Linguistics

Semantics versus Pragmatics

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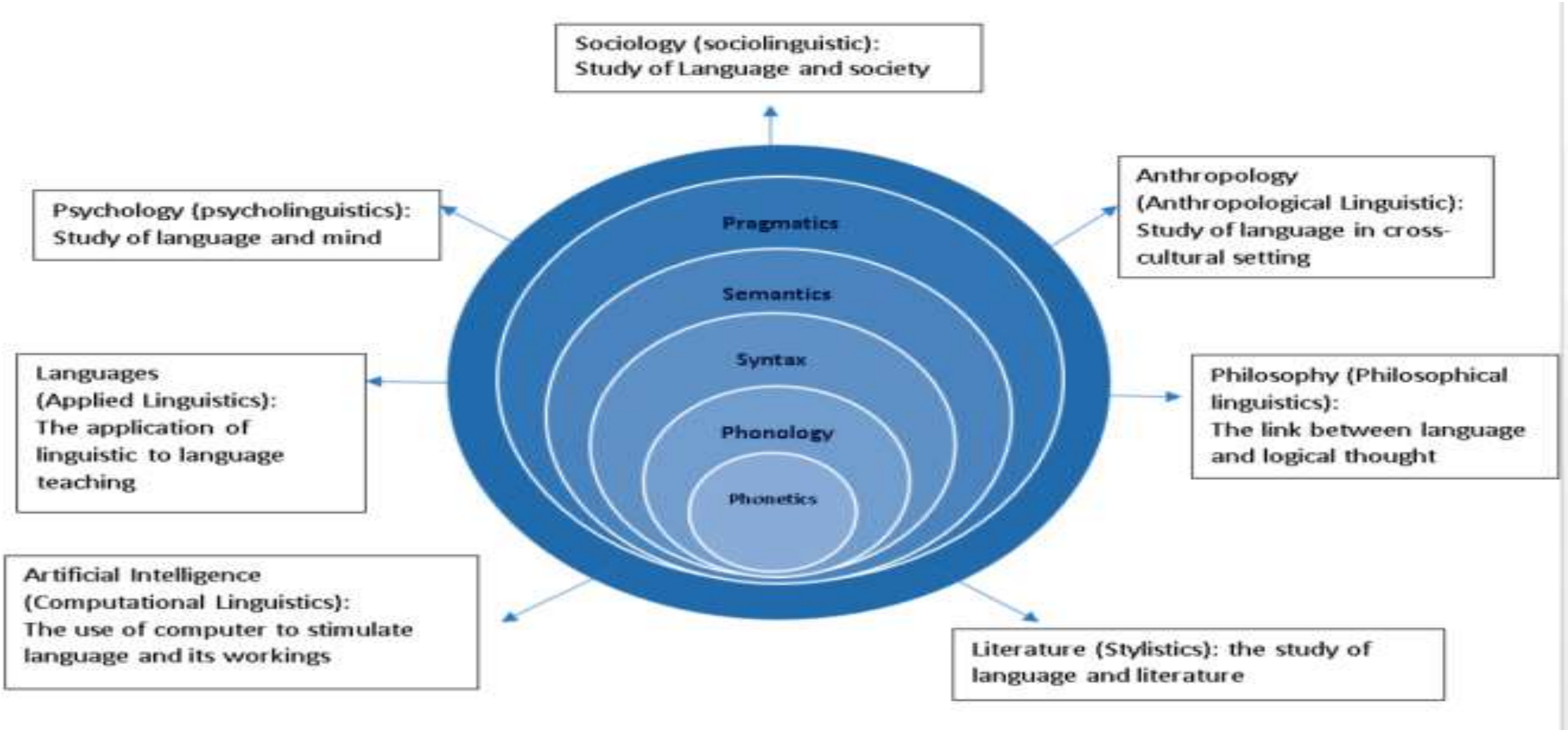
Micro & Macro-linguistics



The scope of linguistics

Micro-linguistics

- phonetics
- phonology
- morphology
- syntax
- semantics
- pragmatics

Macro-linguistics

- neurolinguistics
- psycholinguistics
- applied linguistics

Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning communicated through language. It deals with literal, decontextualized meaning and clarifies how languages organize and express meanings through the following **lexical relations:**

1. **Synonymy** (large/big)
2. **Antonymy** (rich/poor)
3. **Hyponymy** (cat/animal)
4. **Homonymy** (pupil = at school/ pupil = in the eye)
5. **Polysemy** (foot = of person, of bed, of mountain)

Synonymy

Words that have the **same** meanings or that are closely **related** in meaning, like:

answer/reply, almost/nearly, broad/wide, buy/purchase, freedom/ liberty, couch/sofa, boy/lad, lawyer/attorney, toilet/lavatory, large/big

Sameness is not ‘total sameness’- only one word would be appropriate in a sentence, like:

Sandy only had one answer correct on the test. (NOT **reply**)

Also, synonyms differ in formality e.g. **buy/purchase, automobile/car**

Antonymy

Words that are **opposites** in meaning. Some common examples are the pairs: alive/dead, big/small, fast/slow, happy/sad, hot/cold, long/short, male/ female, married/single, old/new, rich/poor, true/false.

Antonyms are usually divided into **three** main types:

- **Simple** (dead/alive)
- **Gradable** (long/short) (longer/shorter)
- **Reverse** (up/down)

Antonymy

1. Simple: (negative/positive) **dead/alive**, **pass/fail**, **hit/miss**

2. Gradable:

- Comparative and superlative forms (A pony is **smaller** than a horse.)
- There are usually intermediate terms (**hot**, warm tepid, cool, **cold**)

3. Reverse: (the relation is between terms describing **movement,** like **come/go, ascend/descend, in/out, inflate/deflate, enter/exit.**

Hyponymy (Inclusion)

Words whose meanings are specific instances of a more **general** word, i.e. one thing is included in (**a kind of**) another thing. e.g. **cats** and **dogs** are hyponyms of the word **animal**.

Other examples are the pairs:

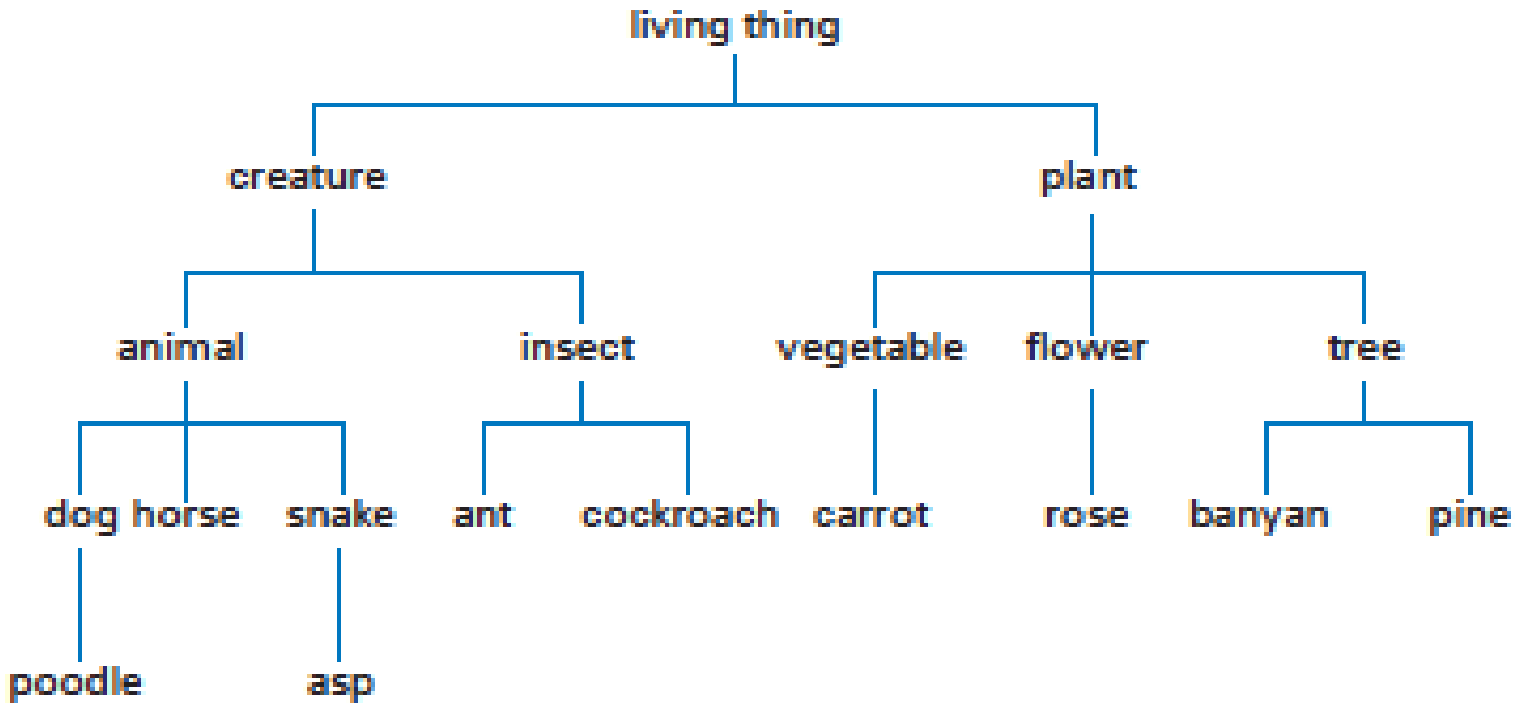
vegetable/carrot

flower/rose

tree/banyan

Hyponymy Connections
Hierarchical Relationship

The relation of hyponymy captures the concept of "**is a kind of**" when we give the meaning of a word by saying: **An asp is a kind of snake.**



Homonymy

One form (written or spoken) has two or more **unrelated** meanings. Here we have **two** types of homonymy depending on their syntactic behaviour and spelling :

1. Homographs = senses of the same written word

bank (of a river) – **bank** (financial institution)

mole (on skin) – **mole** (small animal)

pupil (at school) – **pupil** (in the eye)

race (contest of speed) – **race** (ethnic group)

2. Homophones = senses of the same spoken word.

meat/meet, flour/ flower, pail/pale, right/write, to/too/two, not/knot

Polysemy

We encounter two or more words with the same form and related meanings. Polysemy can be defined as one form having multiple meanings that are all related by extension. Examples are:

- the word **head**, used to refer to many things like:

1. the object on top of your body
2. froth on top of a glass of beer
3. person at the top of a company or department

- the word **foot** (of person, of bed, of mountain) or **run** (person does, water does, colors do).

Polysemous senses versus homonymous senses

There is a traditional distinction between homonymy and polysemy. Both deal with multiple senses of the same phonological word, but:

• **Polysemous senses** are listed under the **same** lexical entry:

foot (of person, of bed, of mountain)

• While **homonymous senses** are given **separate** entries:

pupil (at school) – **pupil** (in the eye)

Pragmatics

The study of how context contributes to meaning.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of the practical aspects of human action and thought. It is the study of how context affects meaning, such as how sentences are interpreted in certain situations (or the interpretation of linguistic meaning in context).

In a narrow sense, it deals with how listeners arrive at the intended meaning of speakers.

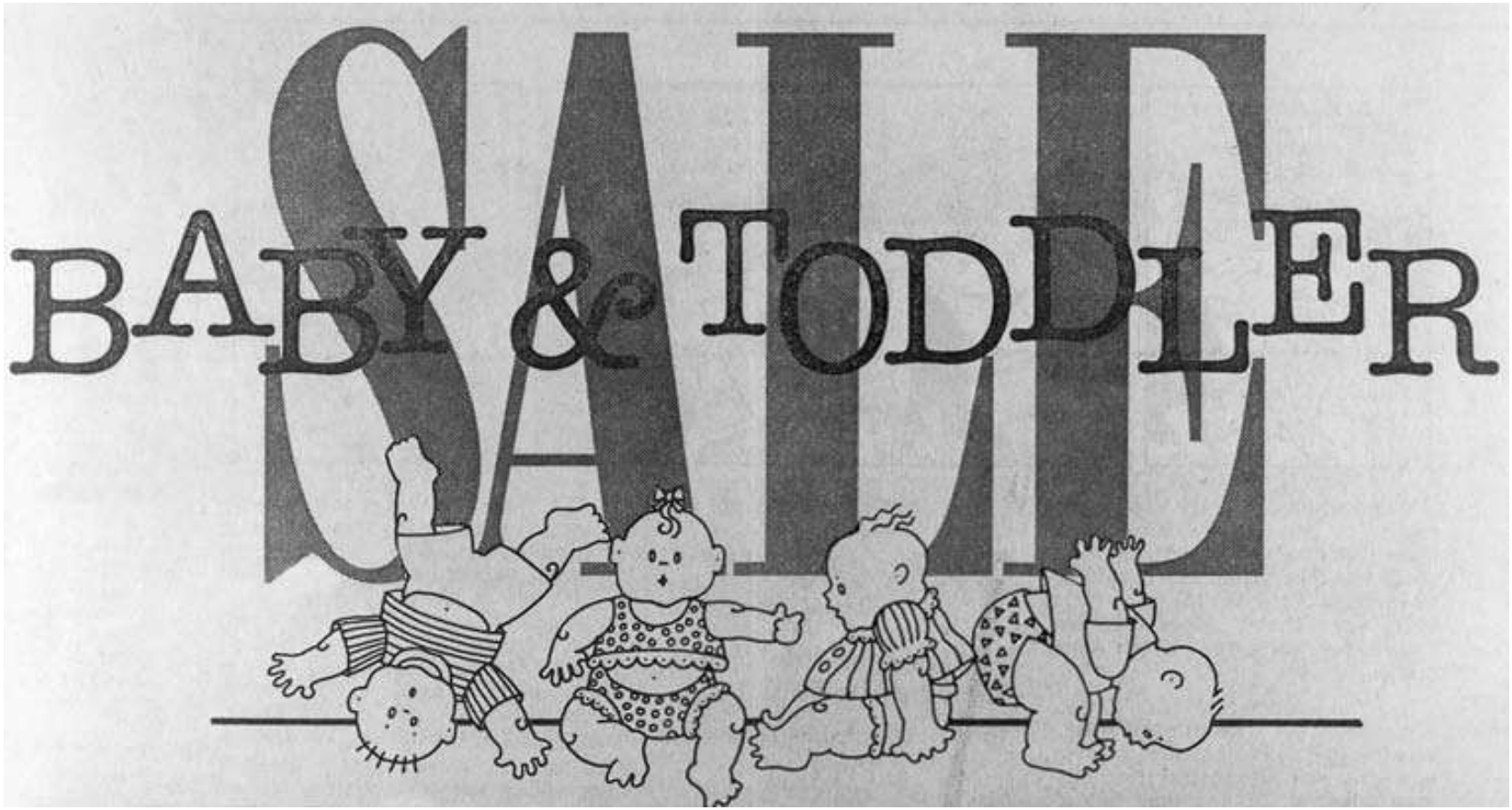
In its broadest sense, it deals with the general principles followed by human beings when they communicate with one another.

Pragmatics

In many ways, pragmatics is the study of "**invisible**" meaning, or how we recognize what is meant even when it isn't actually said or written.

In order for that to happen, speakers (or writers) must be able to depend on a lot of shared assumptions and expectations when they try to communicate. The investigation of those assumptions and expectations provides us with some insights into how more is always being **communicated** than is said.

Example



Semantics versus Pragmatics

- Many linguists make a distinction between

  - **Literal meaning**
    - The core meaning that is independent of context
    - This meaning belongs to **semantics**

  - **Contextual meaning**
    - What a speaker means when they say something, over and above the literal meaning.
    - This meaning belongs to **pragmatics**

Semantics versus Pragmatics

Semantics = Meaning abstracted away from speakers and hearers.
Pragmatics = Meaning described in relation to speakers and hearers.

Let's investigate what this might mean, using this simple example:

A speaker can utter the same sentence to a listener, e.g. ***The place is closing****, and mean to use it as a simple statement, or as a warning to hurry and get that last purchase (if they're in a department store). It could also be an invitation or command to leave.*

Pragmatics: The Outline

1. Speech acts

- Direct Speech Act
- Indirect Speech Acts

2. Discourse analysis

- Cohesion
- Coherence

3. The Cooperative Principles

Speech Acts:
Direct Speech Acts versus Indirect Speech Acts

Speech acts are acts that refer to the action performed by produced utterances. People can perform an action by saying something. We use the term speech act to describe actions such as “requesting,” “commanding,” “questioning” or “informing.” We can define a speech act as the action performed by a speaker with an utterance. If you say, I’ll be there at six, you are not just speaking, you seem to be performing the speech act of “promising.”

Direct Speech Acts and **Indirect Speech Acts** are two different ways in which language can be used to convey meaning and intentions in communication. They are concepts within the field of pragmatics, which is the study of how language is used in context.

Direct Speech Acts

These are examples of **direct speech acts**: the act is expressed overtly by the most obvious linguistic means.

- (I state that:) It's cold.
- (I ask you:) What's the time?
- (I command you:) Go away!

We usually use certain syntactic structures with the functions listed beside them in the following :

	Structures	Functions
Did you eat the pizza?	Interrogative	Question
Eat the pizza (please)!	Imperative	Command (Request)
You ate the pizza.	Declarative	Statement

Direct Speech Acts

When an interrogative structure such as:

Did you…?

Are they…? or

Can we…?

It is used with the function of a question, described as a direct speech act. For example, when we don’t know something and ask someone to provide the information, we usually produce a direct speech act such as:

Can you ride a bicycle?

Examples of Direct Speech Acts

Examples	Speech act	Syntactic Structure	Function
The weather is beautiful today.	direct	declarative	statement
Pass the salt, please.	direct	imperative	request
Close the door behind you.	direct	imperative	command
Watch out for that slippery floor!	direct	imperative	command (warning)
Is the service good here?	direct	interrogative	question

Indirect Speech Acts

However, many speech acts are indirect, in that they possess the syntactic structure more usually associated with another act. For example, the following might all be intended as commands, yet only the first has the typical command structure:

- **Go to bed!**
- **Isn't it past your bedtime?**
- **You should have been in bed long ago**.

Linguistic Expression	Speech act	Structure	Function
Go to bed!	direct	imperative	command
Isn't it past your bedtime?	indirect	interrogative	command
You should have been in bed long ago.	indirect	declarative	command

Indirect speech acts

An example: ***Can you pass the salt?*** In this second example, we are not really asking a question about someone's ability. In fact, we don't normally use this structure as a question at all. We normally use it to make a request. That is, we are using a syntactic structure associated with the function of a question, but in this case with the function of a request. **Another example**: ***You left the door open***. It has a declarative structure and, as a direct speech act, would be used to make a statement. However, if you say this to someone who has just come in (and it's really cold outside), you would probably want that person to close the door. You are not using the imperative structure. You are using a declarative structure to make a request.

Linguistic Expression	Speech Act	Structure	Function
Can you pass the salt?	indirect	interrogative	request
You left the door open.	indirect	declarative	request

Examples of Indirect Speech Acts

Examples	Speech act	Syntactic Structure	Function
The salt is quite far from me.	indirect	declarative	request
You have a great sense of style.	indirect	declarative	compliment
You might want to reconsider your decision.	indirect	declarative	threat
If I were you, I'd study for the exam.	indirect	declarative	advice
It's chilly in here.	indirect	declarative	request

Features of Direct Speech Acts

1. Direct speech acts are straightforward and explicit expressions of a speaker's intention.

2. They convey the speaker's message clearly and directly without relying on the context or additional cues.

3. In a direct speech act, **the illocutionary force = function** (the speaker's intended function of the speech act) matches **the locutionary force = structure** (the actual words spoken). Examples of direct speech acts include **statements**, **questions**, **commands**, and **requests**. Example of a direct speech act: Speaker: "*Please, pass me the salt*.“

Locutionary Force (Structure): imperative = "Please, pass me the salt."
Illocutionary Force (Function): request

Features of Indirect Speech Acts

1. Indirect speech acts rely on context, social norms, and implicature to convey the speaker's intention.

2. The illocutionary force is not directly expressed through the locutionary force. Instead, it is implied, and the listener is expected to infer the intended meaning.

3. Indirect speech acts often involve polite or indirect language to convey requests, suggestions, offers, or refusals without being overly direct.

Locutionary Force (Structure): interrogative="It's cold in here, isn't it?"

Illocutionary Force (Function): request (to close the window or adjust the temperature)

Exercise: There are certain syntactic structures with specific functions in the following examples which can be described as direct or indirect speech acts. Specify them.

Examples	Speech act	Syntactic Structure	Function
Let me know if there's anything I can do.			
I love Italian food.			
Is it okay if I check my email?			
What time is it?			
I don't know what I would have done without you.			

Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis

When we ask how we make **sense** of what we read, how we can recognize **well-constructed texts** as opposed to those that are jumbled or incoherent, how we understand speakers who **communicate more than they say**, and how we successfully take part in that complex activity called conversation, we are undertaking what is known as **discourse analysis**.

The word "**discourse**" is usually defined as: "language beyond the sentence" and so the analysis of discourse is typically concerned with the study of language in texts and conversation.

Discourse Analysis

When we concentrate on the description of a particular language, we are normally concerned with the accurate representation of the forms and structures used in that language. However, as language users, we are capable of more than simply recognizing correct versus incorrect forms and structures.

We can also make sense of notices like "**No shoes, No service**", on shop windows in summer, understanding that a conditional relation exists between the two parts:

If you are wearing no shoes, you will receive no service.

Discourse Analysis

Cohesion and **coherence** are the two properties used in discourse analysis and text linguistics to determine the quality of any content written.

Cohesion means sticking together different sentences, phrases, and paragraphs with each other.

Coherence includes properties like consistency and understandability of the content and how using logically connected and related sentences while representing your ideas and transiting from one idea to another.

Cohesion

We know that texts must have a certain structure that depends on factors quite different from those required in the structure of a single sentence. Some of those factors are described in terms of cohesion, or the ties and connections that exist within texts. A number of those types of cohesive ties can be identified in the following paragraph.

My father once bought a Lincoln convertible. He did it by saving every penny he could. That car would be worth a fortune nowadays. However, he sold it to help pay for my college education. Sometimes I think I'd rather have the convertible.

Cohesive Ties

There are connections present here in the use of words to maintain a reference to the same people and things throughout: father – he – he – he; my – my – I; Lincoln – it. There are connections between phrases such as: a Lincoln convertible – that car – the convertible. There are more general connections created by a number of terms that share a common element of meaning, such as “ money ” (bought – saving – penny – worth a fortune – sold – pay) and “time” (once – nowadays – sometimes).

There is also a connector (However) that marks the relationship of what follows to what went before. The verb tenses in the first four sentences are all in the past, creating a connection between those events, and a different time is indicated by the present tense of the final sentence.

Cohesive Ties

Analysis of these cohesive ties within a text gives us some insight into how writers structure what they want to say. An appropriate number of cohesive ties may be a crucial factor in our judgments on whether something is well-written or not. Cohesive ties can be classified into four major categories. These are the following:

- **Reference**
- **Substitution**
- **Ellipsis**
- **Conjunction**

Cohesive Ties

- **Reference**

Personals (He, him, they, them, theirs, it, its, etc. Three young businessmen had lunch together. THEY ended up drinking too much.

Demonstrative (this, these, that, those, here, there, then) Dr. Forbes drove two miles out of town to seem Mrs. Jones. Two days later, he drove THERE again.

Comparatives (same, equal, better, more, identically, so) John sold three tires for the price of one. Jack asked him, "Won't you give me the SAME deal?"

Cohesive Ties

- **Substitution**: This type of cohesive tie places one item with another. My razor is dull. I need a new ONE.

- **Ellipsis**: The tie omits an item that is assumed. I can only remember the names of 48 states. I need to name TWO MORE. (Hint: two more what?)
- **Conjunction**: Like and, but, so, next, etc. They create an instance of semantic connection in which the conjunctive item receives a cohesive emphasis that characterizes the relationship between the two sentences.

He is cheap sometimes. BUT, he can be generous when he wants to.

They'll be back at 10 o'clock. SO come over early.

Exercise 1: Some cohesive ties are used in the following paragraph. Identify them, then mention their categories.

Once a wise man held a seminar to teach people how to get rid of sorrows in their life. Many people gathered to hear the wise man's words. The man entered the room and told a hilarious joke to the crowd. The crowd roared in laughter.

After a couple of minutes, he told them the same joke, and only a few of them smiled.

When he told the same joke for the third time, no one laughed anymore.

The wise man smiled and said," You can't laugh at the same joke over and over. So why do you cry over the same problem over and over?"

Exercise 2: Some cohesive ties are used in the following paragraph. Identify them, then mention their categories.

A wise and successful man bought a beautiful house with a vast orchard. But, not all were happy for him. An envious man lived in an old house next to him. He constantly tried to make his fellow neighbor's stay in the beautiful house as miserable as possible. He threw garbage under his gate and did other nasty things.

One fine day the wise man woke up in a good mood and went into the porch to notice buckets of garbage thrown there. The man took a bucket and cleaned his porch. He carried a bucket and went to knock on his envious neighbor's door.

The envious neighbor heard a knock at his door and gleefully thought, "I finally got him!". He answered his door, ready to quarrel with his prosperous neighbor. However, the wise man gave him a bucket of freshly picked apples, saying, "The one who is rich in something, shares it with others."

Coherence

It is the other factor that leads us to distinguish connected texts that make sense from those that do not. The key to the concept of coherence (“everything fitting together well”) is not something that exists in words or structures, but something that exists in people.

It is people who “make sense” of what they read and hear. They try to arrive at an interpretation that is in line with their experience of the way the world is. You would have to create meaningful connections that are not actually expressed by the words and sentences.

Coherence

It is certainly present in the interpretation of casual conversation. We are continually taking part in conversational interactions where a great deal of what is meant is not actually present in what is said. Here is a good example:

HER: That’s the telephone.

HIM: I’m in the bath.

HER: O.K.

There are certainly no cohesive ties within this fragment of discourse. It is clear that language users must have a lot of knowledge of how conversation works that is not simply “linguistic ” knowledge.

Exercise 1: The properties of cohesion and coherence are used in the following paragraph. Identify them

There once lived a wealthy man who was bothered by severe eye pain. He consulted many physicians, but none could treat his ache. He went through a myriad of treatment procedures, but his pain persisted with more vigor. He looked for every available solution for his pain and approached a wise monk renowned for treating various illnesses. The monk carefully observed the man's eyes and offered a very peculiar solution. The monk told the man to concentrate only on the green color for a few weeks and avoid other colors. The man was desperate to get rid of the pain and was determined, ready to go to any extent. The wealthy man appointed a group of painters, purchased green paint barrels and directed that every object, his eye was likely to fall to be painted green.

After a few weeks, the monk came to visit the man to follow up on the man's progress. As the monk walked towards the man's room, the appointed painter poured a bucket of green paint on the monk. The monk could see that the whole corridor and the room were painted green. As the monk inquired about the reason for painting everything green, the wealthy man said that he was only following the monk's advice to look at only green. Hearing this, the monk laughed and said, "If only you had purchased a pair of green spectacles worth just a few dollars, You could have saved a large share of your fortune. You cannot paint the world green." So, let us change our vision, and the world will appear accordingly.

The Cooperative Principle

The Cooperative Principle

The cooperative principle describes how people achieve effective conversational communication in common social situations—that is, how listeners and speakers act cooperatively and mutually accept one another to be understood in a particular way.

The Cooperative Principle

An American philosopher, Paul Grice, is sometimes regarded as **'the father of pragmatics'**.

Grice emphasized that human beings can communicate well because they are by nature helpful to one another. He attempted to specify the principles which underlie **this cooperative behaviour.** Grice maintains that people follow certain principles to conduct successful interaction and avoid misunderstanding.

The Cooperative Principle

Paul Grice proposes four **'maxims'** or rules of conversation which can jointly be summarized as a general principle: 'Be cooperative'. These are given below.

1.The Quantity maxim: Make your contribution as informative as is required, but not more, or less, than is required.

2.The Quality maxim: Do not say that which you believe to be false or for which you lack adequate evidence.

3. The Relation maxim: Be relevant.

4.The Manner maxim: Be clear and orderly.

Quantity Maxim :
content length and depth

In simple terms, the maxim of quantity is to **be informative.**

- Make your contribution as **informative** as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
- Do not make your contribution **less** or **more** informative than is required. Avoid unnecessary prolixity (verbosity).

Quantity Maxim

To give the right amount of information when you talk.

For example, if someone at a party asked "Who's that person with Bob?

- **A cooperative reply** would be That's his sister, Alison'.

- **An uncooperative reply** would be **an over-brief one**, such as 'A girl', or **an over-long one**, such as That's Alison Margaret Jones, born in Kingston, Surrey on 4th July 1970, daughter of Peter and Mary Jones... etc'

Quality Maxim:
Be truthful

In simple terms, the maxim of quality is to **be truthful.**

- Try to make your contribution one that is **true**.
- Do not say what you believe is **false**.
- Do not say that for which you **lack** adequate evidence.

Quality Maxim

For example, if someone asked you the name of an unfamiliar animal, such as a **platypus**, reply truthfully, and don't say 'It's a **kookaburra**', or 'It's a **duck**', if you know it's a platypus or not.

kookaburra

platypus

Relation Maxim:
maxim of relevance

Be relevant. For example, if someone says, **'What's for supper?**

- Give a reply which fits the question, such as:

'Fish and chips'

- Do not give an **irrelevant** reply such as:

'Tables and chairs' or

'Buttercups are yellow'

Manner Maxim:
Be clear

The manner maxim is concerned with how what is said is said.

- **Avoid ambiguity** — i.e., avoid language that can be interpreted in multiple ways.

- **Be orderly** — i.e., provide information in an order that makes sense, and makes it easy for the recipient to process it.

Manner Maxim

Be clear and orderly.

For example, describe things in the order in which they occurred: ' **The plane taxied down the runway, and took off to the west**' rather than '**The plane took off to the west and taxied down the runway**', which might confuse people as to what actually happened.

Violation of the Grice's Maxims

This means that we break the maxims overtly (clearly) or covertly (unclearly), so that other people do not know.

- If we violate the quality maxim, we **lie**.
- If we violate the quantity maxim, we give **less** or **more** required information.
- If we violate the relation maxim, we say something **irrelevant**.
- If we violate the manner maxim, we say something **ambiguous**.

Violation of Maxims
Quality (not truthful)

Violation, according to Grice, takes place when speakers intentionally avoid to apply certain maxims in their conversation to cause misunderstanding on their participants' part or to achieve some other purposes.

The following is an example of violation in the quality maxim:

Mother: *Did you study all day long?*

Son (*who has been playing all day long): Yes, I've been studying all day long!*

In this exchange, the boy is not truthful and violates the maxim of quality. He lies to avoid unpleasant consequences such as; punishment or to be forced to study for the rest of the day.

Violation of Maxims: Quantity (not informative)

An example

John: Where have you been? I searched everywhere for you during the past three months!

Mike: I wasn't around. So, what's the big deal?

John poses a question, which he needs to be answered by Mike. What Mike says in return does not lack the truth, however is still insufficient. This can be due to the fact that Mike prefers to refrain from providing John with the answer. John's sentence implies that Mike has not been around otherwise he did not have to search everywhere. Mike **does not say as much as it is necessary** to make his contribution cooperative. Hence, he leaves his listener unsatisfied.

Violation of Maxims:
Relation (irrelevant)

An example

Teacher: *Why didn't you do your homework?*

Student: *May I go and get some water? I'm so thirsty.*

In the above exchange, the student's answer is by **no means** relevant to the teacher's question. One reason for this answer can be the fact that the student is trying to avoid the question posed by the teacher.

Violation of Maxims:
Manner (unclear)

Another example

Sarah: *Did you enjoy the party last night?*

Anna: *There was plenty of oriental food on the table, lots of flowers all over the place, people hanging around chatting with each other…*

Sara asked a very simple question, however what she receives from Anna is a protracted (lengthened) description of what was going on in the party. Two interpretations can be made from Anna's description: 1. Anna had such a good time in the party that she is obviously too excited and has no idea where to begin. 2. Anna had such a terrible time and she does not know how to complain about it. So, here, we have an ambiguity.

Practice:

Give examples to Grice's maxims then give other examples of violating them:

Maxims	Examples of Maxims	Examples of violating them
Quality		
Quantity		
Relation		
Manner		

Flouting of Maxims

Unlike the violation of maxims, which takes place to cause misunderstanding on the part of the listener, the flouting of maxims takes place when individuals deliberately (consciously) cease to apply the maxims to persuade their listeners to infer the hidden meaning behind the utterances.

In the case of flouting of cooperative maxims, the speaker desires the greatest understanding in his/her recipient (listener) because it is expected that this recipient is able to uncover the hidden meaning behind the utterances.

Flouting of the Quality Maxim

People may flout the maxim of quality so as to deliver implicitly a sarcastic (ironic) tone in what they state. As in:

Teacher to a student who arrives late more than ten minutes to the class meeting:

Teacher: *Wow! You're such a punctual fellow! Welcome to the class.*

Student: *Sorry sir! It won't happen again.*

It is obvious from what the teacher says that he is teasing the student and his purpose is, by no means, praising him. He exploits the maxim of quality (being truthful) to be sarcastic. Likewise, the student seems to notice the purpose behind the teacher's compliment and offers an apology in return.

Flouting of the Quantity Maxim

Individuals can flout the maxim of quantity to be humorous. Look at this example, Majid and Ali are talking on the phone:

Ali: *Where are you, Majid?*

Majid: *I'm in my clothes.*

Majid tells the truth because it is expected that people are always in some clothes, yet he flouts the maxim of quantity because the information is insufficient for Ali. While it is not what Ali really tries to find out, he still knows that Majid tries to convey a sense of humor.

Flouting of the Relation Maxim

Individuals may flout the relation maxim to avoid hurting the recipient's feelings:

Bob: *What were you and Anna talking about? You were looking at me all the time!*

Mary: *Oh, well… why don't we go get something to drink?*

Mary answers Bob question with a suggestion in an obvious attempt to evade it perhaps to avoid hurting Bob's feelings. Hence, she flouts the relation maxim.

Flouting of the Manner Maxim

Some individuals can exploit the maxim of manner, as well:

Wife: *Darling….. What's the story with that new watch on your wrist?*

Husband: *Oh, this watch you're talking about! I knew it… I told my boss that my wife would be curious when she sees it. Oh, honey you have no idea how much they're satisfied with my performance, lately!*

The husband would be better off if he told his wife from the beginning of the conversation that his boss awarded him a prize. However, he flouts the maxim of manner to assure his wife that the watch was a gift from a person that she also knew and there is no need for jealousy.

Practice:

Give examples to Grice's maxims then give other examples of flouting them:

Maxims	Examples of Maxims	Examples of flouting them
Quality		
Quantity		
Relation		
Manner		