

ING218
Lecture 2
Language in Use

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In this session we will discuss:

- The specific features of communication, beginning with the observations about non-linguistic signs and how we get meanings from them.
- The distinction between a sentence and an utterance
- Prosody

Another branch of linguistics that is concerned with meaning is **Pragmatics**.

How is it different
from Semantics?

Semantics is mainly concerned with a speaker's competence to use the language system in producing meaningful utterances and processing (comprehending) utterances produced by others.

Meanwhile the chief focus of pragmatics is a person's ability to derive meanings from specific kinds of speech situation:

- To recognize what the speaker is referring to,
- to relate new information to what has gone before,
- to interpret what is said from background knowledge about the speaker and the topic of discourse
- And to infer or fill in information that the speaker takes for granted and doesn't bother to say.

Natural Vs Conventional Signs

Language

How do you define it?
What is it about?

A **language** is a system of symbols through which people communicate. The symbols maybe spoken, written, or sign with gestures.

A **language is** a complex system of symbols, or signs, that are shared by members of a community.



Signs

Natural signs:

They communicate to someone who observes and can interpret but their messages are unintentional, the by-products of various events.
Ex: footprint, smoke, black cloud etc.

Conventional signs:

They have human senders as well as human receivers: each one has an intention and an interpretation.
Ex: sirens of ambulance, sirens of corps, traffic lights etc.

Observing any such sign and getting information from it seems like a simple matter and can take place in an instant, and yet the process of getting information consists of three steps:

- ❖ perception
- ❖ identification
- ❖ interpretation

Meanings are often personal. The meaning of any sign depends on the space-time context in which we observe it.

Conventional signs can have different meanings in different contexts or different circumstances.

The whistle of a policeman directing traffic, the whistle of a hotel doorman summoning a taxi, and the whistle of the referee in a soccer game may all sounds exactly the same: their different meanings are due to the difference of context in which the signal occurs. They have different intentions and are interpreted differently.

Linguistics signs

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Words are linguistic signs, similar in certain respects to natural and conventional signs. They do not 'have meanings' but rather are capable of conveying meanings to those who can perceive, identify, and interpret.

The matter of perception, identification and interpretation

In order to grasp what somebody says, we must first of all perceive the utterance – hear a spoken utterance, see a written one.

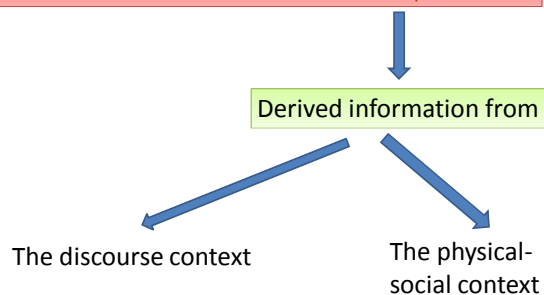
But hearing alone is not enough, nor is seeing. We get no message from an utterance in a language we don't know. Identification of the elements in an utterance requires speaker and hearer to share 'common ground'

"Common ground"



By and large, speaker and hearer use the same vocabulary: they attach the same meanings to the same words and sentences; they have similar pronunciations; they have in general the same ways of putting words together in sentences.

Successful communication → correct interpretation



Sometimes we can interpret what the speaker intends from clues in the physical context even though we don't understand completely what he or she has said (interpretation without identification) and even without having heard everything said (interpretation without perception).

Can you recall an instance in which you did not fully understand what someone said but figured out from the context what he or she meant – what the speaker was trying to do, what the circumstances seemed to require, etc?

Can you recall any instance in which you understood quite well what somebody said but still could not interpret it, because you did not have background information, didn't grasp what the message was about?

Utterance Vs Sentence

Utterance

- An utterance is an act of speech or writing: it is a specific event, at a particular time and place and involving at least one person, the one who produces the utterance.
- meaning – the meaning of the sentence plus the meaning of the circumstances: the time & space, the people involved their backgrounds, their relationship to one another, and what they know about one another.

Sentence

- A sentence is not an event: it is a construction of words in a particular sequence which is meaningful.
- meaning – something known to all people who have learned the language: it is the meaning of the individual words and the meaning of the syntactic construction in which they occur.

Prosody is an important carrier of meaning in spoken utterances and consists of two parts, accent and intonation. Accent is the comparatively greater force and higher pitch that makes one part of the utterance more prominent than other parts. It has a syntagmatic function, giving focus to the accented word and indicating that other parts of the utterance, especially those that follow, are given information. Paradigmatic focus is an emphasis on one word as opposed to other words that might have been used. Intonation is the set of tunes that can differentiate meanings of utterances with the same verbal content. Intonation patterns are falls and rises in pitch and combinations of falls and rises. Generally a fall indicates speaker dominance or termination. A rise is hearer oriented and suggests continuance.

Below are some common distinctions made with intonation in utterances that have the same verbal material.

1 Statement vs question (fall vs rise)

↓ Yes. ↑ Yes? ↓ This is the place. ↑ This is the place?

With a falling tone "Yes" is an answer to some question and "This is the place" is a statement. With rising tones the speaker seeks confirmation or information from the addressee.

2 Information sought vs repetition requested (fall vs rise)

↑ When? ↑ Where? ↓ When? ↓ Where?

With "When?" "Where?" rising, the speaker is asking for repetition of something that was said; the speaker has understood enough of the previous utterance to know that some time or place was mentioned. The falling intonation in such utterances is a request for information that has not yet been given.

3 Parallel structure vs antithesis (fall vs fall and rise)

This is my sister, ↓ Ellen.
This is my ↓ sister, ↑ Ellen.

If *sister* and *Ellen* have the same tune, a fall on *sister* and a long fall on *Ellen*, the parallel structure indicates a correlation of the two—specifically here, equivalence: that Ellen is the name of the speaker's sister. Fall on *sister*—typically a long fall—and a short rise on *Ellen* denotes lack of correlation, so that Ellen can only be the name of the addressee, a short vocative attached to an utterance.

4 Open question vs alternative question (rise vs rise, fall)

Do you have a ↑ pencil or a pen?
Do you have a ↑ pencil or a ↓ pen?

The distinction here reflects the speaker's attitude, perhaps about what seems appropriate in what the addressee can answer. A yes-no question will have a rise. The alternative question has a rise on the first of the alternatives and a fall on the second.

5 Full statement vs reservation (fall vs fall-rise)

↓ That's true, (or That's ↓ true.)
That's ↓↑ true.

This difference reflects the speaker's attitude. A fall expresses agreement with what has been said; a fall and short rise expresses only partial agreement, agreement with reservations.

In speech situations some meanings are conveyed by nonlinguistic matters. These include paralinguistic, appearance, gestures and silence.

The end,
thank you.