Talking about truth, lies, and deception across languages and cultures

Proposal for a workshop at the SLE 2024 Conference in Helsinki

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The proposed workshop aims at exploring the conceptual domains of truth, lies and deception with a primary focus on the lexicon and grammar.

What is truth and what is a lie? These questions of central interest and importance for human beings have been discussed and debated from various perspectives since time immemorial. Philosophers in general and philosophers of language in particular have devoted much attention to these issues, and the relevant research is impressive and too vast to do justice here (a few examples include Barnes 1994 and Saul 2015 on lying, Austin 1950 and Strawson 1950 on truth).

However, while Meibauer 2018a-b are invaluable milestones in linguistic research on lying, we still know very little about how speakers of different languages talk about truth, lies, and deception. To what extent are these concepts lexicalized? What words and expressions are there to refer to them and how are they used? Coleman & Kay's (1981) seminal study on the English *lie* sparked a line of research on its translational equivalents in several other languages, such as Indonesian, Chinese, Colombian Spanish, Mopan Maya, Japanese, Shuar-Achuar etc. (Adha 2020, Brown 2002, Chen et al. 2013, Danziger 2010, Erut et al. 2023, Hardin 2010, Nishimura 2018, Reins et al. 2021, Sakaba 2020, Sweetser 1987), showing that speakers of different languages may, in fact, differ in their judgements of what it means to lie. Linguistic research on words for truth related concepts seems to have mainly targeted their grammaticalization, with Wierzbicka's (2002) analysis of the two Russian words for 'truth', *pravda* and *istina*, as one of the relatively rare examples of linguistic research on the meaning of 'truth'. Truth-attesting markers are known to commonly evolve into boosting intensifiers, with examples like Eng. *very* from French *vrai*, or Hebrew *mamash* (Heine & Kuteva 2002: 302, González 2015, Bardenstein & Ariel 2021, among others); they can also grammaticalize into concessive markers (König 1988, Apresjan 2010), verum markers (Kerr & van der Wal 2022), markers of performatory agreement (Orr & Ariel 2021), tag forms (*pravda?* in Russian or *inte sant?* in Swedish), etc. Words meaning 'lie, deception' can give rise to simulative derivations (Jacques 2023), but on the whole very little is known about grammaticalization of words for 'lie'.

Notably, most of the linguistic research on the concepts of 'lie', 'deception' and 'truth' focus on one word at a time, without taking into consideration their semantic "neighbours", i.e., the broader conceptual domains or lexical fields they are part of (cf. Sweetser 1987, Arutjunova 2008 and Arutjunova & Rjabceva 1995 for some of the exceptions).

For this workshop we invite contributions that explore the conceptual domains of truth, lies and deception in a single language or across languages with a focus on the lexicon and grammar. Some of the interesting research angles include the following ones:

Lexicalization: Do all languages have a lexical expression roughly equivalent to 'truth' in English? Are there other languages with multiple terms for this notion, like Russian with its two words for 'truth'? Do all languages have a lexical expression corresponding to 'lie' as a

speech act, e.g., distinguished from 'deceive', and, on the contrary, in which languages are the two notions colexified? Is this broadly attested? If a language has several 'lying' verbs, what is the semantic-pragmatic difference between them?

Lexical relations: The relations between words are also relevant for charting their meaning and function. For example, what kind of antonymic relations do 'truth' and 'lie(s)' have? Are they complementary, or gradual? Is something true OR false, or can something be almost true? What are the synonyms for truth (e.g., *fact, authenticity, legitimacy*)? What are the synonyms for lies (e.g., *falsity, deception, pretense*)? Can the lexical fields for truth/lies/deception be modelled in terms of hypo- and hyperonyms?

Metaphors, phraseologisms and semantic shifts: What metaphors / phraseologisms are used for talking about lying and telling the truth and what are the conceptual mappings underlying these expressions? Which are broadly attested vs. areally / culturally specific? For instance, lying can be described as blowing in Russian, Latvian, Swedish and Armenian, and as defecating in Wolof, and many languages use similes in their expressions for lying – lying like a gray horse in Russian, like a dog in Croatian, Farsi and Mandinka. Conversely, the words for 'truth' can build phraseologisms, like *kasta sanningen i ansiktet på någon* 'throw the truth in someone's face' in Swedish or *rezatʹ pravdu v glaza* 'cut the truth in the eyes' in Russian for telling the unpleasant truth in a nasty way (and using it as a weapon). Are truths and lies contrasted along similar domains, or do they draw from different ones? Do the identified metaphors suggest a cognitive orientation that may contribute to a richer understanding of the relevant notions? Are there areal patterns in their distribution?

Diachronic issues: What are the sources and source domains for expressions translatable as 'truth, true(ly)' and 'to lie, a lie'? What about the lexicon economy of truth and lie? Do the lexical items belong to a core etymologically opaque lexicon or are they (mostly) a result of (metaphor-triggered) colexification? And how do these expressions and their derivates grammaticalize in the languages of the world? What can we say about the chronological depth of conceptual metaphor for truth and lying? Are some attested on the Longue Durée, in ancient languages? If so, how similar/different are their linguistic realizations with respect to modern languages?

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