a medical record, a love letter, the first lines of a film dialogue, an ad).

- 1b) Depending on its format, copy it onto a file, xerox it or copy it by hand, making sure that next to it you have enough blank space (e.g. a white page/column) for you to make notes.

- 1c) Depending on the genre it represents, divide it into parts/segments (e.g. lines, sentences, cells in a table), marking their boundaries by slashes (in pencil, if your text is on paper).

Possible task, cont. 1

- 1d) Which entities/phenomena are mentioned in each part/segment? Underline them or somehow highlight them, and specify if they are

— Human, animate, inanimate

— Mass or countable entities

— Common/ordinary or rare/exotic

— Representative of broad or narrow categories

— New or traditional/classic

— Relevant to every-/anybody in general or only to a specific group of people

Possible task, cont. 2

- 1e) How are these entities depicted? Consider one or more of the following:
  - their syntactic and semantic roles
  - their part of speech (nouns vs verbs)
  - the lexis used to identify them (descriptive, evaluative, neutral), including repetitions, synonyms and pronouns
  - the metaphors employed
  - the words/ideas attributed to them (reported speech and thought)
  - the words/ideas they are associated with
  - the level of confidence/formality/expertise/precision of the speaker/writer