

“Notion and Notation”

Shubharup Ganguly
SLL, Jadavpur University

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Abstract

An essay in the thread of the philosophy of language.

1 Notion and Notation

1. Expressed in terms of computational representability, a **Notion** is a point in a semantic space.
2. **Notations** are discrete units which can be used instrumentally to denote some notion.
3. Meaning exists objectively and independently. But unless meaning is represented and therefore, ‘captured’ with notation, it does not exist in the same sense e.g. it is not as easily accessible back after time.
4. As words, and linguistic units generally are vehicles for the delivery of ideas in communication.
5. *Need for notation is need for an outlet to express some specific notion.*

2 Factors of evolution working on a language inventory

1. Thinking about the **capabilities** of a particular language for **representing** notions, in the full **space of possible notions** aka **semantic space**, we can conceive the study or enquiry in three respects:
 - (a) **Differentiation** or expressivity: To have different expressions for referring to different entities. This broadens the range of ideas which can be dealt with – accessed, communicated and recovered, over the language channel.
 - (b) **Precision**: To identify between two related ideas with greater exactness.

- (c) **Brevity**: For putting or stating more briefly.
- 2. The stock of words or expressions of a language, the inventory of **usages** or **constructions** contained is shaped by driving forces towards these utilities.
- 3. Differentiation is in some sense more fundamental than the latter, as they can be grouped under as *differentiation towards* increasing precision or brevity, respectively.
- 4. The force towards differentiation is related to the Principle of No Synonymy (Goldberg, 1995) in which each entrenched construction will acquire a unique meaning: whether that is semantic meaning (propositional), pragmatic meaning (non-propositional), or social meaning (an externally conditioned variable).

3 Semiotic systems

- 1. Apparently, at least three **modes of encoding meaning** are known to us: the formalism of mathematics, linguistic meaning in natural languages, and meaning in music.
- 2. These can be ordered,
 - e.g. can be ordered by degree of abstraction, in the meaning content, and required to recover the meaning.
- 3. Formalism of mathematics is **concise** and **precise**. The semantic content is more well-defined, i.e. less sensitive to context or subjective interpretation for correctness.
- 4. Musical meaning can be thought of as going from context-sensitive to **context-conditioned** — incorporating active choice in the theory of meaning in communication use and understanding.

4 A theory of bilingual code-mixing and code-switching

- 1. I forward an observation as an initial premise: When a linguistic community adopts into functional usage what was previously a foreign language, often a new **variant of the language** e.g. with an expanded vocabulary or its own norms, is created in the process.
- 2. This may happen for one or more of diverse reasons, such as:

- (a) **Sociolinguistic identification:** The linguistic community adopts the language while preserving the distinctness of their own community and identity. E.g. this is a prominent contending theory for Black English Vernacular (BEV).
- (b) **Transference** from previous language e.g. **mother tongue influence.** An example is question tags in Indian dialects of English: “*She likes apple pudding, no?*”. The inquisitive “– no?” in the tail is not in the standard British or American English dialects, and may be transference by translation from the Bengali construction “*Or apple pudding bhalo lage, na?*”.

Though these two reasons are not exhaustive.

3. Related to transference, is the **non-standardization of meaning representation capabilities** across languages. It is observable that nuanced or fine-grained meanings are not expressible across languages with equal convenience e.g. due to cultural paradigms if they do not exactly align. Notable that these are frequently at the level of pragmatic competence, rather than grammar or vocabulary, which are lower down in the **meaning representation hierarchy**. This is posited as existence and an organization of linguistic units across the different language levels.
4. This is therefore forwarded as important to code-switching and code-mixing behavior of bilingual or multilingual speakers with other in-group members. The unspecified objective is to **maximally utilize the whole of available linguistic resources** for better meaning representation. This is the collective of inventories of the languages which are common to both i.e. shared between individuals or participants.
5. As related, this lexical gap or **representation gap** at intervals also instigates the **coinage** of new words, phrases or larger constructions. An original writer will almost always be a ‘**linguistic innovator**’ – original writing entails originality of thought, and some thoughts may sometimes have no mode of expression currently available. Then of course, the neologism has to be introduced in such a way that it is perceived to be in good taste and in good etiquette.