



DISCOURSE SEMANTICS

LICENCE 3_ LA (2020-21)

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BRAINSTORMING (1)



**SLOW DOWN!
CHILDREN ROUND THE BEND**

BRAINSTORMING (1)

- ❑ This notice, positioned **before a bend in the road, in a small village**, serves ***to convey information*** and act as a **Warning** and **Directive**.
- ❑ It is also amusing to readers, since the expression ***round the bend*** has the colloquial meaning of **'being crazy'** as well as its literal meaning.

BRAINSTORMING (2)



BRAINSTORMING (2)

- ❑ **René Magritte** painted *The Treachery of Images* when he was 30 years old. It is currently on display at the *Los Angeles County Museum of Art*.
- ❑ The Theme of pipes with the text "**Ceci n'est pas une pipe**" is extended in *Les Mots et Les Images*, *La Clé des Songes*, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe (L'air et la chanson)*, *The Tune and Also the Words*, *Ceci n'est pas une pomme*, and *Les Deux Mystères*.
- ❑ The painting is sometimes given as an example of **METAMESSAGE** conveyed by **PARALANGUAGE**.
- ❑ **METAMESSAGE** is considered by some authors to be synonymous with **subtext**. *Metamessage* is a term more commonly used in the analysis of **Business Communication** rather than of literary works.

BRAINSTORMING (2)

- ❑ **Subtext** or **undertone** is any content of a creative work which is not announced explicitly by the characters or author, but is *implicit or becomes something understood* by the observer of the work as the production unfolds.
- ❑ Subtext can also refer to **the thoughts and motives** of the characters which are only covered in an aside. Subtext can also be used to imply **controversial subjects** without specifically alienating people from the *fiction*, often through use of **metaphor**.
- ❑ Especially in light of their inherently ambiguous and self-referential character, many authors have explicitly used subtexts in humor.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

❑ GENERAL OBJECTIVE:

- **The Students will learn the basics of Discourse Semantics**

❑ SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

At the End of the Course, Learners will understand:

- *WHAT IS DISCOURSE AND WHY ANALYSE IT?*
- *DISCOURSE(S) & THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL REALITY*
- *SEMANTIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS*
- *SOME SPECIFIC PROPERTIES OF DISCOURSE SEMANTICS*

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INTRODUCTION

- ❑ It was emphasized that **Language** is a means of **communication**.
- ❑ This is an abbreviated way of saying that **language is a highly complex system** for encoding a message from the universe of meaning and converting it into a sequence of sounds standing for the original meaning.
- ❑ The process of allowing one thing to stand for another is known as ***symbolization***.

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- ❑ Because the most significant advances in Linguistics since **the 19th century** have depended on analysis of the formal structure of language, ***the communicative aspect of language*** has frequently been neglected.
 - ❑ This was not entirely the case in **Historical Grammar**, where similarities in both ***form and meaning*** are important.
 - ❑ But it was increasingly the case in **Structural Grammar**. Meaning, it was felt, could not be observed directly.
 - ❑ Therefore it was **subjective** and **intuitive**.

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- ❑ Discussions of meaning were therefore rejected as **“mentalist”**.
 - ❑ This view was carried to its logical conclusion by **Harris (1951)**, who took the position that linguistic analysis could focus solely on **formal structure** and proceed without reference to **meaning** at all!
 - ❑ It was merely necessary to know if two linguistic forms were **“same”** or **“different”**.
 - ❑ This requires knowledge of whether the forms in question belong to the **same or different meaning category**, but it would not be necessary to know the actual content of the meaning category.

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- ❑ Chomsky, a student of Harris and a product of the structural era, adopted the anti-meaning bias of the period, observing that "*Grammar (i.e., syntax) is best formulated as a self-contained study independent of semantics*" (1957: 106).
 - ❑ Chomsky and his followers were later to criticize the "autonomous" phonology of structuralism for its refusal to allow grammatical statements in phonological descriptions.
 - ❑ But in Chomsky's revised version of Transformational Grammar (1965) and (1972), Syntax is treated as a largely autonomous component.
 - ❑ The dependence of phonology on grammar is recognized, but ***semantics*** is treated as an appendage that can be described, for the most part, in terms of ***syntax***.



❑ The **Generative Semanticists** have seen this as a shortcoming of conventional transformational grammar and have sought to state syntax in terms of semantics.

❑ As people trained originally in syntax, they tend to see **semantics as a complex kind of syntax.**

❑ **But how do lexical items interact with each other in context? What is the linkage between lexical items and language as a communicative tool?**

❑ Is there a linguistic theory which is capable of elucidating the meaning of all kinds of texts in all their different communicative situations (i.e. **purpose, style, time, place, length, language, medium** and so on)?
What is discourse semantics?

I- WHAT IS DISCOURSE AND WHY ANALYSE IT?

- ❑ In 1996 a spokesperson for British Telecom (BT), the UK's largest phone company, launched a campaign to improve the nation's communication skills, explaining that *'since life is in many ways a series of conversations, it makes sense to be as good as we possibly can at something we tend to take for granted'* (quoted in the *Guardian*, 30 December 1996).
- ❑ Analysts of spoken discourse do not usually share BT's goal of making people *'better'* at talking: they begin from the assumption that people are, with few exceptions, highly skilled users of spoken language.
- ❑ But most would probably agree that *'life is in many ways a series of conversations'*, and that talking is *'something we tend to take for granted'*.

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- ❑ When linguists and other social scientists analyze **spoken discourse**, their aim is to make explicit what normally gets taken for granted; it is also to show *what talking accomplishes in people's lives and in society at large.*
 - ❑ The reference to *'linguists and other social scientists'* is meant to underline the important point that working with **spoken discourse** is an interdisciplinary enterprise: among those who may be engaged in it are *anthropologists, linguists, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, students of the media or education or the law.*
 - ❑ A commonly used academic label for what these various people are doing is *discourse analysis.*

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- ❑ But while it is useful in many contexts to have this generic label available, it does need to be remembered that '**discourse analysis**' is an umbrella term, allowing for considerable variation in subject matter and approach.
 - ❑ For instance, discourse analysis is not exclusively concerned with *spoken* discourse: in principle it can deal with **socially situated language-use** in any channel or medium.
 - ❑ Discourse analysts may work with **written data, or data from sign languages of the deaf, and** some analysts work with **textual graphics and images** as well.

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- ❑ There is also a distinction to be made between analyzing discourse **as an end in itself** and analyzing it **as a means to some other end**.
 - ❑ Some discourse analysts -including many of those whose disciplinary affiliation is to linguistics - are primarily concerned to describe the complex structures and mechanisms of socially situated language-use.
 - ❑ They ask questions like *'how does turn-taking work in conversation?'*, or *'does the form of a question affect the form of the answer?'* or *'why do people misunderstand one another?'*.
 - ❑ **They study talk because they want to know about talk.** But some linguists, and many researchers who are not linguists, are more interested in the idea that *'life is in many ways a series of conversations'*, which implies that **people's talk can be a source of evidence about other aspects of their lives.**

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- ❑ Though they may not be studying discourse as an end in itself, many **sociologists** and **social psychologists**, or **researchers in education**, in **cultural studies** and **media studies**, adopt methods which produce discourse data.
 - ❑ ***Interviews, focus group discussions and ethnographic studies*** using participant observation all involve verbal interaction between a researcher and research subjects, and/or between research subjects themselves.
 - ❑ At least some of the analysis carried out by researchers who choose these methods will involve **listening to talk, transcribing it, and reflecting on its meaning and significance.**

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- ❑ Anyone who has been educated in a highly literate society will have developed, not only the ability to ***read*** and ***write***, but also some ability to think analytically ***about*** written texts.
 - ❑ For instance, many school students have had some experience of learning how to do '**close reading**' of literary texts: *they have had their attention drawn to the structure of a poem or to the existence of competing interpretations of its meaning.*
 - ❑ By contrast it is much less likely that they have ever been taught to approach **ordinary talk** - or any kind of spoken language - in the same systematic way.

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- ❑ Similarly, most people acquire in the course of their schooling an extensive **metalanguage** (*'language about language'*) with which to describe the structures of writing: terms like **letter, comma, sentence and paragraph** belong to this metalanguage.
 - ❑ They rarely possess a parallel **metalinguistic apparatus** for discussing the structures of spoken language.
 - ❑ The above reference to metalanguage reminds us that **issues of terminology and definition** tend to loom large in all academic enterprises; discourse analysis is no exception.

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- ❑ The terms ***conversation, talk*** and [spoken] ***discourse*** appear to be much the same thing. ***Do all these terms, however, really mean the same thing?***
 - ❑ The question would be unlikely to arise in the context of an ordinary, non-academic exchange, but an important part of being '**analytical**' is ***being able to reflect on and ask questions about the conceptual frameworks and vocabulary we take for granted in everyday life.***
 - ❑ So at this point let us look more closely at some of the key terms that are relevant to the analysis of discourse, beginning with the apparently straightforward term ***conversation.***

I-1- CONVERSATION, TALK, DISCOURSE

- ❑ In ordinary usage, *conversation* usually refers to **spoken** rather than *written language*.
- ❑ We say '**usually**' because recently an interesting exception has become noticeable: people who regularly interact with others **via the internet**, for instance in '*chat rooms*', sometimes refer to what they are doing as '**talking**' or to their exchanges as '**conversations**', though the medium is actually *written language*.
- ❑ The term '*chat room*' makes an explicit parallel with a certain kind of informal conversation, namely **chat**.

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- ❑ If we are being analytical, these usages might prompt some questions.
 - ❑ Are ***interactivity*** (the fact that on-line exchange can involve a relatively rapid 'back and forth' between participants) and ***spontaneity*** (*the fact that contributions to chat-room exchanges are typically composed without much planning or editing*) more salient characteristics of what we call '**conversation**' than the channel or medium of interaction?
 - ❑ Is the actual language people produce in chat rooms more similar to face-to-face speech than other kinds of written language?

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- ❑ **Conversation** in English has both '**generic**' and more '**specific**' uses. It is generic in the sense that we can use it to describe a relatively broad range of different kinds of spoken interaction.
 - ❑ More specifically, though, it seems most '**natural**' to apply it to interaction which is characterized by **informality, spontaneity and egalitarian relationships between the participants** (if your boss asks you to come and have a 'conversation' about your punctuality, you tend to suspect *euphemism, or irony*).
 - ❑ Certainly, as an English-speaker it seems more natural to use the word conversation in connection with '**chat**' or '**gossip**' than for a **seminar** or a medical **consultation**.

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- ❑ Here, we want to consider many kinds of spoken interaction, and to examine **the similarities and differences** among them.
 - ❑ When discussing spoken interaction in a generic sense we will use two other words in preference to *conversation*: one is ***talk*** and the other is ***discourse***. One of these terms is more generic, or at least more inclusive, than the other.
 - ❑ ***Talk*** refers only to spoken language-use, whereas ***discourse*** can refer to language-use in any channel or medium.
 - ❑ ***Discourse*** is evidently a more 'technical' term than ***talk*** and like a lot of technical terms it has generated a lot of debate among scholars about what it means and how it should be used.

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- ❑ In fact, the term ***discourse*** is notorious for the arguments surrounding it and the confusion it can cause.
 - ❑ A major source of potential confusion is that the meaning of the term tends to vary quite significantly depending on the academic discipline and the theoretical preferences of the person who uses it.
 - ❑ The range of meanings ***discourse*** can have in academic discussion is an issue that needs to be clarified.

I-2- LANGUAGE 'ABOVE THE SENTENCE' & LANGUAGE 'IN USE'

- ❑ The most straightforward definition of *discourse* is the one often found in textbooks for students of linguistics: *'language above the sentence'*.
- ❑ Of course, that is not at all straightforward unless you understand some basic assumptions in linguistics!
- ❑ Linguists treat language as a **'system of systems'**, with each system having its own characteristic forms of structure or organization.
- ❑ For instance, the sound system of a language (its **phonology**) does not have the same kinds of units, or the same rules for combining them, as the grammatical system of that language.
- ❑ As your units get larger (e.g. *words are larger than sounds and sentences are larger than words*), you metaphorically move 'up' from one level of organization to the next.

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- ❑ If discourse analysis deals with '**language *above the sentence***', this means it looks for patterns (structure, organization) in units which are larger, more extended, than one sentence.
 - ❑ One of the earliest discourse analysts, the linguist **Zellig Harris (1952)**, asked the question: how do we tell whether a sequence of sentences is ***a text*** - that is, the sentences relate to one another and collectively form some larger whole -as opposed to just a random collection of unrelated bits?
 - ❑ The answer to that question, Harris thought, would make clear what kind of structure exists '**above the sentence**'. Texts would have this structure, whereas random collections of sentences would not.

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- Plainly, language-users do routinely interpret sequences longer than a sentence as **texts** in which the parts combine to form a larger whole.
 - Consider the following example, a simple text produced by a child, which is discussed in a famous article by the conversation analyst **Harvey Sacks (1972)**.

The baby cried.

The mommy picked it up!

- ❑ One obvious instance of '**structure above the sentence**' in this example is the pronoun '**it**', which is *anaphoric* (referring back).
- ❑ It comes in the second sentence but it refers to something mentioned in the first: '**the baby**'.
- ❑ A reader or hearer automatically takes it that the '**it**' which the mommy picked up must be '**the baby**', and not some previously unmentioned object like '*a rattle*' or '*a banknote*'.
- ❑ The pronoun is *a cohesive device*, tying the two sentences together, and cohesion is a property of texts.
- ❑ But there is more to say about what makes this sequence work as **a text**.

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- ❑ For instance, it is natural to read it as a ***narrative***, in which *the sequence of events in the text* mirrors *the sequence of events in the reality* being reported: the baby cried ***and then*** the mommy picked it up.
 - ❑ Indeed, in this case we are likely to infer not merely sequence but **causality**: **the mommy picked up the baby *because* it cried.**
 - ❑ The way we process the text as a narrative implies that we are following a general procedure for dealing with structure '**above the sentence**': where **A** and **B** are sentences, we assume that **A** followed by **B** means '**A and then B**' or '**A and consequently B**'.

- ❑ **Real-world knowledge** is also relevant to the interpretation of the '*baby/ mommy*' text.
- ❑ There is no purely **structural reason** why we have to take it that *the mommy who picked the baby up is the baby's own mother*, since '*the child*' does not specify that by using a possessive pronoun, referring only to '*the* mommy'.
- ❑ Nevertheless one could bet that most readers did make that assumption!
- ❑ The text follows a familiar script whereby *babies cry and are picked up by their mothers to stop them crying*.
- ❑ It is imaginable that '*a crying baby*' might be picked up by a total stranger who was, however, *the mother of some other baby*; but that would not be many people's first guess.

- ❑ We suggest, then, that we make sense of discourse partly by making guesses based on **knowledge about the world**. If that is accepted, then arguably the definition of discourse as **'language above the sentence'**, and of discourse analysis as **a search for structure** at a level higher than sentence structure, is not adequate.
- ❑ That definition suggests that single sentences and texts have a similar kind of organization: the difference is one of ***scale***. But is that really the case?
- ❑ To be **grammatical**, a sentence must contain certain **constituents in a certain order: it is conformity to structural rules that makes the difference between grammatical sentences and 'words salad'** (like ****stood boy the on up chair a*** - the asterisk is a linguist's convention for denoting ungrammatical sequences).

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- ❑ But **our ability** to decide whether and how discourse makes sense appears to involve ***much more than quasi-grammatical generalizations*** about what can go with or follow what.
 - ❑ It might also be asked whether the characteristic features picked out by discourse analysts have much to do with the size of the units being analyzed - the fact that they are larger than a sentence.
 - ❑ **Henry Widdowson (1995)** has pointed out that a **'text'** can, in fact, be smaller than a sentence.
 - ❑ He observes for instance that the legend **LADIES** on the door of a public lavatory is **a text**, as is the letter **'P'** which is used in Britain to indicate a space for parking cars.

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- ❑ A single word or letter cannot have '**structure above the sentence**'. So what makes these examples texts?
 - ❑ **Widdowson's** answer is that in the contexts he is concerned with, each of them is intended to convey a complete message.
 - ❑ Of course, what we take that message to be does depend on the context, and once again, its interpretation relies on ***real-world knowledge*** that is not contained in the text itself.
 - ❑ Looking up the word ***ladies*** in a dictionary would not, on its own, make clear what message it conveys when written on a door. (Someone who spoke English but was unfamiliar with the concept and etiquette of public lavatories might think it meant ***'there are ladies behind this door'***.)

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- A great deal of **general knowledge** and **contextual information** has to be brought to bear on even the most banal texts we encounter if those texts are to serve their communicative purpose.
 - A distinctive feature of **discourse analysis**, as opposed to the study of syntax (**sentence structure**), is its overt concern with **what** and **how language communicates when** it is used purposefully in particular instances and contexts, and **how** the phenomena we find in '**real language**' (implicitly contrasted to the idealized, made-up example sentences most often discussed by analysts of syntax) can be explained with reference to ***the communicative purposes of the text or the interaction.***

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- From this standpoint a better definition of *discourse* than 'language above the sentence' might be '**language in use**': *language used to do something and mean something, language produced and interpreted in a real-world context.*
 - **Deborah Schiffrin (1994)** suggests that the two definitions of *discourse* just outlined correspond, roughly speaking, to **two important currents or tendencies** in twentieth-century linguistics:
 - One is ***formalism or structuralism***: an interest in the abstract form and structure of language.
 - The other is ***functionalism***: an interest in what language is used to do.

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- ❑ But **Schiffrin** goes on to point out that treating this as an absolute distinction would be an oversimplification.
 - ❑ Because its meaning is so dependent on **context**, discourse is not amenable to *'pure'* formalist analysis.
 - ❑ Conversely, functionalists have always been concerned with form as well as function.
 - ❑ They are interested in **how the two are connected**, suggesting that language has a certain kind of formal organization because of the purposes it is designed to serve.

II- POWER, KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE: DISCOURSE(S) & THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL REALITY

- ❑ Researchers who favour discourse analysis over supposedly more *'objective'* methods argue that paying attention, not merely to ***what*** people say but to ***how*** they say it, gives additional insight into the way people understand things.
- ❑ It is less about ***collecting facts*** than about ***studying interpretive processes***.
- ❑ Such researchers may also argue that analyzing *'real'* talk does a better job than standardized instruments of capturing the messiness of real life, and to that extent could be seen as more rather than less *'accurate'*.

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- Another advantage that might be claimed for discourse analysis is that *it generates data by getting people to engage, or observing them while they engage, in an activity - talking - which is normal and familiar to them, rather than asking them to undertake an unusual or artificial task.*
 - Life may or may not be *'in many ways a series of conversations'*, but it is in no way *a series of box-checking exercises.*
 - Social researchers who do discourse analysis often want to make the point that even when we talk *'in our own words'*, these words may not actually be *'ours'* at all, in the sense that they are not original or unique to any one individual.

□ As one analyst, **Jay Lemke**, has put this point:

We speak with the voices of our communities, and to the extent that we have individual voices, we fashion them out of the social voices already available to us, appropriating the words of others to speak a word of our own. (1995: 24-5)

□ Within any community there is a finite range of things it is conventional or intelligible to say about any given concern.

□ When people talk about **shopping**, or **drugs**, or **the royal family**, what they say will be drawn from *the community's repertoire of things* it is possible to say rather than representing some unique perspective on the topic.

- ❑ This is not to suggest that people never say anything **novel or unexpected**, or *that they do not have ideas of their own*.
- ❑ But language-using is an ***intersubjective*** rather than ***purely subjective process***: a 'voice' that is **wholly individual runs the risk of being incomprehensible**.
- ❑ Hence **Lemke**'s point that individuals' ways of talking are formed using **resources** that are shared with others in their communities.
- ❑ Discourse semantics can be seen as a method for investigating the '**social voices**' available to the people whose talk analysts collect.

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- ❑ An obvious difference is that the linguist's ***discourse*** has no plural, whereas social theorists often talk about ***discourses***.
 - ❑ This plural usage reflects the influence of the philosopher and cultural historian **Michel Foucault (1972: 49)**, who defined ***discourses*** as ***'practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak'***.
 - ❑ To see what Foucault meant, let us consider the case of **'drugs'**. The word ***drugs*** might seem to name ***a pre-existing 'real-world' category*** (of substances that affect the mind and body in certain ways).

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- ❑ But if we think about the way the word is most often used, it becomes evident that it does not simply denote *all* substances that have certain effects: depending on context, it denotes either **those which are medicinal**, or *those which are used non-medicinally and are also illegal*.
 - ❑ *Caffeine, nicotine* and *alcohol* are clearly **mood-altering substances**, but if we hear a report on '**drugs**' we do not immediately think of *coffee, cigarettes* and *beer*.
 - ❑ We certainly do not think of *coffee-bean importers* as *drug traffickers* or of *tobacconists* as *drug dealers*.

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- ❑ What this suggests is that our category of 'drugs' (in the non-medicinal sense) has been formed through a particular set of ***practices***:
 - ***Legislation*** (making some substances illegal),
 - ***Policing*** (trying to prevent breaches of the law and to catch people who do break it),
 - ***The practices of the courts*** (where stories are told about why people have broken the law and decisions are made about how to deal with them), of
 - ***Social and charitable agencies*** (which try to reduce the harm caused by drugs),
 - ***Schools*** (which practise 'drugs education') and
 - ***The media*** (which report on 'the problem of drugs').

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- ❑ **Buying, selling** and **using** illegal substances are also practices relevant to the understanding of '**drugs**' as a category, though fewer people are involved in these practices compared with the numbers exposed to education or media reporting.
 - ❑ It might be asked what the sense of the word **discourse** has to do, specifically, with **language**.
 - ❑ Recall Foucault's definition: although he calls discourses '**practices**', he goes on to say that they '**form the objects of which they speak**'.
 - ❑ The link between **practice** and **speaking** (or more generally, **language-use**) lies in Foucault's concept of '**power/knowledge**'.

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- ❑ In the modern age, Foucault points out, a great deal of **power and social control** is exercised not by *brute physical force* or even by *economic coercion*, but by the activities of 'experts' who are *licensed to define, describe and classify things and people*.
 - ❑ So drugs education may mix, in various proportions, elements of the *'law and order', 'medical'* and *'recreational' discourses*. So, *definition, description* and *classification* are **practices**, but they are essentially *practices carried out using language*.
 - ❑ As pointed out earlier, though, any researcher who sets out to investigate some aspect of reality by studying discourse will end up with data in the form of *language*.

- ❑ Discourse is not **pure content**, not just *a window on someone's mental or social world*; it has to be considered *as discourse*, that is, as **a form of language with certain characteristics** which are dictated by the way language and communication work.
- ❑ It is not only linguists who can benefit by paying attention to the **'how'** as well as the **'what'**, the ***form*** as well as the ***content*** of people's discourse.
- ❑ Conversely, linguists have something to gain by attending to *other social scientists' insights* into what discourse does, or *what social actors do* with it.

III- WHAT IS SEMANTIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS?

- ❑ Before we try to specify how to give **a semantic analysis of discourse**, we must define what semantic analysis is and what kinds of semantic analysis can be distinguished.
- ❑ Such a definition will be as complex as the number of semantic theories in the various disciplines involved in the study of language: ***linguistics and grammar, the philosophy of language, logic, cognitive psychology, and sociology***, each with several competing semantic theories.
- ❑ These theories will be different according to ***their object of analysis, their aims, and their methods***. Yet, they will also have some common properties that allow us to call them semantic theories.

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- ❑ In the most general sense, semantics is a component theory within a larger semiotic theory about **meaningful, symbolic, behavior**.
 - ❑ Hence we have not only **a semantics of natural language utterances or acts**, but also of **nonverbal or paraverbal behavior**, such as *gestures, pictures and films, logical systems or computer languages, sign languages of the deaf*, and perhaps **social interaction** in general.
 - ❑ Here, we are going to consider only the semantics of natural-language utterances, that is, **discourses**, and their component elements, such as *words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs*, and *other identifiable discourse units*.

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- ❑ Probably the most general concept used to denote the specific object of a semantic theory is the concept of '**interpretation**'. Interpretation may be of various kinds, depending on the discipline or theory involved.
 - ❑ We distinguish between **abstract and concrete types of interpretation**. Thus, grammar and logic have semantic theories that specify abstract interpretations, whereas a cognitive model in psychology will be about concrete interpretations.
 - ❑ The first are interpretations of discourse and discourse elements by systems and by rules of such systems, whereas the latter are interpretations by language users.

- The two kinds of interpretation are not unrelated:
- ❖ An abstract **linguistic (grammatical) semantics** usually has empirical claims that it intends to model at least some aspects of the concrete interpretations of language users as they are accounted for in psychological models.
- A first semantic object of this kind is *meaning*.
- Hence *the interpretation of a discourse, as it is explicated in a semantic theory of discourse, is the assignment of meaning(s) to the expressions of a discourse.*

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- ❑ This is more or less the kind of semantics that is usual in linguistic theory.
 - ❑ Roughly speaking, ***meanings are conceptual objects of various degrees of complexity, depending on the complexity of the corresponding expressions.***
 - ❑ Again depending on the kind of semantics, such meanings may be described in abstract or more concrete terms; the latter are the cognitive representations of language users associated with the expressions of natural language in general or with actual discourses in particular.

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- ❑ The kind of interpretation whereby meanings are assigned to expressions is usually called '**intentional**'.
 - ❑ Besides such intentional interpretations we also have **extensional** interpretations which depend on (are a function of) intentional interpretations: Expressions with a given meaning may refer to or denote some object or property in "**the world**".
 - ❑ Hence, to provide an extensional interpretation of a discourse is to specify what such a discourse is about, that is, **the individuals, properties, or states of affairs** that constitute its various referents in some formal model of a possible world.

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- ❑ This kind of **referential semantics** is the one traditionally explored, in rather formal terms, in philosophy and especially logic. It is shown below that discourse semantics should be both **intentional** and **extensional**, that is, about **meanings** and about **reference**.
 - ❑ Also, it is seen that a discourse semantics is not only abstract but also involves the kind of semantic notions used in the cognitive models of psychology and artificial intelligence.
 - ❑ For instance, *in order to be able to interpret a discourse, that is, to assign it meaning and reference, we also need a substantial amount of world knowledge, and such knowledge can only be partly specified within linguistics or grammar, namely, in the lexicon.*

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- ❑ A first principle of semantics is '**functionality**', which says that ***the meaning of discourse expressions is a function of the meanings of their component expressions.*** Thus *the meaning of a sentence must be calculated on the basis of the meanings of its component words.*
 - ❑ A second major principle is '**structural**', which holds that ***the structures of expressions are interpreted as structures of meanings.***
 - ❑ We are not here concerned with the specific rules that specify how the meaning of sentences can be derived from the meanings of words and phrases.

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- We merely assume (1) that discourse expressions can be analyzed as sequences of sentences and (2) that the meaning units assigned to sentences are propositions, which consist of a predicate and a number of arguments that may have various (case) roles.
 - Hence a first aspect of **semantic discourse analysis** is to *investigate how sequences of sentences of a discourse are related to sequences of underlying propositions and how the meaning of such sequences is a function of the meaning of the constituent sentences or propositions.*

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- ❑ At the same time, **Semantic Discourse Analysis** has an **extensional or referential dimension**. That is, we want to know *what sequences of sentences in a discourse can refer to a reality*.
 - ❑ Traditionally, **Philosophy and Logic** identified the object of reference for a sentence with a truth value, for example, "true" or "false". Compound propositions were then also assigned a truth value on the basis of the specific meaning of the connectives linking propositions (*e.g., logical and, or, if ... then*).
 - ❑ In that tradition we could then demand that **Discourse Semantics** specify the rules that assign a truth value to the discourse as a whole on the basis of the truth values assigned to individual sentences.

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- Although to a certain extent that would be a legitimate aim, there are several reasons not to follow that logical approach here, because, for instance, sentences and propositions in a discourse are not only linked by logical connectives.
 - Also, a truth **Functional Approach** is too limited and would be relevant only for discourses used in affirmative contexts, that is, as speech acts of assertion, and would not be relevant for *questions, orders, promises, congratulations,* and *accusations.*
 - Hence, we assume that the objects of reference for meaningful sentences are facts, namely the facts that constitute some possible world.

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- ❑ A **Pragmatic Theory** will specify whether such facts are part of a given possible world or not, whether such a fact will be or should be brought about, according to the speech act performed when uttering and using the discourse in some specific social context.
 - ❑ Hence, whereas *intentionally we link sequences of sentences with sequences of propositions*, these are in turn linked, at the extensional level, with configurations of facts, such as ***states of affairs, events, actions, or complex episodes*** of these.
 - ❑ This is one reason why a purely abstract semantics of meaning and reference should be extended in ***a Cognitive Framework***.

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- ❑ Similarly, **language users** have had previous experiences, such as having read other discourses about the same kinds of facts, and traces of the representations of these experiences gradually build and update models of the situation in episodic memory.
 - ❑ These models provide the knowledge and referential basis for *the interpretation process*.
 - ❑ And finally, individual language users may also generate opinions, that is, evaluative beliefs, about individual objects or facts, based on their attitudes and ideologies.
 - ❑ That is, the representation of the discourse will not only be objective in the sense of being socially normalized or conventional, but will also have subjective dimensions

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- ❑ Such subjective interpretation will also depend on contextual factors such as *personal motivations* (wishes, desires, preferences, purposes, intentions), *goals, interests, tasks, obligations,* or *social aspects of the communicative setting.*
 - ❑ These will determine which meanings receive special attention, which meanings will be disregarded, how knowledge, beliefs, and opinions are activated and used, which associations are activated, and how meanings may be transformed to more special, personal, or contextual meanings.
 - ❑ We do not, however, respect **the usual boundaries between linguistic or grammatical semantics and cognitive semantics.**
 - ❑ Thus, if we speak about the meaning or reference of discourse elements, such as sentences, this is meant as a generalization and abstraction with respect to the cognitive properties of discourse understanding.

IV- SOME SPECIFIC PROPERTIES OF DISCOURSE SEMANTICS

4-1- DISCOURSE COHERENCE

- ❑ A first aspect that requires our attention is the fact that ***discourses usually consist of sequences of sentences that express sequences of propositions.***
- ❑ Just as we want to know how the meanings of words and phrases within a sentence are related so as to form the meaning of the sentence as a whole, we want to know how the meanings of sentences are related so as to form the meaning of the sequence as a whole.
- ❑ In other words, how are the propositions of a discourse linked up in a sequence, and how do they add up to more complex meanings?

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- ❑ And conversely, how does the meaning of one sentence depend on the meaning of a sequence as a whole?
 - ❑ In fact, sentences follow each other, in both **written and oral discourse**, in a linear fashion.
 - ❑ The underlying semantic structures, that is, the propositions, may have an additional hierarchic organization.
 - ❑ The facts denoted by the discourse, for example, states of affairs, actions, or events, however, have **spatial, conditional** (e.g., causal), or **temporal organization**.

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- Hence it is an important cognitive task for a speaker or writer to represent these relations between the facts as relations within or among propositions and to express these again in ***the linear ordering of words, phrases, and sentences***, whereas the hearer or reader has the task of establishing these relations the other way around (with the additional knowledge about the usual ordering of facts).
 - Hence ***a discourse is not just a set of sentences but an ordered sequence, with conventional constraints on the possible orderings if it is to be meaningful and if it is to represent certain fact structures, for example, episodes.***

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- ❑ But not only is the ordering of propositions in a discourse constrained by rules of meaningfulness; their content, that is, their conceptual meanings and reference, is also subject to certain principles or rules.
 - ❑ In general, then, the proposition sequence underlying an acceptable discourse must satisfy various conditions of what is called 'coherence'.
 - ❑ Similarly, the surface structure expressions, that is, the *morpho-phonological, syntactic, and lexical structures of the respective sentences*, must appropriately signal this coherence, by, for instance, word order, sentence order, the use of connectives, sentential adverbs, verb tenses, or pronouns; these devices are often subsumed under the concept of (**surface structure**) 'cohesion'.

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- Before we analyze some natural discourse examples, a simple constructed example may illustrate some of the conditions of what we call 'local coherence' in discourse:

- (1) a. ***Next month we will be in Berkeley.***
 - b. ***We will be staying with friends.***

- For this sample discourse we may first observe that the reverse order of the sentences would result in a much less meaningful discourse. That is, we apparently should first have the specification of some more global action or state of affairs, possibly with indication of time and place, and then we may have details of the action or state mentioned.

- ❑ There seems to be a principle requiring that the sentence or proposition ordering may reflect the general-particular ordering of facts.
- ❑ This means that (1b) will be interpreted relative to the interpretation of (1a): That is, "we will be staying in Berkeley" and "the friends we are staying with live in Berkeley."
- ❑ These latter propositions may be inferred from (1b) given the previous sentence (1a) in the same discourse. Similarly, spatial ordering between facts may require the same linear ordering in the expression of propositions:

(2) a. *They have a big house on the hill.*

b. *It has at least 10 rooms.*



□ Again, we find that objects must be introduced before properties, such as 'contents', can be properly specified. It would be rather funny to have: *They are living in ten rooms. These are in a big house on the hill*, so there are constraints on the representation of space or possession relations. Similar ordering principles exist for the representation of the perception or understanding of facts:

□ In general, what is discovered first should be mentioned first. This is also why we should rather have ***There was a table in the corner. On it was a large vase of flowers*** than ***In the corner was a large vase of flowers. It was standing on a table.***

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- Some of the principles involved are more or less conventionalized rules, whereas others are stylistic strategies that are often followed but may be ignored to obtain special effects.
 - The most conspicuous coherence constraints hold for the representation of temporal and conditional relations between events or actions. Possible, probable, or necessary conditions (e.g., causes) should in general be mentioned before their consequences:

(3) a. ***This morning I had a toothache.***
b. ***I went to the dentist.***

(4) a. ***We went to an expensive restaurant.***
b. ***John ordered trout with almonds.***

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- ❑ In (3) we first have the condition, namely, **a reason**, and then **a consequent action**, whereas in (4) we first have an action that allows another action as its consequence or as its specification.
 - ❑ In the latter case we may not reverse the order of the sentences, because then it would not be clear when and where John performed that specific action.
 - ❑ In (3) however, we may put the second sentence in first position, but then we obtain a different meaning: **Having a toothache** no longer is presented as a reason for an action; the sentence functions as an explanation rather than as a description of a sequence of events.

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- ❑ That is, sentence ordering in discourse may indicate a conditional ordering between represented facts but also may indicate the use of the sentence as an explanation.
 - ❑ In general, therefore, it makes sense to distinguish between two large classes of semantic coherence conditions: **conditional coherence** and **functional coherence**.
 - ❑ A sequence of propositions is conditionally coherent if it denotes a sequence of conditionally related facts, such as causes and consequences, whereas a sequence of propositions is functionally coherent if the respective propositions have themselves a semantic function defined in terms of the relation with previous propositions.

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- ❑ Thus a proposition may function as a specification, explanation, example, comparison, contrast or generalization with respect to a previous proposition.
 - ❑ **Whereas discourses (1), (3), and (4) are conditionally coherent, (2) is functionally coherent.**
 - ❑ Note that the two kinds of coherence may also overlap to a certain degree: *In (1), going to some town may be a possible condition for the act of staying with friends* (and not, say, going to the movies).
 - ❑ At the same time there is **a functional aspect**: To be in some town, taken as the equivalent of staying in some town, can be specified by the information that we are staying with friends.

- We have argued that coherence is provided not only by the ordering of sentences, but also by their meaning and reference. Thus, we do not in general have sequences like (5) in stereotypical situations:

(5) a. *We went to an expensive restaurant.*
 b. *John ordered a big Chevrolet.*

- Although (5b) is a meaningful sentence in isolation, it does not meaningfully relate to the previous sentence if it is interpreted as an action performed at the restaurant.
- Our **world knowledge** about eating in restaurants organized in so-called scripts tells us that ordering a car is not a normal thing to do in restaurants.

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- ❑ Hence the meaningfulness of discourse also depends on what we assume to be the normalcy of the facts, episode, or situation described.
 - ❑ In other words, **understanding a discourse presupposes understanding the world.**
 - ❑ For a discourse like (5), understanding is restored as soon as we know that John is crazy or just trying to be funny.
 - ❑ (5b) could also be interpreted as the first sentence of a sequence that, as a whole, specifies the restaurant event: John ordered a car (e.g., a taxi) to take us to the restaurant.

- ❑ **Coherence relations** connect sentences or propositions as wholes, and not just elements of propositions. Thus in (1) through (3) we may note that in the sentence pairs we find referential expressions denoting identical referents: *we in (1), the house and it in (2), and 1 in (3)*.
- ❑ It should be stressed that such forms of cohesive co-reference are neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for **discourse coherence**.
- ❑ In (4) there is no strict co-reference, although it is understood that John is a member of the set denoted by *we*. But (4a) may be preceded by sentences like *It was a beautiful night* or *There was no food in the house*, and such sentences would be perfectly coherent with (4).

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- ❑ This is because such sentences, as wholes, denote a condition, reason, or background for the actions mentioned later in the discourse.
 - ❑ Mere co-referential identity would not be sufficient, as we can see if we substituted *John* for the pronoun *we* in (5a), or if *I was born in New York* were substituted for (3b).
 - ❑ It follows that the basis for assessing discourse coherence is not the individual word meanings or referents but rather whole propositions as they relate to facts.

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- ❑ Since identity of referents is often concomitant with the relatedness of facts, co-reference is a frequent aspect of coherence: for at least some stretch of a discourse we are speaking about the same object or the same person, or introduce new objects or persons related to previously mentioned ones.
 - ❑ **Surface cohesion markers** such as *pronouns, articles, demonstratives, names, or lexical identity* signal this property of underlying semantic coherence.
 - ❑ The relations between propositions as wholes, denoting relations between facts, are expressed not only by sentence ordering as discussed above, but also by various kinds of connectives such as:

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- ❑ **The conjunctions** *and, but, although, if . . . then, for, because, or, unless, and despite*, **the sentence adverbs** *therefore, however, consequently*, and *by*;
 - ❑ **Adverbial compounds** such as *on the contrary, as a consequence, or on the one hand and on the other hand*.
 - ❑ They express both ***conditional and functional coherence types***, although it seems that the conditional uses predominate.
 - ❑ In the examples given above we can easily imagine the use of the connectives in the conditional readings, whereas functional coherence is simply signaled by clause or sentence coordination and subordination.

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- We assume that the semantics of connectives can at least partly be accounted for in terms of conditional relations of various strengths (*possibility, probability, and necessity*) between the facts denoted by connected clauses or sentences.
 - Thus, *and* has a general function of connection, which allows it to be used instead of other conditional connectives, and also may function as the weakest conditional connective (A allows B), whereas *because, for,* and *so* express stronger conditional relations.
 - But, *however,* and *yet* presuppose this conditional relation but indicate that an inference or expectation does not hold for a particular case: *Normally A conditions B, but not-B is the case.*

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- ❑ This indicates that the meaning of connectives needs explanation in terms of language users' expectations. It should be added, however, that connectives have pragmatic as well as semantic functions.
 - ❑ In addition to expressing relations between propositions and thereby denoting relations between facts, they may also be used to express relations between the speech acts performed by the utterance of the respective sentences in some context.
 - ❑ In that case, **and** may signal **additional information**, **but a protest against a previous speech act**, **or a correction of previous speech acts or their appropriateness conditions**, and **so a conclusion**.
 - ❑ Pragmatic uses are often signaled by sentence-initial position in independent new sentences, whereas the semantic use of the connectives may also be interclausal.

4-2- INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION

- ❑ There is another aspect of the semantics of discourse involved in the definition of coherence. Discourse is not simply a representation of related facts; it also must respect various information processing constraints, from both a cognitive and an interactional or social point of view.
- ❑ Used in social contexts, discourses are performed as speech-act sequences, and they therefore have as their first function to establish some semantic representation and on that basis some pragmatic representation, in the memory of the hearer or reader.

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- ❑ In this perspective a discourse should respect a number of very general communicative principles: It should be **informative enough** (*not too little but not too much*), it should be relevant with respect to the topic of discourse or conversation or with respect to the interactional context, it should be brief, and it should be sufficiently clear.
 - ❑ For each sentence of the discourse, as well as for the discourse as a whole, it should be indicated to the hearer, at both the semantic and surface structural levels:
 - ❖ *How each sentence relates to previous and possibly following sentences,*
 - ❖ *how the information of each sentence is tied in with the information of other sentences,*
 - ❖ *and what information the hearer or reader is supposed (by the speaker or writer) to have about the context and about the world.*

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- This means, among other things, that at each point of the discourse there should be at least some ***new information*** (we may not repeat the same sentence over and over again), and that this new information should be appropriately linked with old information, which may be ***textual*** (introduced before in the same discourse) or ***contextual*** (derivable from the hearer's knowledge about the communicative context and about the world in general).
 - At several levels this informational aspect of the discourse as a form of communicative interaction shows up. One prominent way of organizing the informational structure of discourse is the distinction, within the semantics of each sentence, between ***a topic function and a comment function.***

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- ❑ The topic function may be assigned to the semantic information that is "old" in various senses, that is, already introduced by the text or already known to the hearer (also from context), and therefore somehow given or presupposed.
 - ❑ The old information is selected and placed in the foreground as an anchorpoint for the new information of the sentence.
 - ❑ We see from this intuitive characterization that the notion of topic requires ***grammatical, pragmatic, cognitive, and interactional explication.***
 - ❑ Within our restricted semantic point of view we can only define it in terms of semantic relations between propositions; for example, in terms of identity or other relations (implication, entailment) or in terms of proposition fragments (predicates, individuals).

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- ❑ The most typical means of topic assignment derives from the identity of previously introduced individuals: The sentence provides further information (*the comment*) about an object or person that has been mentioned before.
 - ❑ Such a topic function is signaled in various ways by the surface structure features of languages, such as word order, *grammatical functions (e.g., subject), pronouns, definite articles, demonstratives, or hierarchical clause ordering*.
 - ❑ Thus in English, initial noun phrases (definites or pronouns) that are not assigned topic function are assigned special stress or organized in cleft sentences (*It was John who . . .*).

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- ❑ The so-called **topic-comment articulation of sentences** is not restricted to elements of propositions but may also extend to whole propositions.
 - ❑ In that case we usually make a distinction between **the presupposition and assertion parts of a sentence**.
 - ❑ A presupposition, having topical function, is a proposition assumed to be known to the hearer from previous text or from the context.
 - ❑ Formally speaking, such a proposition is entailed by both the presupposing sentence and by the negation of that sentence.

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- ❑ Presupposed propositions are typically expressed by initial subordinate clauses but may also be signaled by a number of predicates or adverbs, such as:
 - ❖ ***to know*** (of which the object proposition is assumed to be true by the speaker),
 - ❖ ***to pretend*** (of which the object proposition is doubted by the speaker),
 - ❖ or ***even*** (presupposing that the negation of the proposition would have been more likely, just as in the use of ***but***), as in:

(6) Even the professors participated in the student rally.

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- Note that the assertion part of sentences exhibiting presuppositions is relevant only for affirmative sentences used as assertions;
 - **Presuppositions** also occur in *questions, threats, promises*, or other *speech acts*, although their presupposed nature then is outside the scope of such speech acts (*we need not question what we already know to be the case, nor promise or command that information*).

4-3- GLOBAL COHERENCE: MACROSTRUCTURES

- ❑ Until now, we have discussed the semantic properties of discourse only for *relations between sentences or between propositions*, that is, for pairwise, linear connections between elements in a sequence.
- ❑ We have summarized these properties under the term '**local coherence**'. There is, however, a third major aspect of discourse semantics that needs our attention.
- ❑ The meaningfulness of discourse resides not only at this **local (or microstructural) level** of immediate clause and sentence connections but also at a **global level**.

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- ❑ We should also explain the properties of the meaning of the larger fragments of a discourse, such as paragraphs, as wholes.
 - ❑ **Paragraphs** may be connected even though their respective last and first sentences are not connected according to the conditions mentioned above.
 - ❑ We talk about *the topic, the theme, the subject, the upshot, the point, or the outline of a discourse*, and such notions do not apply to individual sentences or propositions.
 - ❑ We therefore assume that, besides the local semantic structure, a discourse also has a global semantic structure or macrostructure.

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- ❑ Thus a **macrostructure** is *a theoretical reconstruction of intuitive notions* such as '**topic or 'theme' of a discourse**'. It explains what is most relevant, important, or prominent in the semantic information of the discourse as a whole.
 - ❑ At the same time, the macrostructure of a discourse defines its global coherence. Without such a global coherence, there would be no overall control upon the local connections and continuations.
 - ❑ Sentences might be connected appropriately according to the given local coherence criteria, but the sequence would simply go astray without some constraint on what it should be about globally:
 - ***(7) This morning I had a toothache. I went to the dentist. The dentist has a big car. The car was bought in New York. New York has had serious financial troubles.***

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- ❑ The above facts may be related locally, but they are not related to one central issue or topic. The **macrostructure** is the semantic information that provides this overall unity to a discourse.
 - ❑ Often such underlying macrostructures are expressed by the text itself, for example, in *announcements, titles, summaries, thematic sentences, or the expression of plans for action.*
 - ❑ According to the fundamental principle of semantics, that of functionality, **a macrostructure of a discourse should be a function of the respective meanings of its sentences.**

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- ❑ This function, however, is not given by an added connectivity at the local level of the sequence, that is, the sum of all pairwise coherence links between sentences.
 - ❑ Rather it is a kind of semantic transformation, mapping sequences of propositions of the text on sequences of macropropositions at more abstract, general, or global levels of meaning.
 - ❑ Intuitively, such mappings are operations that select, reduce, generalize, and (re-) construct propositions into fewer, more general, or more abstract propositions.

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- ❑ These transformations or operations are called '**macrorules**'.
 - ❑ They are second-order semantic interpretation rules: After the interpretation of sentences and sentence pairs, they allow a further interpretation of sequences as (global) propositions that characterize the meaning of a sequence or discourse as a whole.
 - ❑ Thus a description of the sequence of actions performed by 'John going on a ski vacation to Switzerland' may be reduced by macrorules to the macroproposition '**John went skiing in Switzerland**'.

- ❑ The **macrorules** delete all propositional information of only local relevance that is not necessary for understanding the rest of the discourse.
- ❑ They generalize and collect individuals in terms of groups and various characteristics of persons in terms of global personality traits, and they group conditions, components, or consequences of some action or event together as one overall action or event concept (*'Going to the station', 'Buying a ticket', 'Going to the platform, would thus together result in the macroproposition 'Taking the the train to . . . '*).
- ❑ Obviously, such **macrorules** can operate only on the basis of world knowledge.

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- ❑ Macrorules operate recursively. They may derive a sequence of macropropositions from the sequence of propositions expressed by the discourse (for instance, those of a page in a novel), which may again be the input for the rules so that higher-level topics or themes are derived. We thus arrive at a hierarchic structure, with the most global topic or theme at the top.
 - ❑ In newspapers, for instance, such a highest topic is often expressed (at least partially) by the headlines, as in **EBOLA KILLS 10,000 PEOPLE, or PRESIDENT WILL MEET OPPOSITION LEADERS.**
 - ❑ More fully, a macrostructure is typically expressed by the summary of a discourse. Operationally speaking, discourses that do not allow summarizing have no macrostructure or only a very fragmentary one (e.g., some modern poems).

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- ❑ As theoretically described here, macrostructures are only abstractions relative to more concrete cognitive operations and representations.
 - ❑ That is, since **the world knowledge, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, interests, and goals of speech participants** may vary, they may also assign different global meanings (macrostructures) to the same discourse as they may have different evaluations about what is relevant or important information for the discourse (and the communicative context) as a whole.
 - ❑ Despite these individual and subjective variations, there is often enough overlap to guarantee successful communication and interaction.

4-4- SEMANTIC STRATEGIES

- ❑ There is a large number of anticipating semantic strategies.
- ❑ Thus, when some speaker A is expressing a proposition p , he or she may realize that maybe conversation partner B might draw the inference q from p .
- ❑ If that inference is not intended, A may use a strategy to block such an inference, for example, by denying q with a subsequent sentence or clause beginning with “but” and a negation.
- ❑ In talk where participants are particularly interested in prohibiting wrong conclusions by speech partners, there are many such strategies, including **hedgings, corrections, additions,** and **mitigations.**

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- ❑ That is, a move in a turn of a speaker may be given a special strategic **semantic function** with respect to previous moves (or their underlying propositions).
 - ❑ The speaker may hedge when a previous move was too harsh or decisive, may add some detail explaining why some belief or opinion was expressed or use a correction move to take back what was asserted.
 - ❑ Such **semantic strategies** are part of the overall communicative and interactional strategies used to maintain or establish certain goals, such as face keeping or self-presentation.
 - ❑ The hearer in a conversation must **analyze and interpret** such semantic strategies.

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- ❑ He or she must determine not only what is propositionally meant by some expression but also why such a proposition is expressed at a particular point in the conversation.
 - ❑ Let us give some examples from **data** collected in the context of an investigation into **the ethnic opinions of people in Amsterdam** as these are expressed (or not) in non directed interviews.
 - ❑ It is obvious that in such interviews people *take care to monitor rather attentively what they say or imply* so as **to establish or maintain the wanted self-representation of a kind, responsible, tolerant, and "nice" citizen** and at the same time to provide information about **beliefs', opinions, attitudes, or experiences.**



□ In the following (**approximately translated**) interview fragment, for instance, we find a typical correction move:

(8) . . . They do not work, well, don't work, they just mess around with cars and sell them

□ We see that the meaning of the expression "**they do not work**" may imply a too far-reaching proposition (such as '**they do not want to work**' or '**they are lazy**'), which could be interpreted as a negative opinion or even as a prejudice, so a semantic correction is necessary, signaled here by "**well**", **the reviewing repetition of the wrong statement, and then the correct statement.**



□ This is an example of **a typically strategic semantic move** (and therefore has *conversational and interactional functions* as well) in which the relation between the two propositions can be accounted for by **the functional link of a correction.**

□ Similarly, we often find different forms of explanation. Thus, the same speaker tries to account for the fact that he has few contacts with ethnic minorities first by a series of arguments about his own actual condition and actions and then by attributing some cause or reason to the other group.

□ He first says: . . . ***don't think that one of those people is trying to establish contact***

in which **a direct cognitive blocking strategy** in an appeal to the hearer is performed.

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- The speaker wishes to prevent the conclusion that he is the only one responsible for lack of contact. In order to argumentatively sustain that general proposition the speaker then resorts to several explanatory moves:

because they, terribly need their own community.

- in which we find not only a strategic-rhetorical use of an exaggeration (terribly) but also, semantically, reference to a possible reason for their (lack of) actions, and such postponed references to reasons or causes usually function as explanations.
- In the same way, people in their conversational turn establish a large number of strategic semantic connections between sentences or moves or between underlying propositions.

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- They use **apparent denials** (*I don't hate them, but. . .*), **displacement** (*I don't care so much, but the others in the street do*), **attribution** (which illustrates the well-known strategy of 'blaming the victim'), **denial of presuppositions or implications** (but that does not mean they are inferior), and so on.
 - In other words, semantic relations between sentences or propositions may be used strategically in order to convey precise meanings or to prevent wrong inferences by the hearer, and these strategies are part of more general strategies of conversation and interaction.
 - Hence they need further ***conversational, pragmatic, rhetorical, and interactional analysis***; **their semantic analysis is just one dimension.**

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

A number of conclusions can be drawn about the nature of semantic discourse analysis:

- ❑ Discourses are in principle characterized by an overall meaning or macrostructure that formalizes the theme or topic of the discourse as a whole.
- ❑ Such a macrostructure may often be expressed by titles or headlines, or by initial thematic or final summarizing sentences. The macrostructure propositions are derived by macrorules (such as deletion, generalization, and construction) from the propositions expressed by the text and from activated world knowledge.
- ❑ Without a semantic macrostructure, even a fragmentary one, there is no overall coherence and hence no point to the discourse.

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- ❑ Macrostructures may be further organized by general ordering principles (a kind of specific discourse syntax), which also specify the schematic functions or categories of the sections (e.g., paragraphs) of the text, such as setting, complication and resolution in a story, or premises and conclusion in an argument (or advertisement or scholarly paper);
 - ❑ Newspaper discourse first gives the main facts, mostly conclusions or consequences, followed by causes, previous events, explanation, and background or context.
 - ❑ In other words, the overall meaning of the discourse has a double function:

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- ❑ It provides the semantic content for schematic categories that are typical for a specific discourse genre and at the same time provides the basis for the establishment of local coherence.
 - ❑ That is, the macroproposition contains the concepts by which the associated world knowledge (scripts) is activated to interpret the sentences and words of the discourse.
 - ❑ The local coherence of discourse is to be formulated in terms of propositional relationships denoting relations between facts in some possible world.
 - ❑ These relationships may be conditional (denoting conditional relations between the facts) or functional (showing relations between the information provided relative to previous information).
 - ❑ There are general ordering constraints on propositions and sentences expressing them.

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- ❑ These constraints take into account the conditional, spatial, or temporal ordering of the facts and perceptions, and the cognitive and pragmatic relevance of the facts.
 - ❑ The **global and local coherence of discourse** is expressed by surface properties of discourse, such as *clause organization, clause ordering, sentence ordering, connectives, pronouns, adverbs, verb tenses, lexical identity, paraphrases, and definite articles*.
 - ❑ Local coherence may also serve various pragmatic, stylistic and rhetorical functions, such as linking speech acts, establishing functions for speech acts (such as concluding, exemplifying, contrasting), marking didactic functions of the discourse, marking esthetic functions (by the lack of propositional coherence in a modern poem), or emphasizing the rhetorical, persuasive function of an advertisement.

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- ❑ Each clause and each sentence is marked for its function within the communicative sequence of information distribution: Some semantic information is already known, or is inferable, whereas other information is presented as new.
 - ❑ Thus a topic-comment schema is imposed on the semantic representation of sentences and expressed, depending on language and context, by word order, morphological devices, stress, intonation, fixed syntactic phrases, left or right dislocation of phrases, and pronouns or other pro- elements at the syntactic level, and by participant roles (e.g., agent) at the semantic level.

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- ❑ For each stage in the unfolding of the textual sequence, the reader is presented with the information that, cognitively, should be kept in short term memory or (re-)activated for predication.
 - ❑ It was observed that although permanent topic change is possible, there is often a strategy for the maintenance of sentence-topic providing what may be called "topical coherence" through the discourse.
 - ❑ Thus, maintenance of sentential topics may result in sequential topics, which may be candidates for a participant position, often agent, in the macroproposition of the discourse.
 - ❑ This kind of semantic analysis is highly **abstract, restricted, and general.**

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- ❑ It abstracts from actual cognitive processing, does not explicate the knowledge, beliefs, or other cognitive systems involved, and disregards personal or subjective information (memories, goals, interests, tasks).
 - ❑ It studies meaning and reference in isolation from pragmatic speech acts, superstructural schemata, and rhetorical effectiveness, and thereby in isolation from the whole sociocultural context.
 - ❑ It has been shown for some examples, though, that these multiple links exist between the meanings of the discourse and its actual uses in communication.

ID: Questions & Discussions on Discourse Semantics

PROVIDE A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS TO FOLLOWING DISCOURSES

I- A man walked in. He bought some cigarettes. Then he left.

II- A: Let's put the cruise ship south of Florida.

B: That won't fit there.

III- Interviewer: "What do you think about the works that foreigners do in this country?"

Native person: "Foreigners who live here? They do not work, well, don't work, they just mess around with cars and sell them"

IV- John was on his way to school last Friday. He was really worried about the math lesson. Last week he had been unable to control the class. It was unfair of the math teacher to leave him in charge. After all, it is not a normal part of a janitor's duties.



END OF THE LECTURE