# WHAT IS THE OVERLORD ACTUALLY DOING WITH A SITUATION?

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> ... a communicatively oriented approach describes how the speaker implements his communicative intentions, how the hearer deciphers the speaker's intentions, and how these interact in particular situations of communication.
>
> Kari Sajavaara (1981)

There always have been outstanding researchers bringing their ideas into scientific fashion – as Roman Jakobson or Noam Chomsky. It is beginning to be indecent not to refer to their works, their names are widely known not only among narrow specialists, crowds of young women besiege the rooms where they appear. Another kind of researches are dissenters: after their "classical" period they work outside the main flow and are cited – if are – only critically, except for their direct pupils and collaborators. So are Charles E. Osgood or my friend Kenneth Lee Pike.

There exists also a third group of great researchers. It consists of persons like Kari Sajavaara, whose popularity roots more in the deepness than in the brilliance of their scientific ideas. They have more partisans than admirers. They are instrumental leaders, not expressive ones.

One of such extremely interesting ideas of Sajavaara is his (elaborated partly together with Jaakko Lehtonen) cross-linguistically oriented model of message processing which has to do with cognitive psycholinguistics much more than with "classical" linguistics (Sajavaara – Rasanen – Hirvonen 1980; Sajavaara 1981) The key notion of this model is Overlord – "a decision-maker/problem-

solver, which has access to all the sources of information all the time" (Sajavaara 1981: 99).

Among these sources of information the important role is played by the frame of situation. The cognitive activity of the communicator (or mutatis mutandis the recipient), which is directed to a communicative situation and develops accordingly some specific rules, results in a model of this situation directly included in the general model of speech processing. Of course different psycholinguists understand this model of the situation in a different way (Leontiev 1997: 107-109): but for everyone this situation is constructed of a system of communicatively important cognitive elements.

The following part of my paper describes the model of the situation as part of the Universal Comparative Grammar for Didactic Purposes (Leontiev 1990: 94-96).

The situation of communication includes a lot of components. A great part of them could be important for the communication process but is not directly reflected in its structure. So position in space ("face-to-face" or "side-by-side") influences only the choice of existing lexical and grammatical variants (Leontiev 1982: 130). Other components influence the structure and content of utterances and are of greater interest for us.

Let us divide the proper *situation of communication* and the *meant situation*. The latter is not always expressed in the utterance: if its components are known to both communicants they can be a part of "background" (presupposition). On the other hand, the contents of the situation of communication and of the meant situation can be consciously "disagreed", and this lack of agreement becomes means of persuasion (implication).

The meant situation can be perceptible, but it is only a particular case: *A (the) dog barks* and *The dog is an animal* both describe a meant situation. We will operate below only with the first kind of utterances (situations) – the kind designated by Luria as "communication of events" (the second one is "communication of relations") (Luria 1974: 2583).

A meant situation has its own psychological structure determined by the specificity of the communicator's orienting activity in this situation. This psychological structure isn't to coincide with the content structure of the corresponding utterance. The components of the meant situation are from the outset hierarchized in the communicants' consciousness. Let us take the famous example given by Lev Vygotsky: *Today I saw a berefoot boy in a blue shirt running down the street* (Vygotsky 1986: 251). Vygotsky is right when he writes: "... I do not see every item separately: the boy, the shirt, the blue color, his running, the absence of shoes. I conceive of all this in one thought, but I put it into separate words". However, it doesn't mean that this situation isn't dismembered at all, that it is perceived only globally; different things could be

the main object of "my" perception ("thought") – either the boy (wearing a shirt, running etc.) or the street (where the boy is running) or his bare feet. It could be important to the communicator that the dog barks (before, it didn't know how to do it), that it is the dog and not the fox, finally, that the barking of the dog takes place as the signal of a burglary. The meant situation is dismembered in one's consciousness, it has its own "topic" and its own "comment" (we will call them "topic of the situation" and "comment of the situation").

The subject of the situation of communication and the one of the meant situation do not always coincide. You see or hear (and inform the recipient) the dog barking – or somebody informs you that the dog is barking.

The relation between the subject of the meant situation and this situation as a totality can be different. You can be sure that *Socrates is a philosopher* – or you can only assume it.

There are the following components in the meant situation

(1.1) structure of the situation,
(1.2) its content,
(1.3) its subject.

The situation of a communication consist of:

(2.1) subject of the communication (communicator, speaker),
(2.2) object of the communication (recipient, hearer),
(2.3) process of the communication.

On the basis of these elements we can formulate a set of *universal basic elements of grammatical content of a whole utterance*. Some of these elements are *codified* in a given natural language, some aren't. Among codified elements there are *morphologized* ones, *lexicalized* ones or elements expressed by *fixed grammatical constructions*. It is a matter of principle that we construct this set of basic elements in a deductive way – otherwise we could restrict this set only in elements being codified in a given language.

Every basic element is constructed as function of two arguments (marked here with numbers):

1. Authenticity vs. non-authenticity of the situation (1.3-2.1): *He says, he wasn't here.*
2. Episthemic modality (1.2-1.3): *Peter really went away.*
3. Axiological modality (1.3-1.1): *Thank God, Peter isn't here!*
4. Modality of communication (1.3-2.2): *Is Peter here?*
5. Topic / comment of the situation (1.1-1.2)
6. Topic / comment of the communication (1.1-2.2)
7. Grade of importance (1.1-2.1)
8. Deixis-1 (absolute deixis) (1.2-2.1): *You ...*

9. Deixis-2 (relative deixis) (1.2-2.2): *Here ...*

10. Deixis-3 (subjective deixis) (1.3-2.3): *Yesterday ...*

11. Reality vs. irreality of predication (1.2-2.3): *He speaks – It rains.*

12. Latent vs. actual character of predication (1.1-2.3): *Sleeping cat – The cat sleeps.*

13. Adressed vs. unadressed character of utterance (2.2-2.3): *Dear colleague!*

14. Deixis-4 (communicative deixis) (2.1-2.3): *Just now ...*

15. Deontic modality (2.1.-2.2): *Read aloud!*

For a detailed description of these basic elements see (Leontiev 1981: 111-115).

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