

A Semiotic Approach to the Study of Translation

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Coffee Break Conference III

This is not a presentation!
Just a few words about **terminology** and
some other general issues regarding the
translation from a linguist's viewpoint

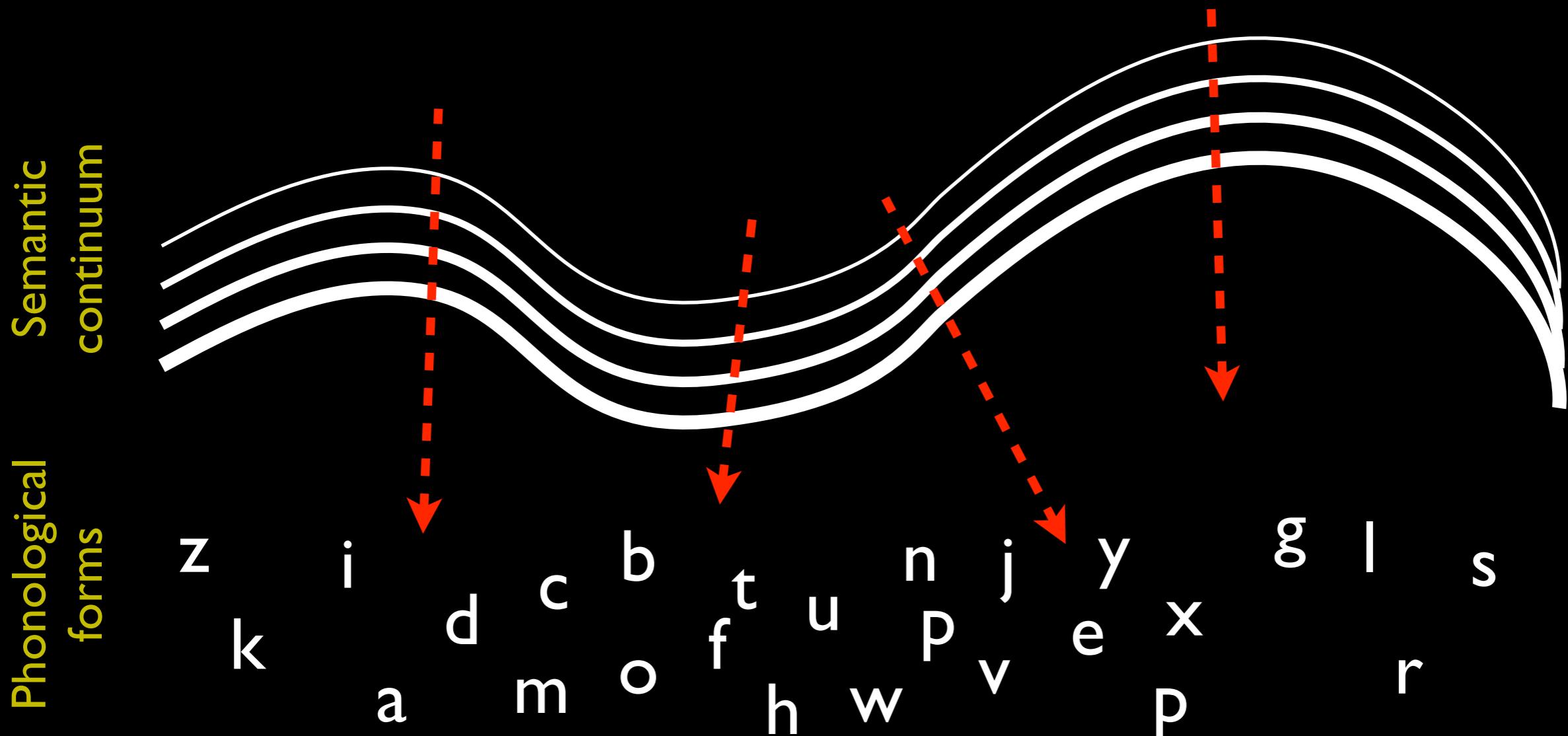
Translation: Why is it so **difficult?**

Translation is difficult
because languages are
different, in many ways

Linguistic diversity

- **Phonological** diversity: languages sound differently
- **Semantic** diversity: languages shape differently the meanings of the words
- **(Meta)-semiotic** diversity
- Diversity of the **knowledge structure**

Phonological and semantic diversity



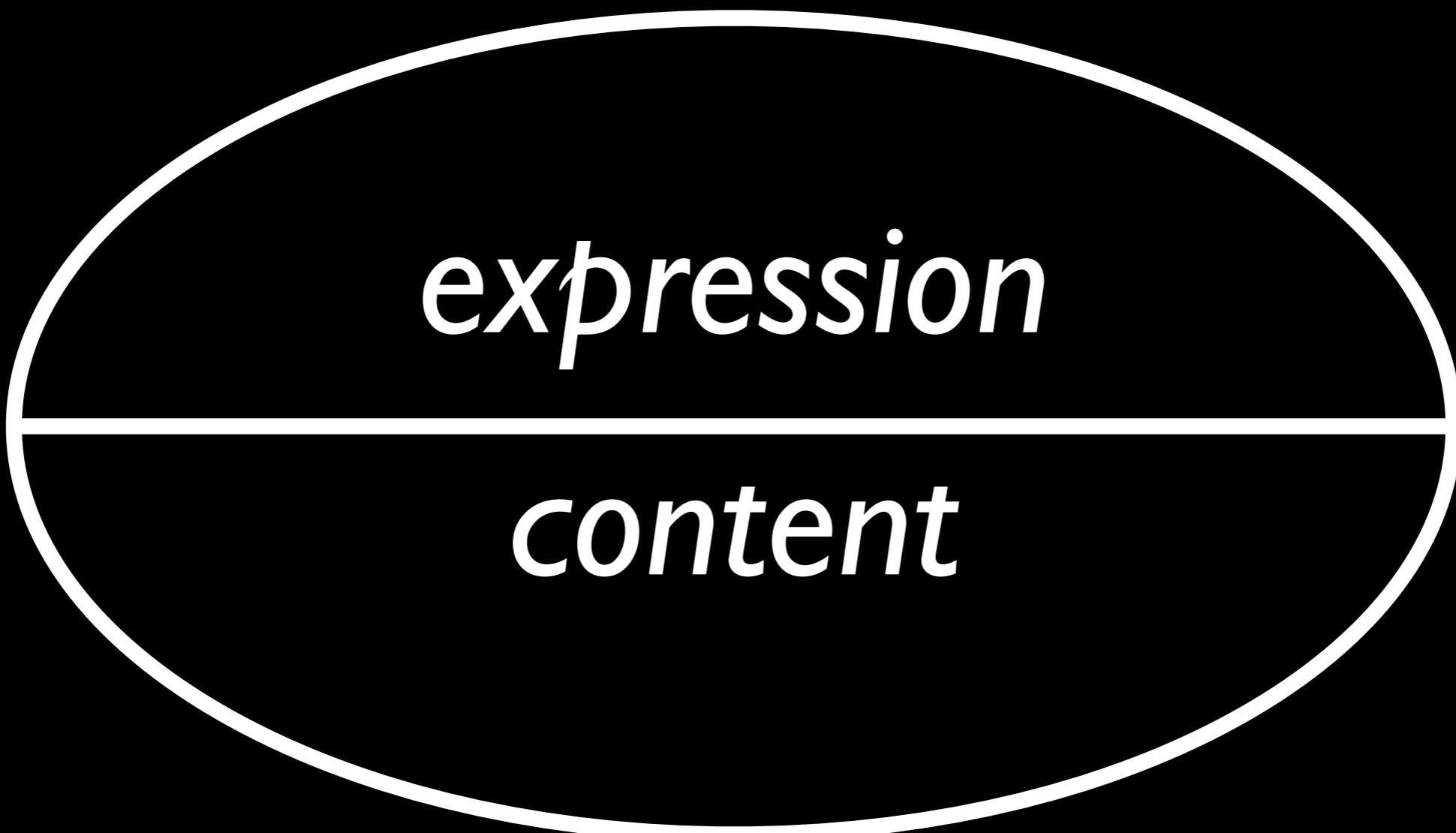
What's meta-semiotics?

- Louis **Hjelmslev**'s theoretical framework: well-forgotten, but still valid approach
- Languages are **semiotics** (or semiotic systems)
- Semiotic systems have a plane of **expression** and a plane of **content**

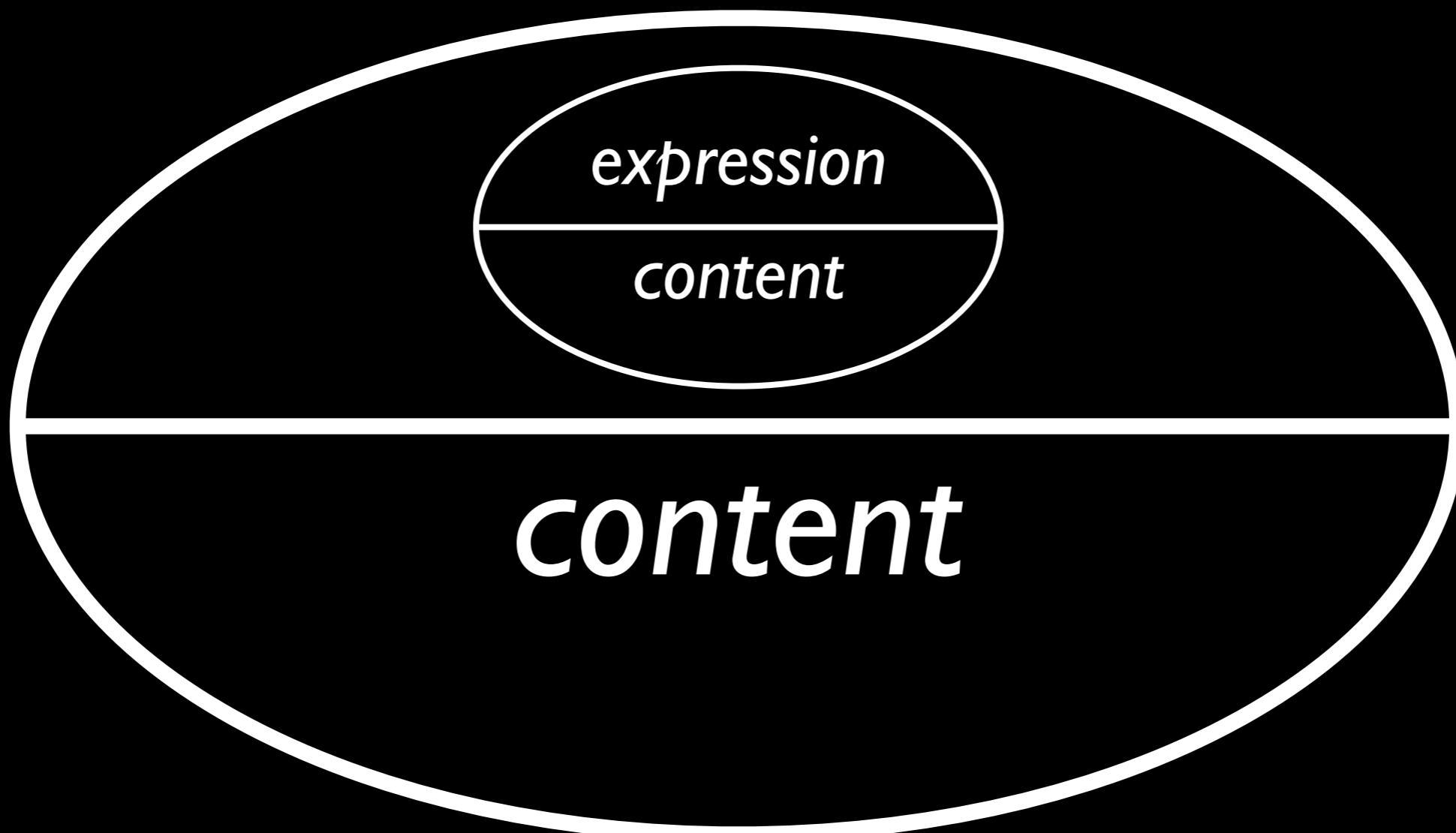
What's meta-semiotics?

- A semiotic system per se can become the expression or the content of a higher semiotic entity termed **meta-semiotics**
- Two types: **denotative** vs. **connotative** meta-semiotics

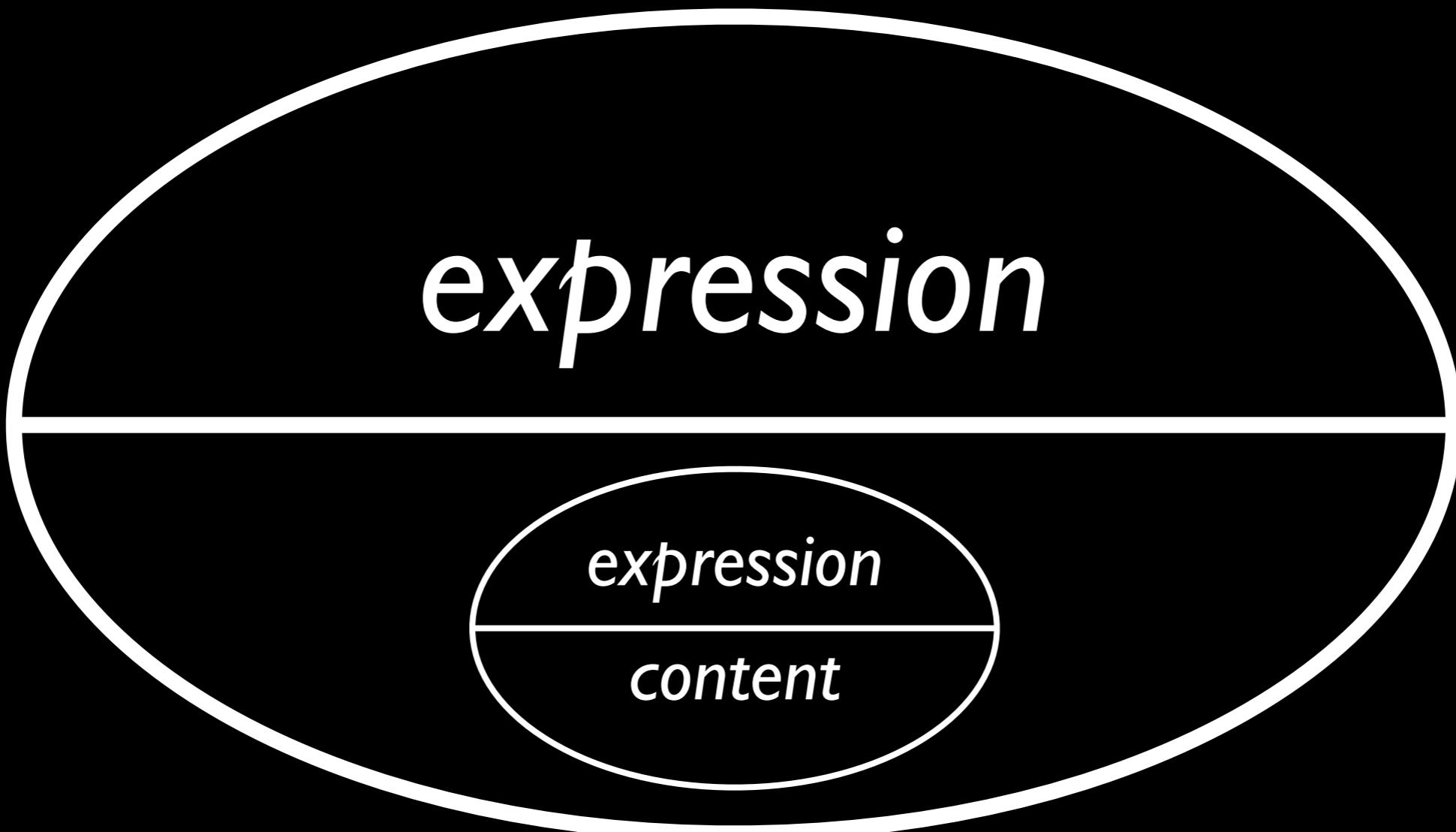
Semiotics



Connotative Meta-Semiotics



Denotative Meta-Semiotics



In other words

- Denotative meta-semiotics: **speech about speech** (texts on grammar, stylistics etc.)
- Connotative meta-semiotics: **the way of speaking about something is meaningful in itself** (stylistic diversity and every other connotations)

Examples

- **Slang, jargon** and other stylistic and sociolinguistic registers: they are the expression of sociologically relevant information about the speaker, e.g.:
 - ▶ I like it vs. I am down with it
 - ▶ U K? vs. Are you ok?

Examples

- Rhymes, metrics and other poetical features. They express aesthetic values, e.g.:
 - ▶ I like Ike vs. I'm madly for Adlai
- Sacred texts. Their exact wording express religious values

To translate a meta-semiotic system means to translate at least **two** different, highly structured **systems**

Presuppositions and knowledge structure

- Linguistic communication process is **additive**: we add small pieces of information to the huge background knowledge shared by the speakers
- The comprehension of a single sentence implies some **presuppositions**

Source of the background knowledge

- **Biological** (e.g.: self-consciousness, body parts)
- **Cultural** (e.g.: the structure of the world)
- **Situational** (e.g.: the notion of ‘now’ and ‘here’)

Examples

- P. Grice defined the notion of **conversational implicatures**, e.g.:
 - Where is John? — The door of the office room n. 5 seems locked. — Neither did Mary show up today
 - (The speaker implies that there exist an objective link between John and the office room n. 5, known to his audience)

The translator has to make
available to his target
audience all the necessary
background knowledge
implied by the source text

Conclusions

- Translator must individuate all the meaningful levels and structures of the source text
- Then, the most important level is to be identified and translated first
- The remaining levels are translated or ignored depending on how sophisticated is the translator's technique