

# Approaches to analyzing discourse

## Lecture 2

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# 1. The notion of discourse

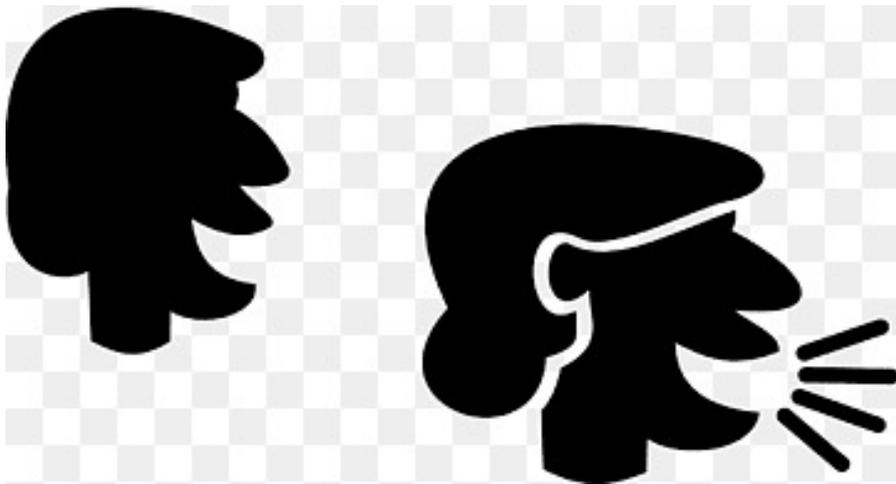
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**Discourse** – language use above the sentence (text) and beyond the sentence (context).



**Discourse** organizes our social lives, the understanding that structures our lives.



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- ***Discourse analysts*** focus on peoples' actual utterances and try to figure out what processes make those utterances appear the way they do.

# What do people do through discourse?

Represent	represent the world
Convey	convey communicative intentions
Organize	organize thoughts into communicative actions
Arrange	arrange information so it is accessible to others
Engage in	engage in actions and interactions with one another
Convey	convey their identities and relationships

# Van Dijk singles out 3 dimensions to discourse

(a) language use (who uses language + how + why + when)

(b) communication of beliefs

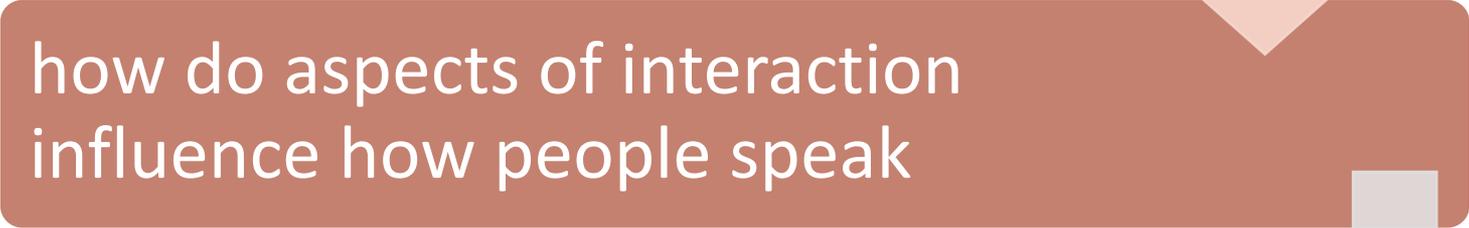
(c) interaction in social situations

# *Discourse studies: integrated descriptions*

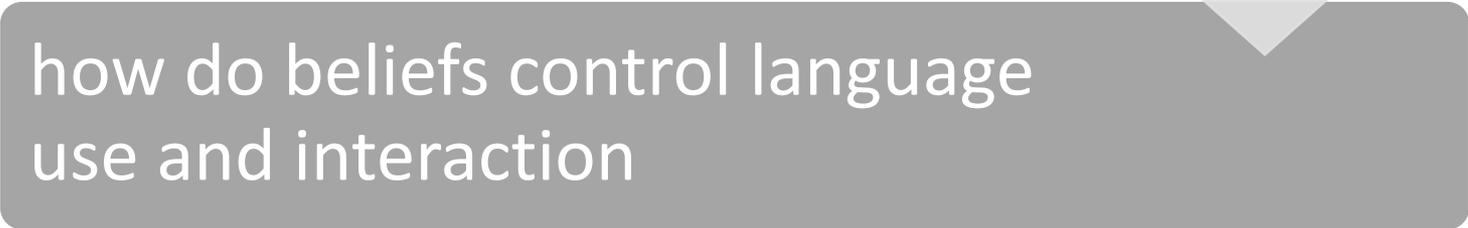
how does language use influence beliefs and interaction

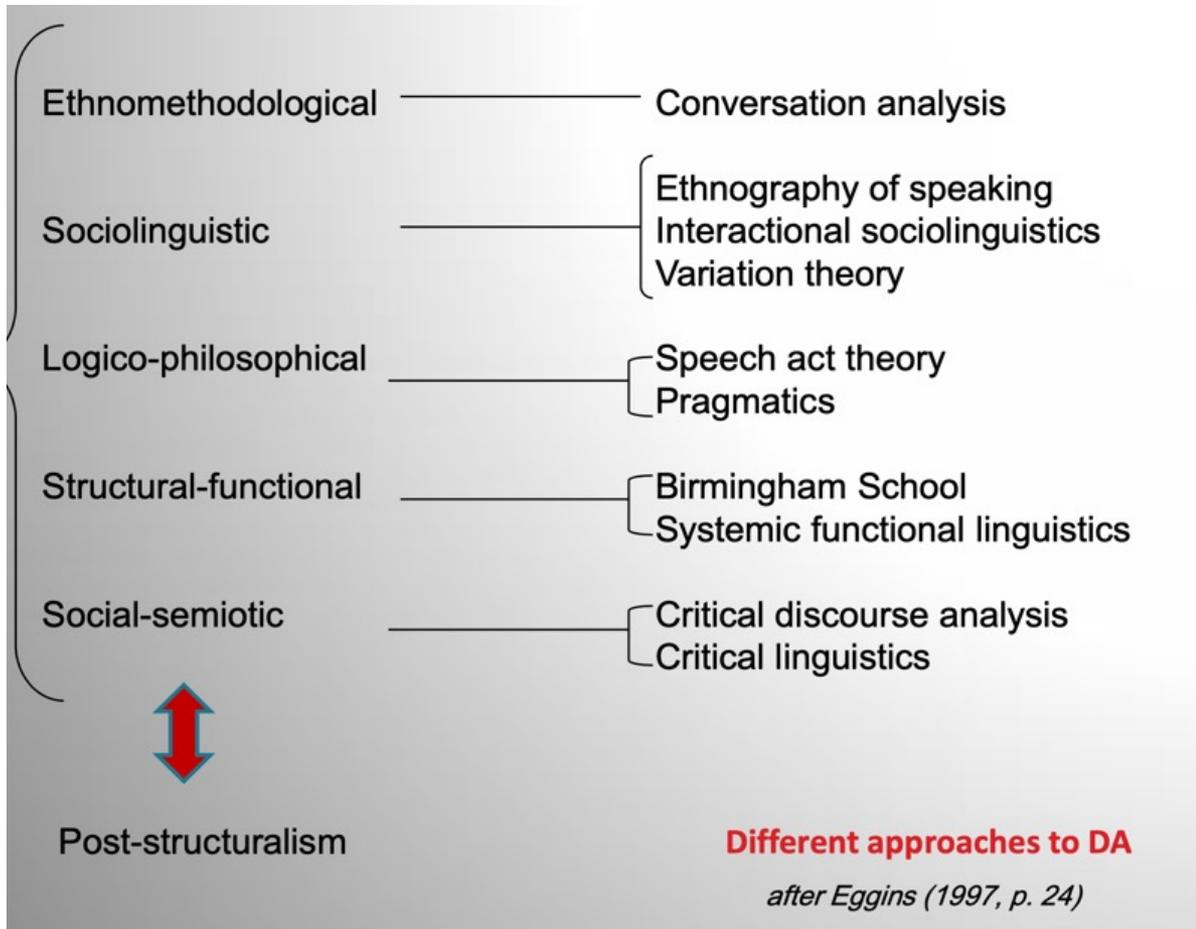


how do aspects of interaction influence how people speak



how do beliefs control language use and interaction





Approaches  
to the  
linguistic  
analysis of  
discourse



1. *Formal approach*

Discourse is defined as  
'language above the level of  
the clause or sentence' →

understand the kinds of  
rules that govern the ways  
people join clauses and  
sentences together to make  
texts.

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Discourse as 'language in use' ⇒

2. *Functional approach*

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how people use language  
to do things like make requests, issue warnings, and apologize, how we interpret

### *3. Social approach*

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Discourse as a kind of social practice →

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what we believe to be right and wrong, who has power over whom, and what we have to do and say to 'fit in' to our societies



# 1.1. Language use above and beyond the sentence

- Much of what keeps people and societies together depends crucially on language.

# What is there about language that lets us engage in a wide range of activities?

- ✓ Sounds, morphemes, lexical items, sentences are put together in discourse.
- ✓ It is by examining **units larger than sentences**, then, that discourse analysts go “above” the sentence.





*Zellig Harris* introduced the notion of '*discourse*'

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- how sentences are put together to form texts.
- how the texts are related to the social situations in which they occur.
- It is by examining **aspects of the world in which language is used** that discourse analysts go “beyond” the sentence.

What does  
the  
construction  
of discourse  
involve?

*Linguistic  
processes*

- arranging  
sentences
- conveying  
meanings

*Cognitive  
processes*

- organizing  
thoughts  
into verbal  
form

Discourse processes draw on

**interactional roles**

*who is speaking?  
who is listening?*

**social relationships**

one's role in a family or one's socioeconomic status

**cultural models**

what we should do, what kinds of people we should be.

- ✓ Discourse has **coherence** – it conveys meaning that is greater than the sum of its parts.
- ✓ Discourse is a **unit of language above and beyond** a mere accumulation of sounds, morphemes, words, clauses, and sentences.



## 1.2. Language use in everyday life

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- **1. Spoken discourse**
- examine actual samples of people interacting with each other in everyday situations
- how, when we say things, we are actually doing things: *apologizing, promising, threatening*
- the form of language is governed by **communicative competence** – our knowledge about how to use language in different speech situations

## 2. Role of discourse in certain kinds of activities

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- conversations between customers and the cashier
- communication between the cashier and the person making the coffee
- chatting, etc.



## *Mediated discourse analysis: 'What's going on here?'*

Different kinds of actions and different kinds of discourse are associated with different kinds of people

- ✓ mediated discourse analysis tries to understand the relationships between '*what's going on*' and the discourse that is available in the situation;
- ✓ how discourse is relevant to 'real life':
  - how different texts and conversations are linked to the real-time actions
  - how these linkages work to create social identities ('friends', 'colleagues', 'teachers', 'customers') and social practices (like 'teaching a lesson' or 'having a cup of coffee').

How people try to communicate their interpretation of a situation or to manage their relationships with other people.

### **i. Face strategies**

People 'wear' different faces for different people

3. Using discourse strategically

*i. face  
strategies*

- ***Involvement strategies***  
are strategies people use  
to communicate  
friendliness or solidarity
- ***independence strategies***  
are strategies people use  
to communicate respect  
or deference

## Involvement strategies

- used to establish '*closeness*' with the people with whom we are interacting – to show them that we consider them our friends:

- *calling people by their first names*
- *using nicknames*
- *using informal language*
- *showing interest in someone by asking personal questions*

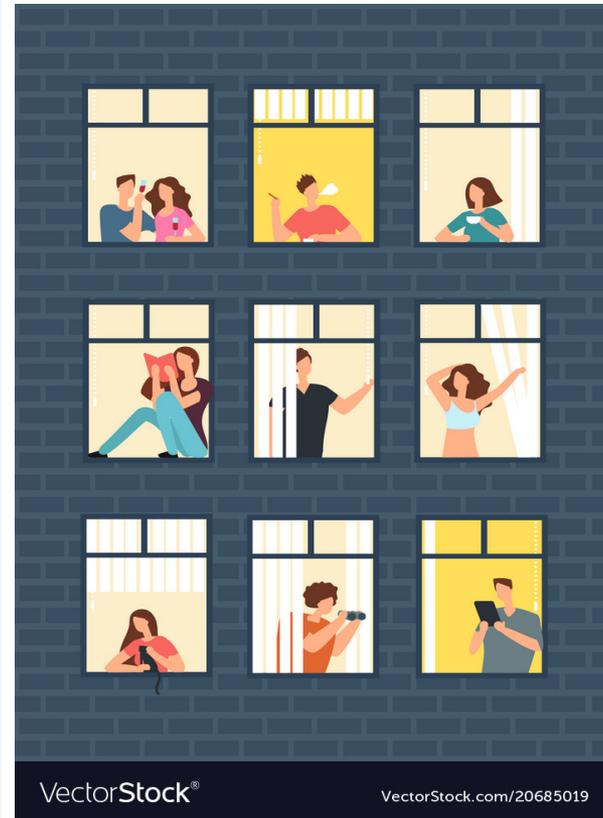
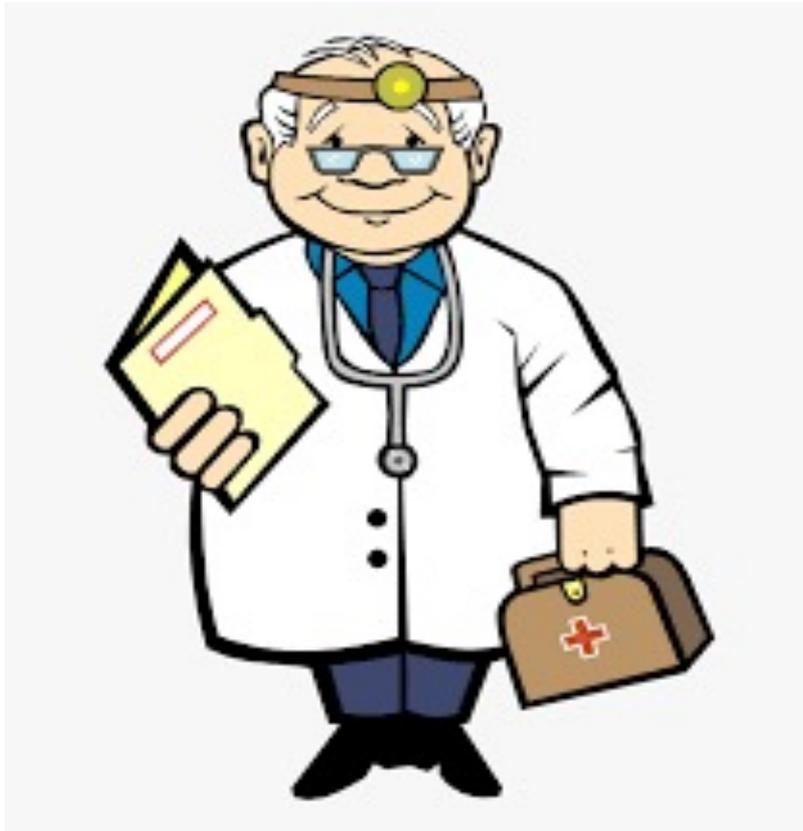
## Independence strategies

- used to establish distance from the people with whom we are interacting
- formal language and terms of address:
  - Using titles: *Good morning, Professor Jones!*
  - Apologizing: *I'm terribly sorry to bother you.*
  - Admitting differences: *Of course, you know much more about it than I do.*
  - Using formal language: *Pardon me, can you spare a few moments?*
  - Being indirect and hedging: *I wonder if you might possibly drop by.*

## *ii. framing strategies*

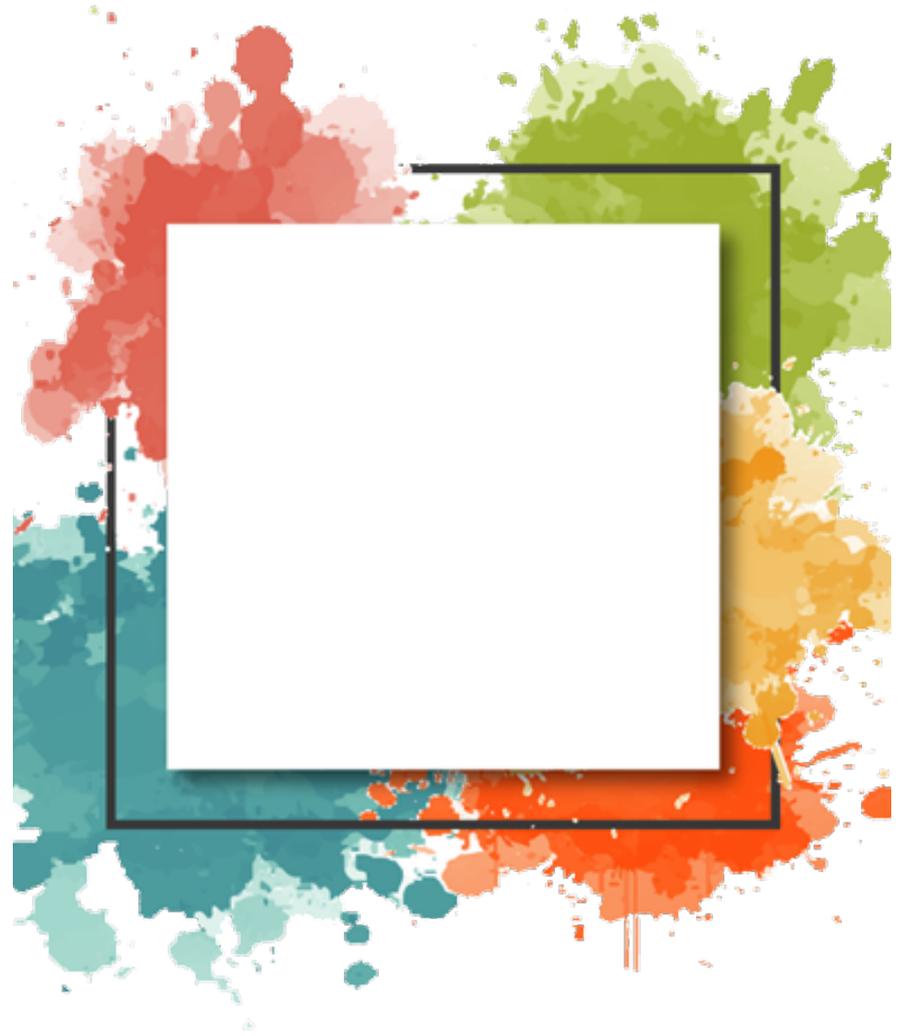
- showing what people are doing
- the degree, to which people are imposing on other people

*'please take off your clothes'*



meanings of many utterances change based on what people are doing when they utter them

For different kinds of activities we have different sets of expectations. They are called frames.





# Framing and contextualization cues

- Whenever people speak, they communicate not just the message, but also information about what they think they are doing and how the words should be interpreted.
  - These signals are called *contextualization cues*
  - **Framing** operates by providing *contextual cues* that guide decision making and inferences drawn by message audiences.
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## Verbal contextualization cues

people signal what they are doing through the choice of ***topic***, ***vocabulary***, ***grammar***, the ***language*** they use

Doctor:

small talk →

weather →

local sports team →

‘talking like a doctor’



## Non-verbal contextualization cues

- *gestures, facial expressions, gaze, use of space*
- *paralinguistic signals: alterations in the pitch, speed, rhythm or intonation*

Contextualization cues do not contain information about what people think they are doing, but activate culturally conditioned assumptions about context, interactional goals and interpersonal relationships

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# There are two kinds of frames

## broader primary frameworks

- consist of the relatively stable sets of expectations people bring to particular situations
- *lectures, medical consultations*

## smaller interactive frames

- consist of ideas about what people are doing moment by moment in a conversation
- change rapidly in the course of an interaction

Shifts in frames ⇔ through *discourse markers*

*okay, so, well, anyway*

formal connectors: *first, next, however*

A lecturer move from the pre-lecture chatting and **milling around frame** → to the **formal lecture frame**

*'Okay, let's get started...'*

A doctor move from **small talk** → to the **formal medical examination**

*'So, how are you feeling?'*



## Framing strategies play an important role in **managing relationships**

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To **frame** is to *select* some aspects of perceived reality and *make them more salient* in the communicating text, in such a way as to *promote* a particular *problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation* and/or *treatment recommendation* for the item described (R. Entman)



### 1.3. Language and ‘Social practice’

**Language** is seen not just as a system for making meaning, but as **part of larger systems** through which people **construct social identities and social realities**.

**Michel Foucault** (1926–1984) argued that **discourse** is the main tool through which **we construct ‘knowledge’ and exert power** over other people.

**Ideology** is a specific set of beliefs and assumptions people have about things like what is good and bad, what is right and wrong, and what is normal and abnormal.

Discourse is always '*ideological*'.  
It serves the interests of certain people over others.

Words are never neutral.

Texts promote a particular ideology.



- ✓ Ideologies provide people with models of how the world is 'supposed to be'.
- ✓ Ideologies help to create a shared worldview and sense of purpose among people.
- ✓ Ideologies limit the way people look at reality and tend to marginalize or exclude altogether things and ideas that do not fit into these models

Some news about Russia is privileged over other in the British media

- News content directly representing Russia as initiator of information war.
- (1) *Based on what we know about Russian information warfare, the Twitter accounts run by the country's 'troll army', based in a nondescript office building in St Petersburg, are unlikely to be automated at all.* (The Guardian, 07.01.2018).
- (2) *Russia vs the West: Is this a new Cold War?* (BBC News, 31.03.2018).
- Russia is imputed an image of aggressor.





## 2. Spoken and written discourse



**Deborah Shiffrin (1951-2017)**

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In **spoken discourse**, different kinds of processes work rapidly together to produce coherence.

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When people speak, they try to achieve several goals: verbalize thoughts, introduce new information, repair errors, take turns at talk, think of others, and perform acts.

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They achieve these goals by using a range of different units – speech acts, idea units, turns at talk, sentences.

Written texts **differ** from spoken discourse

## *1. Fragmentation and integration*

- When speaking, we can move rapidly from one idea to another, resulting in **fragmentation** - the segmentation of information into small chunks of language that present one idea at a time.
- When writing, we have time to mold a group of ideas into a complex whole in which various types of information are **integrated** into sentences.

**Integration** is the arrangement of information into long, syntactically complex chunks of language that present more than one idea at a time.

## 2. *The role of the recipient*

The recipient is a co-participant in the discourse in two ways:

- (a) the recipient provides *feedback* through back channels or by asking for clarification
- (b) the recipient gets a chance to become a speaker

Writers have to anticipate the informational needs of their intended recipients, as well as what will maintain readers' interest, *without the immediate feedback*.

# Rodney H. Jones

1. *Speech is more interactive.*
2. *Speech tends to be more transient and spontaneous than writing.*
3. *Speech tends to be less explicit than writing.*





3.

# Interpreting Discourse

*headline: Trains collide, two die*

essay by a student learning English:

Complex  
interpretations  
of fragmentary  
linguistic  
messages

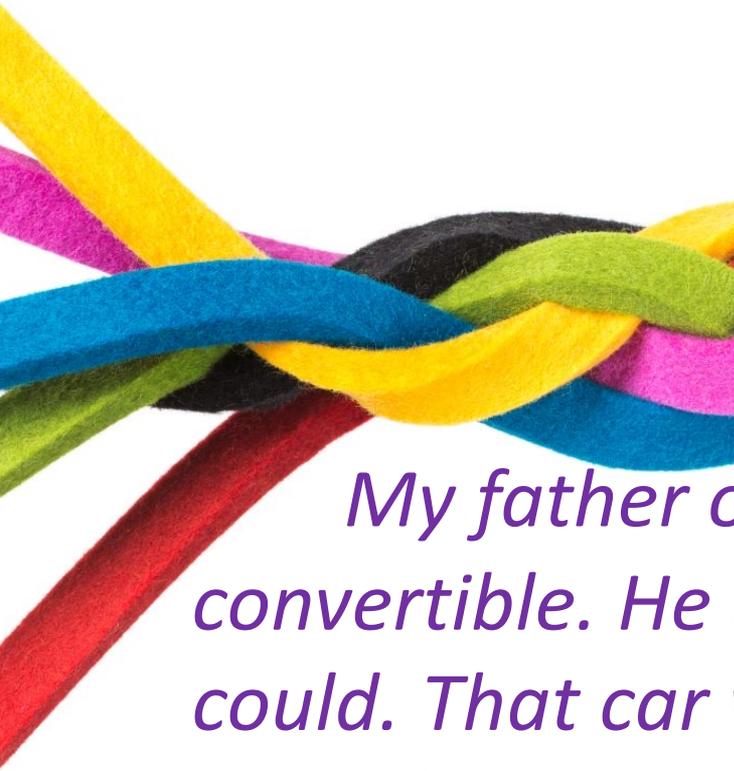
### *My Town*

*My natal was in a small town, very close to Riyadh capital of Saudi Arabia. The distant between my town and Riyadh 7 miles exactly. The name of this Almasani that means in English Factories. It takes this name from the peopl's carrer. In my childhood I remmeber the people live. It was very simple. Most the people was farmer.*

⇒ people try to arrive at a reasonable interpretation

# 3.1. Cohesion

- the **ties** and **connections** that exist within texts



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Find elements of cohesion  
in the following text:

*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.*

- reference to the same people and things:  
*father – he – he – he; my – my – I; Lincoln – it*
- connections between phrases:  
*a Lincoln convertible – that car – the convertible*
- general connections created by terms that share a common element of meaning: **money** and **time**  
*bought – saving – penny – worth a fortune – sold – pay  
once – nowadays – sometimes*
- a connector (*However*) marks the relationship of what follows to what went before
- verb tenses in the first four sentences are 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 within a text gives us some insight into how writers structure what they want to say. However, cohesion would not be sufficient to enable people to make sense of what they read.

*My father bought a Lincoln convertible. The car driven by the police was red. That color doesn't suit her. She consists of three letters. However, a letter isn't as fast as a telephone call.*

- ☞ Cohesion is the quality in a text that forces you to look either backward or forward in the text in order to make sense of the things you read.
- ☞ The “connectedness” we experience in our interpretation of texts is not simply based on connections between words.

## 3.2. Coherence

- is not something that exists in words or structures, but something that exists **in people**

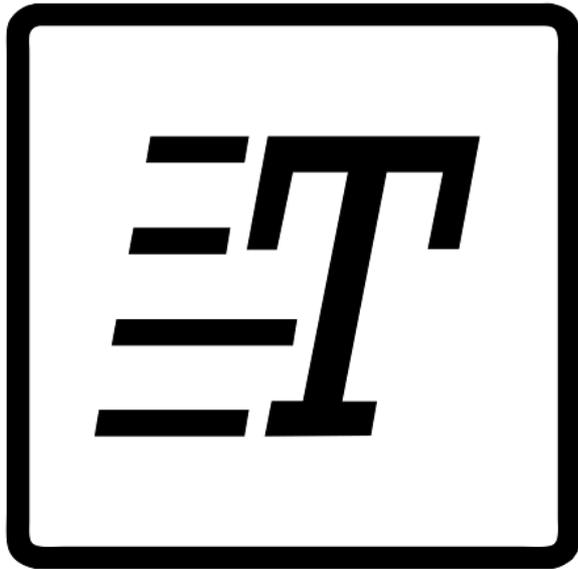


Trying to arrive at an interpretation, people create meaningful connections that are not expressed by the words and sentences. A great deal of what is meant is not present in what is said.

her: *That's the telephone.*

him: *I'm in the bath.*

her: *O.K.*



- ***Cohesion*** primarily has to do with *linguistic features in the text*.
- ***Coherence*** has to do with the kind of *'framework'* with which the reader approaches the text and what he or she wants to use the text to do.

# 4. Conversation analysis

**Conversation** - an activity in which two or more people take turns at speaking.

For the most part, participants wait until one speaker indicates that he or she has finished, usually by signaling a *completion point*.

Speakers can mark their turns as complete in a number of ways: by asking a question, by pausing at the end of a completed syntactic structure.

- **Conversation analysis** comes out of a tradition in sociology called **ethnomethodology**, which focuses on the ‘methods’ ordinary members of a society use to interact with one another and interpret their experience.



**Harvey Sacks**



**Gail Jefferson**



**Emanuel Schegloff**

- **Ethnomethodology** means studying the link between what social actors 'do' in interaction and what they 'know' about interaction.
- Following this line of enquiry, **conversation analysis** views language as a form of social action and aims to discover and describe how the organization of social interaction makes manifest and reinforces the structures of social organization.

The emphasis in Conversation analysis is on discovering the **structures of talk** that produce and reproduce patterns of social action.

One central Conversation analysis concept is **preference**, the idea that, at specific points in conversation, certain types of utterances will be more favoured than others.

Conversation analysis  
focuses on

**openings and closings of  
conversations**

(General **opening conversation**)

*Hi. How are you? How is it going? ...*

(When you have not seen the person for a long time)

*How have you been doing?; Long time no see. It's been a while! ...*

(General **closing conversation**)

*Sorry, but I got to go now. It was nice talking to you. I will talk to you soon.*



## adjacency pairs

- An **adjacency pair** is a two-part exchange in which the second utterance is functionally dependent on the first (in conventional greetings, invitations, and requests).
- Adjacency pairs include:  
question/answer; complaint/denial;  
offer/accept; request/grant;  
compliment/rejection; challenge/rejection

# Other conversational features

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**topic management** and **topic shift**

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**conversational repairs**

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**showing agreement and disagreement**

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introducing **bad news** and processes of **troubles-telling**

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mechanisms of **turn-taking**

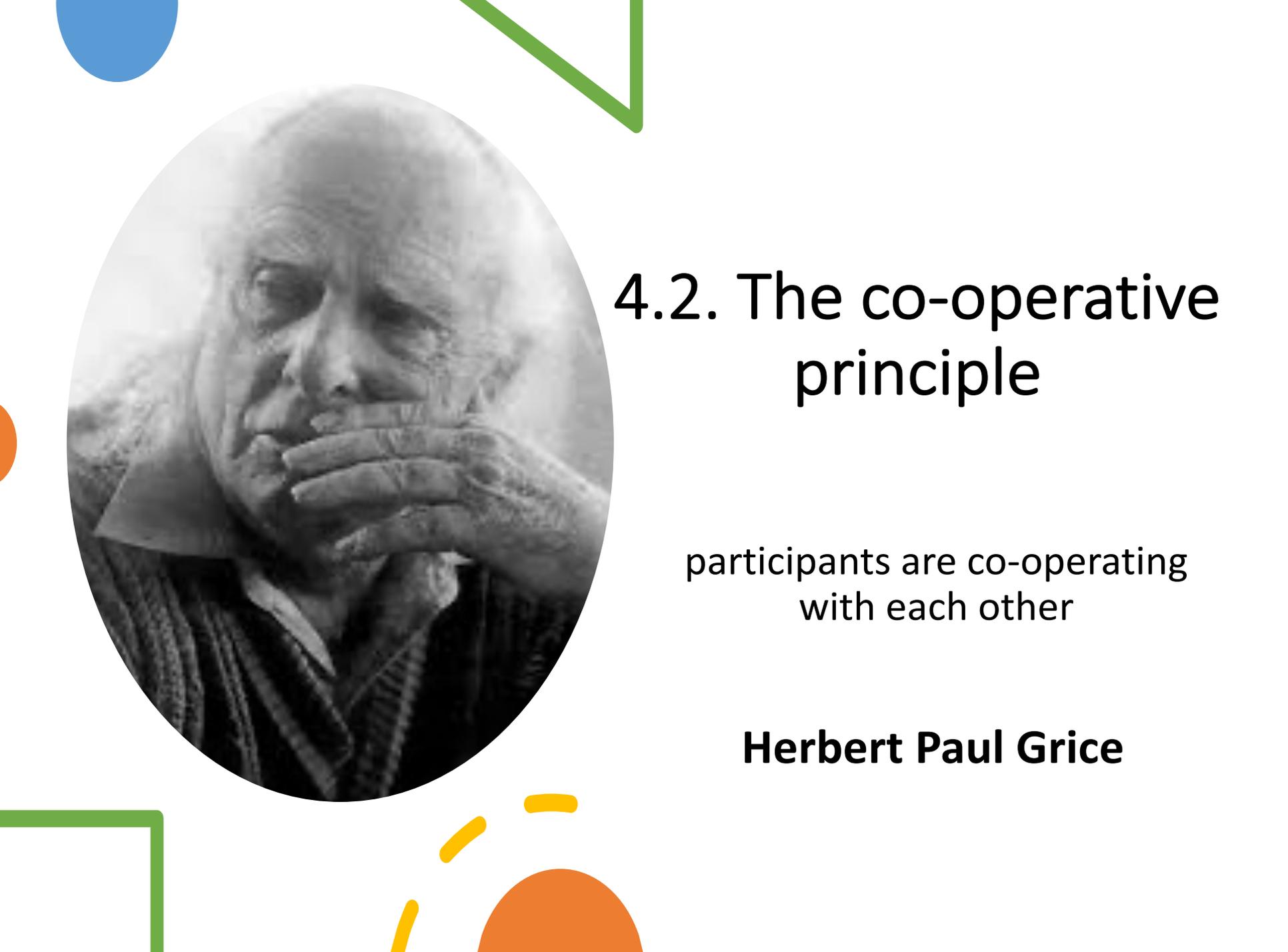


## 4.1. Turn-taking

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- The guiding principles for turn-taking in conversation:
  - speakers follow in taking turns to avoid gaps and overlaps in conversation
  - one party speaks at a time

People fill in 'slots' in discourse structure, they anticipate completion of an utterance on the basis of a perceived completion of a grammatical unit (sentence).



## 4.2. The co-operative principle

participants are co-operating  
with each other

**Herbert Paul Grice**

- Make your conversational contribution such as is required.
- **The Quantity maxim:** Make your contribution as informative as is required, but not more, or less, than is required.
- **The Quality maxim:** Do not say that which you believe to be false or for which you lack adequate evidence.
- **The Relation maxim:** Be relevant.
- **The Manner maxim:** Be clear, brief and orderly.

- We expect our conversational partners to make relevant and clear contributions to the interaction and to signal to us if these maxims are not being followed.

- Sometimes the cooperative principle may not seem to be in operation.

- *Oh, a sandwich is a sandwich.*



## 4.3. Hedges

words or phrases used to indicate that we're not really sure that what we're saying is sufficiently correct or complete:

- ❑ *sort of, kind of*
- ❑ *As far as I know, ...*
- ❑ *Correct me if I'm wrong, but ...*
- ❑ *I'm not absolutely sure, but ...*
- ❑ *think* or *feel* (not *know*)
- ❑ *possible* or *likely* (not *certain*)
- ❑ *may* or *could* (not *must*) *happen*



## 4.4. Implicatures



- *Carol: Are you coming to the party tonight?*
- *Lara: I've got an exam tomorrow.*

Lara is being relevant and informative, adhering to the maxims of **Relation** and **Quantity**.

## 4.5. Background knowledge

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- we use our background knowledge to arrive at interpretations of what we hear and read
- *John was on his way to school last Friday.*
- *He was really worried about the math lesson.*

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- readers can quickly abandon inferences if they do not fit in with some subsequent information

- *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.*

- ⇒ People create what the text is about on the basis of their expectations of what normally happens.

- ⇒ **schema** or a **script**

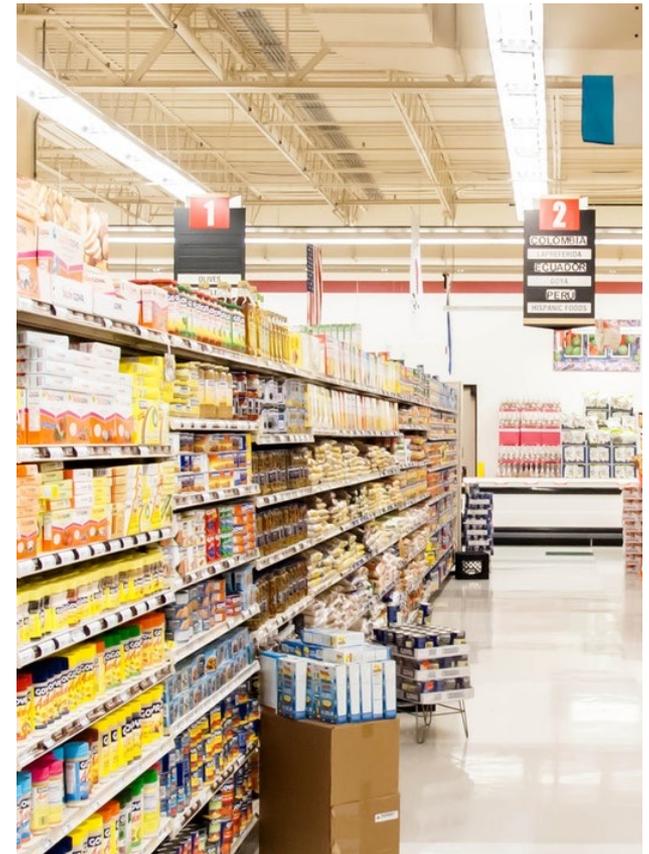
# Schema

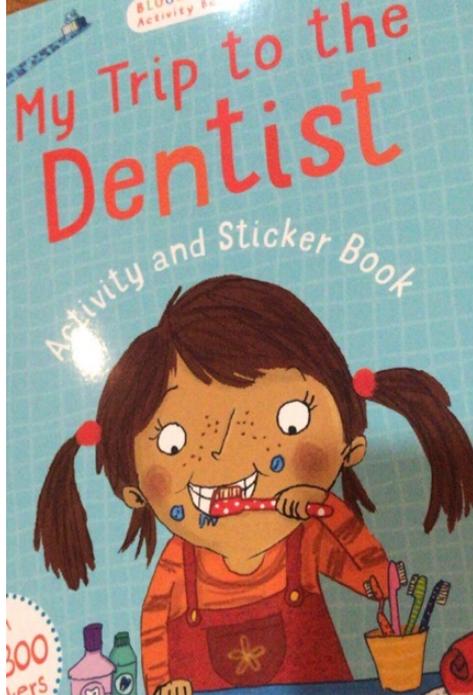
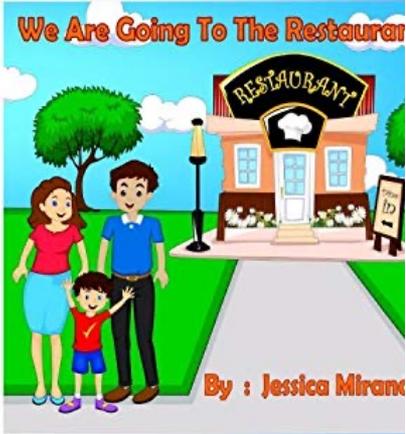
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- A **schema** is a general term for a conventional knowledge structure that exists in memory.

## *supermarket schema*

- food displayed on shelves, arranged in aisles
- shopping carts and baskets
- check-out counter
- other conventional features



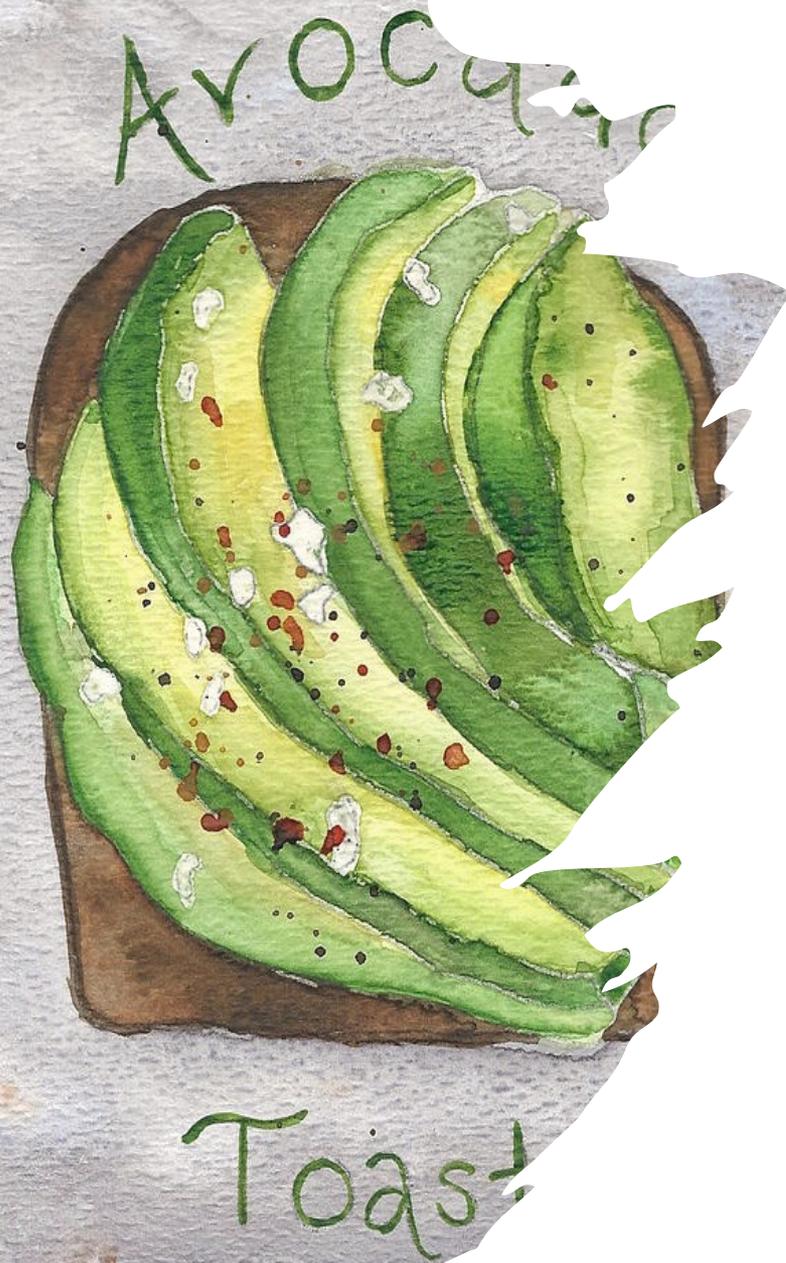


## Script

- A **script** is essentially a dynamic schema. It has a series of conventional actions that take place.

- *Going to the dentist*
- *Going to the movies*
- *Eating in a restaurant*





• *Trying not to be out of the office for long, Suzy went into the nearest place, sat down and ordered an avocado sandwich. It was quite crowded, but the service was fast, so she left a good tip. Back in the office, things were not going well.*

⇒ Our understanding of what we read is not only based on what we see on the page (**language structures**), but also on the things that we have in mind (**knowledge structures**).