



Introduction to Discourse Studies



Plan

- 1. Communication as a type of action.**
- 2. Speech act theory in discourse studies**
- 3. The pragmatic aspect of discourse**
- 4. The discourse situation**
- 5. 5. What makes a discourse discourse?**



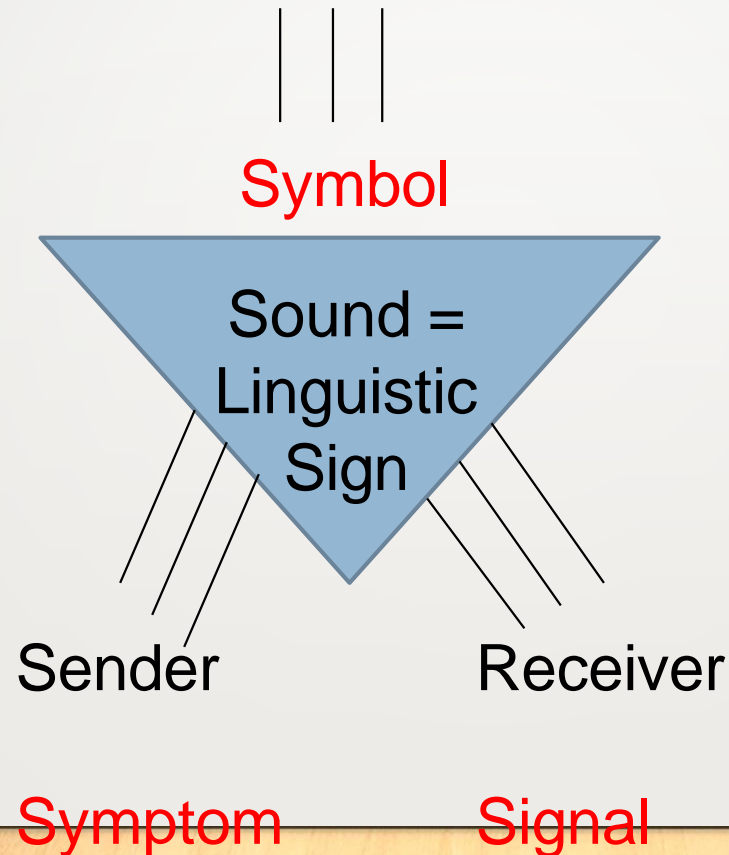
Plato's Cratylus

- Speech as a form of action
- Words as instruments with which actions can be performed

Organon model (by Karl Bühler):

(language as a tool (Organon), instrument)

Objects and states of affairs





Example:

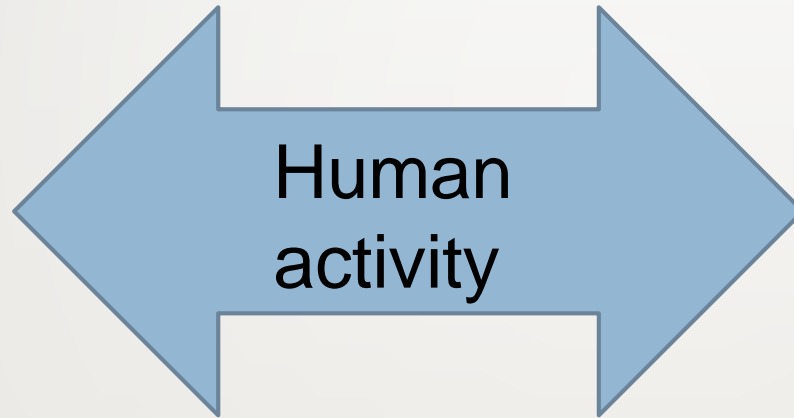
- Have you heard that strange story about the drunk who decided to play barber and cut off his friend's ear?



Oto Jespersen:

The essence of language

To make himself understood



To understand what was in the mind of the speaker



Speech act theory:

- language as a form of acting
- What people are doing when they use language
- How people perform speech acts such as apologizing, promising, ordering, etc.

Three kinds of action by John Austin (1967)

- **Locution:** the act of producing an utterance
- **Illocution:** the act that is committed by producing an utterance
- **Perlocution:** the production of an effect through locution and illocution

Various uptakes of the same utterance

Locution of the speaker	illocution	Perlocutive uptake
There is a good movie tonight	Invitation	Ok, let's go
There is a good movie tonight	Advice	Ok, I will go there
There is a good movie tonight	Excuse	Never mind
There is a good movie tonight	offer	Thank you



Types of illocution acts

- **assertives** = speech acts that commit a speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition
- **directives** = speech acts that are to cause the hearer to take a particular action, e.g. requests, commands and advice
- **commissives** = speech acts that commit a speaker to some future action, e.g. promises and oaths
- **expressives** = speech acts that express on the speaker's attitudes and emotions towards the proposition, e.g. congratulations, excuses and thanks
- **declarations** = speech acts that change the reality in accord with the proposition of the declaration, e.g. baptisms, pronouncing someone guilty or pronouncing someone husband and wife



Examples of illocution acts

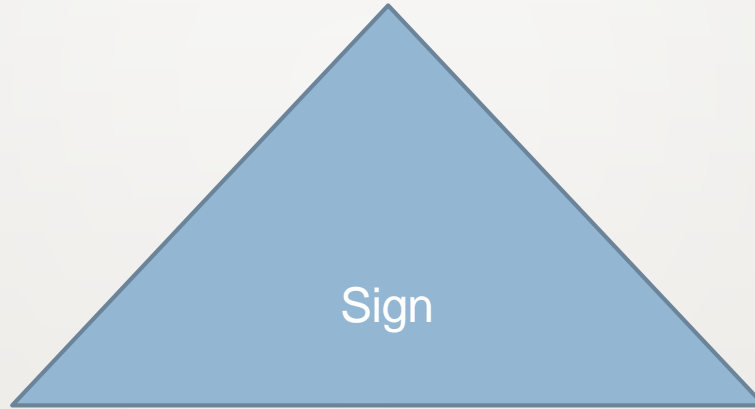
- **Assertives:** "Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius."
- **Directives:** "Could you close the window, please?"
- **Commissives:** "I vow to support you through thick and thin."
- **Expressives:** "Congratulations on your promotion!"
- **Declarations:** "I now pronounce you husband and wife."

Pragmatics:

- The study of acts
- Part of an approach to sign (semiotics)
 - The focus is on the way linguistic signs function
- A sign can only be a sign if it is addressed to somebody, and creates an “idea” in the mind of the addressee; this is called the interpretant.
- A sign is “nothing” without its function, referring to an object and creating an idea.

Interpretant

The sense made of the sign



Sign

Representamen

The sound vehicle

Object

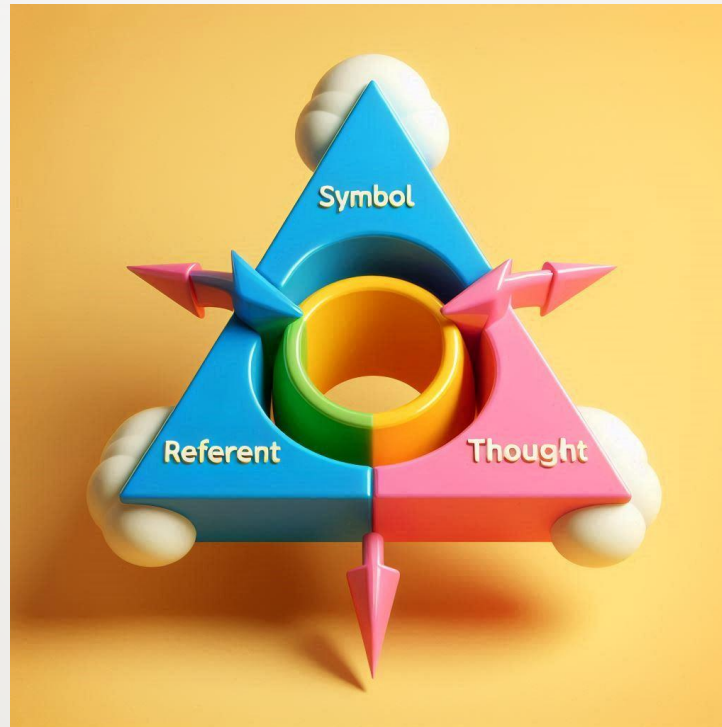
What the sign stands for



Types of signs

- Icon:
 - The sign resembles some object, e.g., a picture of a castle on a billboard, the
 - picture of a man on a toilet door or an emoticon in a text message.
- Index:
 - It directs attention to the object. For example, a weathercock is an index of the direction of the wind. The phone ringing is an index of someone who wants to talk to you and an arrow on a crossroads can be an index to a castle.
- Symbol:
 - It is associated with an object by “rule”. A building with battlements, a drawbridge and towers is called a castle.
 - A symbol represents its object and determines its interpretant on the basis of conventions.
 - Most words are symbols.

The Ogden-Richards Semiotic Triangle



Three areas in the field of semiotics (Morris, 1938)

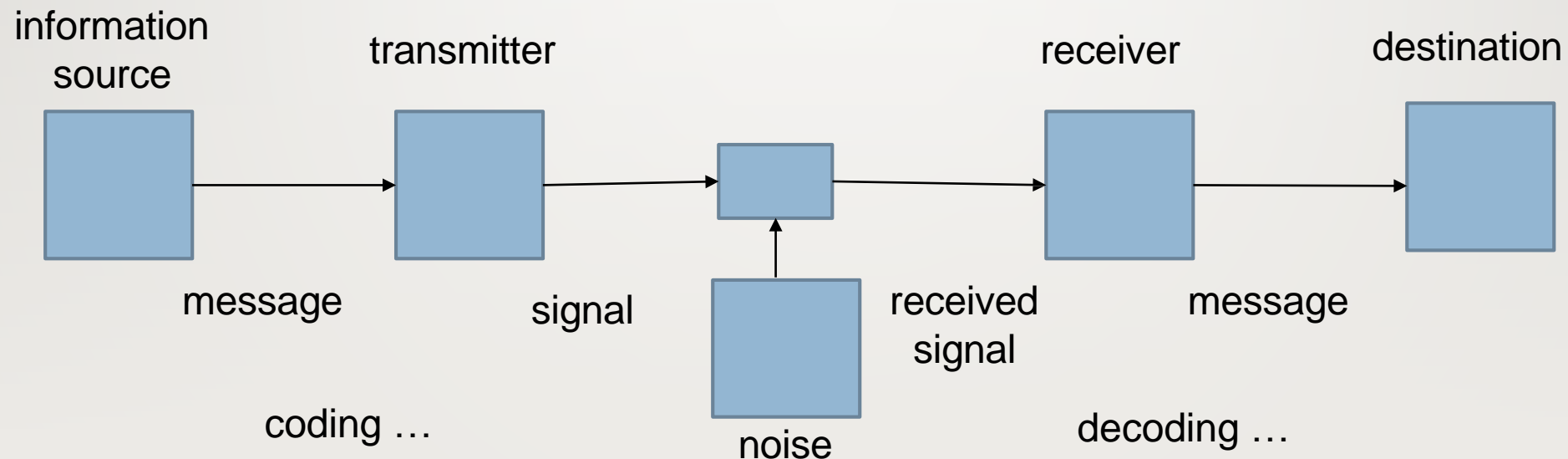
1. Syntax: the relationship between signs within a sign system.
2. Semantics: the relationship between signs and the objects they refer to.
3. Pragmatics: the relationship between signs and the people who use them.

Pragmatics deals with questions about how signs function. Applied to discourse, the pragmatic approach deals with the question of how discourse is produced and interpreted in context, in specific situations.

Pragmatics is about the social rules for the interchange of symbols.

The sender-message-receiver approach

- Sender and receiver
- It presupposes that there is an information package that has to be transmitted from one person to another.
- This view stems from the general communication model (originates from Shannon and Weaver, 1949):



Discourse situation

- Illocutions is viewed as functions of certain forms.
- Function means the objective and effect in a given situation.

A: Do you smoke?

B: Well, if you've got a cigarette.



Discourse situation

- The interpretation of possible objectives and effects, however, can be strongly influenced by the situation in which the utterance takes place.
- In the above example, A wants to make B feel at ease by using the question form for the illocution to offer. A's objective has a specific effect: B makes it clear that the illocution is understood, and counters with as a perlocution, a suggestion which makes it clear that A's objective has been achieved.
- If, for example, the question "Do you smoke?" is asked by a physician, it does not function as a means of starting a conversation, but as a medical question.

Components of speech events (SPEAKING) by Hymes (1972)

S	Setting	The time and place which is the concrete physical circumstances in which speech takes place.
S	Scene	The abstract psychological setting, or the cultural definition of the occasion. A setting can be changed (from formal to informal) by the participants.
P	Participants	Speaker-listener, addressor-addressee or sender-receiver
E	Ends	Goals and outcomes of communication
A	Act	The form and the content of the message
K	Keys	The tone of the conversation; serious, mocking
I	Instrumentalities	The choice of channel, such as oral, written, or telegraphic, and the actual form of speech, such as dialect, standard language, register
N	Norms	The norms of interactions and the norms of interpretations
G	Genre	Clearly demarcated types of utterance, such as poems, proverbs, prayers, lecture

The socio-semiotic approach

- Offers a good general framework for analyzing all the different aspects of discourse.
- Two important aspects:
 - Receivers are active cooperating participants in the communication.
 - Discourse is always situated in a social context and in a specific situation.
- Michael Halliday (1978) and Ruqaiya Hasan proposed functional grammar or systemic functional linguistics.
- Socio: the social context (the context of culture and the context of situation).
- Semiotic: the act of conveying meaning with symbols.
- The central claim in this approach is:
 - Every (piece of) discourse has to be studied in its social context, in the culture and situation in which it appears.

Tenor

Tenor deals with the participants in a communicative situation and their social roles and relationships. This includes:

- **Power dynamics:** Is the interaction between equals, or is there a hierarchical relationship (like teacher-student, boss-employee)?
- **Social distance:** How well do the participants know each other? Are they close friends, acquaintances, or strangers?
- **Formality:** Is the interaction formal or informal? This affects the tone and choice of language.

Mode


Mode refers to the channel of communication and how the language is delivered. This includes:

- **Medium:** Is the communication spoken or written? Does it involve gestures, images, or digital media?
- **Formality and style:** How is the language structured? Is it a casual chat, a formal presentation, or a written report?
- **Interaction:** Is the communication interactive, like a conversation, or monologic, like a lecture?



Field

Field involves the subject matter or the content of the communication. This includes:

- **Topic:** What is being talked about? Is it about science, politics, daily life, or something else?
 - **Activity type:** What kind of social activity is taking place? Is it a discussion, a narrative, an explanation, or a directive?
 - **Specialization:** Does the communication involve technical jargon or specialized vocabulary?
- 

Three aspects of meaning in discourse

- Ideational meaning: corresponds to the field. It is the content of a discourse as it refers to what is going on in a particular situation or a specific topic.
- Interpersonal meaning: corresponds with the tenor of context and can be detected by analyzing how participants in the discourse are related to the content or ideational meaning and how they use language to act
- Textual meaning: corresponds to the mode of the context. The textual meaning is the organization of the content elements in a larger structure, e.g., the techniques of putting some information in a prominent place or the combining of sentences.

Three aspects of social context by Halliday and Hasan (1985):

Situation components of contexts	Discourse Aspects of meaning
Field of discourse Tenor of discourse Mode of discourse	Ideational meaning Interpersonal meaning Textual meaning

- **Field:** What is happening; what the discourse is all about; different kinds of social actions.
- **Tenor:** Participants, their roles/relationships, status. Power and social distance. It also refers to affect: the degree of emotional charge in the relationship between the participants, the attitudes and emotions that play a role in communication.
- **Mode:** The symbolic organization of the text, its status and its function including the channel (spoken, written or a combination of the two), persuasive, expository, and didactic categories, and the like.

What is wrong with this text/situation?

John wants to visit his girlfriend. **Mr Smith** lives in a small village nearby. **The vacuum cleaner** didn't start. **The barber** down the street couldn't help. **The last tomatoes** had been sold out. It is going to be a long dull **talk**.



Is this a more meaningful situation?

- John wants to visit his girlfriend. **She** lives in a small village nearby. **The car** didn't start. **The garage** down the street couldn't help. The last **ignition coil** had been sold out. It is going to be a long dull **walk**.



Seven criteria for textuality:

- (1) **Cohesion:** Connections between elements in the text.
- (2) **Coherence:** The connection that is brought about by something outside the text.
- (3) **Intentionality:** Writers and speakers must have the conscious intention of achieving specific goals with their message.
- (4) **Acceptability:** A sequence of sentences be acceptable to the intended audience.
- (5) **Informativeness:** A discourse must contain new information. If a reader knows everything contained in a discourse, then it does not qualify.
- (6) **Situationality:** It is important to consider the situation in which the discourse has been produced and dealt with.
- (7) **Intertextuality:** A sequence of sentences is related by form or meaning to other sequences of sentences.

Cohesion

Cohesion refers to how well the elements of a text are connected and stick together. It involves the use of linguistic elements like conjunctions, pronouns, and synonyms to link sentences and ideas.

*"John loves playing football. He **plays** every weekend with his friends."*

Here, "He" refers back to "John," creating a cohesive link.



Coherence

Coherence deals with the logical flow and organization of the text, ensuring that it makes sense as a whole. It's about how well the parts fit together conceptually.

"She went to the market because she needed groceries. Once there, she bought vegetables, fruits, and bread."

The actions and events follow a logical order, making the text coherent.



Intentionality

Intentionality is about the purpose behind the text. The author has a specific goal or intention, whether it's to inform, persuade, entertain, or instruct.

You should definitely vote for him, because he is the only true candidate.

A political speech aims to persuade the audience to support a candidate or policy.

The intention is clear in the choice of words and arguments presented.

Acceptability

Acceptability refers to how well the text meets the expectations and standards of its audience. It should be appropriate in terms of formality, style, and content.

The speed of light in a vacuum is constant and independent of the motion of the light source or observer [Einstein, 1905]

An academic essay is expected to be formal, well-researched, and properly cited. Using colloquial language in this context would not meet the acceptability criterion.

Informativity

Informativity concerns the amount of new or unexpected information provided in the text. It's about the balance between known and unknown information to keep the audience engaged.

For example,

An article about a new scientific discovery presents new facts and insights that were previously unknown to the readers.

Situationality

Situationality is about the relevance of the text to its context or situation. The text should fit the context in which it is used.

For example, a weather report is relevant to the current and upcoming weather conditions, providing timely and useful information.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality means that a sequence of sentences is related by form or meaning to other sequences of sentences. This lecture is a discourse because each next part of it is connected with the previous one.



What is the connection between these sentences?

Shakespeare wrote more than 20 plays. Will you have dinner with me tonight?

Connectivity: coherence vs cohesion

Cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical linking within a text that holds it together on a surface level. This includes:

- Pronouns: Replacing nouns with pronouns for flow (e.g., "John" becomes "he").
- Conjunctions: Using words like "and," "but," "however" to link sentences.
- Lexical chains: Repeating words, synonyms, or related terms to maintain a topic.

Example: "John went to the store. He bought some apples." Here, "He" ties the two sentences together, making it cohesive.

- **Coherence**, on the other hand, deals with the logical connections and overall sense of the text. It ensures that the text is meaningful and logically structured. Coherence is more about how well the ideas in the text flow and make sense as a whole.

Example: "*John went to the store because he wanted to buy some apples. The apples were for his pie recipe.*"

The cause-and-effect relationship between the sentences makes the text coherent.

A bright yellow rectangular sticky note is placed on a dark, weathered wooden surface. The note features the text "THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, arranged in three lines. The wooden background consists of horizontal planks with a visible grain and some shadows. The entire scene is set against a light-colored wooden floor at the bottom of the frame.

**THANKS FOR
YOUR
ATTENTION**