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Oxana CREANGA

Pragmatics of the English Discourse

A Coursebook

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Supportul de curs *Pragmatica discursului englez* este destinat studenților Ciclului I, licență, și dezvoltă competențele prevăzute de curriculumul universitar la unitatea de curs *Pragmatica discursului englez*.

Conținutul lucrării cuprinde 10 unități de învățare elaborate în conformitate cu curriculumul la disciplina respectivă. Fiecare unitate de învățare este însoțită de activități practice de autoevaluare, ceea ce le permite studenților să dezvolte competențe specifice pragmaticii discursului englez, prin înțelegerea relației dintre limbaj și context, prin recunoașterea intențiilor comunicative și a strategiilor discursive, precum și prin formarea abilităților de analiză critică a textelor de diferite tipuri și grade de complexitate, pregătindu-i pentru viitoarea activitate profesională în calitate de profesori de limba engleză. De asemenea, suportul de curs include următoarele compartimente: recomandări metodice pentru lucrul individual al studentului; lista temelor pentru teze de an / licență / masterat; lista bibliografică și sursele literare utilizate la ilustrarea conceptelor din pragmatică.

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PREFACE

The coursebook *Pragmatics of the English Discourse* is designed for fourth-year students specialising in English at the Faculty of Letters, Moldova State University, within the general field of study *Educational Sciences*. It addresses the essential aspects of pragmatic theory and discourse analysis, combining theoretical exposition with practical tasks relevant to the professional training of future teachers of English.

The course introduces students to the central principles of pragmatics, focusing on the relationship between language use, meaning construction, and communicative context. By exploring the notions of sentence, utterance, and proposition, as well as the interplay of literal, implied, and inferred meaning, students are encouraged to approach discourse as a dynamic process determined by context, inference, and communicative intention. The coursebook aims to develop pragmatic competencies through the integration and application of language in authentic professional communication contexts. The pragmatic competence enables graduates to use English effectively in various social and professional contexts, thereby contributing to comprehensive training aligned with modern professional requirements. The graduates of the course develop the ability to interpret and apply fundamental pragmatic concepts in educational communication situations, adapting language and discursive intentions to context, curricular objectives, and the developmental level of students in the secondary cycle. They are capable of creating coherent and effective teaching messages, in accordance with the principles of both communication and English language teaching. The course comprises 10 learning units and emphasises the study of inferential strategies, speech act theory, conversational implicature, politeness strategies, relevance theory, coherence,

and rhetorical effectiveness, thus offering an integrated perspective on discourse as both a linguistic and a social practice.

The main learning outcomes of the course are:

- to develop students' ability to interpret meaning beyond the literal level of the sentence, identifying the speaker's intended meaning in authentic communicative acts;
- to provide students with the tools necessary to analyse how contextual, cognitive, and cultural factors influence the interpretation of utterances and govern the meaning of discourse;
- to cultivate critical and reflective thinking in relation to pragmatic phenomena such as implicature, presupposition, relevance and processing effort, politeness and face management, information structuring, discourse organisation;
- to develop students' critical and evaluative competences through activities that require the assessment of the effectiveness of rhetorical strategies and pragmatic choices in achieving communicative goals in authentic discourse situations and literary texts.

At the same time, the course contributes to fostering undergraduates' pragmatic competences, included in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR, 2001; 2020)*, required for professional training, which include three key components of competence:

1. Discourse competence – the ability to organise and structure the message coherently and logically according to the communicative context.
2. Functional competence – the ability to use language to achieve specific communicative functions.

3. Design competence – the ability to apply principles governing the sequencing of messages according to interactional and transactional schemata in different communicative contexts.

Throughout the course, students will acquire competences central to their future professional activity: to evaluate how linguistic choices function in discourse; to apply pragmatic principles in the analysis of authentic communicative exchanges; to assess the organisation and management of interaction in various contexts; and to interpret the pragmatic mechanisms that sustain coherence, persuasion, and rhetorical impact.

The coursebook presents a clear and accessible account of key concepts in pragmatics and discourse, illustrated with examples from authentic communication and excerpts from English and American literary texts. Each unit includes an application section with questions, analytical and interpretative tasks designed to check students' comprehension, consolidate their understanding of the theoretical material, and promote independent analysis. The coursebook also contains individual project assignments, suggested research topics, a sample test, and a list of essential references in pragmatics and discourse analysis.

The emphasis of the course is on nurturing an active and reflective engagement with language use, encouraging students to recognise, analyse, and evaluate the pragmatic dimensions of English discourse. This approach ensures that students not only assimilate theoretical knowledge but also acquire practical skills in interpreting and managing communication effectively in their future professional careers as teachers of English.

Unit 1.

INTRODUCTION TO PRAGMATICS AND DISCOURSE

Learning outcomes:

- present the distinction between pragmatics and semantics;
- define the concepts of sentence, utterance, and proposition and describe their role in meaning construction;
- distinguish between literal meaning, implied meaning, and inferred meaning in communicative acts;
- evaluate how pragmatic factors influence linguistic choices and affect meaning in authentic discourse situations.

Pragmatics vs. semantics

Language, an essential tool for human communication, serves both to express ideas, *the ideational function*, and to facilitate interaction, the *interpersonal function*. The role of language in conveying meaning is reflected in our reliance on language for everything from meeting basic needs to conveying emotions and discussing abstract concepts. Therefore, understanding language requires examining not only its structure but also the ways in which meaning is created and interpreted in different contexts. The two subfields in the study of meaning are semantics and pragmatics. In general terms, the difference can be understood by examining the role of context. **Semantics** deals with the meaning of a linguistic expression independently of the context in which it is used. In contrast, **pragmatics** is the study of how meaning is generated and interpreted within a specific context. Pragmatics focuses on what a speaker intends to convey when using a particular expression in a specific situation [28, p. 2]. René Dirven and Marjolijn Verspoor highlight the interactional function of pragmatics defining it as “the study of how people interact when

using language”, language-in-use being defined as a part of human interaction [12, p. 150].

Geoffrey N. Leech, in *Principles of Pragmatics*, states that the boundary dispute between semantics and pragmatics underlies the problem of distinguishing *language* (langue) and *language use* (parole). Although the centrality of meaning is peculiar to both fields, the distinction can be underscored by the different uses of the verb to mean [20, p. 5]:

- [1] What does X mean? [2] What did you mean by X?

Semantics deals with meaning as a dyadic relation, as in [1], *i.e.*, meaning is fixed and context-independent, analysed in terms of *signifier* (word) and *signified* (concept), without considering speaker’s intent or situational context. Pragmatics, on the other hand, deals with meaning as a triadic relation, as in [2], *i.e.*, analysed in terms of the linguistic expression, the speaker’s intention, and the context of use. Thus, in pragmatics meaning is interpreted in relation to the user of the language, whereas in semantics, it is treated as an inherent feature of linguistic expressions, independent of particular situations, speakers, or hearers.

In this context, it is worth mentioning Chapman’s distinction between theoretical pragmatics and social pragmatics [7]. Both explore the role of context on interpretation, but they differ in focus and approach. Theoretical pragmatics examines how meaning is conveyed and interpreted in discourse contexts, often drawing from the philosophy of language. It focuses on linguistic structures, inference mechanisms, and the cognitive processes involved in understanding utterances. Social pragmatics, however, emphasises naturally occurring discourse and investigates how social and cultural factors shape interactions.

Pragmatics is concerned with studying language's relation to the contextual background features. The choice of a specific grammar form depends on the speaker's communicative intentions, influenced, in its turn, by the context in which the interaction takes place, the social context, the relationship among the interlocutors, and the overall message intended to be conveyed. The interpretation extends beyond literal meaning to include emotions, attitudes, and implied content, relying on the hearer's access to contextual information [28, p. 5]. Consider the examples:

- (1) Turn down the music!
- (2) Would you mind turning down the music a little?
- (3) Wow, it's pretty loud in here!

The first example is a direct request framed by means of an imperative utterance, which might sound commanding. The use of the imperative has the strongest effect on the hearer. The second request is indirect. Using "*would you mind*" makes it more considerate. It uses negative politeness strategy, because it asks if the hearer is able to do something, thereby allowing the hearer to refuse if it is impossible for him to comply with the speaker's request. Here, the speaker seems to be expressing doubt as to whether the hearer is willing to comply with the speaker's request. The third is a hint that something should be done about the noise without explicitly stating it. It relies on the listener to infer the intended request.

Pragmatics also examines how meaning is shaped by knowledge of the physical and social world, socio-psychological factors, and the time and place of communication. It focuses on how speakers convey more than just the literal meaning of words, relying on shared assumptions between speaker and hearer. Communication involves both the speaker's intention and the

hearer's inference, as Cutting explains: "*the speaker constructs the linguistic message and intends or implies a meaning, and the hearer interprets the message and infers the meaning*", making interpretation a dynamic process influenced by context and interaction [11, p. 2]. In the same line of thought, Scott defines pragmatics as [28, p. 5]:

the study of the context-sensitive decisions that speakers make, and it is the study of the effects that these decisions have on what is communicated. Pragmatics, as a field, is concerned with everything that is communicated by an utterance beyond the literal, encoded meanings of the words that are used.

So, pragmatics seeks to grasp how we interpret the meaning the speaker intended to communicate beyond the literal, direct language used. It explores how people make linguistic choices, in particular contexts, and how those choices create meaning. Understanding the pragmatic processes is essential for fully understanding how communication works.

Sentence, utterance, and proposition

In pragmatics, the distinction between sentences and utterances is important as it functions as a general principle of distinguishing between semantics and pragmatics [7, p. 21], and one that marks the scope of pragmatics.

A sentence is a structured linguistic unit with a fixed meaning, governed by grammatical rules of the language [*Ibidem*]. Sentences have syntactic and semantic properties that are independent of context. A sentence meaning is derived from the syntactic arrangement and semantics of the words. An **utterance** is a specific instance of a sentence being spoken or written in a particular context by a particular person. In addition to the linguistic properties, inherited from the sentence of which it is

made, utterances have further properties that are not shared by the sentence. An utterance has spatial, temporal, and physical properties that a sentence does not have. Thus, the referents of the utterance “*I will see you here tomorrow.*” (who, to whom, where, and when it was spoken) will vary depending on the context in which it was produced. The notion of *contexts* or of *speakers* and *hearers* is limited to descriptions of utterances. Sentences are abstract linguistic structures; they do not have contexts and they are not produced by speakers or received by hearers [7, p. 21].

Another distinction between sentences and utterances is marked by the features of *grammaticality* and *acceptability*. **Grammaticality** refers to whether a sentence follows the grammar rules of the language. A sentence is either grammatical or ungrammatical, irrespective of the context. As an example, Chapman quotes Noam Chomsky’s famous sentence “*Colourless green ideas sleep furiously*”, which is grammatically correct, even though it is nonsensical [*Ibidem*, p. 22]. **Acceptability**, on the other hand, refers to whether an utterance is appropriate or meaningful in a specific context. For instance, “*I order you to be here by 9 o’clock tomorrow.*” is grammatically correct, but it will be acceptable in contexts where ‘I’ is in a position of authority over ‘you’.

Kate Scott brings forward the concept of the *proposition* to highlight the difference between sentence and utterance [28, p. 8]. **A proposition¹** is a representation of a state of affairs that can be true or false. A sentence by itself does not express a proposition

¹ A proposition is what is expressed by a declarative sentence when that sentence is used to make a statement, that is, to say something, true or false, about some state of affairs in the external world [17, p. 14].

The propositional content of a sentence is that part of its meaning that can be reduced to a proposition [*Ibidem*].

until it is used by a speaker in a specific context. When a sentence is used to communicate a proposition, it becomes an utterance.

- (4) A: Did Sarah pass the exam?
B: She looked happy.

In this example, B's utterance "*She looked happy.*" expresses the proposition that Sarah looked happy. This proposition can be true or false depending on whether Sarah actually looked happy. However, the meaning of B's utterance goes beyond the sentence's literal meaning. It also implies that B thinks Sarah passed the exam. The additional meaning is inferred based on the context of A's question, which we would miss without understanding the implied connection between passing the exam and looking happy. Thus, the full meaning of B's utterance requires understanding the context and the implications it carries. A proposition is the intended meaning behind an utterance, and it can vary depending on the context in which the sentence is used.

In assigning meaning, we resort to information that goes beyond what is explicitly stated, *i.e.*, decoding the lexical elements and interpreting the syntactical dependencies of an utterance. For instance, the utterance exemplified by Scott "*It is too hot.*" could refer to weather, food, or something else depending on the context [*Ibidem*, p. 11]. To determine its exact meaning, hearers have to construct a proposition – an interpretation that can be evaluated as true or false. Therefore, a sentence can convey different propositions, depending on the context.

The process of constructing these propositions involves three key components:

- **encoded meanings** – the explicit content of the utterance
- **contextual information** – details about the situation in which the utterance occurs

- **world knowledge** – shared or assumed knowledge about how the world works.

This process of using encoded meaning, contextual information, and world knowledge to construct the propositions behind the encoded content of an utterance is called **inference**.

When it comes to communication, it is important to distinguish between two different processes designated by corresponding terms that denote the two actants of the communicative situation:

- **to imply** – refers to what the speaker intends to communicate beyond the literal meaning.
- **to infer** – refers to what the hearer interprets or deduces from the speaker's utterance.

In a successful communication sequence, the listener infers what the speaker implies.

Pragmatics, as discussed, extends far beyond decoding literal meaning. It is primarily concerned with how language is used to serve specific functions in real communicative contexts. In this light, pragmatics can also be seen as the study of how linguistic forms are employed to express different communicative functions, and how these forms are adapted depending on the constraints of the context in which they are used [3, p. 324]. Therefore, a key area of focus is the way language is used to construct **discourse**, *i.e.*, sequences of spoken or written sentences that cohere and function as meaningful units of communication.

Another essential aspect of pragmatics is concerned with how **contextual conditions** influence linguistic choices: the physical and social settings, the interpersonal relationships between discourse participants, such as their roles, degrees of intimacy or authority, etc. Factors such as intentions, attitudes, and

beliefs also shape language use. Therefore, competent language users intuitively adjust their language according to these factors, through their **communicative competence** – the knowledge and ability to produce and interpret utterances appropriately in various social and situational contexts [*Ibidem*, p. 325].

In conclusion, pragmatics offers a conceptual framework for understanding how meaning is actively constructed in use – determined by context, shared knowledge, and the communicative goals of participants. It bridges linguistic form and real-life language use, highlighting how language functions as a dynamic resource for human interaction.

Activities

1. Review the following definitions of *pragmatics*. Identify the commonalities and differences. Consider how each definition highlights a particular aspect of pragmatics (e.g., speaker meaning, language use, social context, etc.).
 - a. Pragmatics studies language in context and the influence of situation on meaning [15, p. 4].
 - b. Pragmatics: the study of speaker meaning and how more is communicated than is said [42, p. 292].
 - c. Pragmatics refers to how language is used in communication [20, p. 1].
 - d. Pragmatics is often described as the study of language use, as opposed to language structure [39, p. 1].
 - e. Pragmatics is concerned with ‘meaning in context’ [7, p. 1].
 - f. Pragmatics, as the study of the way humans use their language in communication, bases itself on a study of those premises and determines how they affect, and effectualise, human language use. Hence, pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society [21, p. 6].

2. Formulate the difference between semantics and pragmatics in the study of meaning.
3. Explain the role of context in distinguishing between semantic and pragmatic meaning.
4. What is the distinction between a sentence and an utterance according to pragmatics?
5. Define the notion of a proposition and explain how it relates to sentences and utterances.
6. Describe the process of inference in pragmatics and differentiate between *to imply* and *to infer*.
7. Consider Queen Victoria's famous quotation, "We are not amused," allegedly uttered when an equerry ventured to tell a joke during dinner at Windsor. Analyse the sentence from the following perspectives, using the distinctions presented in the unit:
 - Semantics: What does the sentence literally mean?
 - Syntax: How is the sentence structured? What effect does the use of "we" and the passive voice have?
 - Pragmatics: What does the Queen likely intend to communicate beyond the literal meaning? How do the social context and background features affect or guide interpretation?
8. Read the following closing excerpt from W.S. Maugham's "A Friend in Need". Analyse the final utterance in terms of (a) its literal meaning, (b) the proposition it conveys in response to the preceding yes/no question, and (c) the pragmatic reason for the speaker's indirect reply.

I didn't say anything for a moment or two. I was a trifle shocked. Then I asked Burton a question.

'When you made him that offer of a job, did you know he'd be drowned?' He gave a little mild chuckle and he looked at me

with those kind and candid blue eyes of his. He rubbed his chin with his hand.

‘Well, I hadn’t got a vacancy in my office at the moment.’ [51, p. 580]

Recommended bibliography:

1. Chapman, S. *Pragmatics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 224 p.
2. Dirven, R., Verspoor, M. *Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics. Second Revised Edition*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004. 277 p.
3. Huang, Y. *Pragmatics*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 464 p.
4. Scott, K. *Pragmatics in English: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 254 p.

Unit 2.

COMPONENTS OF SPEAKER'S INTENDED MEANING

Learning outcomes:

- explain the inferential strategies used in pragmatic interpretation: reference assignment, pragmatic enrichment, and disambiguation;
- apply pragmatic principles to real or fictional discourse in order to determine the intended meaning beyond the literal expression;
- analyse different types of ambiguity and evaluate how contextual cues resolve them.

In conversational discourse, determining the meaning of an utterance involves deducing the meaning the speaker intends to convey. This is possible through a number of inferential procedures that involve considering [28, p. 26]:

- what the chosen words literally mean (the explicit meaning)
- the way they express it, *i.e.*, happily, angrily, approvingly, etc.
- real world knowledge
- the context of the utterance
- what the chosen words might imply (the implicit meaning).

The scope of pragmatic inquiry primarily encompasses instances where a speaker's intended meaning differs from the literal meaning of the chosen words, as well as why speakers often rely more on implicit meaning than explicit expression. Chapman explains that one reason for this is that implicit meaning makes

conversations more engaging, as literal speech can be monotonous. Additionally, implicit meaning contributes to the efficiency of communication, allowing thoughts to be conveyed more quickly than through explicit statements, since in nearly all cases where there is a difference between explicit and implicit meaning, the implicit meaning conveys a lot more than is literally expressed; the literal meaning “underdetermines” the meaning conveyed [7, p. 31].

The linguistic *underdeterminacy thesis* posits that the linguistically encoded meaning of a sentence radically underdetermines the proposition a speaker expresses when he or she utters that sentence [17, p. 378]. The pragmatic principles that are shared by speakers and guide listeners toward the intended interpretations of the propositional meaning are *reference assignment*, *pragmatic enrichment*, and *disambiguation* [28, p. 26-27].

Reference assignment

When communicating, speakers refer to things, people, objects, places, concepts, abstract ideas using referring expressions. George Yule defines reference as “an act in which a speaker, or writer, uses linguistic forms to enable a listener, or reader, to identify something” [41, p. 17]. In Yan Huang’s account, reference “is a relation that involves speakers, linguistic expressions, and the object, or the set of objects, that these linguistic expressions stand for, or that is picked out by a speaker in using these linguistic expressions”, thus foregrounding the triadic relationship between the speaker, the linguistic form, and the referent [17, p. 224]. The category of referring expressions includes:

- definite pronouns: he, she, it, they, we;
- indefinite pronouns: someone, anyone;

- definite descriptions: the author, the man on the bike, the girl in white;
- indefinite descriptions: a horse, an angry customer, a beautiful day;
- demonstratives: this, that, those ideas, these answers;
- proper nouns: John, London, Mr. Sumner.

The interpretation of referring expressions is determined by the context and speaker intentions, as the choice of the type of referring expression often depends on what the speaker assumes the listener already knows. Reference assignment is an inferential process, since pronouns like “*he*” in “*He entered the room.*” provide some information, but do not uniquely identify a referent. Thus, the same sentence can express many different propositions depending on who “*he*” refers to (e.g. John, Mark, or Liam). This principle applies to all referring expressions, for each word or phrase has a “range of reference” [28, p. 28].

George Yule emphasises that understanding reference in language requires more than just identifying the referents. The interpretation of referencing elements is determined by the **co-text** (the linguistic material surrounding the expression) and **context** (the physical or situational environment). For example, in a headline like “*Brazil wins World Cup*” the co-text narrows the interpretation of “Brazil” to its national soccer team. Similarly, phrases like “the cheese sandwich” can refer to food or a person ordering it, depending on the co-text (e.g., a menu vs. a restaurant scenario) [41, p. 20-21]. The physical context and socio-cultural conventions influence interpretation. For instance, in a hospital, “*the heart-attack mustn't be moved*” refers to a patient, not the condition itself. This demonstrates that reference is a social act, relying on shared knowledge and conventions between speaker and listener. It extends beyond

simple word-object relationships to include inferences determined by contextual and cultural norms [*Ibidem*, p. 22]. Thus, names associated with things can refer to people, and names of people can refer to things, as in “*Can I look at your Chomsky?*” referring to a book by Noam Chomsky. The process used in this situation is called *inference*. Yule defines inference as the “additional information used by the listener to create a connection between what is said and what must be meant” [42, p. 13]. This shift in reference, where a person’s name is used to refer to an object associated with that person, illustrates a specific type of pragmatic process called **semantic transfer**. In semantic transfer, an expression is used to refer to something other than its standard, literal meaning, based on systematic and culturally familiar associations (e.g., author to book, dish to customer, place to event). In this case, the name *Chomsky* is pragmatically transferred to stand for one of his works [41, p. 21-22].

Pragmatic enrichment

Even beyond reference and inference, some expressions require additional processing to arrive at a full propositional meaning, especially when the linguistic form encodes incomplete concepts. This is where the pragmatic process of **enrichment** comes into play. It occurs when some information that is part of what is said is not strictly included in, or even directly motivated by, the linguistic form and additional contextual inferences are needed to complete the intended meaning. The sentence “*Mary took out her key and opened the door.*” does not actually say *how* Mary opened the door. But most people will naturally understand that *she used the key to open it*. This extra detail, “with the key”, is not directly stated in the sentence, but we add it automatically because it makes sense in the context [7, p. 121]. According to the *availability*

*principle*², if this meaning comes to us so naturally, it must be part of what is communicated, not part of the explicit content of the sentence.

- (I) "It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig," the man said.
"It's not really an operation at all."
The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on.
"I know you wouldn't mind it, Jig. It's really not anything.
It's just to let the air in."
The girl did not say anything.
"I'll go with you and I'll stay with you all the time. They
just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural."
"Then what will we do afterward?"
"We'll be fine afterward. Just like we were before."
"What makes you think so?"
"That's the only thing that bothers us. It's the only thing
that's made us unhappy." [47, p. 17]

The dialogue revolves around an implied subject, an abortion, which is never explicitly named throughout the story "Hills like White Elephants" by E. Hemingway. The man uses euphemisms and vague expressions such as the pronoun "it," the indefinite description "*an awfully simple operation*", "*just to let the air in*", and "*it's all perfectly natural*" to refer to the procedure. The girl's responses, "*Then what will we do afterward?*" and "*What makes you think so?*" indirectly track the same topic, although she does not explicitly name it either. The lack of direct reference conveys the emotional tension and the evasive tone in the characters' conversation. Assigning reference to these vague referring expressions requires the reader to consider the co-text and the

² Recanati's Availability Principle: "what is said" must be analysed in conformity to the intuitions shared by those who fully understand the utterance – typically the speaker and the hearer, in a normal conversational setting [24, p. 14].

context. Phrases like "*let the air in*" are not literal but rely on shared understanding between the characters. While the object or procedure remains undefined, the characters and, by extension, the reader share implicit knowledge of what they are discussing, even though they avoid naming it directly. Here, the characters engage in pragmatic enrichment – supplying unstated but contextually obvious information to fully understand what is meant. This shared understanding enables them to communicate indirectly, avoiding direct mention of the issue.

Disambiguation

In addition to reference assignment, another inferential process that contributes to deciphering the speaker's intended meaning³ is **disambiguation**, defined by Huang as "the selection of one sense out of two or more potential senses provided by the linguistic system" [17, p. 276].

Ambiguity means that a word or sentence can have more than one meaning. Unlike straightforward coded systems, such as traffic lights, where a given signal corresponds with a fixed meaning, language is more flexible [28, p. 29]. In English, many words and sentences can be understood in different ways depending on the context. The sentence "Flying planes can be dangerous." is an example of *syntactical* (or *structural ambiguity*), as the phrase "flying planes" allows for two distinct interpretations [17, p. 275]:

- verbal interpretation (gerund phrase as subject), where "flying" functions as a gerund, meaning that the act of flying planes (piloting or operating an aircraft) can be dangerous;

³ According to Grice, one has to resolve reference, fix deixis, and disambiguate expressions [16, p. 25]

- adjectival interpretation (participial phrase modifying the noun) with "flying" interpreted as an adjective (a present participle) modifying "planes", meaning that planes currently in the air, in flight, might pose a danger. This participial phrase provides additional information about the type of planes being referred to (those that are currently in flight).

The example presented by Kate Scott "*Matthew keeps his bat in the shed.*" exhibits a case of *lexical ambiguity*, since the word "bat" encodes more than one meaning [28, p. 29-30]. Matthew might keep his pet bat in his shed, or he might keep his sports bat in his shed. The broader discourse context is needed for the hearer to form a hypothesis about the intended meaning of the speaker.

"*John saw her duck.*" is a classic example of *structural-lexical ambiguity*, since two different parts of speech are associated with the same lexeme "duck", allowing for two different interpretations, each supported by a different syntactical structure. In the first interpretation, "*John saw her lower her head*", "duck" functions as a verb, meaning "*to bend to avoid something*," following the verb "saw" in an infinitival construction. In the second interpretation, "*John saw the duck belonging to her*", "duck" is a noun referring to a bird that belongs to "her", serving as the head of the noun phrase "her duck," which functions as the direct object of the verb "saw".

According to Scott, disambiguation is rarely required in everyday conversation, unless speakers deliberately use ambiguous lexemes or structures that lead to misunderstandings [Ibidem, p. 30-31]. The most conspicuous cases of ambiguity are the wordplay or puns that lead to humour. The example "*What steps would you take if an empty tank were coming toward you? – Long ones.*" illustrates a case of humour that arises from the lexical ambiguity and wordplay involving the word "steps" and the

phrase "empty tank". In the case of "*steps*", there are two possible meanings, 1) a sequence of actions to avoid the danger, most likely meant by the speaker and 2) long strides meant by the interlocutor. "*An empty tank*" has the meaning of 1) a fuel tank with no contents and an alternative interpretation of 2) a military tank (armoured vehicle), which could be dangerous if coming toward someone. The joke plays on the expectation that "*What steps would you take?*" is inquiring for a plan of action, but the answer "*Long ones.*" humorously shifts the meaning to running away with big strides, especially if a large vehicle (tank) is approaching [*Ibidem*].

Interpreting the correct meaning of words with multiple possible interpretations and clarifying syntactic ambiguities require inference. The listener must consider the contextual clues to determine the proposition intended by the speaker. Therefore, disambiguation is a pragmatic process.

Activities

1. What are the main components involved in inferring meaning in addition to the literal interpretation of an utterance?
2. Explain the inferential strategies of reference assignment, pragmatic enrichment, and disambiguation. How does each strategy help listeners determine the speaker's intended meaning?
3. Differentiate between lexical ambiguity and syntactic ambiguity.
4. Using an example from real or fictional discourse, demonstrate how contextual cues help solve ambiguity.
5. Identify the ambiguity in the examples below. In each case, indicate whether the ambiguity is lexical or syntactic (or both). Explain the possible interpretations of each sentence.

- a. Alex saw the man with the drone.
 - b. Over the years, the springs have been seriously damaged.
 - c. He painted the sculpture in the garden.
 - d. They are cooking apples.
 - e. Visiting relatives can be annoying.
6. Read the excerpt below from *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll. Identify the instances of ambiguity that create confusion in the conversation. Comment on the discrepancy between Alice's intended meaning and the White Queen's interpretation. Explain how the failure of disambiguation contributes to the absurdity or humour of the scene.

Here the Red Queen began again. 'Can you answer useful questions?' she said. 'How is bread made?'

'I know *that*!' Alice cried eagerly. 'You take some flour –'

'Where do you pick the flower?' the White Queen asked. 'In a garden, or in the hedges?'

'Well, it isn't *picked* at all,' Alice explained: 'it's *ground* –'

'How many acres of ground?' said the White Queen. 'You mustn't leave out so many things.'

'Fan her head!' the Red Queen anxiously interrupted. 'She'll be feverish after so much thinking.' [45, p. 68].

7. Examine the excerpt from Mary McCluskey's "*Before / After*", where Chloe, the protagonist, finds two ticket stubs for *Hedda Gabler* in her husband's shirt pocket and quietly tries to make sense of what he has concealed. Comment on the pragmatic principles involved in forming a hypothesis about Chloe's intended meaning in the excerpt. Discuss how the semantic transfer in the reference to *Hedda Gabler* contributes to the meaning implied by the character.

Chloe studies these tickets with a sense of unreality, as if she is watching herself on a movie set, frowning for the

camera. But her mind is seething with questions. Dan had not told her of this theatre visit. Off-Broadway does not seem appropriate, somehow. Hedda Gabler is an odd choice for an evening with a client. Or a colleague [52].

8. Why do speakers generally prefer implicit expressions over explicit ones, and how does this affect the efficiency of conversations?

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Unit 3.

INFORMATION STRUCTURING

Learning outcomes:

- present the main semantic distinctions involved in information structuring;
- analyse how a variety of syntactic possibilities in English affect information structuring according to discourse context and communicative intention;
- evaluate the pragmatic functions and discourse effects of information structuring strategies, such as focusing, topicalisation, marked syntactic constructions, etc., in authentic discourse and literary fiction.

Information structuring is a key component of pragmatics concerned with how information is organised and presented within a discourse. Since pragmatics focuses on language use in context, information structuring refers to the strategic choices speakers make, often using syntactic options available in English, to emphasise, deemphasise (background), or integrate information in ways that ensure textual coherence and cohesion. These choices are determined by contextual factors, primarily the context of the immediate discourse, and serve various communicative functions, such as guiding the listener's attention or fitting contributions into an ongoing discourse.

Key semantic distinctions for information structuring

L.G. Brinton and D.M. Brinton summarise the main semantic distinctions relevant to information structuring as follows [2, p. 325-326]:

Given and new information. **Given information** is information already known to the participants, 1) either mentioned earlier, 2) present in the situation, or 3) inferable from shared knowledge [23]. Linguistically, it is signalled through *pronouns, unstressed nouns* and typically appears in the *subject position*. By contrast, **new information** is information introduced for the first time or that has not been mentioned recently. It is signalled through *full noun phrases*, stress, and with modifiers spelled out in full (such as explicit adjectives, relative clauses, or other descriptive elements), and commonly appears in *the predicate position*. In the discourse sequence selected from E. Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants" [47, p. 17],

(I) "It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig," the man said. "It's not really an operation at all."

the personal pronoun "*it*" in the first utterance represents given information referring anaphorically to a previously unspoken topic that is privately shared by the participants in the discourse – the operation. The new information "*an awfully simple operation*" is expressed by means of a full descriptive noun phrase, marking its new status. The reference to *Jig* is treated as given information, as she is a participant in the discourse. In the second utterance, the given information is again referred to using the pronoun "*it*", while the predicate introduces new information, "*'s not really an operation at all*", which represents a redefinition or understatement of the term "*operation*", conveying a new perspective on the topic.

Topic and comment. **The topic** is what the utterance is about, *i.e.*, its starting point or centre of attention, and typically corresponds to given information, usually realised as the subject of the sentence. **The comment** is what is said about the topic; it

conveys new information, and is usually expressed in the predicate. However, there are situations in which the topic is new and the comment consists of old information, as in the following example: “*As for our neighbours, they moved out last week too.*” Here, *our neighbours* is new information, introduced for the first time; it functions as the topic of the sentence. “*Moved out last week too.*” is given (old) information, but it serves as the comment about the neighbours. Expressions such as “*as for*” and “*speaking of*” serve as linguistic markers of topic [3, p. 327].

Contrast. Information is in contrast if it emphasises an element in opposition to another or selected from a limited set. It is often marked by expressions such as “*only*”, “*rather than*” and are usually stressed, for example, in “*Only Mark got the promotion,*” *Mark* contrasts with other colleagues who did not. Contrastive information is similar to new information but differs in scope. New information selects from an unlimited set of possibilities, while contrastive information selects one item in opposition to another or from a limited set of alternatives.

Definite and indefinite. Information is (1) *definite* when the referent of the noun phrase is familiar to the hearer, marked by *proper nouns, pronouns, definite articles, or demonstratives*, indicating that the speaker assumes the hearer can identify it, and (2) *indefinite* when the referent is novel or unfamiliar, marked by the indefinite article or *any*, the speaker assuming that the hearer cannot identify the referent.

Table 3.1 Combining specificity with definiteness [3, p. 328]

Combinations in English	Examples	Interpretation
specific + definite	Tomorrow I’m going to polish <u>the car</u> .	it refers to a particular car in the real world which the hearer can identify

nonspecific + indefinite	I dream of buying <u>an expensive car</u> .	it refers to no particular car, and thus the hearer cannot identify it
specific + indefinite	I saw <u>a car</u> I liked yesterday.	it refers to a particular car but the hearer cannot identify it
nonspecific + definite	I'm going to buy <u>the first car</u> off the production line.	It refers to no particular entity which the hearer can identify

Generic vs. specific reference. **Generic reference** refers to a whole class, set or category (the "genus") of entities, not to individual members, whereas **specific reference** refers to particular members of that category.

Table 3.2. Genericity and definiteness

Genericity and Definiteness	Examples	Interpretation
Generic + indefinite	A house is expensive.	Refers to any house as a type.
Generic + definite	The house is the largest purchase you will make.	Refers to the concept of a house as a known type or category.
Generic + bare plural	Houses are expensive.	Refers to houses in general; expresses a property of the category.

Syntactic options in information structuring

According to L.G. Brinton and D.M. Brinton, different syntactic structures are available in English to manipulate the semantic distinctions discussed above and to structure information in ways that correspond to different discourse functions.

Fronting is the movement of a word, phrase, or clause to the beginning of the sentence to make it the topic of the utterance. In

addition, there is adverb fronting, moving adverbial words, phrases, or clauses to the front of the sentence and topicalising them:

- (2) Because he was dying again, Theo moved back to his mother's house in New Jersey. The DHPG injections she took in stride – she'd seen her own mother through her dying, after all [50, p. 146].

Left-dislocation is a syntactic arrangement where a word, phrase, or clause is moved to the beginning of the sentence and replaced in its original position by a pronoun. A left-dislocated NP (noun phrase) can come from any position in the sentence, even from within embedded clauses. This construction serves to reintroduce given information that has not been talked about for a while and make it the topic. It is frequently contrastive and definite, typically used when going through a list:

- (3) I've kept in touch with lots of classmates. I still see Hal, who was my best friend in high school. And then there's Jim, my college roommate, and Stan and Sara, who I met as a sophomore at Ohio State. I really like Jim and Stan and Sara. But Hal, I can't stand him now [14, p. 261].

Cleft sentences use an empty subject "*it*" to move the most important or focused part of the message to the beginning of the clause. It follows the pattern: *It + be + [clefted element] + relative clause*. The clefted element is new information and comment, while the relative clause is given information and topic. The clefted element is frequently contrastive: "*It was upon her evidence that Flush was convicted.*" [55] It stresses "*her evidence*" as the main factor leading to Flush's conviction, implicitly contrasting it with other possible sources of evidence.

Pseudo-cleft sentences follow the pattern [*Wh-clause*] + *be* + [*focused element (NP or VP)*]. The new information is expressed in

the NP or VP following the verb “to be”. The pseudo-cleft structure thus postpones the sentence focus (the new information) to the end. The new information may also be contrastive, as in:

- (4) She loved ideas, and was considered very intellectual. What she liked most of all was an argument on religion or philosophy or politics with some educated man. This she did not often enjoy. So she always had people tell her about themselves, finding her pleasure so [49, p. 19].

Stress. Both new information and contrastive information receive phonological stress (as well as higher pitch), which in written language is often indicated through typography or punctuation devices. In the following example, capitalisation is used to mark contrastive focus, drawing attention to the speaker's uncertainty:

- (5) “Then she sat down and thought: ‘WAS there a sixpence? I hadn’t spent it, had I? And I hadn’t left it anywhere else?’” [49, p. 83]

Passive. By expressing the agent of the active sentence in a by-phrase and changing the direct or indirect object to subject position, the passive voice makes the passive subject the given information and the topic of the sentence:

- (6) “Succeeding generations of youthful American males are not deterred in the slightest by this terrifying pattern of divorce and death.” [47, p. 59]

Likewise, the “passive of experience,” which uses *have*, makes the experiencer the topic, instead of topicalizing the object from the active sentence:

- (7) “She had her hopes dashed by the news.” (< The news dashed her hopes.)

“He had his reputation tarnished by the rumours.” (< The rumours tarnished his reputation.)

The construction *Be + past participle* has the same effect of making the experiencer the topic [3, p. 334]:

- (8) “Miriam was somewhat scared by the wind, but the lads enjoyed it.” [49, p. 326]
- (9) “She was stunned by his cruelty, and did not hear.” [49, p. 418]

Topicalizing transformations. **Topicalisation** is the process of moving elements leftwards into topic position or making them part of the topic [*Ibidem*].

- *Tough-movement* – it occurs with the adjective *tough* (as well as *difficult*, *hard*, *easy*, and *impossible*) and shifts the object of an infinitive to the subject (and hence topic) position of the main clause:

- (10) The right answer is difficult to find. (To find the right answer is difficult. It’s difficult to find the right answer.)

- *Subject-to-subject raising* – moving the subject of the that-clause occurring with *likely*, *certain*, *happen*, and *seem* to the subject position in the main clause:

- (11) Sam is certain to foot the bill. (< That Sam will foot the bill is certain. It is certain that Sam will foot the bill.)

- *Subject selection* – certain verbs in English allow different NPs to appear in subject, or topic, position, depending on the perspective or syntactic construction. Examples include: *buy/sell*, *give/take*, *borrow/lend*, *teach/learn*, *rob/steal*, *imply/infer*, and *regard/strike*.

- (12) She sent him a letter. / He received a letter from her.

- *Dative movement with ditransitive verbs* allows two word orders:
Verb + direct object + to/for + indirect object

(13) I gave the report to George.

The topic is “my giving the report to someone” and the comment is “George”.

Verb + indirect object + direct object

(14) I gave George the report.

The topic is “my giving George something” and the comment is “the report”.

- *Moving a noun phrase leftward to alter the topic:*

(15) They loaded the cart with hay. (“their loading the cart” – topic, “with hay” – comment)/“They loaded hay onto the cart.” (“their loading hay” – topic, “onto the cart” – comment).

- *Particle movement:*

(16) He wore out the brakes. (“his wearing out (something)” – topic, “the brakes” – comment.)/“He wore the brakes out.” (“his wearing the brakes” – topic, “out” – comment).

The second sentence also conveys a *completive sense* due to the final placement of the particle *out*, which carries heavy stress.

Focusing transformations

Another important syntactic arrangement in terms of information structuring is **focusing transformation** – moving an element to the end of the sentence, the second prominent position, to emphasise or focus attention on it. The focusing operations in the English language, listed by Brinton, include [*Ibidem*, p. 336-338]:

It-extraposition – moving a *that-clause* to the end of the sentence:

- (17) It has been confirmed that Boris won the election. < That Boris won the election has been confirmed.

Extraposition from NP – moving a relative clause or other modifying element out of the NP to the end of the sentence:

- (18) A new course will be offered which explores the influence of global warming. < A new course which explores the influence of global warming will be offered.

Subject-verb inversion – it occurs in cases where the sentence starts with locative or directional adverbial, or, less commonly, where there is an adjectival phrase or a participial phrase:

- (19) “Between them lay the widest gulf that can separate one being from another.” [55]
(20) “Behind Miss Barrett's bedroom, for instance, was one of the worst slums in London. Mixed up with that respectability was this filth.” [*Ibidem*]

There-insertion – it occurs with copula verbs and definite noun phrases:

- (21) “There were several peasants taking a walk.” [*Ibidem*]< Several peasants were taking a walk.

In cases of heavy subjects, *there-insertion* is the preferred structure, while in other cases, it may be obligatory.

- (22) “There was a little bowl of small, yellow chrysanthemums.” [49, p. 616]?/A little bowl of small, yellow chrysanthemums was on the table.

Heavy NP shift – moving a heavily modified NP to the end:

- (23) “You should see before it leaves the show at the art gallery.”
[*Ibidem*] < You should see the show at the art gallery before
it leaves.

Quantifier postposing – moving a quantifier such as “*each*” or “*all*” from its position before the NP to after the NP:

- (24) “The girls in the Spiral department were all of good homes”
[49, p. 506] < All the girls in the Spiral department were of
good homes.

Right-dislocation – the reverse of left dislocation; however, right-dislocation differs from left-dislocation in that both a noun phrase and an auxiliary can right dislocate:

- (25) “It’s my birthday, and they’ve bought me a fine lot of paints,
all the girls.” [49, p. 521] vs. He’s kind, that gentleman is.

Discourse-status, *i.e.*, whether a referent has already been introduced in the discourse, and hearer-status, *i.e.*, whether the speaker assumes the referent is known or unknown to the hearer, are key factors in how speakers structure their utterances. Non-canonical constructions such as fronting, passives, clefting, extraposition, or focusing transformations are used in predictable ways to preserve the general old-before-new ordering of information in English. In this way, syntax serves pragmatic needs, ensuring clarity, cohesion, and communicative effectiveness.

Activities

1. Explain the difference between *given* and *new* information, and how each is typically signalled in the English syntax.
2. Describe how a *cleft sentence* contributes to information structuring, specifying which elements are interpreted as given and new.
3. Present the role of *topic* and *comment* in information structuring, and provide an example where the topic is new information.
4. Compare various syntactic strategies (e.g., fronting, clefting, passivisation, dislocation) in terms of how they organise and emphasise information to reflect the speaker's communicative intention.
5. Present possible syntactic transformations in English used to highlight contrastive information.
6. Distinguish between *left-dislocation* and *right-dislocation*, commenting on the pragmatic effects of each in discourse.
7. Explain how certain focusing transformations in English, such as it-extraposition, heavy NP shift, quantifier postposing, subject-verb inversion, etc., function to emphasise particular information within a sentence.
8. Read the following examples from Virginia Woolf's *Flush*. For each, identify the topic and the comment and analyse the information structuring strategies employed.
 - a. "Two points he had in his favour indeed, great personal beauty—he was like an Apollo until gluttony and intemperance changed Apollo into Bacchus—and he was genuinely devoted to dogs."
 - b. "It is to poetry, alas, that we have to trust for our most detailed description of Flush himself as a young dog."

- c. "But suddenly down the wind came tearing a smell sharper, stronger, more lacerating than any—a smell that ripped across his brain stirring a thousand instincts, releasing a million memories—the smell of hare, the smell of fox."
- d. "Off he flashed like a fish drawn in a rush through water further and further."
- e. "With ten or fifteen pounds she might have re-covered her chairs, she might have re-stocked her greenhouse, she might have bought herself an entire wardrobe..."
- f. "Over the fire hung a mirror with two cupids to hold the lights." [55]

9. Consider the following excerpt from the same literary work. Analyse the sentences in context, identifying the syntactic operations used to structure information and create emphasis. Comment on how these constructions contribute to the overall discourse effect and thematic development.

(1) But as Flush trotted up behind Miss Mitford, who was behind the butler, he was more astonished by what he smelt than by what he saw. (2) Up the funnel of the staircase came warm whiffs of joints roasting, of fowls basting, of soups simmering—ravishing almost as food itself to nostrils used to the meagre savour of Kerenhappock's penurious frys and hashes. (3) Mixing with the smell of food were further smells—smells of cedarwood and sandalwood and mahogany;... of curtains of plush; of coal dust and fog; of wine and cigars. (4) Each room as he passed it—dining-room, drawing-room, library, bedroom—wafted out its own contribution to the general stew; while, as he set down first one paw and then another, each was caressed and retained by the sensuality of rich pile carpets closing amorously over it. (5) At length they reached a closed door at the back of the house. (6) A gentle tap was given; gently the door was opened [55].

- 10.** The following two texts exhibit topicalisation and focusing devices of various sorts. Identify the types of operations involved. Account for the fact that while version A seems to be fairly coherently structured, version B is decidedly odd.

Version A

It was in 1960 that the cave was discovered. 2. An old shepherd thought he heard 'water running underground' at the foot of a nearby mountain. 3. He told a friend of his who lived in the nearby village of Petralona. 4. The villager removed a few stones and literally fell into the cave. 5. A quick search showed that the floor was littered with animal bones. 6. What he had found was a prehistoric habitation site. 7. On a subsequent visit he found an entire human fossil, lying on its right side with its legs drawn up. 8. He told other villagers that night that he had found the remains of a 'big monkey' in a cave.

Version B

What was discovered in 1960 was the cave. 2. A shepherd who was old thought that 'water running underground' had been heard by him at a nearby mountain's foot. 3. A friend of his who lived in the nearby village of Petralona was told by him. 4. A few loose stones were removed by the villager and it was the cave he literally fell into. 5. That animal bones littered the floor was shown by a quick search. 6. He had found a prehistoric habitation site. 7. Lying on its right side with its legs drawn up, he found an entire human fossil on a subsequent visit. 8. He told other villagers that night that the remains of a 'big monkey' had been found by him in a cave [4].

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Unit 4.

SPEECH ACT THEORY

Learning outcomes:

- outline the structure of speech acts and their role in constructing meaning in discourse;
- interpret the concept of illocution in relation to speaker intention and evaluate the felicity conditions for successful speech acts;
- present the cognitive taxonomy of speech acts;
- analyse the realisation and interpretation of speech acts in authentic discourse.

Speech Act Theory, originally developed by J.L. Austin (1975), the author of *How to Do Things with Words*, is a foundational component of pragmatics that aims to explain how meaning is constructed within conversation [1]. Central to this theory is the idea that when we produce utterances, we are not only describing facts about the world but also performing actions. These actions, or *speech acts*, include a wide range of communicative functions such as asserting, promising, warning, begging, threatening, naming, or even marrying. The same sentence can function differently depending on the speaker's intent and the context in which it is used. For example, the utterance "*You left the door open.*" might simply describe a state of affairs, but in a specific context, such as during a conversation about keeping the house warm, it could function as a reproach or even a request. This highlights a core concern of Speech Act Theory: interpretation relies on the hearer's ability to infer, or form a hypothesis about, the speaker's intentions. Misunderstandings can arise when the inferred speech act does not match the intended one [28, p. 45]. Thus, identifying

the specific act being performed is crucial in understanding meaning in interaction.

Components of speech acts

Austin outlines a three-part framework for understanding speech acts:

Locution – what the speaker literally utters, the act of creating an utterance and its propositional content, consisting of sense and reference [*Ibidem*, p. 51].

Illocution – the communicative purpose of an utterance, the use to which language is being put, or what the speaker is trying to do with his locutionary act [3, p. 340]. The locutions “*Do that now!*”, “*What time is it?*” and “*Buster is six years old*” have the illocutionary force of a command (an imperative), a question (an interrogative) and a statement (a declarative) respectively.

Perlocution – such as persuading, annoying, consoling, or alarming; the intended or actual effects of a locutionary act, the consequences these acts have on hearers’ attitudes, beliefs, or behaviour. For example, the utterance “*You left the door open*” might lead the hearer to offer an apology, or go and close the door. These reactions represent the perlocutionary effect, showing how the hearer has interpreted and responded to the utterance, regardless of the speaker’s precise intention.

The illocutionary act is about the nature of the speech act that is performed, and it is determined by the conventions of the grammar and the intentions of the speakers. The perlocutionary act is about the consequences or effects of the utterance, and it depends on the context in which the utterance is produced [28, p. 51-52]. Ideally, the perlocution should match what the speaker intended, which is not always the case. Unintentional effects may well result, causing miscommunication or even communication breakdown.

Austin also devised the category of *performative speech acts* – utterances which simultaneously perform the speech act, i.e., bring about a change in the social world through words, as well as describing the act itself. Most performative speech acts follow the structure of first person + performative verb as in “*I promise*”, “*I apologise*”, “*I inform you*”, “*I warn you*”. For example, saying “*I now pronounce you husband and wife.*” enacts a marriage, or “*I hereby declare the meeting open.*” initiates an official institutional event. In these cases, the utterance itself constitutes the act, and the world, namely the social reality, is altered as a result.

Austin distinguishes between **(1) explicit performatives**, which contain a performative verb (e.g., to promise, to warn, to apologise) that names the act being performed, such as “*I promise to help*” or “*I warn you that the floor is wet*” and **(2) implicit performatives**, sometimes called **primary performatives**, as in “*The floor is wet*” (used as a warning) or “*I will come on Tuesday*” (used as a promise).

Felicity conditions

Drawing on Austin’s theory of speech acts, his disciple, the philosopher John R. Searle (1969), identifies four categories of **felicity conditions**, certain expected or appropriate circumstances for the performance of a speech act to be recognised as intended, and uses these as a framework to analyse and classify illocutionary acts: propositional content conditions, preparatory conditions, sincerity conditions, and essential conditions [30, p. 69].

Propositional content conditions specify the kind of content a speech act must express to be appropriate and meaningful, and these conditions vary depending on the type of illocutionary act. For example, both promises and warnings must refer to future events. However, a further condition for a promise is

that the future event must be an action performed by the speaker, while a request must concern a future action of the hearer.

Preparatory conditions are the necessary background assumptions that must be met for a speech act to be appropriate. These vary by act type. For a promise, the speaker must believe the hearer wants the action, the event will not happen on its own, and it will have a beneficial effect. For a request, the hearer must be able to perform the action. For a warning, the speaker must believe the hearer is unaware the event will occur, the speaker believes it will occur, and the event is not beneficial to the hearer. Without these conditions, the speech act is not felicitous [28, p. 53-55].

Sincerity conditions require that the speaker genuinely holds the appropriate psychological state toward the propositional content of the utterance. For a promise, the speaker must really intend to carry out the action; for a request, the speaker must want the hearer to perform it; and for a warning, the speaker must believe the event will occur and be harmful.

Essential conditions are the key requirements that make a speech act (like a promise, request, or warning) count. For the act to be appropriately performed, the speaker must genuinely intend the utterance to do what the words say, like creating an obligation in a promise or trying to get someone to act in a request. Without this intention, the speech act is not successful. These conditions combine with the content of the utterance, the context, and the speaker's intentions to make the act appropriate and effective.

Searle's taxonomy of speech acts

Searle's taxonomy of five types of speech acts includes:

Assertives, which Searle also refers to as representatives – speech acts in this category commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition, and that proposition is evaluated based on correspondence with the actual world. The words and the truth of

them are determined by the state of affairs in the world, and it is a property of assertives that they can be assessed as true or false, e.g., *"The Earth orbits the Sun"*, *"Water boils at 100°C."*

Directives – by means of these speech acts we give an order *"Get out. I want you to leave"*, make a request *"Would you mind helping me with this report?"*, a suggestion *"Maybe you could try restarting the router"*, etc.

Commissives – these speech acts commit the speaker to some future actions by promising or offering, thus imposing an obligation on ourselves, e.g., *"I promise to come tomorrow."*

Expressives – these speech acts state what the speaker feels, i.e., their psychological state or emotional reaction towards a proposition: congratulations, gratitude, praise, likes, dislikes, joy, sorrow: e.g. *"Oh, thank you, you're always so kind."* [41, p. 53]

Declarations or declarative speech acts – utterances which change the world by the very fact that they have been produced. These acts create a new social fact simply through being uttered, provided the context and conditions are appropriate. For example, in the act of marrying, the words *"I now pronounce you husband and wife"* do not merely describe a state of affairs, they bring that state into being.

A cognitive typology of speech acts

René Dirven and Marjolijn Verspoor propose a cognitive typology of speech acts based on the principle of proximity among certain types, which can be clustered together under superordinate categories linked by similar underlying principles. For example, *assertive speech acts* and *information questions* both can be subsumed under **informative speech acts**. *Directives* and *commissives* are grouped as **obligative speech acts** since they impose obligations on the hearer or speaker. *Expressive* and *declarative acts* require specific social contexts, e.g. congratulate

someone on a given social occasion, and thus form **constitutive speech acts** [12, p. 152-153].

Informative speech acts include conveying information, asking for information, or stating that someone lacks a piece of information. They often rely on background assumptions, such as the hearer's need, ability, or willingness to provide information. For example, a speaker may explain why they ask a question, "*I don't know this city very well*", use indirect forms like "*Can you tell me the way to the station, please?*" to check whether the hearer has relevant knowledge, and receive detailed answers that may use commands (imperatives like "*Yes, turn left, then turn right again. It's on the left*") without requiring the hearer to do anything. This shows that linguistic forms do not always directly match communicative intentions [*Ibidem*].

Obligative speech acts involve speakers committing themselves or others to future actions. These acts include requests, offers, and promises, where the speaker's goal is to obligate the hearer or themselves to perform a specific action. Unlike information questions, obligative acts require actual actions rather than just verbal responses. In the following example:

- (1) Sarah: Tom, can you send me the client files? I'll review them tonight.
Tom (forwarding the files): Sure, but next time I'll handle the report writing – I promise.

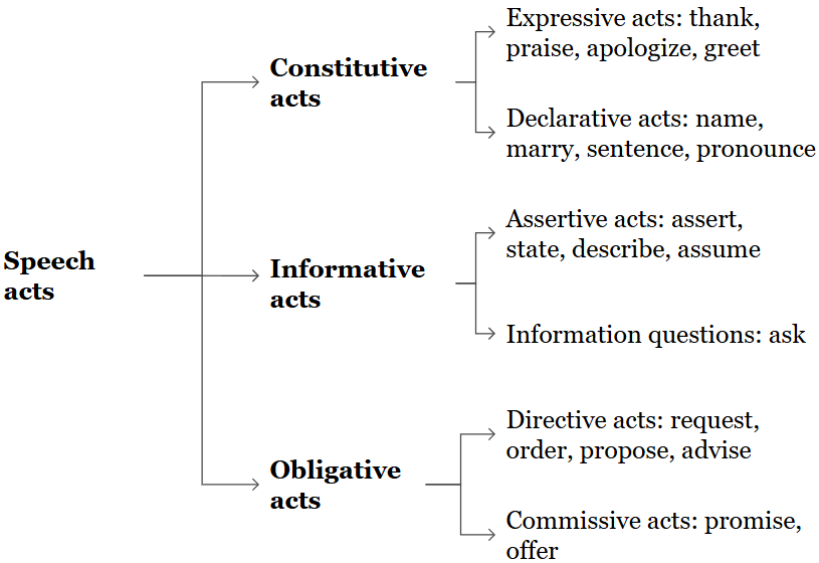
Sarah's utterance combines a directive (requesting the files) and a commissive (offering to review them). Tom complies with the request by acting (sending the files) and follows up with a promise, committing himself to a future task. This illustrates how obligative speech acts involve mutual commitments to future actions.

Constitutive speech acts create or define social realities, but they are only effective if performed by the right person, in the

right way, and at the right time. This applies to declaratives (e.g., pronouncing someone guilty, marrying someone) as well as expressives (e.g., thanking, congratulating). Although these acts differ in purpose, both depend on appropriate context and convention to be considered successful or felicitous: saying the right words in the right circumstances is often enough to bring about a change in social reality. Unlike acts such as repaying a debt, which require physical action, constitutive acts can achieve their effect through speech alone. For example, a judge saying "*Objection overruled!*" in which the judge, simply by uttering the words, gives an event its legal status. In such cases, the ritual use of language itself performs the act.

The different types and subtypes of speech acts are outlined in Table 4.1, along with examples of common verbs typically associated with certain subcategories [12, p. 155].

Table 4.1. Types and subtypes of speech acts



The subcategories of constitutive speech acts are primarily divided into **expressives** and **declaratives**. Expressive acts convey the speaker's emotional or attitudinal state, such as greetings, farewells, thanks, apologies, congratulations, and comforting remarks. They are often informal, brief, and can be creatively varied (e.g., "*Hi*" instead of "*Hello*", "*Cheers*" instead of "*Goodbye*"). Formal expressives, like apologies made on someone's behalf, involve authorised performative verbs (e.g., "*We apologise*", "*I'm sorry*") that explicitly perform the act. For expressive acts, such as congratulating or apologising, the act is felicitous only if the right person performs it, at the right time, and in the right context (i.e., the occasion has actually occurred). If any of these are missing, such as congratulating someone on the wrong date or for something that has not happened, the act is infelicitous and fails to count as a proper speech act.

Declarative acts create or change social reality within institutional contexts, such as wedding vows, court rulings, christenings, or declarations of war. They require specific rituals and formal language, often using performative verbs (e.g., *declare*, *pronounce*). These acts are characterised by their "frozen" style and are typically performed by authorised individuals during designated ceremonies, often in the simple present tense where the saying and doing coincide. They must be performed under specific institutional conditions, fulfilling all felicity requirements (e.g., correct person, right time, proper procedure); otherwise, the act is infelicitous and may be legally or socially invalid [*Ibidem*, p. 155-159].

Informative speech acts centre on the exchange of information, both asking and telling, and depend on a shared understanding between speaker and hearer. For these acts to succeed, speakers must estimate what the hearer already knows

and formulate their message accordingly. This cooperative interaction relies on different types of presuppositions:

Conversational presuppositions arise from shared *background knowledge* based on prior interaction and personal experience, such as knowing someone's routines or past actions. For example, in the following exchange

- (2) Anna: Are you heading to the gym after work?
Liam: Yeah, it's leg day.

Anna's question presupposes that she knows Liam regularly goes to the gym and is familiar with his workout habits.

Conventional presuppositions are based on general *world knowledge* embedded in language use, like the use of definite articles that assume familiarity (e.g., the gym). Ordinary conversations include presupposition elements that speakers assume the listener already knows or that are obvious from the situation and which can therefore be taken for granted.

Cultural presuppositions involve broader social or national knowledge, such as places, historical events, national institutions, elections, public figures, which are only meaningful within a shared cultural context. For instance, Mrs. Garvie's statement "*In my street, everybody votes Labour*" relies on shared British cultural knowledge, such as regular elections, a two-party system, and the idea that people in close-knit communities often know each other's voting preferences.

These layers of assumed knowledge allow speakers to be efficient and indirect, trusting the listener to fill in the gaps. Without this shared ground, informative speech acts risk being misinterpreted or falling flat.

Obligative speech acts are primarily concerned with influencing others' actions and include two main types:

- Directive speech acts – where the speaker tries to get someone else to do something (e.g., giving orders or making requests). These acts often require politeness to avoid sounding rude or harsh.
- Commissive speech acts – where the speaker offers or promises to do something for others.

Politeness is especially important in these acts because they involve social imposition. Direct orders like “*The door!*” or “*I told you to close the door!*” are generally considered impolite unless contextually justified, such as reminding someone who forgot or reprimanding a child.

René Dirven and Marjolijn Verspoor highlight the distinction between a directive act, such as “*May I have the salt, please?*” and an information question like “*What’s the time, please?*” – which lies in their motivation and desired consequences, despite the shared use of politeness strategies [*Ibidem*, p. 167-168]. Information questions request information the hearer may or may not have knowledge of, so a lack of answer is accepted without blame, making them less socially demanding. In contrast, directives request actions that often involve effort, assuming the hearer’s willingness and ability, so refusals need explanations to avoid rudeness. Consequently, politeness is more crucial in directives to soften the imposition and preserve social harmony.

Activities

1. List and explain the main components of speech acts, according to J.L. Austin.
2. State the distinction between explicit and implicit performatives in J.L. Austin’s theory of speech acts. Provide examples of each type.

3. Explain the concept of felicity conditions introduced by J.R. Searle and briefly describe each of the four types.
4. Illustrate each type of speech act in J.R. Searle's taxonomy with appropriate examples.
5. Explain the underlying principle used to group speech acts into the three major cognitive categories – informative, obligative, and constitutive – as proposed by Dirven and Verspoor.
6. Present the subcategories of each type of speech act, the felicity conditions required for their successful realisation, and the specific characteristics and pragmatic concepts relevant to them, such as presupposition and politeness.
7. Analyse the following utterances. Classify the speech act as: constitutive, obligative, or informative. Identify the subtype: if constitutive: declarative or expressive; if obligative: offer or directive; if informative: assertive or information question.
 - a. Would you like me to turn on the fan?
 - b. I hereby declare this shopping centre open!
 - c. Excuse me, could you tell me where the registration desk is?
 - d. Are you ready to order your meal?
 - e. Library hours: Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 - f. Ugh, not this nonsense again.
 - g. Why are you touching my phone?
 - h. Could you maybe stop slamming the door every time?
8. In telemarketing, salespeople are often trained to use certain types of speech acts and strategies so that their potential customer, whom they call unexpectedly, will not break off the conversation immediately. The following are two examples of tele-sales training conversations for agents. Analyse each extract in terms of speech acts (obligative, informative, and constitutive) and other possible strategies

and suggest why one might be more successful than the other [12, p. 177].

- a. *Agent*: It's Pat Searle, Mr. Green, and I am calling from the Stanworth Financial Services Company.

Mr. Green: Oh, yes.

Agent: I wonder, Mr. Green, would you be interested in getting a better return on your investments?

Mr. Green: I'm sorry — no I am not. I am quite happy with my current situation. Good night.

- b. *Agent*: This is Stanworth Financial Services Company. With the current low interest rates, getting a reasonable return on your investments is something of a challenge these days.

Mr. Green: Weeell, yeeees ...

Agent: This is why I felt you might be interested in a new investment product my company has recently launched. It provides a considerably better return than all building society accounts and most other similar types of investment products.

Mr. Green: Yes.

Agent: Tell me, Mr. Green, how would you feel about receiving details of our new investment product that could provide you with a return of up to nine percent?

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Unit 5.

CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE AND COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

Learning outcomes:

- explain the Gricean concept of implicature and its role in the inferential processes that enable hearers to infer implied meaning based on the cooperative principle;
- present and apply the maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner in discourse to ensure clarity, accuracy, and relevance of the message, thereby facilitating effective and efficient communication;
- infer the implications of messages, even when conversational maxims are flouted by using context and shared knowledge to interpret the real meaning of communication;
- evaluate the contextual and linguistic factors relevant for generalized, particularized, and conventional implicatures, and assess their role in guiding pragmatic interpretation of an utterance.

The language philosopher H. Paul Grice, in his seminal work *Studies in the Way of Words* (1989), proposed a comprehensive account of the inferential processes the participants in conversation use to derive implied meaning. He introduced the term **implicature** to designate any proposition that is communicated without being directly stated [16]. As Yan Huang posits, “a conversational implicature is definable as a meaning or proposition expressed or implied by a speaker in the utterance of a sentence which is meant without being part of what is said in the

strict sense.” [17, p. 32]. It is part of what a speaker means, though not part of what a sentence means.

Grice’s framework is based on the assumption that the interpretation of utterances is guided by general expectations about how people behave in communication. The author suggested that there is an underlying principle that determines how language is used with maximum efficiency and effectiveness to achieve rational interaction in communication. When producing utterances, speakers automatically generate certain expectations for the addressee, which guide the latter to infer what is conversationally implicated/implied, based on the premise that both the speaker and the addressee are rational and cooperative agents. He called this overarching dictum **the cooperative principle** [17, p. 29-32]. As K. Scott explains it, when interpreting utterances, we assume that the speaker is trying to be cooperative, *i.e.*, aims to contribute appropriately to the conversation and listeners are inferring what the speaker was intending to communicate beyond the explicit words. This offers an explanation of why hearers draw the inferences they do and how these inferences are derived [28, p. 65]. In this context, it is important to present Grice’s distinction between two layers of conveyed meaning:

- *What is said* – the basic proposition that has been asserted by the speaker, “What someone has said” is, according to Grice, “closely related to the conventional meaning of the words⁴ (the sentence) he has uttered” [16, p. 25].
- *What is implicated* – any meaning that is communicated beyond “what is said”; the meaning

⁴ Conventional meaning of a word is the accepted meaning that is encoded by that word.

that is suggested, implied, or hinted at without being explicitly stated [28, p. 65].

In Grice's account, the hearer goes through the following stages in decoding the meaning:

1. Decoding the words – decoding the linguistic form, understanding the literal meaning of the words used.
2. Disambiguation – identifying and solving the lexical ambiguities (e.g., multiple meanings of a word like *bank*).
3. Reference assignment – determining what or whom referring expressions (e.g., *he*, *his*) denote in the given context.
4. Inference of implicature – interpreting what the speaker intended to communicate implicitly, beyond the literal meaning, what is suggested but not explicitly stated. In the example:

(1) Alex: Did Maya pass the exam?

Jordan: She went out celebrating last night.

Jordan's response does not explicitly answer the question addressed by Alex. What is said is simply that Maya went out celebrating. However, the hearer can reasonably infer that Maya passed the exam, since celebration commonly indicates that something went well. This inference is not part of the literal meaning of Jordan's utterance but stems from what is implicated, *i.e.*, from what is suggested or implied, rather than directly stated.

Another important difference worth highlighting is between the terms *implicature* and *implication*. An implicature is an implication that is intended by the speaker. In this framework, a speaker implies or implicates, and the addressee infers [17, p. 32]. Conversely, an implication is any potential inference made by

the addressee, which may not be intended by the speaker. Utterances often lead to implications that the speaker did not intend.

With regard to meaning discrepancies between utterance production (conversational implicature) and comprehension (inference), Saul introduces the term “audience-implicature” – a conversational implicature recognised by the addressee but not intended by a speaker [27]. An illustrative example of differing interpretations is presented by Scott in the following conversation [28, p. 67-68]:

- (2) Arnie: Did you go out last night?
 Bertha: It was the final of Love Island!

The meaning implicated by Bertha, *i.e.*, the implicature of the speaker’s utterance, and the inference she expects Arnie to draw, is that she did not go out last night, since, following a general assumption, people typically stay at home when they watch popular television shows. However, if we assume that Arnie has a low opinion of people who are fond of reality TV shows, he may judge Bertha superficial, and therefore form a negative impression of her. This would be the implication of the utterance/ the addressee’s inference/audience-implicature in Saul’s terms – an unintended meaning inferred by the addressee.

The cooperative principle and maxims of conversation

A successful interpretation of an utterance, according to Grice, relies on a number of “silent” rules or principles, also called “maxims”, which support the cooperative principle governing conversation:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or

direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged [16, p. 26].

The use of the imperative form in Grice's quote stands for internalised rules for cooperative interaction observed by participants in conversation. These involve making appropriate and timely contributions that support the overall goal of the verbal exchange and inferring additional meaning when not explicitly stated. The four specific subprinciples that govern all rational interaction are: Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner.

Quality (or truthfulness)

The maxims in this group are related to the truthfulness of the communicated content. The supermaxim is:

- *Try to make your contribution one that is true.*

The two more specific maxims include:

- *Do not say what you believe to be false.*
- *Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.*

Grice considers the maxim of Quality the most important of his conversational maxims, with the others operating only if this principle is satisfied. It requires that we only give information for which we have evidence. It is not only about avoiding lies, but it also accounts for cases of non-literal meaning, such as metaphor, irony, storytelling, or jokes. In the conversational exchange:

- (3) A: Is Sarah coming to the meeting this afternoon?
B: a. No, she told me she's out of town.
b. She probably isn't coming.
c. Yes, she is.

(a) respects the maxim of Quality, as it is a truthful answer based on direct evidence (Sarah told them); (b) is also truthful; even if the speaker does not know exactly, he signals uncertainty using

the modal adverb *probably* and therefore complies with the maxim of Quality by indicating limited evidence; (c) appears to be truthful, but if the speaker does not actually know whether Sarah is coming, the answer violates the maxim of Quality by stating it as a fact without evidence, which is misleading.

Quantity (or Informativeness)

- *Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).*
- *Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.*

The essence of this principle is that speakers are expected to say neither less nor more than is required. Consider the example below:

- (4) A: Do you have a pen I could borrow?
B: a. Yes, I do.
b. Yes, here you go.
c. Yes, I have a blue one, a black one, and a red one with glitter ink.

(a) provides too little information, as the answer does not answer the request; (b) is a cooperative answer, as it provides the right amount of information to answer the request; (c) provides irrelevant information, exceeding the amount of information requested.

Relation

The maxim included in this category is:

- *Be relevant.*

Dirven and Verspoor present the following example to illustrate the maxim through a deviant case [12, p. 162]:

(5) Ann: Did Tony Blair win the election?

Bill: The paper is on the table.

Although there is no apparent logical connection between Ann's question and Bill's reply, a more thorough analysis confirms the relevance of the answer. Grice claims that speakers tend to be cooperative, even if they do not seem to be so. Following the assumption that Bill has been cooperative and that his utterance is therefore relevant to the question, it can be inferred, by applying the maxim of relevance, that the paper contains the answer to Ann's question.

Manner

The last of Grice's maxims focuses on how something is said rather than what is said. It includes a supermaxim and several submaxims that specify how to communicate clearly and effectively [28, p. 72]:

- *Be perspicuous.*
 - I. *Avoid obscurity of expression*
 - II. *Avoid ambiguity*
 - III. *Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)*
 - IV. *Be orderly*

The supermaxim requires a speaker to be clear. This involves avoiding obscurity and ambiguity, being succinct, and presenting information in an orderly and logically connected manner. The excerpt below from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* illustrates the maxim of Manner in relation to the processing effort and the interpretation of figurative meaning.

- (6) The Queen propped her up against a tree, and said kindly,
"You may rest a little now."

Alice looked round her in great surprise. "Why, I do believe we've been under this tree the whole time! Everything's just as it was!"

"Of course it is," said the Queen, "what would you have it?"

"Well, in *our* country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else — if you ran very fast for a long time, as we've been doing."

"A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

"I'd rather not try, please!" said Alice. "I'm quite content to stay here — only I *am* so hot and thirsty!" [45]

The episode follows Alice's agreement to be the White Queen's Pawn and run as fast as she can to reach the Eighth Square in order to become a Queen. Suddenly after a dizzying race, hand in hand with the Queen, Alice realises that their place and time have not changed, which confuses her. The dialogue between the Queen and Alice, in the literal sense, is a paradox, even illogical, with the partners being obscure to each other and it apparently not aligning with the cooperative principle, namely the submaxims of Manner: to be clear, to avoid ambiguity, and to be short. However, its interpretation requires a deeper cooperative strategy that involves the analysis of figurative language. The Queen's statement "*Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!*" reflects the conceptual metaphors LIFE IS A RACE, according to which progress requires a lot of effort, even for maintaining the same position, and STATUS IS MOTION, *i.e.*, reaching a certain status requires active

involvement or movement in order to advance and not to fall behind.

Therefore, figurative language, such as metaphor, symbolism, or paradox, allows us to express complex and abstract ideas that are difficult to convey using literal language. In this regard, Dirven and Verspoor [12, p. 164] emphasise the role of metaphor and metonymy as part of everyday language for expressing deeper insights and argue for their inclusion within the Maxim of Manner.

Flouting

Flouting is a category of implicature that occurs when a speaker deliberately violates a conversational maxim at the level of “what is said,” prompting the addressee to draw inferences as part of what is communicated by the utterance, based on the assumption that the latter adheres to the cooperative principle [28, p. 74]. This assumption motivates the addressee to engage in inferential reasoning to understand why the maxim was flouted. The purpose of flouting is often to convey some extra message, or indirectly communicate something the speaker is unwilling or unable to state directly, such as criticism, irony, or disapproval. In doing so, the speaker is aware that the addressee is able, through cognitive effort, to reconstruct the speaker’s intended message, provided that he recognises the mismatch between the literal expression and conversational expectations.

The episode extracted from the short story “Death of Kapsak” by Crispin Oduobuk contains a dialogue between the main characters, Kapsak and Julie-Julie, and is built on the breach of several conversational maxims that reveal the tension, evasiveness, and emotional conflicts experienced by the interlocutors.

(7) "Who brought you home?" he says as Julie-Julie comes through.

"Oh, Kappy-Pappy dear," Julie-Julie coos. "You're home early."

"I asked who brought you home?" Kapsak repeats, trying hard to keep his temper under control.

"That's just Davie, my business partner," Julie-Julie replies, pecking her husband lightly.

Backing away slightly, Kapsak points his thumb behind him. "Didn't you introduce Ibrahim as your 'business partner' just the other day?"

"Oh Ibrahim!" Julie-Julie's singsong voice usually thrills Kapsak. But right now he's rather irritated by it.

"How many 'business partners' do you have?"

"Come on Kappy-Pappy! What is it with the Gestapo number?"

"You haven't answered my question, Julie-Julie. And what is Gestapo?"

"Gestapo is – never mind. I'm going to shower and get ready else I'll be late for my dinner engagement." [53]

The maxims of Quantity and Relation are flouted by Julie-Julie, who repeatedly avoids giving enough information. Her reply to "*Who brought you home?*" is "*You're home early*". When asked again, she responds vaguely: "*That's just Davie, my business partner.*" Her verbal behaviour indicates that she is intentionally withholding information and hiding something unacceptable – a possible relationship with Davie.

The maxim of Manner is flouted when Julie-Julie uses the ambiguous phrase "business partner" to refer to Davie and, previously (as retrospectively mentioned by Kapsak), to Ibrahim in order to obscure the nature of her relationships. In addition, the maxim of Quality is flouted too, as the addressee doubts the truthfulness of the claimed status of "partners". Kapsak, along

with the reader, realises that the phrase “business partner” probably stands for a romantic affair, since she persistently avoids any clarification:

- (8) "How many 'business partners' do you have?"
"Come on Kappy-Pappy! What is it with the Gestapo number?" [*Ibidem*]

This last reply also flouts the maxim of Relation. Instead of addressing Kapsak's questions, she avoids answering them, then completely dismisses the line of questioning: "*Never mind. I'm going to shower...*" The irrelevant responses suggest she is evading accountability and trying to distract or disarm Kapsak emotionally, avoiding any confrontation.

Although there is no clear evidence that Julie-Julie is dishonest, Kapsak is suspicious, and the phrasing prompts the inference that she may be lying. Her indirect, evasive, and ambiguous answers must hide the romantic involvement with these “partners”, and she is using strategic vagueness with a playful tone (e.g., “Kappy-Pappy”, “Gestapo”) to avoid escalating the situation. Thus, Kapsak, through contextual reasoning, must reconcile what is explicitly said with what is implied, inferring meaning from what is omitted, evaded, and ambiguously formulated.

While the general principle of cooperation, according to Grice, should be observed by speakers, he acknowledges that there are circumstances in which the maxims are violated. It is noteworthy to distinguish between *overtly violated maxims* and *covertly violated maxims*. Lying, for instance, constitutes a covert violation of the maxim of Quality (truthfulness), as the speaker does not want the addressee to realise that she has done so. This contrasts with the cases of overt violation (or flouting), as previously discussed [28, p. 76-77].

Therefore, when encountering an apparent case of maxim violation, it is important to consider the underlying reason the speaker has violated the maxim and the inference we must draw in order to maintain the overall assumption of cooperation.

Categories of implicatures

Another important dichotomy advanced by Grice is between:

- **generalized conversational implicatures** – which arise without requiring any particular contextual conditions
- **particularized conversational implicatures** – which are tied to the conversation and are therefore context-dependent.

A clear case of a context-dependent (particularized) implicature is displayed in the family scene with the wife telling her husband, “*You left the door of the fridge open.*” The utterance is not a simple factual observation. Following the maxims of relevance, quantity, and manner, the husband is expected to interpret the remark as a request to close the fridge. The implicature stems from shared background knowledge that fridge doors should not be left open and from the context in which the utterance was produced. This meaning is not explicitly stated but is implicitly understood [12, p. 164].

The statement “*Most of the guests enjoyed the dinner*” is a generalized conversational implicature because the inference (*not all*) arises naturally from the general use of the quantifier “most” and does not depend on the conversational context. It is a default interpretation triggered by the scalar term “most.”

Generalized conversational implicatures commonly arise from the use of indefinite noun phrases (e.g., *a child*), scalar terms such as quantifiers (e.g., *some, most*), and frequency adverbs (e.g.,

sometimes, often), where the implicature is triggered without resort to specific contextual knowledge.

Grice also identified a category of implicature called **conventional or implicature by convention** – an implicature that is encoded in linguistic expressions. These do not have to occur in conversation, and they do not depend on special contexts for their interpretation [41, p. 45]. One of Grice's examples of conventional implicatures is the contrastive meaning of a connective like *but*. The interpretation of the utterance "*It was raining, but we had a great time at the picnic*" will be based on the meaning of the conjunction *and* – a combination of two facts "it was raining" and "we had a great time at the picnic" – plus an implication of "contrast" between the information in the two clauses, conveyed by the conventional implicature of *but*.

Similarly, *even* adds an implication of "contrary to expectations"; *yet* adds the implication that the present situation is expected to be different, or perhaps the opposite, at a later time, as in "*She hasn't found a job yet*" which carries the implicature of expectation that the present situation (jobless) is not permanent and will likely change.

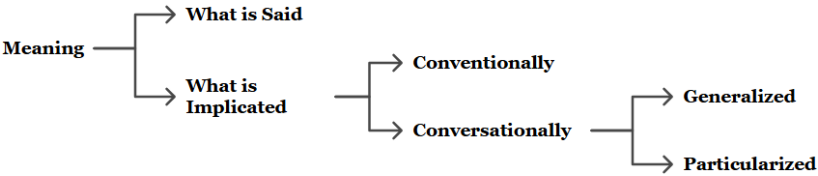
Dirven and Verspoor present an example of conversational implicature which also contains *but* to create irony or criticism by flouting Grice's maxim of Quality and requiring the hearer to infer a deeper, contrastive meaning: "*It's not a sugar spoon you're holding, Carl, but a tennis racket*". The speaker uses the contrastive structure *not A but B*, which conventionally implies correction. However, because it is obvious that Carl is not literally mistaking a tennis racket for a spoon, the utterance flouts the maxim of Quality, openly stating something that contradicts reality. This overt flouting carries a conversational implicature intended for Carl to infer, on the assumption of the cooperative principle, that

he has been playing the tennis racket as if it were a spoon, *i.e.*, without a real feel for the racket [12, p. 166].

Other representative lexical items that are considered to carry conventional implicatures in English include: *actually, also, anyway, barely, besides, however, manage to, on the other hand, only, still, though, too, and yet* [17, p. 75].

By way of summary, meaning / speaker-meaning or the total signification of an utterance in the Gricean system may be represented schematically as follows [*Ibidem*, p. 76]:

Table 5.1. Understanding meaning in communication



In conclusion, Grice’s theory of implicature, advanced within the cooperative principle and its conversational maxims, provides an important framework for understanding how meaning in communication goes beyond what is openly stated. Whether through generalized or particularized implicatures, figurative language such as irony and metaphor, or flouting, speakers rely on shared assumptions of cooperation, guiding them to infer implicated meanings that ensure effective and even nuanced communication.

Activities

1. Formulate the definition of implicature.
2. Present the stages the hearer follows in decoding inferential meaning in a conversational exchange.

3. Differentiate between implicature and implication, and support your explanation with relevant examples.
4. Explain the essence of the Cooperative Principle proposed by H. Paul Grice and illustrate the four maxims that support rational conversational interaction.
5. Define flouting as a type of conversational implicature. How do overt and covert violations of conversational maxims differ in terms of their communicative function?
6. Establish the criteria used to distinguish between generalized, particularized, and conventional implicatures, and provide an example of each.
7. Identify the type of implicature contained in each sentence.
 - a. Not all of the guests had wine with dinner.
 - b. Alex: Do you think Jane is at home?
Sam: Her car is parked outside.
8. Read the following two sentences below. Identify the different conventional implicatures triggered by the conjunction *and* (*i.e.*, additive or sequential). Which of the two allows for reversing the order of coordinated elements without significant change in meaning, and why?
 - a. He unlocked the door and went inside.
 - b. She is smart and ambitious.
9. Read the excerpt from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. Analyse the application of the Cooperative Principle and Grice's Maxims in the conversation between Alice and the Footman. Identify which maxims are observed, flouted, or violated. Consider how these (non-)cooperative moves affect the flow of conversation and the relationship between the interlocutors.

Alice went timidly up to the door, and knocked.

"There's no sort of use in knocking," said the Footman, "and that for two reasons. First, because I'm on the same

side of the door as you are; secondly, because they're making such a noise inside, no one could possibly hear you." And certainly there was a most extraordinary noise going on within—a constant howling and sneezing, and every now and then a great crash, as if a dish or kettle had been broken to pieces.

"Please, then," said Alice, "how am I to get in?"

"There might be some sense in your knocking," the Footman went on without attending to her, "if we had the door between us. For instance, if you were inside, you might knock, and I could let you out, you know." He was looking up into the sky all the time he was speaking, and this Alice thought decidedly uncivil. "But perhaps he can't help it," she said to herself; "his eyes are so very nearly at the top of his head. But at any rate he might answer questions.—How am I to get in?" she repeated, aloud.

"I shall sit here," the Footman remarked, "till tomorrow—"

At this moment the door of the house opened, and a large plate came skimming out, straight at the Footman's head: it just grazed his nose, and broke to pieces against one of the trees behind him.

"—or next day, maybe," the Footman continued in the same tone, exactly as if nothing had happened.

"How am I to get in?" asked Alice again, in a louder tone.

"Are you to get in at all?" said the Footman. "That's the first question, you know."

It was, no doubt: only Alice did not like to be told so. "It's really dreadful," she muttered to herself, "the way all the creatures argue. It's enough to drive one crazy!"

The Footman seemed to think this a good opportunity for repeating his remark, with variations. "I shall sit here," he said, "on and off, for days and days."

"But what am I to do?" said Alice.

"Anything you like," said the Footman, and began whistling.

“Oh, there’s no use in talking to him,” said Alice desperately: “he’s perfectly idiotic!” And she opened the door and went in [44].

Recommended bibliography:

1. Grice, H.P. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989. 394 p.
2. Dirven, R., Verspoor, M. *Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics. Second Revised Edition*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004. 277 p.
3. Yule, G. *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 152 p.

Unit 6.

RELEVANCE THEORY AND COGNITION

Learning outcomes:

- present the main principles and determining factors of relevance theory;
- analyse the degree of relevance of various discourse inputs by evaluating the balance between cognitive effects and processing effort;
- explain the role of optimal relevance in ostensive-inferential communication and how it guides the hearer's interpretation of utterances;
- apply the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure to sequences of authentic discourse and literary fiction.

Relevance theory was originated by the French scholar Dan Sperber and the British scholar Deirdre Wilson (1986, 1995). It was developed out of, and influenced by, Grice's theory of communication – particularly the idea that an essential feature of most human communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is the expression and recognition of intentions. Sperber and Wilson put forward the key principles that embody the notion of relevance:

- Cognitive principle of relevance, which refers to how we process information in general.
- Communicative principle of relevance, which deals with information deliberately communicated to us. This principle is responsible for the recovery of both the explicit and implicit content of an utterance [32, p. 269-270].

The cognitive principle of relevance

The cognitive principle of relevance provides an essential foundation for explaining how information is processed. The main thesis of the theory is that the human cognitive system is geared towards maximizing relevance in the process of communication:

...as a result of constant selection pressures, the human cognitive system has developed a variety of dedicated (innate or acquired) mental mechanisms or biases which tend to allocate attention to inputs with the greatest expected relevance, and process them in the most relevance-enhancing way [38, p. 394].

In other words, we tend to pay attention to and allocate processing resources to inputs and stimuli which are likely to be relevant, and we process these in a relevance-maximising fashion [28, p. 123]. In relevance theory, not only utterances but also thoughts, memories, and inferences can be relevant, since any input to cognitive processes may matter at a given moment. Utterances create expectations of relevance, not because of conversational maxims or conventions, but because the search for relevance is a fundamental aspect of human cognition that speakers may exploit.

According to Sperber and Wilson, relevance is a function (or measure) of two factors: **the cognitive or contextual effects** and the **processing effort** [32]. Broadly speaking, a new piece of information is relevant if it changes what we think and how we view what is true about the world. In relevance theory terms, an input is relevant to an individual if it has a cognitive effect – that is, if it interacts with the assumptions in the individual's **cognitive environment**, leading to a modification. This is the first factor that determines relevance – the extent to which the new

information interacts with existing assumptions to alter our understanding [28, p. 114].

The second factor is the effort a cognitive system must exert in order to provide a satisfactory interpretation of any incoming information processed. Interpretation is determined by the expectation of **optimal relevance**, *i.e.*, when information is communicated to us, we can expect that it will be optimally relevant.

Assumptions that we generally hold, with a varying degree of certainty, are a wide array of beliefs, ranging from philosophical ones about our origin to everyday, mundane beliefs about the way things are, which make up the context in which we process new information. These assumptions can be more or less obvious or “in focus”/**manifest**/mentally available to a person at any moment, similar to how some things in our field of vision are clear and prominent while others are just in the background. They make up the individual’s cognitive environment – a key concept in the relevance-theoretic approach to cognition and communication. Communication, from this perspective, is an attempt to change another person’s cognitive environment [28, p. 115].

The degree of relevance of an input (incoming information) to an individual is a balance struck between cognitive effects (reward) and processing effort (cost). Therefore, the relevance of an input in a context may be assessed in terms of cognitive effects and processing effort [40, p. 609]:

- a. Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.
- b. Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

Relevance theory recognises three types of **cognitive effect**:

- Contextual implication – generating a conclusion from input and context together, but from neither input nor context⁵ alone.
- Strengthening – a warranted reinforcement of an existing assumption.
- Contradiction and elimination – warranted revision including contradicting and abandonment of available assumptions.

To illustrate the different types of cognitive effects, Wilson and Sperber use the scenario of a train arriving late [*Ibidem*, p. 608].

- a) On seeing their train arrive, the person might look at their watch, access their knowledge of the train timetable, and derive the *contextual implication* that the train is late.
- b) Seeing the train arrive late might confirm the person's belief that the service is deteriorating (*strengthening*).
- c) Seeing the train arrive late, the person might alter their plans to do some shopping on the way to work (*abandoning/cancelling* the initial plan).

Relevance is a comparative notion, as an input that leads to more cognitive effects is more relevant than one that leads to fewer, if the processing effort involved is the same. Similarly, if two inputs produce the same cognitive effects, the one that demands less processing effort is considered more relevant. This

⁵ It is noteworthy to clarify the concept of **context** in relevance theory, which is a dynamic, psychological construct consisting of all the assumptions the hearer uses to interpret an utterance. It goes beyond just physical surroundings or prior discourse to include any relevant knowledge, beliefs, expectations, or memories. This context is not established before producing the utterance but is actively constructed during interpretation, guided by the hearer's search for relevance to make sense of the speaker's meaning.

allows the comparison of relevance of the same input in different contexts and different inputs in the same context. Wilson and Sperber suggest an example to illustrate how the relevance of alternative inputs might be compared [40]. Mary, who dislikes most meat and is allergic to chicken, calls her dinner host to ask about the menu. He could truthfully say any of the following:

- (1) We are serving meat.
- (2) We are serving chicken.
- (3) Either we are serving chicken or $(7 \times 7 - 3)$ is not 46.

According to the characterisation of relevance, all three replies would be relevant to Mary. However, (2) would be more relevant than either (1) or (3). It would be more relevant than (1) for reasons of cognitive effect: (2) entails (1), and therefore generates all the conclusions deducible from (1). It would be more relevant than (3) for reasons of processing effort: although (2) and (3) are logically equivalent, and therefore yield exactly the same cognitive effects, these effects are easier to obtain from (2) than from (3), since the latter has a second, false disjunct to be computed (and the first is therefore true). In other words, the processing effort required to compute (2) is smaller than that required to compute (3). Thus, (2) would be the most relevant utterance to Mary, for reasons of both effort and effect.

Relevance is subjective, relative to the individuals, since each person processes new information within their own cognitive environment. As Scott illustrates [28, p. 121], the same input (*e.g.*, the sight of a bee) may trigger minimal cognitive effects for one person, and consequently, the information will have little relevance. For another person, who is possibly allergic to bee stings, it may be highly relevant, producing strong cognitive effects about how the presence of a bee could affect her and what actions she might need to take. Therefore, the difference in

relevance results from the difference in the cognitive effects that the individual deduces.

The communicative principle of relevance

According to Sperber and Wilson, theories of communication can be divided into two broad models: *the code model* and *the inferential model*. The first is based on the assumption that communication involves encoding and decoding messages using a shared code. This model is considered inadequate as it fails to explain the discrepancy between the linguistically encoded meaning and the proposition expressed by an utterance, known as the *linguistic underdeterminacy thesis*, according to which the encoded meaning alone does not fully determine the speaker's intended message. Directly opposed to the code model is the inferential model, rooted in Grice's theory of meaning that views *communication as intended to be recognized as having been intended*, i.e., communication is achieved by expressing and recognizing intentions. The communicator provides evidence of their intention to convey a certain meaning, which is then inferred by the audience based on the evidence presented [17, p. 272].

New information can be transmitted in different ways from different sources, including the physical environment and other people. According to relevance theory, interpersonal communication covers several types of information transmission:

- 1) **Accidental information transmission** – information is conveyed unintentionally by the speaker (e.g., shaking hands revealing nervousness), there is no intention to transmit this information; on the contrary, the speaker may wish to avoid doing so.
- 2) **Covert intentional information transmission** – the communicator intends to communicate something, but does not want the audience to be aware of this intention.

For instance, glancing at a watch during a meeting to suggest that a colleague should wrap up. The communicator has an informative intention, but not a communicative intention. In relevance theory the following types of intention are distinguished:

- **the informative intention** – the intention to inform an audience of something;
- **the communicative intention** – the intention to inform an audience of one's informative intention.

3) Ostensive-inferential communication – a form of overt and intentional communication in which the communicator is open about their intention to communicate. It involves 1) the (first-order) *informative intention* and 2) the (higher-order) *communicative intention* [28, p. 124-125].

The ostensive-inferential communication carries an ostensive stimulus, the use of which triggers the expectation of a particular level of relevance, which Sperber and Wilson called **optimal relevance** [40, p. 612].

Presumption of optimal relevance

- a) The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough to be worth the audience's processing effort.
- b) It is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

This underlies the communicative principle of relevance, formulated by Sperber and Wilson as:

Every ostensive stimulus (e.g. every utterance) conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance [*Ibidem*].

According to relevance theory, when a communicator produces an ostensive stimulus (a gesture, a facial expression, or other types

of ostensive act), it carries a presumption of relevance, offering their audience information in a way that guides them towards producing the most meaningful and efficient interpretation. While the audience may hope for maximal relevance, according to the cognitive principle formulated above, what they are entitled to expect is optimal relevance – enough cognitive effect for reasonable processing effort. In line with this,

- Clause (a) sets the lower limit of expectations and implies that, by directing their attention to the input (or stimulus), the addressee will obtain worthwhile cognitive effects that justify the effort required to process it.
- Clause (b) sets the upper limit and expresses the idea that, although the addressee may expect maximum effects for minimal effort, the input will depend on the communicator's abilities and preferences [28, p. 126].

The example below shows how inferences are derived when processing utterances according to the communicative principle of relevance, based on the assumption that our interlocutor is trying to be optimally relevant – an approach that differs from the cooperative principle, which holds that inferences arise because the interlocutor is being cooperative.

- (4) Lisa: Are you coming to the meeting this afternoon?
Tom: I've got a dentist's appointment at 2.

Although there is no mention of the meeting in Tom's reply, Lisa assumes it is meant to address her question about the meeting – according to clause (a), which states that the hearer assumes the ostensive stimulus is relevant enough to be worth the audience's processing effort. To maintain this assumption, she draws the inference that the dentist appointment overlaps with the meeting

time and, therefore, that Tom is implying he won't come. According to clause (b) – that *the utterance is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences* – Lisa assumes the response is as relevant as Tom is willing or able to make it without stating the conclusion directly. He might believe the implication is obvious enough, which may reflect his communicative preferences or constraints (e.g., time pressure or politeness).

The communicative principle of relevance and the presumption of optimal relevance offer a practical procedure for performing a variety of pragmatic subtasks subsumed under the overall task of inferring the speaker's meaning, which include solving ambiguities and referential ambivalences, interpreting ellipses, and underdeterminacies. The hearer should take the decoded linguistic meaning, following a path of least effort, *i.e.*, interpreting the input by testing the most obvious and easily accessible interpretations first, he should enrich it at the explicit level and complement it at the implicit level until the resulting interpretation meets his expectation of relevance [40, p. 613]:

Wilson's relevance-theoretic comprehension
procedure

a. Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguations, reference resolutions, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility.

b. Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied (or abandoned).

According to the relevance-guided comprehension procedure, following a path of least effort is reasonable as the speaker is expected (within the limits of their abilities and preferences) to make their utterance as easy as possible to process. If an interpretation of the input is simple to access, *i.e.*, does not require

significant cognitive effort, it is assigned an initial degree of plausibility. Therefore, the first, most obvious interpretation will only be rejected if it does not provide enough rewards to justify the effort. Once the hearer reaches an interpretation that satisfies their expectations of optimal relevance, they stop searching for other meanings, assuming this is the interpretation the speaker intended.

Activities

1. State the main thesis of relevance theory.
2. Define cognitive effect and processing effort in relevance theory. How is the degree of relevance measured through the interaction of these two factors?
3. Present the distinction between the cognitive principle of relevance and the communicative principle of relevance.
4. Explain the concept of context in relevance theory.
5. Exemplify the main types of cognitive effect according to relevance theory.
6. Describe the types of information transmission outlined in relevance theory, distinguishing intentional from unintentional forms.
7. Explain the presumption of optimal relevance as it applies to ostensive stimuli in communication.
8. Compare relevance theory and Grice's cooperative principle in terms of inferential communication.
9. Read the excerpts below. Explain how inferences are derived based on the communicative principle of relevance, assuming that the speaker aims to be optimally relevant.
 - (1) 'Well, of course luckily I have private means.' It was a lie, but one had to keep up appearances. Miss Treadwell's means consisted of a small Post Office Savings Account from which

she extracted a minute sum every Monday morning. 'I simply couldn't manage the apartment without.'

'Those curtains must have cost you a bit.'

'Oh! the earth. The absolute earth.'

'On the subject of affluence,' he suddenly said, 'I feel in honour bound to buy you a drink this morning. Would you?'

'But it's only half past eleven-'

'By the time we've walked to The Lansdowne Arms it'll be twelve o'clock.' [43, p. 109]

- (2) I have two jobs, Miss Fanshaw, two strings to my bow, as it were. That surprises you? But I have always been anxious to fill up every hour of the day, I have boundless energy.'

...

'Of course, it is to some extent seasonal work.'

'Seasonal?'

'Yes. For those odd wet and windy days which always come upon us at the English seaside, and of course during the winter, I travel in clearing utensils.'

...

He had visited the town previously, he told her, in the course of his work, and fell for it. 'I never forgot it, Miss Fanshaw. I should be very happy here, I told myself. It is my kind of place. Do you see?'

'And so you came back.'

'Certainly. I know when I am meant to do something. I never ignore that feeling. I was intended to return here.'

'It is rather a small town.'

'But select.'

'I was only wondering – we do have a very short season, really only July and August...'

'Yes?'

'Perhaps it would not be suitable for your – er – summer work?'

'Oh, I think it would, Miss Fanshaw, I think so, I size these things up rather carefully, you know, rather carefully.' [47, p. 128-130]

- (3) 'One is never too old to learn, Mr Curry.'
'How splendid that we are of like mind! How nice!' [*Ibidem*, p. 133]

Recommended bibliography:

1. Sperber, D., Wilson, D. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 338 p.
2. Wilson, D., Sperber, D. Relevance Theory. In: Horn, L. R., & Ward, G. L. (eds.) *The Handbook of Pragmatics*. Malden, MA & Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2006, p. 607–632.
3. Wilson, D. Relevance Theory. In: Cummings, L. (ed.) *The Pragmatics Encyclopaedia*. London: Routledge, 2010, p. 393–399.

Unit 7.

MANAGING INTERACTION: POLITENESS

Learning outcomes:

- determine the role of politeness in managing social interaction and maintaining interpersonal relationships;
- relate the concept of face as an interactional identity to the distinction between positive and negative politeness;
- classify face-threatening acts (FTAs) and identify the sociocultural variables that determine their weight or seriousness;
- analyse positive and negative politeness and impoliteness strategies in terms of their linguistic realisation and pragmatic functions.

Any communicative interaction is *a priori* a social interaction that is determined by two broad types of factors related to social distance and closeness governing the wording of the message and its interpretation by the audience:

- **External factors** established prior to the interaction by social roles and status, such as age, power, and familiarity that determine how speakers observe social distance, for example by using formal address forms.
- **Internal factors** emerging during the interaction and involving the negotiation of social closeness, such as the amount of imposition or degree of friendliness, which can lead to adjustments in the course of conversation, for example, moving from formal to informal address.

Interpretation often leads to evaluations of what is said, beyond the intended meaning, as being rude, inconsiderate, or considerate – judgements that are central to the investigation of *politeness* [41, p. 59-60].

Politeness

Politeness in communicative interaction concerns how speakers manage social relationships by making their utterances more or less polite, a key aspect of interpersonal behaviour that is present to some degree in all communication. In addition to the factors mentioned above, *social motivation* plays a key role, as speakers often aim not just to convey information but also to maintain social relationships and influence others by managing impressions. These are socially oriented objectives that shape both what is said and how it is said [28, p. 190]. The role of social motivations in interpretation was briefly acknowledged by Grice [16, p. 28], suggesting an additional *aesthetic, social, or moral in character* maxim “Be Polite” that marks the social aspect of communication.

Another early approach to politeness was developed by Robin Lakoff, who proposed two basic rules of pragmatic competence: 1) *be clear* and 2) *be polite* [19, p. 296]. While these rules sometimes overlap – for instance, in giving instructions – they may also conflict, as a direct and clear command might be effective but perceived as impolite. In such cases, speakers must prioritise clarity over politeness, or vice versa, depending on the context of the utterance and their relationship with the addressee. Lakoff further subdivides politeness into three rules: (R1) *Don’t impose*; (R2) *Give the receiver options*; (R3) *Make the receiver feel good – be friendly* [*Ibidem*, p. 298].

Face

Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson made an influential contribution by relating politeness to the sociological notion of **face** – defined as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” [6, p. 61] (where the most visible part of a person stands metonymically for the whole person and his or her identity). This interactional identity refers to the individual’s self-esteem as it has to do with how they are viewed within a culture – as more or less respectable, with greater or lesser reputation or esteem. In this context, politeness can be defined as “any behaviour including verbal behaviour of an interlocutor to maintain his or her face and that of the individuals he or she is interacting with” [17, p. 142]. Therefore, awareness of another person’s face is essential to politeness.

According to Brown and Levinson, *face* includes two key aspects:

- **Positive face** – reflects the individual's desire to be approved of, accepted, admired, liked, and validated by others.
- **Negative face** – reflects the need to be independent, to have freedom of action, and not to be imposed on by others.

These face needs (wants) are addressed through two corresponding types of politeness:

- **Positive politeness** – oriented to the positive face of others by choosing speech strategies that emphasise one’s solidarity with the addressee, such as claiming *common ground*, conveying that the speaker and the addressee are co-operators, and satisfying the addressee’s wants [6, p. 101].

- **Negative politeness** – oriented to maintaining the negative face of others, by opting for speech strategies that emphasise one's deference for the addressee, linguistically realised through conventional indirectness, hedges on illocutionary force, and apologies [*Ibidem*, p. 130].

Notwithstanding our intention to address the positive and negative face wants of our interlocutors, our utterances can still pose a threat to either face. Behaviours which do this are termed **face-threatening acts** (often abbreviated to *FTAs*) by Brown and Levinson. They can lead to adjustments in how we phrase utterances in order to reduce the risk of *face damage*. FTAs can be categorised according to whether they threaten:

- **The other person's positive face** – through expressions of disapproval, accusations, criticisms, disagreements, and insults.
- **The other person's negative face** – through advice, orders, requests, suggestions, and warnings.

Moreover, speakers can also threaten both ***their own positive face*** – by, for example, performing speech acts such as apologising – and ***their own negative face***, by performing speech acts such as accepting apologies. Because both the speaker and the addressee typically cooperate to maintain face under normal circumstances, any FTA directed at one party may also affect the other's face, and vice versa [*Ibidem*, p. 65–68].

Table 7.1 Types of FTAs, according to Brown and Levinson
[6, p. 313-315]

Types of face threatened	Definition	Kinds of acts that threaten face (run contrary to face wants of the addressee and / or of the speaker)
Addressee's positive face	The speaker (S) does not care about the addressee's (H's) feelings, wants, acts, personal characteristics, goods, beliefs or values; considers the addressee wrong or misguided or unreasonable about some issue, etc.	<p>1. Acts that show that S has a negative evaluation of some aspect of H's positive face:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) expressions of disapproval, criticism, contempt or ridicule, complaints and reprimands, accusations, insults (b) contradictions or disagreements, challenges. <p>2. Acts that show that S doesn't care about (or is indifferent to) H's positive face:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) expressions of violent (out-of-control) emotions (b) irreverence, mention of taboo topics, including those that are inappropriate in the context (c) bringing of bad news about H, or good news (boasting) about S (d) raising of dangerously emotional or divisive topics, e.g., politics, race, religion, etc. (e) blatant non-cooperation in an activity, e.g., disruptively interrupting H's talk (f) use of address terms and other status-marked identifications in initial encounters.

Addressee's negative face	<p>The speaker does not intend to avoid impeding H's freedom of action.</p>	<p>1. Acts that predicate some future act of H, and in so doing put some pressure on H to do (or refrain from doing) the act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) orders and requests (b) suggestions, advice (c) reminders (d) threats, warnings, dares <p>2. Acts that predicate some positive future act of S toward H, and in so doing put some pressure on H to accept or reject them, and possibly to incur a debt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) offers (with H thereby incurring a possible debt) (b) promises (S commits himself to a future act for H's benefit) <p>3. Those acts that predicate some desire of S toward H or H's goods, giving H reason to think that he may have to take action to protect the object of S's desire, or give it to S:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) compliments, expressions of envy or admiration (b) expression of strong (negative) emotions toward H, e.g., hatred, anger, lust (S indicates possible motivation for harming H or H's goods).
Speaker's positive face	<p>Acts that threaten the speaker's self-image by admitting faults, losing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) apologies (b) acceptance of a compliment (S may feel constrained to denigrate the object of H's prior compliment, thus damaging his own face; or

	control, or vulnerability.	<p>he may feel constrained to compliment H in turn)</p> <p>(c) breakdown of physical control over body, bodily leakage, stumbling or falling down, etc.</p> <p>(d) self-humiliation, shuffling or cowering, acting stupid, self-contradicting</p> <p>(e) confessions, admissions of guilt or responsibility, e.g., for having done or not done an act, or for ignorance of something that S is expected to know</p> <p>(f) emotion leakage, non-control of laughter or tears.</p>
Speaker's negative face	Acts that impose obligations or limit the speaker's freedom.	<p>(a) expressing thanks (S accepts a debt, humbles his own face)</p> <p>(b) acceptance of H's thanks or H's apology (S may feel constrained to minimise H's debt or transgression, as in 'It was nothing, don't mention it.')</p> <p>(c) excuses (S indicates that he thinks he had good reason to do, or fail to do, an act which H has just criticised; this may constitute in turn a criticism of H, or at least cause a confrontation between H's view of things and S's view)</p> <p>(d) acceptance of offers (S is constrained to accept a debt, and to encroach upon H's negative face)</p> <p>(e) responses to H's <i>faux pas</i> (if S visibly notices a prior <i>faux pas</i>, he may cause</p>

		embarrassment to H; if he pretends not to, he may be discomfited himself) (f) unwilling promises and offers (S commits himself to some future action although he doesn't want to; therefore, if his unwillingness shows, he may also offend H's positive face)
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Brown and Levinson posited three independent, culturally sensitive social variables that can determine the seriousness or weight of a FTA [*Ibidem*, p. 74–77].

1. **The social distance (D)** between speaker and the addressee, based on how well they know each other and the nature or frequency of their interactions. Greater distance increases the need for politeness.
2. **The relative power (P)** of the addressee over the speaker. When the hearer holds more power (e.g., due to status or authority), the FTA is considered more serious, requiring more mitigating actions.
3. **The absolute ranking of imposition (R)** – the extent to which a FTA imposes on the addressee in a given culture or context.

Politeness strategies

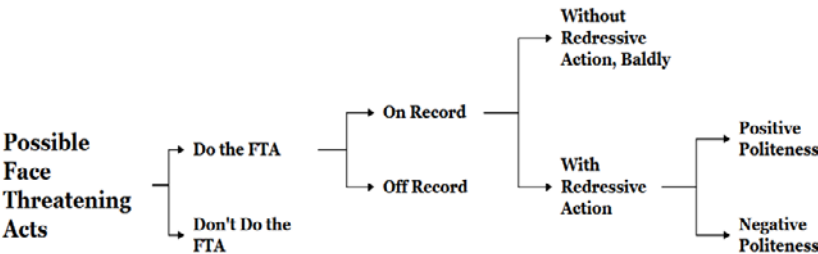
Saying something off or on record

Communicative interaction inevitably involves FTAs, such as requests, offers, promises, etc. In such cases, maintaining a cooperative social relationship between the communicators requires constant assessment of the potential impact of their utterances and adjusting the formulation of the message to manage these FTAs. Brown and Levinson's approach outlines a set

of linguistic and non-linguistic strategies that speakers can choose from to address the face wants of other people:

1. Do not do the FTA.
2. Do the FTA off record.
3. Do the FTA on record without redressive action, baldly (bald on record).
4. Do the FTA on record with redressive action using positive politeness.
5. Do the FTA on record with redressive action using negative politeness.

Table 7.2 Brown and Levinson's set of FTA-avoiding strategies



Performing an FTA **off record** means communicating intentions indirectly, by dropping a hint that allows for more than one interpretation, and thus avoiding direct imposition and preserving the hearer's face. The two overarching approaches to performing an off record FTA are:

1. via an implicature, or
2. by being vague or ambiguous [28, p. 200].

The indirect request *It's getting a bit stuffy in here* is an off record FTA, uttered as an attempt to get the addressee to open the window. The speaker's intention is implied rather than directly stated, allowing for plausible deniability – that is, the speaker

could deny that she wanted the window open. The range of linguistic strategies used to convey an FTA off record, according to Brown and Levinson, includes:

- General statements – e.g., *Thoughtful people call if they are going to be late.*
- Understatements – e.g., *Maybe that wasn't the best idea in the world.*
- Overstatements – e.g., *You are never on time!*
- Figurative language (metaphor, irony) – e.g., *She's a ticking time bomb* (metaphor); *How clever of you!* (irony)
- Speaking a necessary truth (tautology) – e.g., *What's done is done.*
- Rhetorical questions – e.g., *Why would you think that was a good idea?*

These off record strategies rely on indirectness, leaving the speaker room to deny specific intentions while simultaneously guiding the addressee towards an interpretation that is either relevant (in relevance-theoretic terms) or cooperative (in Gricean terms). This process triggers an implicature, by means of which the speaker performs the face-threatening act [*Ibidem*, p. 200–201].

Performing the FTA without face-saving mitigations or redress, i.e., through direct, clear, and concise orders and requests, is defined as the **bald on record** strategy. It is appropriate in cases where the urgency and efficiency of communicating the message outweigh the desire to maintain the hearer's face want. Brown and Levinson identify three typical contexts in which bald on record use is appropriate:

- Urgency of the situation involving threat or danger to the hearer – e.g., *Watch out!*

- Acts that pose very little threat to the hearer's face, and may even be in the hearer's interest – e.g., *Come in* or *Sit down*.
- Situations where the speaker does not intend to maintain the hearer's face wants, either due to a position of power or authority and the ability to control the other's behaviour with words – e.g., an invigilator at the end of an examination: *Put your pens down. Leave the room without talking*; or directives in military contexts.

An FTA performed **on record with redressive action** is delivered directly but includes strategies to soften its impact, such as *please* or *would you, I'm sorry to say*, in order to protect the hearer's face. These politeness strategies mitigate the force of the imposition, as in *I'm sorry to say this, but you're not looking your best today, are you?* Brown and Levinson distinguish between two types of redressive strategies [6, p. 129]: **positive politeness strategies**, which aim to enhance or maintain the hearer's positive face by expressing closeness and solidarity, and **negative politeness strategies**, which respect the hearer's negative face by emphasising deference and minimising imposition.

Positive politeness strategies

Positive politeness strategies are intended to maintain or enhance the addressee's positive face. They emphasise closeness between the speaker and the addressee, highlighting shared perspectives, values, and goals, and are referred to as **solidarity strategies**.

The strategies identified by Brown and Levinson to attend to the interlocutor's positive face include the following, among which are:

- **Notice, attend to the addressee** (their interests, wants, needs, goods) – commenting on the addressee's

appearance, anticipating their needs, offering before being asked.

- **Exaggerate** (interest, approval, sympathy with the addressee) – using empathetic or superlative adjectives.
- **Intensify interest to the addressee** – involving the addressee more directly using the historic present tense or “vivid present” in Brown and Levinson’s terminology, hyperbole, tag questions, directly rather than indirectly quoted speech.
- **Use in-group identity markers that signal in-group membership** – informal terms of address, such as *mate, buddy, or guys*; common dialect or vocabulary; jargon or slang, ellipsis conveying confidence that the listener will be able to infer the meaning.
- **Seek agreement** – repeating something the interlocutor has said.
- **Avoid disagreement** – focusing on aspects of topics that the communicators agree on; using *token agreement, i.e.*, beginning an utterance with apparent agreement before the speaker backtracks to reveal some degree of disagreement, e.g. “*yes, but...*”.
- **Presuppose / raise / assert common ground** – opening a conversation by raising a topic the addressee is likely to agree with; using *so* and *then* in an imperative utterance to imply suggestions on a previously agreed plan, thus confirming agreements and creating a sense of common ground.
- **Joke** – talking about trivial things or joking to establish a common ground before making a FTA, such as asking a favour or raising a difficult point.

- **Assert or presuppose speaker's knowledge of and concern for the addressee's wants** – assuming that the speaker understands and shares the hearer's wants and needs using utterances that express familiarity with the hearer's needs, interests, or preferences, such as knowledge predicates, expressions of concern, or presuppositions to show solidarity and shared understanding.
- **Include both speaker and addressee in the activity** – signalling cooperation, collaboration, and shared purpose, usually through inclusive forms like *we* and *us* (e.g. *Okay, let's refocus and finish this part together, shall we?*), even if the speaker is not technically involved in the activity.

Negative politeness strategies

Negative politeness strategies emphasise the addressee's right to freedom of action by acknowledging the imposition placed on them and mitigating its effects. Referred to as **deference strategies**, they express politeness and courtesy [28 p. 208-212]:

- **Acknowledge the imposition** directly, e.g. *"I realise this might be inconvenient..."*, *"I understand this is a bit much..."*; by indicating reluctance to impose on the hearer, e.g. *"I hate to have to bother you, but..."*; by apologising and asking for forgiveness, e.g. *"I'm really sorry, but..."*; by providing the hearer with a reason for not being able to avoid performing the FTA, e.g. *"I wouldn't ask if it weren't important."*
- **Impersonalise the FTA** by dissociating the speaker and the addressee from the FTA through avoidance of the personal pronouns *I* and *you* in overt imperatives

without subjective pronoun “Stop it now!” vs. “You stop it now!”; through passive voice, e.g. “*Visitors are requested to remain silent during the performance*”; through the use of the past tense, e.g. “*I was wondering if you could...*”, “*I thought you might...*”, conveying distance from the *here* and *now* of the imposition.

- **Hedging** is a means of indicating a level of uncertainty or tentativeness, distancing the speaker from the imposition: modifiers such as *rather*, *quite*, or *sort of*; tag questions such as *isn't it?* or *don't they?*; verbs with modal meaning “*I believe...*”, “*I don't think...*”; conditional mood, e.g. “*If you don't mind...*”; phrases admitting imposition and hoping to partially redress it, such as “*I hate to have to say this...*”, “*I must say...*”, and “*I have to be honest with you...*”; and interjections such as *um* or *ah*.
- **Minimising the imposition** by means of phrases that make the imposition seem small or insignificant, such as *just*, *a bit*, *a second*, or using understatements, e.g. “*I'm only asking for a quick look, nothing too detailed.*”
- **Polite pessimism**, according to Brown and Levinson, expresses the speaker's doubt that the hearer can reasonably fulfil the request, thereby reducing the imposition [6, p. 174]. For example, “*I don't suppose there's any chance you could cover for me tomorrow?*” This is done by framing hypothetical suggestions or requests using the modal auxiliary *could* along with possibility markers such as *suppose*, *perhaps*, *possibly*.
- **Conventionalised indirectness** – a way to resolve the clash between the speaker's desire to be direct and their wish to avoid threatening the hearer's negative face by

using phrases with a conventional meaning different from their literal one. For example, “*Can you*” followed by a verb phrase conveys an indirect request, not ability; similarly, “*Will you...*”, “*Why don’t you...*”, and “*Can I ask you to...*” are commonly used indirect requests [26, p. 82].

Impoliteness

Impoliteness involves an overt violation of politeness norms that threatens the hearer’s face, often interpreted as intentional. Unlike politeness strategies that are aimed at maintaining and enhancing face, impoliteness strategies create social tension by attacking the addressee’s face. Jonathan Culpeper offers the following definition when delimiting impoliteness from other face-related behaviours:

Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and / or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2) [9, p. 38].

Interpretations of impoliteness are highly sensitive to the discourse contexts, including the relationship between the interlocutors, cultural norms and expectations. What is seen as impolite in one context may not be in another, depending on how the act is framed and received. For example, calling someone *lazy* in a formal workplace context may be perceived as rude or offensive, while the same word used jokingly among close friends may be interpreted as playful teasing, not an insult.

Culpeper (1996) proposes a model of impoliteness strategies that parallels Brown and Levinson’s politeness framework, aimed at attacking face rather than maintaining it. Impoliteness, he argues, is “the parasite of politeness,” functioning through the deliberate threat to the hearer’s face [10, p. 215-216].

- **Bald on record impoliteness strategies** occur when the speaker performs a direct FTA, without any attempt of redressing, in a context where politeness is expected. For example, “Get out, now!” said to a guest at a casual gathering would obviously be seen as rude.
- **Positive impoliteness strategies** are intended to attack the hearer’s positive face. These include: 1) the use of insults, name-calling, disrespectful terms of address; 2) ignoring somebody, pretending not to know them (or remember their name), leaving uncomfortable silences, and so on.
- **Negative impoliteness strategies** are aimed at damaging the addressee’s negative face by limiting their freedom from imposition. These include: space invasion (asking for information that is too intimate), threatening, emphasising power relations (when one has more power), reminding of debts.
- **Off record impoliteness** is implicated impoliteness, where an utterance appears polite on the surface but is clearly insincere or sarcastic in context, e.g. “*No please, after you. Don’t let me get in your way!*” said after someone rudely pushes past you, evidently not intended sincerely in that discourse context.
- **Withhold politeness** denotes the deliberate absence of expected politeness behaviour, such as not thanking someone or refusing to apologise.
- **Impoliteness meta-strategies: sarcasm and mock politeness** involve using politeness strategies which are obviously insincere. For example, produce an utterance where a certain feature is more salient than

usual to convey irony, through pitch movements or use of particular words, e.g. *“Thank you so much. I really appreciate this. You are so kind.”* delivered with exaggerated intonation to signal mockery.

Linguists acknowledge the complexity of defining and inventorying impoliteness strategies [28, p. 217]. The classification proposed by Culpeper serves as a useful model for analysing data and provides a solid theoretical foundation for continuous research into the production, reception, and interpretation of impoliteness within the broader study of how communicative choices manage social interaction and relationships.

Activities

1. Explain how politeness functions as a socially motivated strategy in communicative interaction
2. Define the concept of face in Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory. Present the distinction between positive face and negative face.
3. Classify the main types of FTAs. What factors determine the seriousness of a FTA?
4. Outline the five strategies for performing an FTA according to Brown and Levinson. How do these strategies differ in terms of directness, redressive action, and their impact on face?
5. Explain the distinction between positive politeness strategies and negative politeness strategies. Refer to the linguistic characteristics and pragmatic goals of each type.
6. Describe the main types of impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper.

7. For each of the following scenarios (i) – (v), prepare an utterance using each of the strategies in (a) – (d). Consider whether the utterances you produce avoid a positive FTA (e.g., disapproval, criticism, etc.) or a negative FTA (e.g., imposition, limiting freedom, etc.). Whose face is potentially at risk – the speaker’s, the hearer’s, or both?

- (a) Off record
- (b) Bald on record
- (c) Positive politeness
- (d) Negative politeness

(i) You’re in a queue at a busy café and notice that someone ahead of you has dropped their ID card / €20 banknote without realising it. (*Consider how urgency and personal impact affect your politeness strategy.*)

(ii) Your friend shows up with a brand-new haircut that you personally think doesn't suit them. They smile and ask, “So, what do you think of my new haircut?”

(iii) You're preparing for an important presentation but realise you left your laptop charger at home. You want to ask a classmate or colleague if you could borrow theirs.

(iv) Your neighbour has started parking slightly over the line into your space. It’s making it difficult for you to park. You decide to address the issue politely.

(v) You're on a group video call, and someone keeps interrupting others while they're speaking. You want to bring this up without offending them.

8. Read the excerpt below. Analyse how the interlocutors employ positive and negative politeness strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) in a situation of social misunderstanding. Comment on their linguistic realisations and evaluate their pragmatic functions,

focusing on how the speakers ensure smooth interaction, express deference, and show interpersonal sensitivity.

When she answered the front doorbell at eleven fifteen the following morning and found Mr Amos Curry, hat in hand, upon the step, inquiring about a room [...].

Mr Amos Curry rubbed his left eyebrow with a nervous finger a gesture of his because he was habitually shy. 'A room to let,' he said, [...] 'I understand from the agency... a room to let with breakfast.'

'I know nothing of any agency. I think you have the wrong address.'

He took out a small loose-leaf notebook. 'Number 23, Park Close.'

'Oh no, I'm so sorry, we are...' she corrected herself, 'I am twenty-three Park Walk.' [...]

'An easy mistake, a perfectly understandable mistake. Mr ... Please do not feel at all...'

... Curry. Amos Curry.'

... embarrassed.'

'I am looking for a quiet room with breakfast. It seemed so hopeful. Park Close. Such a comfortable address.' [...]

'I do apologise, Madam, I feel so troubled...' I would not have

'No... no, please...'

'I must look for Park Close, Number 23.'

'It is just around the bend, to the left, a few hundred yards. A very secluded road.'

'Like this. This road is secluded. I thought as I approached this house, how suitable, I should... I feel one can tell, a house has a certain But I am so sorry.'

He settled his hat upon his neat grey hair, and then raised it again politely, turning away.

She took in a quick breath. She said, 'What exactly... that is to say, if you are looking for a room with breakfast, I wonder if

Mr Amos Curry turned back [48, p. 125-126].

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Unit 8.

CONVERSATION STRUCTURE

Learning outcomes:

- describe the structural features of conversation, including turn-taking, floor management, and adjacency pairs with preference structures, and their role in managing speaker roles and organising discourse;
- interpret the pragmatic function of adjacency pairs and their preference structures in maintaining rapport and mutual understanding;
- analyse conversational sequences in terms of their pragmatic functions;
- evaluate how conversational styles and culturally determined norms of floor management influence the negotiation of interpersonal alignment in conversational exchanges.

The two major functions of language identified by Brown and Yule are the **transactional function** and the **interactional function of language** [5, p. 1-3]. The transactional is the function which language serves in the expression of content and the efficient transmission of factual information. In this role, language is “message-oriented” focusing on the accurate relay of the informative detail. The interactional function is involved in establishing and maintaining social relationships, expressing personal attitudes, showing solidarity, and promoting social cohesion [*Ibidem*]. In reality, most conversations combine both functions, with communication ranging along a continuum from purely transactional, such as a police officer giving directions to a traveller or a doctor instructing a nurse on how to administer medicine, to purely interactional, known as *phatic communion*,

which serves to acknowledge each other's presence and maintain social connection. Brown and Yule present the following example to point out that much of everyday human interaction is characterised by the primarily interpersonal rather than the primarily transactional use of language:

When two strangers are standing shivering at a bus-stop in an icy wind and one turns to the other and says 'My goodness, it's cold', it is difficult to suppose that the primary intention of the speaker is to convey information. It seems much more reasonable to suggest that the speaker is indicating a readiness to be friendly and to talk [*Ibidem*, p. 3].

Conversation analysis

The term *interaction* encompasses a wide range of social encounters, from highly formal situations, such as a lawyer questioning a witness in court, to everyday transactions, such as ordering a taxi or booking a hotel room, all involving interpersonal communication. While the kind of talk generally varies depending on the context of interaction, the structure of the talk follows the turn-taking pattern, *i.e.*, *I speak – you speak – I speak – you speak*, which we acquire first and use most often [41, p. 71]. An important approach to conversation structure is **conversation analysis (CA)**, which views conversation as a dynamic process [11, p. 27], *i.e.*, a linear, ongoing event that unfolds gradually and involves the negotiation of cooperation between speakers. In this context, conversation is discourse mutually constructed and negotiated in time between speakers; it is usually informal and unplanned. G. Cook considers that talk may be classed as conversation when [8, p. 51]:

1. It is not primarily necessitated by a practical task
2. Any unequal power of participants is partially suspended

3. The number of the participants is small
4. Turns are quite short
5. Talk is primarily for the participants, not for an outside audience.

The components of conversation analysis, as outlined by Yule, include [41, p. 71]:

- **Floor** – the right to speak
- **Turn** – having control of the floor at any time
- **Turn-taking** – the process by which participants attempt to gain the floor
- **Local management system** – a set of socially shared conventions for managing turns in conversation, *i.e.*, getting turns, keeping them, or giving them away.
- **Transition relevance place (TRP)** – a point in conversation where a change-of-turn is possible.

According to this analytical tool, cooperative speakers in a conversation are viewed as equally sharing turns at holding the floor. Turn changes are accomplished smoothly because speakers are aware of the local management system for taking turns at appropriate TRPs [*Ibidem*, p. 72]. Cooperation in conversation is managed by all participants through turn-taking. Each potential speaker is expected to wait until the current speaker reaches a TRP. The most obvious markers of a TRP are the end of a structural unit (a phrase or clause) and a pause. When speakers do not want to wait for the TRP and take the floor early, it is called an *interruption*. When hearers predict that the turn is about to end and intervene before it does, this is called an *overlap*.

Joan Cutting claims that each culture has an unwritten agreement about the acceptable length of a pause between two turns [11, p. 29-30]. In any culture, if the pause is meant to convey

meaning, it is called an *attributable silence*. In the following sort of exchange:

- (1) A: Did you get the job?
B: (*three-second pause*) I did.
A: That's amazing – congratulations!

B pauses for three seconds before responding with “*I did*”. This attributable silence is interpreted by A as meaningful, suggesting emotional weight or significance. A responds with enthusiasm, interpreting the pause as reinforcing the positive impact of the news. In cultures with a low tolerance for silence between turns, if a pause in conversation exceeds ten seconds, speakers tend to say something like “*um*” or “*So there you go*” to break the silence. For people who do not know each other well, a long, non-attributable silence can feel awkward.

However, there are floor-holding devices that speakers can use when they intend to have longer turns – for example, making a comment about their need (for more time) to finish the turn or using certain expressions (e.g., “*There are three points I'd like to make*” or “*Did you hear about...*”) to signal that their turn will be extended. These means help the speaker suspend the normal turn-taking process and establish temporary control of the conversational floor. During these extended turns, conversational partners are still expected to show engagement through *backchannel signals* such as “*uh-uh*,” “*yeah*,” or “*mmm*”. These brief vocal cues, along with gestures or facial expressions, reassure the speaker that their message is being received, followed, and not objected to. The absence of backchannels is also meaningful. In telephone conversations, it may cause the speaker to check if the listener is still present. In face-to-face interactions, the absence of backchannels may be interpreted as disagreement, since the expected supportive feedback is withheld. Yule presents two

types of conversational styles characterised by different turn-taking features:

- 1. **High involvement style** – participants are expected to be active, speak at a relatively fast rate, with minimal pausing between turns, and with some overlap or even completion of the other's turn.
- 2. **High considerateness style** – participants tend to speak at a slower rate, allow for longer pauses between turns, avoid overlapping, interruption, or completion of the other's turn [41, p. 76].

Adjacency pairs

Conversation contains frequently occurring patterns in pairs of utterances known as **adjacency pairs**, consisting of a *first part* and a *second part*, produced by each participant. The utterance of one speaker creates an expectation of a certain response from the next speaker as the second part of the same pair: question-answer, offer-accept, thanking-response, blame-deny and so on. This is known as *preference structure*: each first part has a preferred and a dispreferred response.

Table 8.1 The general pattern of preferred structures

a question	has the preferred response of	an answer
an offer		an acceptance
an invitation		an acceptance
an assessment		an agreement
a proposal		an agreement
a greeting		a greeting
a complaint		an apology
a blame		a denial

As in the examples:

First Part

- a. Can you give me a hand with this?
- b. Do you want a cup of tea?
- c. Isn't this music amazing?

Second Part

Sure, no problem.
Yeah, that'd be nice.
Totally, I love it.

The dispreferred responses tend to be the refusals and disagreements. These are the more unusual responses, and they can be interpreted as meaningful or rude. An absence of response may be interpreted as the hearer either not having heard, not paying attention, or deliberately choosing not to cooperate. The example below illustrates a dispreferred second part to an invitation, which would normally expect an acceptance.

First Part

A: Do you want to join us
for dinner tonight?

Second Part

B: Uh–well–I'd really like to, but
I've got a deadline I have to meet
tonight, you know?

The refusal is carefully constructed to maintain politeness and minimise the potential for offense. The turn begins with a *hesitation*, "*Uh – well –*", that signals a delay and prepares the listener for a dispreferred answer. This is followed by a *token acceptance*, "*I'd really like to*", to express appreciation of the invitation, backed up by an *account*, "*but I've got a deadline I have to meet tonight*", to explain his refusal, suggesting that an external obligation, not a lack of interest, is preventing the addressee from accepting. The final phrase, "*you know?*", invokes the listener's understanding and empathy, conveying the idea that the addressee's refusal is dictated by circumstances beyond his control.

Table 8.2 Dispreferred second parts of adjacency pairs

[41, p. 81]

How to do a dispreferred	Examples
a. Delay / hesitate	pause; er; em; ah
b. preface	well; oh
c. express doubt	I'm not sure; I don't know
d. token Yes	that's great; I'd love to
e. apology	I'm sorry; what a pity
f. mention obligation	I must do X; I'm expected in Y
g. appeal for understanding	you see; you know
h. make it non-personal	everybody else; out there
i. give an account	too much work; no time left
j. use mitigators	really; mostly; sort of; kinda
k. hedge the negative	I guess not; not possible

In English conversation, preferred responses, such as accepting or agreeing, tend to be brief and immediate, signalling closeness and connection between speakers. Conversely, dispreferred responses, such as refusals or rejections, typically involve more time and more language, creating a sense of distance and lack of connection. To avoid generating contexts for dispreferred responses, speakers can use pre-sequences, as discussed below.

Sequences

Sequences are stretches of utterances or turns that emerge as speakers are jointly constructing and negotiating their conversation in time. These can be pre-sequences, insertion sequences, and opening and closing sequences [11, p. 31].

Pre-sequences prepare the ground for a subsequent sequence and signal the type of utterance to follow. There are pre-invitations, "*What are you doing Friday night?...*", pre-

requests, "*Are you busy right now?*", "*Do you have a minute?*", and pre-announcements "*You'll never guess!*" "*You know what...*".

[1]

A: *Are you doing anything tonight?*

(= pre-invitation)

B: *No, why?*

(= go ahead)

A: *How about coming over for dinner?*

(= invitation)

B: *Sure, that sounds nice.*

(= accept)

[2]

A: *Are you busy this weekend?*

(= pre-invitation)

B: *Yeah, I've got a lot going on.*

(= stop)

A: *Okay, maybe another time.*

(= stop)

As illustrated in examples adapted from Yule [41, p. 68], pre-invitations are used as a preliminary attempt to test the availability or willingness of the addressee before making the actual invitation. The response to this pre-sequence functions as either a "*go ahead*" in [1], encouraging the speaker to continue with the invitation, or a "*stop*" in [2], indicating that the invitation will likely be declined.

Insertion sequences are sequences *that occur embedded between the first pair part and the second pair part* of an adjacency pair, which acts as a macro-sequence, often to address problematic issues, clarifications, or confirmations before the main conversational path continues. Sidnell analyses the insertion sequence in the following transcript example [31, p. 41-50]:

(2) Mair's Deli

Archie: Can I have a sandwich to take away please? Q1

Eric: What would you like?

Q2

Archie: What would you recommend?

Q3

Eric: Are you a vegetarian?

Q4

Archie: Yes.

R4

Eric: Well the vegetarian cajun pâté is good.

R3

Archie: Okay I'll have one of those then!

R2

Eric: Right, that'll be £3.20 please.

R1

In Sidnell's example of a layered conversation about ordering food, although there are four questions and four responses, only the fourth pair (Q4-R4) forms strict adjacency. Each time a new pair is started before the previous first pair part has received its second pair part, the new pair is inserted within the first pair. In the Mair's Deli example there are three insertion sequences within the Q1-R1 pair, two insertion sequences within the Q2-R2 pair and one within Q3-R3.

The last category of sequences includes **opening** and **closing structures** that mark the beginning and the end of an interaction. Openings typically contain summons – answer pairs, *"Hello?" – "Hi!"*, followed by identification and greeting exchanges, an enquiry after health *"How are you?"* and a past reference *"How did it go last night"*. Closings involve pre-closings, *"Okay," "So..."*, followed by terminal exchanges like *"Bye" – "Bye"*. These sequences signal mutual recognition of interactional boundaries.

Even if CA views conversation as a negotiated, cooperative process, it shows that interaction follows structured patterns determined by turn-taking rules, preference organisation of adjacency pairs, and the sequencing of utterances. These regularities enable smooth communication and the joint construction of meaning by discourse participants in real time.

Activities

1. Explain the distinction between the transactional and interactional functions of language. How do speakers shift between these functions in everyday conversation?
2. How is conversation viewed within the conversation analysis framework? Define its main components (floor, turn, turn-taking, transition relevance place). How do participants manage these elements during interaction?

3. Explain the processes of interruption and overlap in conversation. How do they differ, and what do they reveal about interpersonal alignment or misalignment?
4. Describe the characteristics of high involvement and high considerateness conversational styles and explain how they reflect culturally determined norms of interaction?
5. Outline the structure and function of adjacency pairs. What is a preferred vs. dispreferred response, and how does this distinction influence the interpretation of conversational responses?
6. Explain the role of conversational sequences in structuring interaction.
7. Read the extract below from the short story “Same Time, Same Place” by H.E. Bates.
 - a. Does the conversation display the transactional or the interactional language function? Support your answer with arguments. Discuss how these two functions interact in the exchange. Formulate the overall communicative purpose of the interaction.
 - b. Analyse each speaker’s turn and indicate how they gain, hold, or yield control of the floor. Evaluate turn transitions at TRPs. Are there any overlaps, interruptions, or floor-holding devices? Are there any attributable silences? If so, what effect do they convey?
 - c. Identify at least four adjacency pairs. For each, specify whether the second part is preferred or dispreferred. If dispreferred, how does the speaker mitigate the potential face-threat?
 - d. Identify the sequences used in this exchange.
 - e. Is the conversational style of the speakers high-involvement or high-considerateness? Provide evidence.

- f. Evaluate how the interlocutors negotiate interpersonal alignment throughout the exchange.

[...] The only place she could find to sit down was next to a gentleman. [...] After studying his newspaper in concentrated silence for another five minutes, he folded it up and laid that too on the seat beside him. Unwilling to appear too eager, Miss Treadwell waited some further minutes before saying:

'I hope you won't think me rude but I wonder could I take a tiny glance at your newspaper? I couldn't get one this morning.'

'Oh! By all means. By all means. Take it, please. I've finished with it anyway.'

'Oh! I didn't mean to take it altogether.'

'Oh! Do. I've finished the cross-word. And once I've finished that I'm not interested. Do you do the cross-word?'

No, Miss Treadwell had to confess, she never did the cross-word. She supposed she wasn't clever enough for that.

'Nor was I, this morning. There was a devil of a clue and the only word that fitted was *poitivene*. Had me stuck for an hour. Do you know what a *poitivene* is?'

Miss Treadwell suddenly felt flattered and very pleased with herself. Yes, she said, as a matter of fact she did.

'And what on earth is it?'

'It's a sort of chrysanthemum.'

'Is it by Jove? How ever did you know?'

Miss Treadwell said she had seen them on the market flower stalls, named. There was another one called *rayonante*. She always thought they were such pretty names, she said, and the gentleman in the homburg hat gave her a long friendly blue-eyed stare of admiration.

Silence came between them for some few minutes after this, until finally the gentleman in the homburg hat said:

'What a beautiful morning.'
'Lovely. Spring at last.'
'Spring at last.' [43, p. 105-106]

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Unit 9.

DISCOURSE COHERENCE

Learning outcomes:

- present the notion of coherence from a pragmatic perspective;
- analyse how referential and relational coherence is achieved in discourse;
- explain the cognitive mechanisms involved in construing coherence, with particular focus on inference, background knowledge, and discourse processing operations;
- use inferences appropriately and interpret contextual references in order to follow the logical flow of a text, identifying ellipses and filling in missing information;
- organise a text in a logical order, maintaining the natural sequence of ideas and the causal relationships between events to produce a clear and well-grounded discourse.

Technically, **coherence** refers to the unity in a text or discourse, which makes sense because its elements do not contradict each other's presuppositions [13, p. 447]. As a text linguistics notion, coherence denotes the properties in the structure and design of a text that motivate readers to consider the identified textual parts as all contributing to a whole and making sense, not just being an arbitrary set of sentences. R. Dirven and M. Verspoor define a text as coherent "if it is possible to construct a coherent representation of that text," where *text representation* refers to the mental or conceptual model that both the speaker/writer and the hearer/reader build of a text in order to produce, interpret, and understand it [12, p. 184].

Coherence vs. cohesion

The cohesion of a text is the explicit marking of its coherence by means of cohesive links which indicate semantic relations between elements of discourse: grammatical cohesion is realised through reference, ellipsis, substitution and conjunction, lexical cohesion concerns such features as synonymy, antonymy, metonymy, collocation, the use of subordinate or superordinate terms, repetition etc. [13, p. 447].

Cohesion is regarded as an overt (explicit) linguistic-surface phenomenon, while coherence is a covert (implicit) deep-structure phenomenon [*Ibidem*]. In terms of text production and interpretation, local utterances are linked both to adjacent utterances and to the broader discourse, including topics and overall storyline. The production and interpretation of text in context assign text the status of discourse, produced and interpreted with a specific intention and goal, involving the selection, encoding, and categorisation of information. Adopting a pragmatic perspective, text producers select and categorise information in a speaker-intended manner and the recipients of texts interpret them accordingly. Construing textual coherence thus depends on both linguistic and extra-linguistic information and involves a cognitive operation which is based on various logical operations, such as inference, deductive and abductive reasoning.

Cognitive operations involved in construing coherence

Brown and Yule identify three aspects of the process of interpreting a speaker's / writer's intended meaning in producing discourse [5, p. 225]: 1) computing the communicative function (how to take the message), 2) using general socio-cultural knowledge (facts about the world) and 3) determining the inferences to be made.

As Brown and Yule point out, in interpreting discourse, in addition to decoding the literal meaning of utterances, hearers need to determine the **communicative function**, *i.e.*, what action the speaker is performing in context (e.g., making a request, giving a refusal, offering advice). Coherence depends on recognising these functions which are embedded in conventional structures of interaction such as **adjacency pairs** with a preferred second part (Question → Answer, Greeting → Greeting, Offer → Acceptance) and the smooth management of **turn-taking**. The consecutive turns produced by different speakers follow a logical order, where the first turn creates an expectation for a particular type of second turn. Even when the second turn is not explicitly connected to the first, we interpret it as related because of this expectation. Thus, two formally unconnected utterances can form a coherent exchange simply because we assume an underlying interactional structure that ensures a socially appropriate flow of conversation, beyond the literal meaning:

(1) A: *Can you go to Edinburgh tomorrow?*

B: *B.E.A. pilots are on strike* [*Ibidem*, p. 227].

Here, B's reply is not an explicit negative answer, but it still functions as one. Awareness of turn-taking rules and adjacency pair patterns allows us to recognise it as a response and not just a gratuitous statement about the way the world is, which preserves coherence in the dialogue.

Moreover, according to relevance theory, listeners interpret such utterances by assuming that every communicative act carries a **presumption of relevance**, *i.e.*, when a speaker produces an utterance (an ostensive stimulus), the listener expects it to be worth processing – yielding meaningful cognitive effects with reasonable effort. The theory accounts for the

coherent nature of formally unconnected utterances placed together in adjacency pairs.

Knowledge of the world

The knowledge about the world that interlocutors possess supports our interpretation not only of discourse, but of nearly every aspect of our experience. As de Beaugrande notes, “the question of how people know what is going on in a text is a special case of the question of how people know what is going on in the world at all” [Apud 5, p. 233]. Understanding discourse is, in Brown and Yule’s account, essentially a process of retrieving stored information from memory and relating it to the encountered discourse. Knowledge of the world is organised into separate but interconnected areas or domains of knowledge. When interpreting discourse, people draw on only the relevant subset of this general knowledge needed to understand the specific text [*Ibidem*, p. 237]. The authors discuss two important concepts dealing with organisation of knowledge in memory: **frames** and **scripts**. In addition, they refer to **scenarios** and **schemata** to account for the online processing of background knowledge.

Frame theory advanced by Minsky proposes that our knowledge is stored in memory in the form of data structures, called **frames**, and which represent stereotyped situations. They are used in the following way:

When one encounters a new situation (or makes a substantial change in one's view of the present problem) one selects from memory a structure called a *frame*. This is a remembered framework to be adapted to fit reality by changing details as necessary [22, p. 211].

Minsky compares a frame for a room in a visual scene with a frame for a noun phrase in a discourse. Both frames have

obligatory elements (wall / nominal or pronominal) and optional elements (decorations on the walls / a numerical determiner). Frames consist of labelled slots that can be filled with specific details or other frames. For example, a house frame includes slots such as “kitchen,” “bathroom,” and “address”, etc. A specific house, real or mentioned in discourse, is an instance of this frame, represented by filling these slots with its constituting elements. Frames thus function as fixed mental structures representing stereotypical knowledge about the world and serve as useful metaphors for fitting input into the framework established by existing knowledge.

The notion of a **script** was developed by analogy with Minsky's frame, but to account for the sequential representation of events. Unlike a frame that denotes a generally stable set of facts about the world, a script includes “a standard sequence of events that describes a situation” [25, p. 254]. As Thornbury specifies, “scripts are the ways in which we come to expect things to happen” [33, p. 55]. The following example, cited from R. Dirven and M. Verspoor, illustrates how readers, based on their familiarity with the relevant script, can interpret a text that lacks explicit cohesive links such as repetition, reference, or topic recurrence [12, p. 185]:

- (2) Twelve-year term of imprisonment. London, April 10. The London court has convicted a Brighton resident to twelve years imprisonment for accessory to murder. The victim was fatally wounded in a shooting incident in a Winchester restaurant last year.

Despite the absence of overt cohesion between the third and fourth sentences, readers understand the text as a coherent whole because they draw on *murder script* – stereotypical knowledge that includes murderers, victims, means, motives, murder sites, etc. and the expected sequence of events in a criminal case, such

as investigation, arrest, trial, and sentencing. This background knowledge enables the construction of a coherent mental representation, showing that coherence can exist without explicit cohesion.

Brown and Yule also discuss the text-processing notion of **scenario** to describe a pre-existing mental representation of a situation or setting that readers automatically activate during text comprehension [5, p. 245]. Scenarios are situation specific and contain typical participants, roles, and events associated with that situation, such as a courtroom scenario comprising a judge, lawyers, and a trial sequence, or a restaurant scenario comprising a waiter, tables, and ordering procedures. Scenarios help readers interpret a text efficiently by allowing them to assume the typical roles and events of the described situation, creating a mental representation even when certain elements are not explicitly stated.

Another cognitive structure, derived from psychology and artificial intelligence, that refers to the broader notion of organised background knowledge guiding readers' expectations and interpretation is **schema** (plural "schemata"). Schemata are "higher-level complex (and even conventional or habitual) knowledge structures" [Apud 5, p. 246], which supply information about our understanding of generic entities, events and situations, thus scaffolding our mental understanding of the world. In processing a given input, schemata, *i.e.*, the organised background knowledge we all use and assume others can use too, allow readers to anticipate, infer, or fill in elements in their interpretation of discourse that are either not mentioned or not fully specified. Cognitive researchers acknowledge that people's personal histories, interests, and perhaps sex contribute to the creation of "higher-level schemata" that cause them to "see"

messages in certain ways [Apud 5, p. 249]. Thus, schemata depend on the cultural background of the receiver. Thornbury uses the example of the utterance “*Be careful in the orchard. There are bees*” to demonstrate how the “bee schema” enables our understanding of the caution conveyed: the knowledge that bees frequent flowers, sting, make honey, live in hives, buzz, and are always on the move [33, p. 55]. This schema helps us interpret both literal and metaphorical language, e.g., “busy as a bee.” As the author notes, “the depth and breadth of a schema will vary with each individual: a beekeeper’s schema for bee will be much more elaborated than either yours or mine”.

Referential coherence

A text is coherent not only because its sentences are connected, but also because it consistently talks about a set of concepts and their referents using referential expressions, such as pronouns and noun phrases. Modern linguistics emphasises that such expressions refer not to real objects in the world, but to the *mental images* readers have of them. This explains our ability to understand references to imaginary things such as *unicorns* or *Santa Claus* [12, p. 186]. The reference can be to something outside the text – **exophoric reference** or **deixis**, or to other concepts mentioned in the text – **endophoric reference**. The example that follows contains exophoric reference:

[Teacher, pointing at the window]:

(3) Could you please close it?

The pronoun *it* does not refer to any element mentioned in the preceding discourse, but to the window that is part of the physical environment shared by both speaker and hearer. The hearer must resort to the situational context (the teacher’s pointing gesture) to identify the referent.

Unlike exophoric referents, endophoric elements are interpreted using the textual context. The two types of endophoric reference are:

- **anaphoric reference** – the use of pronouns to refer to a noun that *precedes*; the interpretation of the referent is drawn from the preceding context, as in “*Last year we were in the Alps. We think they’re beautiful.*”;
- **cataphoric reference** – the use of pronouns to refer to a noun that *follows*; the interpretation of the referent is drawn from the following context, as in “*That’s just my luck: first my tyre bursts and then the bridge is closed, too.*” [*Ibidem*]

Dirven and Verspoor claim that referential coherence is established through endophoricity, as endophoric elements contribute to a text coherence by relying on the textual context for their interpretation [*Ibidem*, p. 186].

In a text, not all referents are equally prominent. Some are kept in focus and talked about continuously, some are introduced as new to the discourse, and others play only a subsidiary role. The way a referent is expressed depends on its level of *prominence*. When a referent is new, it must be introduced clearly, usually by means of an *indefinite expression* such as *a man* or *a little girl*, as in “*Once upon a time there was a little girl*”. Once the referent has been established, it can be referred to in more economical ways. If it remains at the centre of attention, the natural choice is to use a *pronoun*, “*She was called Goldilocks*”, since the hearer can easily recover the intended reference from the immediate context. In cases where the referent is extremely prominent, reference can even be further *ellipted*, as in “*a little girl Ø called Goldilocks*” (where *who was* is omitted). However, if the referent has dropped out of focus and is no longer highly prominent, pronouns may not

provide enough information. In this case, a *full noun phrase* must be used again to re-establish *co-reference*, i.e., reference to the same person or object.

- (4) Once upon a time there was a little girl called Goldilocks. She lived in a forest that belonged to a rich and powerful king. The king had a son called Jeremy, who loved hunting. One day, as he was chasing a deer, he saw the little girl (not her).

The general principle is that the more prominent a concept is, the less linguistic material is needed to identify it. This explains why texts naturally shift between indefinite expressions, pronouns, ellipsis, and full noun phrases, depending on how central a referent is at a given moment in the discourse.

Relational coherence

Construing the coherence of a text largely depends on the interpretation of the coherence relations of *cause-consequence*, *contrast*, *evidence*, *concession*, *result*, and so on between the sentences or clauses of the text. A coherence relation refers to that aspect of text interpretation that is additional to the interpretation of the sentences or clauses in isolation. The class of connectives used to encode coherence relations explicitly includes:

- subordinating conjunctions (because, if, although),
- coordinating conjunctions (and, but),
- conjunctive adverbs (so, therefore, yet),
- conjunctive adverbial phrases (as a consequence, in contrast with this).

The same coherence relations that can occur between clauses can also occur between larger text segments, such as paragraphs and even complete sections.

In addition, coherence relations can be signalled using *relational content words*, like the pair *some ... others* to convey a contrast relation, or by means of stress and intonation. Dirven and Verspoor illustrate how a rising intonation at the end of the first clause and a steep fall in the second clause can signal the concession link between the two clauses [*Ibidem*, p. 190]: “*John may have written a famous book, but he has absolutely no manners.*”

Anita Fetzer states that “in discourse analysis, discourse connectives signal the nature of the connectedness between utterances, between utterances and discourse, between utterances and interlocutors, and between utterances, discourse and context” [13, p. 458]. According to Fetzer, the communicative meaning of discourse connectives can often be paraphrased using a performative verb or a hedged performative. For example, *as a result* carries the meaning “*I conclude*”, *but* carries the meaning “*I contrast*” or “*I do not quite agree*”, and *like* carries the meaning “*I quote*”.

Another type of discourse connective with an overt metacommunicative function are metacommunicative comments, such as *in a nutshell*. These do not merely signal the nature of the connectedness between discursive parts but also comment on them. Fetzer links metacommunicative comments to the Gricean cooperative principle and the maxims, particularly the maxim of manner. For example [*Ibidem*]:

- *briefly* signals the value of “I formulate my utterance in accordance with the Gricean maxim of manner, especially with the third maxim: *be brief*”;
- *bluntly* has the value of “I formulate my utterance in accordance with the Gricean maxim of manner, especially with the second maxim: *avoid obscurity of expression*”;

- *I mean* carries the value of “I formulate my utterance in accordance with the Gricean maxim of manner, especially with the second maxim: *avoid obscurity of expression*”.

In discourse, metacommunicative comments may carry a generalized conversational implicature, signalling the intersubjective positioning of the speaker. For instance, *I mean* commonly introduces a speaker-initiated self-reformulation, implying that previous utterances may not have fully adhered to the maxim of manner, while *bluntly* implicitly warns the addressee that the formulation of the next utterance may be a threat to their face.

However, there are cases when the connectives used by the speaker do not seem to match the underlying coherence relation expressed. This phenomenon is called **relational underspecification** [12, p. 190]:

- (5) Since June 1 Jan Kaal has been editor-in-chief of the monthly *O*. Kaal was approached last year by the publisher, Maurice Keizer, after he had written a critical article in *NRC Handelsblad* on the first issue of the magazine.

In the example above, the writer uses the connective *after*, which only signals a temporal relation, to implicitly convey a *causal* relation (“Kaal became editor *because* he had written a critical article”), which has to be inferred by the hearer / reader.

Relational underspecification requires more interpretative effort on the part of the hearer, but speakers tend to use it only when the context provides enough information for the hearer to infer the intended relation. An important contextual factor is genre: in *narratives*, causal relations between events are often left implicit, whereas in *testimonies* the speaker is expected to be very explicit and underspecification is, therefore, rare.

This phenomenon can also be explained in terms of *conversational implicature* and the *maxim of relevance*. Participants rely on the cooperation of their conversational partners to draw the relevant inferences when coherence relations are not signalled explicitly, as in the example about elections presented in Unit 5. The same mechanism explains why temporal connectives are often interpreted as causal. In the same way, relations of simultaneity can be interpreted as concessive, as in: “He’s only seven years and he can play the Beethoven sonatas” [12, p. 192]. Dirven and Verspoor consider that the underlying principle of these interpretations is that of metonymy, as *temporal* and *additive* connectives may serve as metonymies for *causal* and *concessive* relations, respectively.

Classification typologies of coherent relations

There are different classification typologies of coherent relations. One grouping recognised in the literature, based on the hierarchical relation between the clauses that are linked, is the categorisation into paratactic and hypotactic relations.

- **A paratactic relation** denotes the link between clauses of equal status, such as sequence relations, as in “*Bring the water and milk to the boil, (b) add the yeast extract (c) and pour in the dry semolina*”, in which one clause describes an event that follows an event mentioned in the previous clause. Paratactic relations are considered “multi-nuclear”, in that all of the clauses are equally central to the text.
- **A hypotactic relation** links a dependent clause to an independent one, such as the evidence relation, as in “*(a) John must have stopped smoking, (b) because I haven’t seen him with a cigarette all day*”. Hypotactic relations

are **nucleus-satellite** relations: one clause (the nucleus) contains the main information, while the other (the satellite) supports it. This difference is relevant for summarising a text, since an accurate summary can be obtained by removing the satellite clauses [12, p. 193].

The distinction between nuclei and satellites is functional. The nucleus contributes more to the main line of the text than a satellite and is essential for understanding it. By contrast, the satellite adds supporting or background information and can usually be omitted without changing the main intention of the text. Although nuclei are typically expressed in main clauses and satellites in subordinate clauses, this is not always the case. Sometimes the main clause functions as a satellite and the subordinate clause carries the nucleus, as in: "*MacLoyd had just started to study the legacy left by the socialist Heath, when he died.*"

Another grouping of coherence relations, highlighted by Dirven and Verspoor, comprises the distinction between the different conceptual levels represented by a clause [*Ibidem*, p. 194]:

- **Ideational or content relations** occur if the two clauses are related at the same "world" level, as in "*The unicorn died because it was lonely*", where an event (it died) is a natural consequence of a certain situation (it was lonely).
- **Epistemic relations** occur if one of the two clauses relates to the speaker's judgement, for instance, the first clause describes a "worldly" event and the second clause contains the speaker's reasoning, as in "*Maggie must be eager for promotion. She's worked late three days in a row*". In interpersonal or speech act relations, the first clause gives a reason why the speaker is uttering the second clause: "*Since we're on the subject, when was George Washington born?*"

In conclusion, the complexity of coherence is reflected in its dual nature, being both a process and a product. Discourse coherence is a process, as the listener actively construes the meaning of incoming input by integrating it with subsequent discourse units, relying on referential relations, the semantics of discourse relations and connectives, and inferential operations supported by linguistic cues, background knowledge, and contextual and contextual information. Coherence is also a product of the listener's deep-level interpretative processes, resulting in a meaningful, unified mental representation of discourse that may include underspecified relations or even conflicting elements.

Activities

1. Present the notion of coherence from a pragmatic perspective and explain how it differs from surface-level cohesion.
2. Describe the cognitive operations involved in construing discourse coherence. What role do inference and background knowledge play? Explain the distinction between frames, scripts, scenarios, and schemata in construing discourse coherence. Illustrate your answer with an example.
3. Explain the distinction between referential coherence and relational coherence. How is each type of coherence realised? Discuss the type of context that is relevant for interpreting each type of coherence.
4. Define endophoric and exophoric reference. How does each type contribute to establishing referential coherence in a text?
5. Read the excerpt from the short story *The Unconquered* by W.S. Maugham and analyse the referential coherence of the text by answering the questions below.

- a. Identify and underline all the referential expressions (pronouns and full noun phrases) in the text.
- b. Indicate whether each referential expression presents *new information* (N) or *given information* (G).
- c. Identify whether each referential expression has an *exophoric* (EX) *reference* or an *endophoric* (EN) *reference*.
- d. For the endophoric references, classify them as *cataphoric* (C) or *anaphoric* (A).
- e. As explained in this chapter, endophoric elements may be *conceptually prominent* (and realised by a pronoun or through ellipsis) or *non-prominent* (usually realised by full noun phrases). In this excerpt, decide whether the correlation between prominence and linguistic form is respected.

He came back into the kitchen. The man was still on the floor, lying where he had hit him, and his face was bloody. He was moaning. The woman had backed against the wall and was staring with terrified eyes at Willi, his friend, and when he came in she gave a gasp and broke into loud sobbing. Willi was sitting at the table, his revolver in his hand, with a half empty glass of wine beside him. Hans went up to the table, filled his glass and emptied it at a gulp.

‘You look as though you’d had trouble, young fellow,’ said Willi with a grin.

Hans’s face was blood-stained and you could see the gashes of five sharp fingernails. He put his hand gingerly to his cheek.

‘She’d have scratched my eyes out if she could, the bitch. I shall have to put some iodine on. But she’s all right now. You go along.’

‘I don’t know. Shall I? It’s getting late.’

‘Don’t be a fool. You’re a man, aren’t you? What if it is getting late? We lost our way.’ [51, p. 174]

6. What is relational underspecification and how does it contribute to coherence even when explicit connectives are absent?
7. Explain the difference between paratactic and hypotactic coherence relations and provide examples of each.
8. Study the survey of coherence relations (subchapter 8.6) presented by R. Dirven and M. Verspoor in *Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics* (John Benjamins, 2004), Chapter 8 “Structuring texts”, p. 195–197. In all the illustrative examples, the nucleus and the satellite are explicitly marked. Drawing on this classification, select your own examples for each type of coherence relation and analyse them in terms of whether they instantiate paratactic or hypotactic relations.
9. Describe and exemplify the classification of coherence relations according to the conceptual level.
10. Read the flash story “*The Last Trash Can*”. Then analyse the relational coherence of the text by answering the questions below:
 - a. Using Mann and Thompson’s typology, identify the coherence relations instantiated in the text. For each case, state whether the relation is explicitly signalled (via connectives) or implicitly inferred.
 - b. Classify each identified coherence relation as paratactic (multi-nuclear) or hypotactic (nucleus – satellite).
 - c. Based on the nucleus – satellite distinction, indicate which sentences or clauses could be omitted without changing the central meaning of the story.
 - d. Explain how the manifestation of coherence and the reader’s schemata (or script) influence the interpretation of the story.

The Last Trash Can

We went to climb a mountain, a small mountain. A two-mile hike. She had hiked a mountain or two prior, and I had done a few half-mountains with the Scouts, but this was our first mountain together. We planned to kiss at the summit. She didn't know about the ring. To be safe, we had each invited a pair of friends to climb along and witness our affections, and to help carry sandwiches, water and wine, and add to the general spirit and to the joy. In a clearing marked "Last Trash Can" we broke for lunch. Cold air swallowed us. People and warnings floated down. Hikers wound past us, shouting downhill. The weather had shifted. There was ice and snow above the tree line. Ruddy-faced climbers with backpacks and knitted caps turned back. We had nothing. We were six kids in denim jackets. We were children [54].

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Unit 10.

RHETORICAL EFFECTIVENESS

Learning outcomes:

- identify the main concerns of pragmatics and rhetoric in their shared focus on effective communication;
- present the key rhetorical appeals and strategies;
- analyse the principles of interpersonal and textual rhetoric, including their instantiating maxims;
- evaluate how rhetorical strategies operate in authentic discourse to achieve communicative goals effectively.

Pragmatics, as a discipline, has emerged and developed in a natural relationship with rhetoric, generally conceived as the art of persuasion [34, p. 403], and more specifically as the study of effective speaking and writing. Its fundamental character as a discipline for training students includes two basic objectives: 1) to understand how language functions in both speech and writing, and 2) to develop proficiency in applying the resources of language in their own speaking and writing. The former objective relates to the classical distinction between *content* (what is said) and *form* (how it is said)⁶, a division that underpins the principles of rhetorical and linguistic effectiveness.

Classical foundations of rhetoric

Rhetoric in the Western tradition has its roots in ancient Greece, with systematic treatment in the form of textbooks as Aristotle's

⁶ Aristotle formulated this distinction as the difference between *logos* (the logical content of discourse) and *lexis* (its style and delivery), while Roman authors such as Quintilian expressed it as *res* (substance) versus *verba* (verbal expression).

Rhetoric. Aristotle emphasised the role of the audience in persuasion by three means:

- *Logos* – the appeal to their reason, referring to the internal consistency of the message, the clarity of the claim, the logic of its reason and the effectiveness of its confirming proof.
- *Pathos* – the appeal to their emotions, as a very powerful persuasive factor, which is intended to make hearers feel compassionate, afraid, angry, proud, reverent and ashamed, or the like. When logical arguments might fail, emotions frequently have the ability to motivate people to respond.
- *Ethos* – the appeal of the speaker's personality or character. It refers to the credibility or ability to present an argument effectively, which is connected to the perception of the audience of how ethical, trustworthy, and sincere the speaker is.

People are persuaded by the way they are invited to complete the argument, the weight granted to the arguer's character, and the way they are moved by the appeal. Aristotle also distinguished three types of rhetorical speech [*Ibidem*]:

1. the *deliberative*, which concerns debate, primarily in the political realm;
2. the *epidictic*, or the ceremonial use of language, such as that used in funeral orations;
3. the *judicial*, or forensic, involving the detailed examinations of the courts.

Roman rhetoricians, especially Cicero (106–43 BCE), both a skilled theorist and practitioner, further developed these foundations, elevating rhetoric above philosophy and law and codifying the five rhetorical canons:

1. *Invention (inventio)* – concerns the creation of the content of a speech and deciding which strategy to use in conveying it.
2. *Arrangement (dispositio)* – concerns with laying out the argument or speech through its component parts, from introduction, through proof, to conclusion.
3. *Style (elocutio)* – refers to the best figures to use in presenting the case to the audience.
4. *Memory (memoria)* – the use of mnemonics to remember a speech.
5. *Delivery (pronuntiatio)* – the actual delivery of the speech.

Regarding the relevance of rhetoric to pragmatics, the first three of these remain the most significant.

Rhetorical pragmatics

Rhetorical pragmatics, as Walton defines it, is using a proposition to fulfil a "goal in an argument or to make the language very effective within a particular context as through the use of figures of speech" [36, p. 21]. One common and important type of goal is to successfully convince or persuade a respondent. Since Aristotle, rhetoric has been central to theories of persuasion, aiming to select and adapt the most effective expressions for different situations. This places rhetoric within the scope of pragmatics, because both focus on how language use must fit contextual factors. Rhetoric thus involves a wide range of linguistic strategies for communicating thoughts ranging from explicit to implicit and from argumentative to figurative. According to Walton [37, p. 18], speakers resort to rhetoric to consider:

1. How to create emotions in the audience (*pathos*), how to display credibility (*ethos*), and how to present facts and arguments (*logos*).

2. The use of figurative linguistic choices, such as metaphor and irony, to ornament the language and attract hearers' attention.

Leech uses the term *rhetoric* in a broader and more general sense than the traditional one. Instead of restricting it to persuasion, literary style, or public speaking, he applies it mainly to everyday conversation and only secondarily to prepared, public uses of language. Rhetoric for him refers to the *functional and goal-directed principles guiding effective communication*, where a speaker uses language to produce an intended effect on the hearer [20, p. 16]. Leech identifies two types: *interpersonal rhetoric* and *textual rhetoric*.

Interpersonal rhetoric

The interpersonal rhetoric, in Leech's account, consists of pragmatic principles that serve as *input constraints* in the communication process from the speaker's perspective, guiding how language is used to influence the hearer's attitudes and behaviour in a goal-oriented speech situation. Leech complements Grice's Cooperative Principle by incorporating the Politeness Principle to emphasise the idea that "politeness is an important missing link between the Gricean CP and the problem of how to relate sense to force" [*Ibidem*, p. 79]. He views cooperation and politeness as regulative factors for preserving the fruitful course of conversation. The key components of Leech's interpersonal rhetoric include the following principles:

- The Cooperative Principle (CP)
- The Politeness Principle (PP)
- The Irony Principle (IP)
- The Banter Principle (BP)

Leech's PP consists of six key maxims guiding polite conversation to help speakers balance cooperation with social consideration [Leech p. 132]:

(I) Tact Maxim (in directives / impositives and commissives):

- (a) Minimise the expression of beliefs which express or imply cost to *others* and (b) maximise the expression of beliefs which express or imply benefit to *others*.

Speakers show tact by carefully choosing how they express themselves to avoid making the hearer feel burdened or pressured. This is achieved by:

- Reducing the focus on difficulties or costs that the hearer might experience and instead stressing how the action could be beneficial or positive for him.
- Allowing options to accept or refuse the request, thus lowering the sense of obligation.
- Using indirect illocutionary acts that soften the demand rather than direct commands, which makes the communication feel less forceful and more courteous.

- (1) "Take me home!" vs. "Can you take me home?" or "Could you possibly take me home?"
- (2) "Answer the phone!" vs. "Could you possibly answer the phone?"
- (3) "Shut the door!" vs. "Could you close the door, please?" or "It's a bit drafty in here."

(II) Generosity Maxim (in directives and commissives):

- (a) Minimise the expression of beliefs which express or imply benefit to *self* and (b) maximise the expression of beliefs which express or imply cost to *self*.

- (4) "Could you give me some more X?" (least polite) vs. "Could I have some more X?" (more polite, as the hearer's role as benefactor is suppressed) vs. "Is there some more X?" (even more polite, as it omits reference to self as beneficiary)

(III) Approbation Maxim (in expressives and assertives):

- (a) Minimise the expression of beliefs which express or imply dispraise of others and (b) maximise the expression of beliefs which express or imply praise of others.

This maxim says "avoid saying unpleasant things about others, and more particularly, about the hearer": "*What a marvellous meal you cooked!*" vs. "*What an awful meal you cooked!*"

- (5) A: Her performance was outstanding! B: Yes, wasn't it!
(6) A: Her performance was outstanding! B: Wasn't it! (The reply is evasive and implies an unfavourable opinion, reluctance to declare his opinion is due to the Approbation Maxim.)

Indirect strategies are used to soften criticism, often appearing as institutionalised forms of understatement:

- (7) You could be more careful.
(8) Her performance was not so good as it might have been.

(IV) Modesty Maxim (in expressives and assertives):

- (a) Minimise the expression of praise of *self* and
(b) maximise the expression of dispraise of *self*. It shows itself in asymmetries:

- (9) A: They were so kind to us.
B: Yes, they were, weren't they.
vs.
A: You were so kind to us.

B: Yes, I was, wasn't I. (It is felicitous to agree with another's commendation except when it is a commendation of oneself.)

- (10) How stupid of me! vs. How clever of me! (Self-dispraise is regarded as quite benign, even when it is exaggerated for comic effect.)
- (11) Please accept this small gift as a token of our esteem. vs. Please accept this large gift as a token of our esteem. (The understatement of one's generosity is shown to be quite normal in contrast to the exaggeration of one's generosity⁷.)

(V) Agreement Maxim (in assertives):

(a) Minimise the expression of disagreement between *self* and *others* and (b) maximise the expression of agreement between *self* and *others*.

There is a tendency to exaggerate agreement with other people, and to mitigate disagreement by expressing regret, partial agreement, etc.:

- (12) A: It was an interesting exhibition, wasn't it? B: No, it was very uninteresting.

vs

A: A referendum will satisfy everybody. B: Yes, definitely.

- (13) A: English is a difficult language to learn.
B: True, but the grammar is quite easy.

- (14) A: The book is tremendously well written.

⁷ To break the first submaxim of Modesty is to commit the social transgression of boasting. In Japanese society, especially among women, the Modesty Maxim is stronger than in English-speaking societies, where it is usually more polite to accept a compliment graciously. English speakers tend to balance between modesty and agreement rather than fully denying praise [20, p. 137].

B: Yes, well written as a whole, but there are some rather boring patches, don't you think?

(VI) Sympathy Maxim (in assertives):

- (a) Minimise the expression of antipathy between *self* and *others* and
- (b) maximise the expression of sympathy between *self* and *others*.

(16) I'm really pleased that you succeeded!

These maxims explain the social motivations behind indirectness, praise, and agreement in interaction, contributing to an atmosphere of relative harmony in conversational exchanges.

In addition to PP, Leech proposes the **Irony Principle** (IP) as a higher order principle. He claims that the CP and the PP have direct role in promoting effective interpersonal communication whereas the IP is parasitic (depending on, clinging) on the CP and the PP and its function "can only be explained in terms of other principles." The IP "enables a speaker to be impolite while seeming to be polite" [*Ibidem*, p. 142], thus performing irony by insincere politeness. The insincerity may take the form of a breach of the maxim of Quantity or more often – a breach of the maxim of Quality:

(17) That's all I wanted!

(18) Bill wanted that news like he wanted a hole in the head.

These examples present an overt violation of the maxim of Quality, used ironically, example (17) means "*That's exactly what I did not want.*" In example (18), the insincerity of the speaker's opinion is derived from the absurdity it expresses. Leech observes that when performing an irony, the "speaker appears to make an innocent assumption which is observably untrue, and by that means implicates that the opposite assumption, which is impolite, is

true" [*Ibidem*, p. 143]. The ironic force of a remark is signalled by exaggeration or understatement, which prevents the hearer from interpreting the remark literally. In example (17), if the speaker had said just the opposite of the truth "*That's what I wanted*", the ironic force would not have been attained. Notwithstanding its dysfunctional nature, IP has a positive function in that it permits aggression to manifest itself in a less dangerous form than direct criticism, insults, threats, etc.

The last higher-order principle that, according to Leech, governs interpersonal rhetoric, is the **Banter Principle** (BP). As opposed to irony, which is an apparently friendly way of being offensive (mock-politeness), *banter* is an offensive way of being friendly (mock-impoliteness). Although The BP is of minor importance compared with other rhetorical principles, it is manifested in many casual conversations, particularly among young people. For example, two friends may greet one another with remarks such as "*Here comes trouble!*" or "*Look what the cat's brought in!*" Leech formulates this principle as follows: "In order to show solidarity with *h*, say something which is (i) obviously untrue, and (ii) obviously impolite to *h*" [*Ibidem*, p. 144].

Like irony, banter must be recognizable as unserious. Whereas ***overpoliteness*** can signal superiority or ironic distance, ***underpoliteness*** can indicate familiarity, since a low degree of authority and social distance correlate with a lower need for politeness. The Banter Principle is based on the fact that the more intimate the participants are, the less polite they seem to be. Thus, impoliteness in jest can be a sign of intimacy. The implicature derived from the BP is just the opposite of that derived from the IP:

"What *s* says is impolite to *h* and is clearly untrue.
Therefore what *s* really means is polite to *h* and true."
[*Ibidem*]

Textual rhetoric

Textual rhetoric, in Leech's account, refers to the set of pragmatic principles and constraints that guide how a speaker or writer structures their utterance or text so that it can be easily understood and efficiently processed by the listener or reader. Leech proposes a textual rhetoric scheme, similar to the one suggested for the Interpersonal Rhetoric, consisting of four principles, each subdivided into maxims:

The Processibility Principle – recommends that the text should be presented in a manner which makes it easy for the hearer to decode in time. There are three types of decisions which are interrelated:

- The way to segment messages into their units.
- The way to assign degrees of subordination or prominence to various portions of the message.
- The way to order the parts of the message.

Leech identifies three maxims that guide speakers in making texts processible at different levels of encoding:

- *End-focus Maxim (phonological level)* – new information is typically signalled at the end of a tone-unit, with nuclear stress highlighting its importance.
- *End-weight Maxim (syntactic level)* – short, simple constituents are placed before longer, more complex ones. This leads to the predominance of right-branching structures over left-branching structures in English and motivates transformations such as *extraposition*:

(19) *That Simon will resign* is on the cards → It is on the cards *that Simon will resign*.

- *End-scope Maxim (semantic level)* – logical operators (negation, quantifiers) precede the elements which are within their scope, ensuring clarity of interpretation [20, p. 65-66].

The Clarity Principle requires that a text be expressed in a way that avoids confusion and ensures a clear correspondence between meaning and form. This principle operates through two maxims:

- *Transparency Maxim* – requires retaining a direct and transparent relationship between semantic structure (message) and syntactic / phonological structure (text). Semantically related elements should also be placed close together in the sentence. Discontinuous structures often obscure meaning, as in:

(20) “*The morning came at last [when we were due to leave]*” is clearer if the clause is placed next to its head *morning*.

- *Ambiguity Maxim* – requires avoiding ambiguity in expression, especially where it may delay or confuse interpretation. Problems arise with unclear pronoun reference:

(21) “If the baby won’t drink cold milk, it should be boiled.”

Temporary “garden path” ambiguities⁸ also hinder processing:

(22) “Before we started eating the table was loaded with delicacies.” [*Ibidem*, p. 67]

The Clarity Principle contributes to reducing interpretative uncertainty. Thus, it can be seen as subordinate to the Processibility Principle, since both promote ease of real-time decoding.

⁸ “Garden path ambiguities” are syntactic ambiguities which are temporary, and are resolved by a later part of the same sentence.

The Economy Principle is based on the precept "*Be quick and easy*". If a text can be shortened without impairing the message, the amount of time and effort involved, both in encoding and in decoding, will be reduced. On the phonological level, economy is attained through elisions, assimilations, and other abbreviating and simplifying processes. Similarly, on the syntactic level, Leech mentions that Economy Principle has a contributory Maxim of Reduction which might be formulated as *Reduce where possible* and is realised through (a) pronominalisation, (b) substitution by other pro-forms, e.g., do, so, (c) ellipsis (or deletion). However, reduction should not be employed at the expense of intelligibility. If reduction leads to ambiguity, the speaker must *sacrifice economy for clarity*, as in example (21) "*If the baby won't drink cold milk, the milk should be boiled*" [20, p. 67].

The Expressivity Principle concerns the "expressive and aesthetic aspects of communication", rather than simply "efficiency" [*Ibidem*, p. 68]. Leech claims that an Iconicity Maxim, which invites the user to make the text imitate aspects of the message, should be included in this principle. The Expressivity Principle sometimes restricts the use of reduction:

(23) John Brown was guilty of the crime, and John Brown would have to pay for it.

(24) They put in the best they had and we put in the best we had and we beat them and beat them bad.

(25) She saw there an object. That object was the gallows. She was afraid of the gallows.

In each of these examples, it would be possible to abbreviate the text without causing ambiguity. The fact that the Economy Principle does not operate, although it is not inhibited by ambiguity, suggests that some other principle is in play. These examples are cases of expressive repetition, which carries

rhetorical value by adding emphasis, surprise, or interest. Thus, the repetition of *John Brown* in (23) carries the implicature: “*John Brown and no one other than John Brown would have to pay for it.*”

Like the maxims of the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle, the maxims of Textual Rhetoric (i) apply differently in different contexts, (ii) apply to variable degrees, (iii) may compete with one another, (iv) may be exploited for the purpose of implicature, (v) are regulative rather than constitutive, (vi) are interpreted as goal-oriented, and as serving goals which are common between the speaker and the hearer. In this way, the four textual principles, Processibility, Clarity, Economy, and Expressivity, stand in continuity with the interpersonal principles, together forming a complementary system of pragmatic guidance. They govern how utterances are designed, not only to influence attitudes and preserve social harmony, but also to ensure that texts are structured for clarity, efficiency, and rhetorical effect.

Activities

1. Present the common goals of pragmatics and rhetoric in their focus on effective communication.
2. Briefly explain the three main modes of persuasion in rhetoric and provide one example of how a speaker might use each in practice.
3. Present the five rhetorical canons.
4. Formulate the distinction between *interpersonal* and *textual rhetoric*, according to G. Leech.
5. What are the key components of Leech's interpersonal rhetoric, and how does the PP guide effective conversation?
6. Explain the communicative roles of irony and banter in interpersonal rhetoric, according to G. Leech.

7. Present the four main principles of textual rhetoric and explain how their respective maxims contribute to effective communication.
8. Examine the sentences below. Determine which maxims are in conflict and explain why [a] is more felicitous. Identify similar sentences with discontinuous constituents, i.e., an infringement of the Transparency Maxim, in the interests of the Maxim of End-weight. Rewrite them to improve felicity, indicating which maxims guided your restructuring.

The morning came at last when we were due to leave.

a. *The morning came when we were due to leave.*

b. *The morning when we were due to leave came.*

9. Compare Leech's Politeness Principle and Brown and Levinson's model of politeness strategies, identifying similarities and differences in how each framework explains indirectness, face-saving, and the social motivation behind polite behaviour.
10. Read the chapter "Rhetorical Devices" in *Diving into Rhetoric* (<https://pressbooks.pub/divingintorhetoric/chapter/rhetorical-devices/>). Analyse the typology of rhetorical devices functioning as rhetorical pragmatic strategies and classify them broadly as *schemes* and *tropes*. Explain how these devices enable the Expressivity Principle, for example by adding emphasis, imagery, or emotional impact.

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INDIVIDUAL PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS

Project 1

Analyse the mechanisms of discourse coherence in a TED

Talk of your choice:

- Comment on how the talk maintains a clear and consistent central message by identifying the logical structure and progression of ideas.
- Determine how coherence relations (cause–consequence, contrast, concession, evidence, result) contribute to the development of the central message.
- Explain how inference, schemata, and scripts enable listeners to construe coherence.
- Evaluate the use of effective language to instantiate the Expressivity Principle and therefore enhance clarity, engagement, and impact on the audience.

Project 2

Analyse the rhetorical effectiveness of a politician's speech of your choice:

- Evaluate the speech structure: how the speaker organises ideas to achieve clarity, coherence, and persuasive impact.
- Assess argumentation and evidence: how claims and supporting evidence are presented to persuade the audience.
- Analyse emotional appeal: how the speaker resorts to the audience's emotions to strengthen arguments.
- Determine rhetorical figures used to achieve the intended effect.
- Identify and interpret the implicatures in the speech, and explain how these implicit meanings reinforce both the

speaker's arguments and their appeal to the audience's emotions.

Project 3

Analyse politeness strategies in a communicative interaction of your choice (TV show, interview, fictional dialogue, etc.).

- Identify and comment on positive and negative face management.
- Classify FTAs and explain their weight using social distance, power, and imposition.
- Analyse politeness strategies: positive, negative, off-record, and bald on-record.
- Explain how implicature conveys intentions while protecting face.
- Evaluate how strategies maintain social harmony, reduce conflict, and affect audience perception, and comment on any instances of impoliteness.

TOPICS FOR RESEARCH AND GRADUATION PROJECTS

1. Pragmatic Functions of Ambiguity in Online Advertising Discourse
2. The Pragmatics of Flouting in Political Discourse
3. Implicature in Children's Literature: A Case Study of *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll
4. Strategic Flouting of the Cooperative Principle Across Discourse Types
5. Pragmatic Strategies for Capturing Reader Attention in Clickbait Titles
6. Relevance and Implicature in Clickbait Titles: News vs. Entertainment Discourse
7. Gender Differences in Politeness Strategies Across Digital Communication (Forums, Blogs, and Comment Sections)
8. Conversation Analysis of Teacher-Student Interaction
9. Reference Assignment, Pragmatic Enrichment, and Disambiguation in Clickbait Titles: A Pragmatic Analysis
10. Restoring Coherence in Fiction: Pragmatic Inference from Relational Underspecification.

TEST SAMPLE

Subject One: Speech Act Theory (50 pts)

- 1.1.** Present Austin's tripartite model of speech acts. Illustrate with examples the distinctions between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. **(16 pts)**
- 1.2.** Apply Searle's taxonomy and the cognitive typology to the following utterances by classifying them into the appropriate speech act categories and subtypes. Analyse and justify your classification by referring to the illocutionary force and communicative intent of each example. **(17 pts)**
 - a) I apologise for being late.
 - b) Could you possibly forward me the file?
 - c) I promise I'll handle the report tomorrow.
 - d) The meeting is now postponed.
 - e) Light travels faster than sound.
- 1.3.** Design a short classroom dialogue (6-8 turns) that integrates at least three different types of speech acts. The dialogue should illustrate how interlocutors negotiate meaning and achieve a communicative goal (e.g., assigning a task, resolving a misunderstanding, or giving feedback). For each turn, indicate:
 - a) the illocutionary act performed;
 - b) the felicity conditions that make it successful;
 - c) the intended perlocutionary effect on the hearer. **(17 pts)**

Subject Two: Managing Interaction: Politeness (50 pts)

- 2.1.** Define the concept of face as developed by Brown and Levinson. Distinguish between positive and negative face and explain how each relates to politeness strategies in social interaction. **(16 pts)**

2.2. Compare and exemplify the strategies of politeness (17 pts).

Explain how the choice among these strategies reflects the social variables:

- a) performing a FTA bald on record;
- b) performing a FTA off record;
- c) performing a FTA on record with positive politeness;
- d) performing a FTA on record with negative politeness.

2.3. The following series of utterances were made by a student to a classmate who repeatedly interrupted during a group discussion. Analyse the sequence to determine the type of politeness strategy used. Comment on how phrasing, directness, and word choice affect politeness. What potential effects might each utterance have on the classmate's reaction? (17 pts)

- a) Hey, could you please let me finish speaking?
- b) Can you let me finish now, please?
- c) Let me finish talking.
- d) Stop interrupting me!

Oxana CREANGA

PRAGMATICA DISCURSULUI ENGLEZ

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