[ˈpˌæktˌɪk.(ə)ɬ‿ˈɪŋ.glɪʃ fə.ˈn̩eˌt̩ɪks |] ⟵ (British English)

[ˈpˌæktˌɪkˌ(ə)ɬ‿ˈɪŋˌglɪʃ fəˌˈnẹtˌɪks |] ⟵ (British English)
Practical English Phonetics /

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

[ˈpˌækt.ɪk.(ə)ɬ◡ˈɪŋ.glɪʃ fə.ˈn̩ɛt.ɪks |] ⟵ (British English)
Practical English Phonetics /

[fə.ˈn̩ɛt.ɪks wɪð ˈlɪs.(ə)n.ɪŋ ˈpˌækt.ɪs ˈd͡ʒn̩ɛn.ɹəɬ ˈjˌuː.nɪt̚ ˈθɾiː]

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Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Practical English Phonetics /

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Phonetics with Listening Practice (General): Unit 3:

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

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Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

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- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Practical English Phonetics /

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φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

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Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
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- Rank
- Metafunction
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Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Practical English Phonetics /

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The syllable and its environments:

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
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- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Practical English Phonetics /

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φωv

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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φωv

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Practical English Phonetics /

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φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

[ˈpˌæktˌɪkˌ(ə)ɬ‿ˈɪŋˌglɪʃ fəˌˈnẹtˌɪks |] ⟵ (British English)
Practical English Phonetics /

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Fachrichtung Anglistik und Amerikanistik /
Fachrichtung Sprachwissenschaft und Sprachtechnologie,
Universität des Saarlandes

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

[ˈpˌækt.ɪk.(ə)ɬ◡ˈɪŋ.glɪʃ fə.ˈn̩t.ɪks |] ⟵ (British English)
Practical English Phonetics /

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Fachrichtung Sprachwissenschaft und Sprachtechnologie,
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[lə kɛ̃.ti.di sɛ̃k bʁy.mɛːʁ ɑ̃ dø.sɑ̃.tʁɑ̃t.sɛ̃k]

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

[ˈpˌ̊ækt.ɪk.(ə)ɬ◡ˈɪŋ.glɪʃ fə.ˈn̩et.ɪks |] ⟵ (British English)
Practical English Phonetics /

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Fachrichtung Anglistik und Amerikanistik /
Fachrichtung Sprachwissenschaft und Sprachtechnologie,
Universität des Saarlandes

[lə kɛ̃.ti.di sɛ̃k bʁy.mɛːʁ ɑ̃ dø.sɑ̃.tʁɑ̃t.sɛ̃k]
le quintidi cinq brumaire an CCXXXV

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Practical English Phonetics /

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Fachrichtung Anglistik und Amerikanistik /
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le quintidi cinq brumaire an CCXXXV

[tjˌuːz.de̞ɪ̯ ðə ˈtw̩e̞nt.i.ˈse̞v.(ə)n̪θ◡əv◡ɒk.ˈtʰəʊ̯b.ə ˈtw̩e̞nt.i.ˈtw̩e̞nt.i. ˈsɪks]

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le quintidi cinq brumaire an CCXXXV

[tjˌ̊uːz.de̞ɪ̯̊ ðə ˈtwe̞nt.i.ˈse̞v.(ə)n̪̊θ◡əv◡ɒk.ˈtʰəʊ̯̊b.ə ˈtwe̞nt.i.ˈtwe̞nt.i. ˈsɪks]
Tuesday 27 October 2026

φωv

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

Unit 3

The syllable and its environments

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Slides for the session of
Practical English Phonetics /
Phonetics with Listening Practice (British & General)
held on
le quintidi 5 brumaire an CCXXXV
Tuesday 27 October 2026

Robert Spence
{ English Department | LangSciTech }
Saarland University

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

Dedication



Image: ”F. Jullien Genève”, maybe Frank-Henri Jullien (1882–1938) - Indogermanisches Jahrbuch / Wikipedia CC BY-SA 4.0

Ferdinand Mongin de Saussure

26.11.1857–-22.2.1913

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
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- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

Diachronic and synchronic perspectives

- **Diachronic** (but *not systemic*):

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
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- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
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Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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- How to **fuse** both perspectives?

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

Diachronic and synchronic perspectives

- **Diachronic** (but *not systemic*):
  - Before Saussure, linguistics was mostly historical linguistics – studying the history of (*parts* of) languages, such as words, or sounds, **across time**.
- **Synchronic** (and *systemic*):
  - Saussure proposed that a language should be studied as a *single, whole system*, at **one point in time**.
  - This change of perspective made Saussure the father of modern linguistics.
- How to **fuse** both perspectives?
  - "The biggest mistake people make is: not to work historically!" — Ruqaiya Hasan

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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  - "The biggest mistake people make is: not to work historically!" — Ruqaiya Hasan
  - "Every text — that is, everything that is said or written — unfolds in some context of use; furthermore, it is the uses of language that, over tens of thousands of generations, have shaped the system. Language has evolved to satisfy human needs; and the way it is organised is functional with respect to these needs." — Michael Halliday (IFG2: xiii)

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

Overview of Unit 3

1 From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

2 Signs and semiotic systems

3 Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

4 Homework for Week 4

5 Envoi

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation
Stratification
Rank
Metafunction
Instantiation
Individuation
Axis
Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

Evolution vs. development: a terminological reminder

Evolution is “Descent with modification”.
Languages, computers and fashions evolve.
Solar systems, mountains and embryos don’t.
They develop

Chaucerian English EVOLVED into modern English.
Language DEVELOPS afresh in each child.

In EVOLUTION there is a succession of entities,
each slightly different from its predecessor.
In DEVELOPMENT, one entity changes over time.

– Richard Dawkins
Twitter
9.11.2015

The place of language in the evolutionary order of nature:

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

From matter to meaning

The place of language in the evolutionary order of nature:

- **matter** + **life** $\rightarrow$ *function*

From matter to meaning

The place of language in the evolutionary order of nature:

- **matter** + **life** → *function*
- **life** + **society** → *value* — *Gebrauchswert* ↓ *Tauschwert*

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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation
Stratification
Rank
Metafunction
Instantiation
Individuation
Axis
Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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  - **meanings**
  - ... stood for by **wordings**
  - ... stood for by **sound(ing)s**

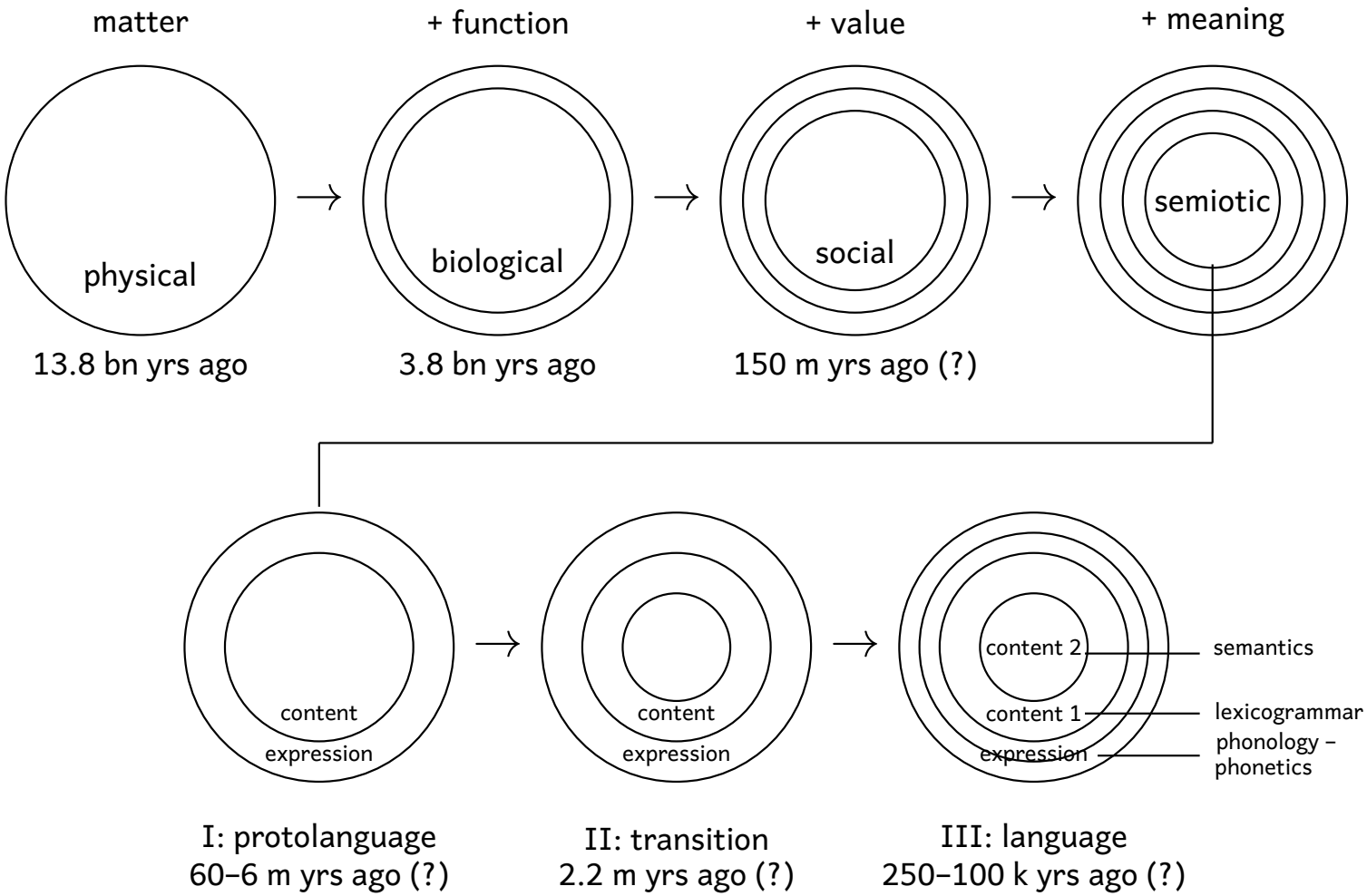


Figure: From matter to meaning (after C. M. I. M. Matthiessen)

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

The importance of using a logarithmic time scale:

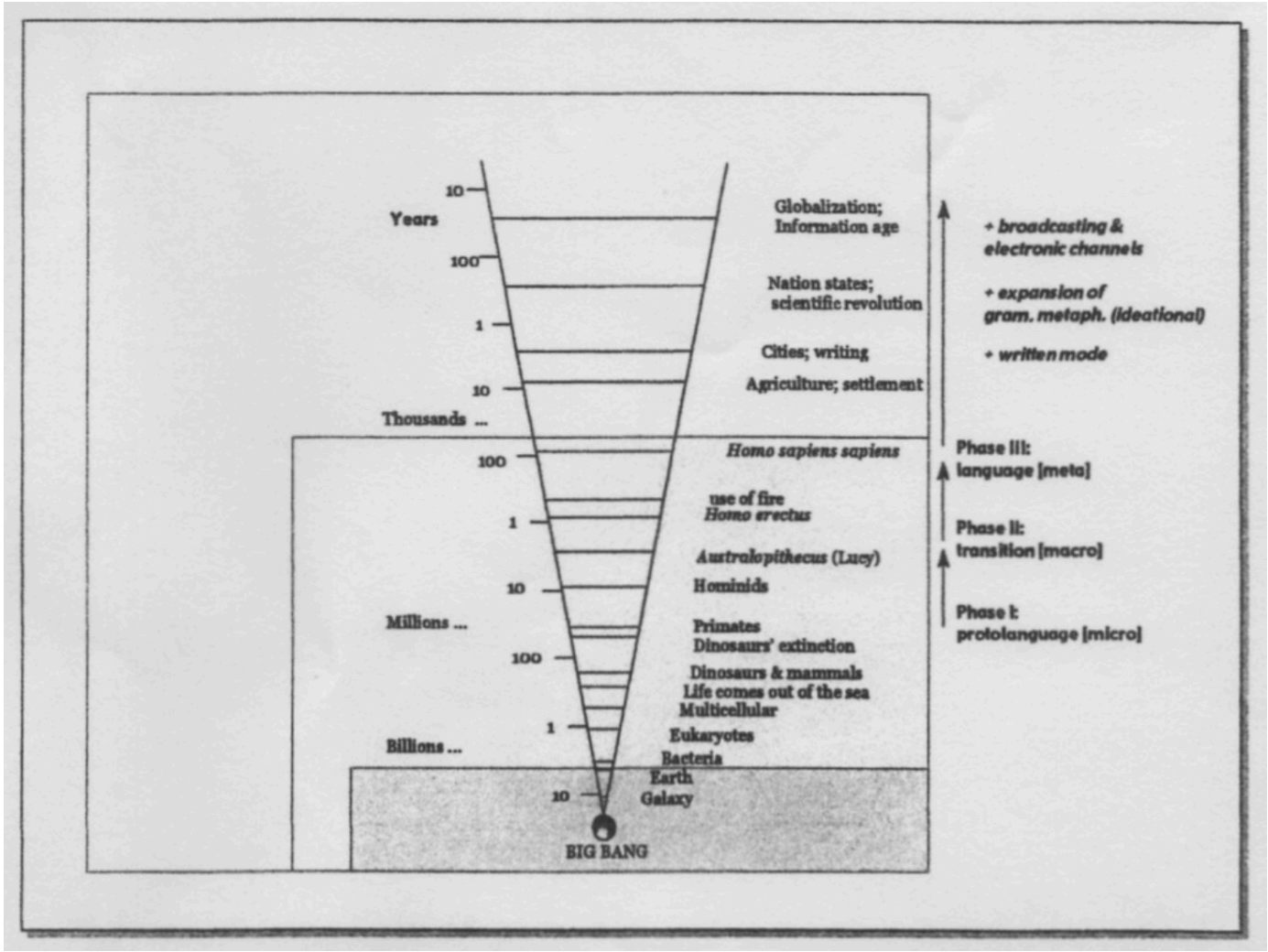


Figure: Cosmogenesis (logarithmic scale): acceleration

Source: Delsemme 1998, adapted by C.M.I.M. Matthiessen

Signs and semiotic systems (1)

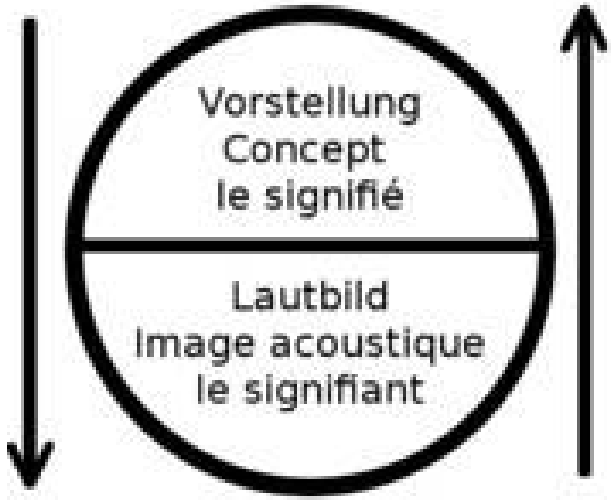


Figure: The sign function (Saussure)

Source: Wikipedia

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

Signs and semiotic systems (2)

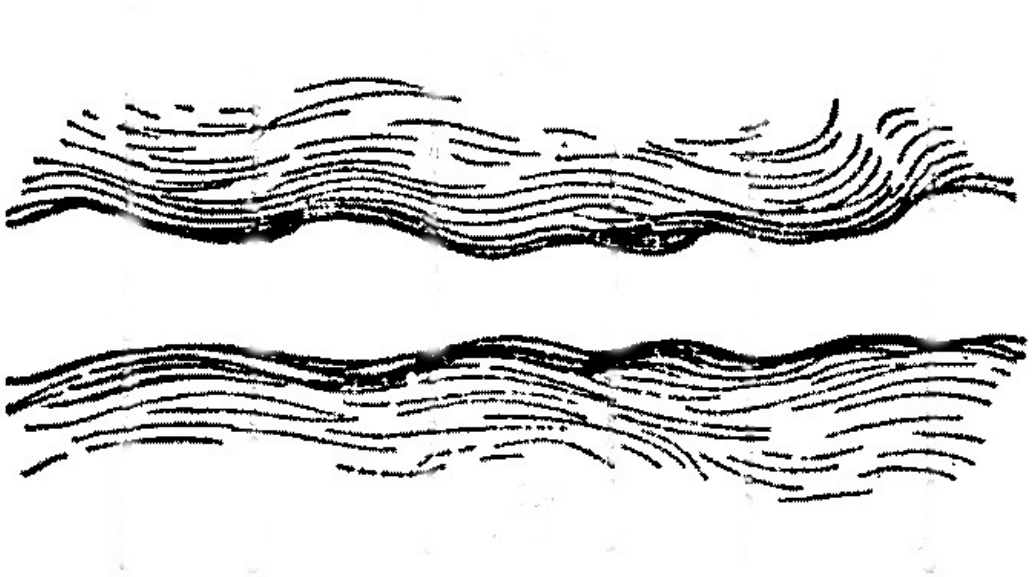


Figure: Without language, thought and sound are indefinite and indistinct

Source: adapted from Saussure (1916); Wikipedia

Signs and semiotic systems (3)

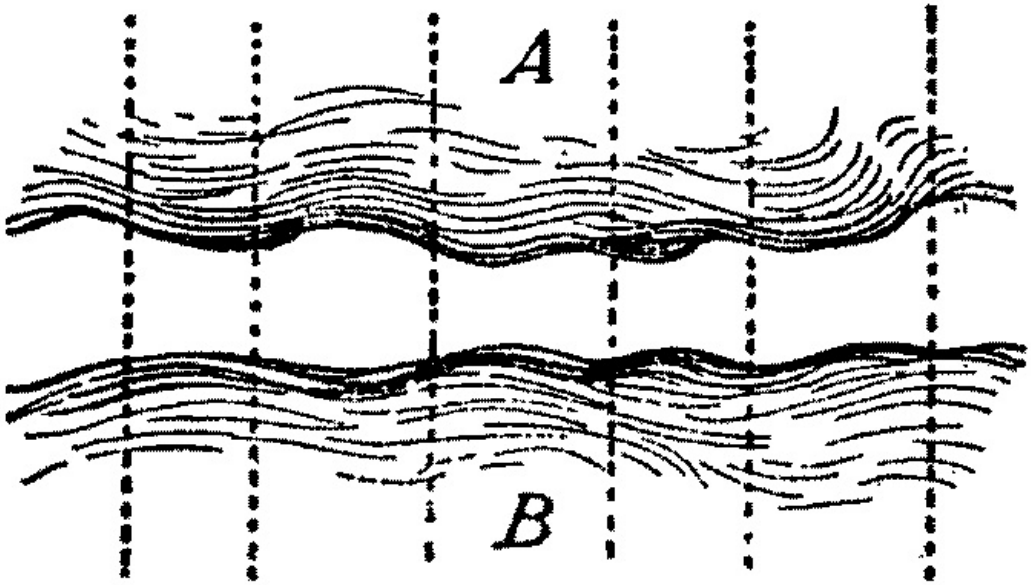


Figure: With language: the arbitrariness of the sign and the notion of *valeur*

Source: Saussure (1916); Wikipedia

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

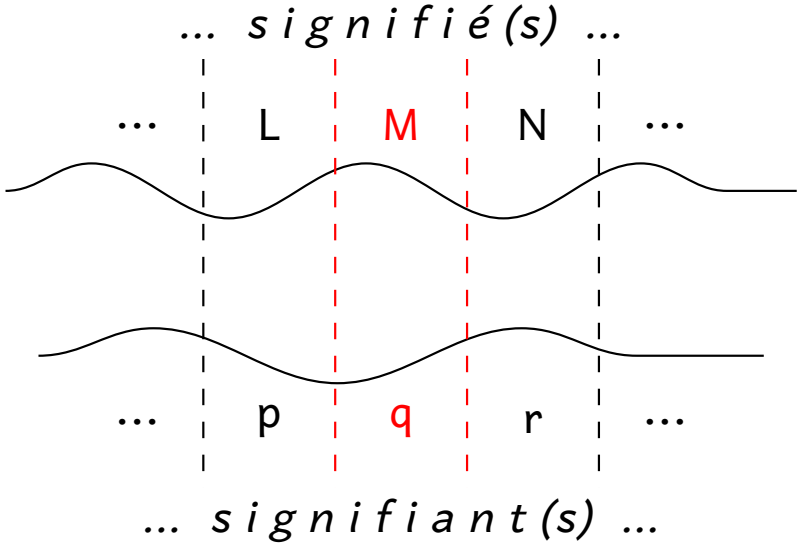
- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

Signs and semiotic systems (4): *l'arbitraire du signe* & *valeur*

- language (… L/p, M/q, N/r, …) is a form, not a substance



  - that q stands for M is ARBITRARY
  - M is only defined by its VALUE relative to { … L … N …}
  - q is only defined by its VALUE relative to { … p … r … }

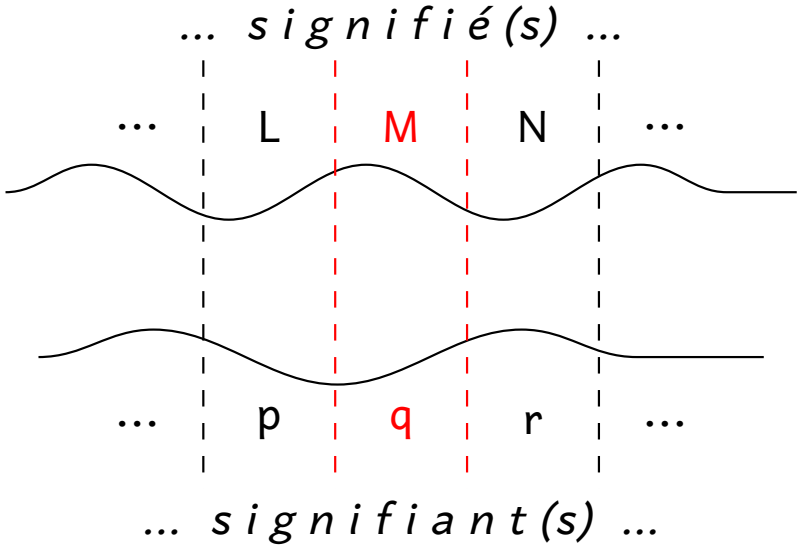
Signs and semiotic systems (5): an extraterrestrial example



Figure: Klingon has 8 different concepts where English has only ‘fight’; and don’t confuse the final sound of “qaH” [qʰɑx] (‘Sir!’) vs “qagh” [qʰɑɣ] (‘worms’) ! — semantic space and phonetic space are partitioned differently from the way they are in English

Signs and semiotic systems (6): *l'arbitraire du signe* ⟷ *valeur*

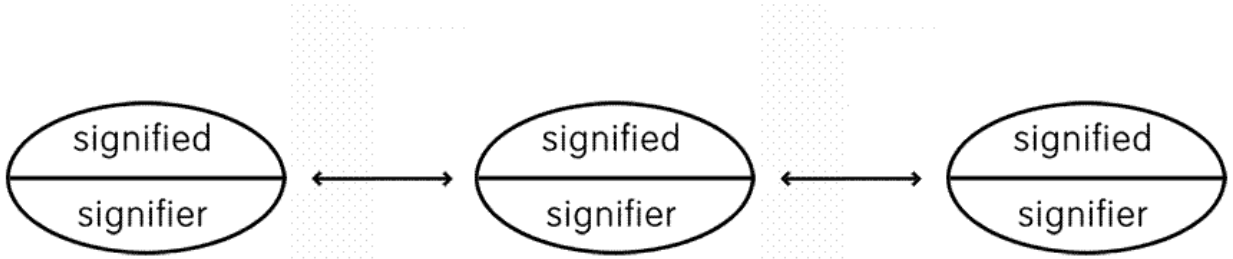
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  - that q stands for M is ARBITRARY
  - M is only defined by its VALUE relative to { … L … N …}
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- society (a speech community) is necessary to define these SYSTEMS of values
- were the *signifiant* / *signifié* relation natural, not arbitrary, it would not be necessary for the speech community to so strictly police the boundaries between the signs within the system

A semiotic system = a system of signs

- Each sign can only be defined by its place in the *system* of signs.



Source: Wikipedia

- Language is a system of signs.
- Read:
  Ferdinand de Saussure: *Cours de linguistique générale*. 1916.
  Available online.
- These five paragraphs from Saussure (1916) are …
  … the most important thing I will ever be able to teach you about language:

Priming vocabulary for the following video

Richard Dawkins's teacher, John Maynard Smith, introduced GAME THEORY into evolutionary biology.

Here, as part of a lecture on the evolution of life seen from the point of view of information theory, he describes the difference between animal language and human language.

Key vocabulary items that unexpectedly occur in the video clip:

vervet monkey

leopard — eagle — snake — another troop of monkeys

lion — dog — sleeping — running

From a bistratal to a tristratal semiotic system

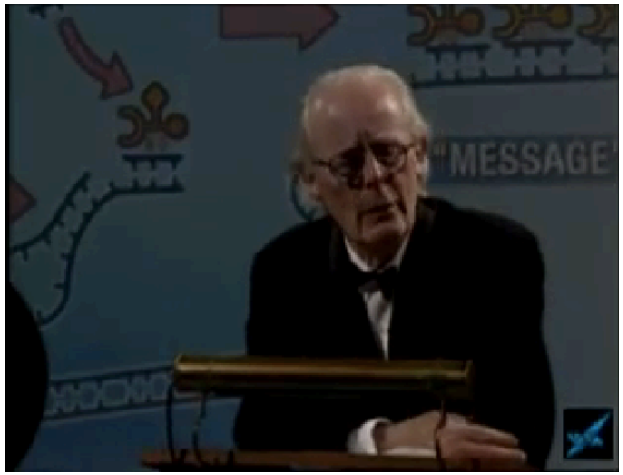


Figure: John Maynard Smith ← click for link to video extract

The full video on the origin of life is available in six parts here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viP5kBMtZ18

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzP3m_XlwV8

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRzRbohQ5Zs

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Il-yoFGogyA

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmrje1cd90o

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzGDio2ARPw

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The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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7. **Axis** (choice vs. chain)
8. **Delicacy** (‘broad’ vs. ‘narrow’ descriptions)

Outline
From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order
Signs and semiotic systems
Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language
Manifestation
Stratification
Rank
Metafunction
Instantiation
Individuation
Axis
Delicacy
Homework for Week 4
Envoi

1) Three possible MANIFESTATIONS of language

At the point where language interfaces with physical reality, there are three possible ways in which it can 'manifest itself':

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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

MANIFESTATION

STRATIFICATION

RANK

METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

INDIVIDUATION

AXIS

DELICACY

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

MANIFESTATION

STRATIFICATION

RANK

METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

INDIVIDUATION

AXIS

DELICACY

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Genuine question: Would you be prepared to change your handwriting in order to "fit in" better in an English-speaking country?

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

MANIFESTATION

STRATIFICATION

RANK

METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

INDIVIDUATION

AXIS

DELICACY

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

MANIFESTATION

STRATIFICATION

RANK

METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

INDIVIDUATION

AXIS

DELICACY

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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I have to change the way I write these every time I enter Australia or enter Germany.

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

MANIFESTATION

STRATIFICATION

RANK

METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

INDIVIDUATION

AXIS

DELICACY

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

1) Three possible MANIFESTATIONS of language

At the point where language interfaces with physical reality, there are three possible ways in which it can 'manifest itself':

- **sound** (pronunciation) … from the very beginning
- **writing** (orthography) … since about 3000 B.C.
- **"signing"** (*Gebärdensprache*) … for the hearing-impaired

Genuine question: Would you be prepared to change your handwriting in order to "fit in" better in an English-speaking country?

What about the way you write J, Z, z, 1, 7, 9 ?

I have to change the way I write these every time I enter Australia or enter Germany.

Changing the way your hand moves when you write is like changing the way your tongue moves when you speak.

1) Three possible MANIFESTATIONS of language

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I have to change the way I write these every time I enter Australia or enter Germany.

Changing the way your hand moves when you write is like changing the way your tongue moves when you speak.

Are you aware of what makes you seem German?
(Remember: You're a spy! A German accent will give you away!)

Outline
From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order
Signs and semiotic systems
Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language
MANIFESTATION
STRATIFICATION
RANK
METAFUNCTION
INSTANTIATION
INDIVIDUATION
AXIS
DELICACY
Homework for Week 4
Envoi

2) Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

- **Phonetics** (are those human sounds? AND: are those the kinds of sounds you'd hear in English?)

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

2) Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

- **Phonology** (are those the kinds of sound patterns you find in English words and sentences?)
- **Phonetics** (are those human sounds? AND: are those the kinds of sounds you'd hear in English?)

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

MANIFESTATION

STRATIFICATION

RANK

METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

INDIVIDUATION

AXIS

DELICACY

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

2) Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

- **Lexicogrammar** (what do the words and sentences mean… regardless of context?)
- **Phonology** (are those the kinds of sound patterns you find in English words and sentences?)
- **Phonetics** (are those human sounds? AND: are those the kinds of sounds you'd hear in English?)

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

2) Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

- **Discourse Semantics** (what do the words and structures mean… in context?)
- **Lexicogrammar** (what do the words and sentences mean… regardless of context?)
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Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

MANIFESTATION

STRATIFICATION

RANK

METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

INDIVIDUATION

AXIS

DELICACY

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

2) Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

- **Register** (what's going on? who's taking part? what role is language playing?)
- **Discourse Semantics** (what do the words and structures mean… in context?)
- **Lexicogrammar** (what do the words and sentences mean… regardless of context?)
- **Phonology** (are those the kinds of sound patterns you find in English words and sentences?)
- **Phonetics** (are those human sounds? AND: are those the kinds of sounds you'd hear in English?)

Outline
From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order
Signs and semiotic systems
Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language
MANIFESTATION
STRATIFICATION
RANK
METAFUNCTION
INSTANTIATION
INDIVIDUATION
AXIS
DELICACY
Homework for Week 4
Envoi

2) Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

- **Genre** (what kind of text for what social purpose?)
- **Register** (what's going on? who's taking part? what role is language playing?)
- **Discourse Semantics** (what do the words and structures mean… in context?)
- **Lexicogrammar** (what do the words and sentences mean… regardless of context?)
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2) Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

- **(Code)** (who's an insider? e.g. two insiders: *„Unn?"* — *„Jo."*)
- **Genre** (what kind of text for what social purpose?)
- **Register** (what's going on? who's taking part? what role is language playing?)
- **Discourse Semantics** (what do the words and structures mean… in context?)
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2) Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

- **Ideology** (what is thinkable? what is doable?)
- **(Code)** (who's an insider? e.g. two insiders: *„Unn?"* — *„Jo."*)
- **Genre** (what kind of text for what social purpose?)
- **Register** (what's going on? who's taking part? what role is language playing?)
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2) Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

- (Material reality: Bipedal apes **living**)
- **Ideology** (what is thinkable? what is doable?)
- **(Code)** (who's an insider? e.g. two insiders: *„Unn?“* — *„Jo.“*)
- **Genre** (what kind of text for what social purpose?)
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φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

MANIFESTATION

STRATIFICATION

RANK

METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

INDIVIDUATION

AXIS

DELICACY

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

2) Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

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- (Material reality: Bipedal apes making **noises** with their **faces**)

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

MANIFESTATION

STRATIFICATION

RANK

METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

INDIVIDUATION

AXIS

DELICACY

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

2) Higher STRATA *constraining* lower STRATA

- ***Language**: the **noises** we make with our **faces** in order to **live***
- (Material reality: Bipedal apes **living**)
- **Ideology** (what is thinkable? what is doable?)
- **(Code)** (who's an insider? e.g. two insiders: *„Unn?" — „Jo."*)
- **Genre** (what kind of text for what social purpose?)
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- (Material reality: Bipedal apes making **noises** with their **faces**)

φων

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

MANIFESTATION

STRATIFICATION

RANK

METAFUNCTION

INSTANTIATION

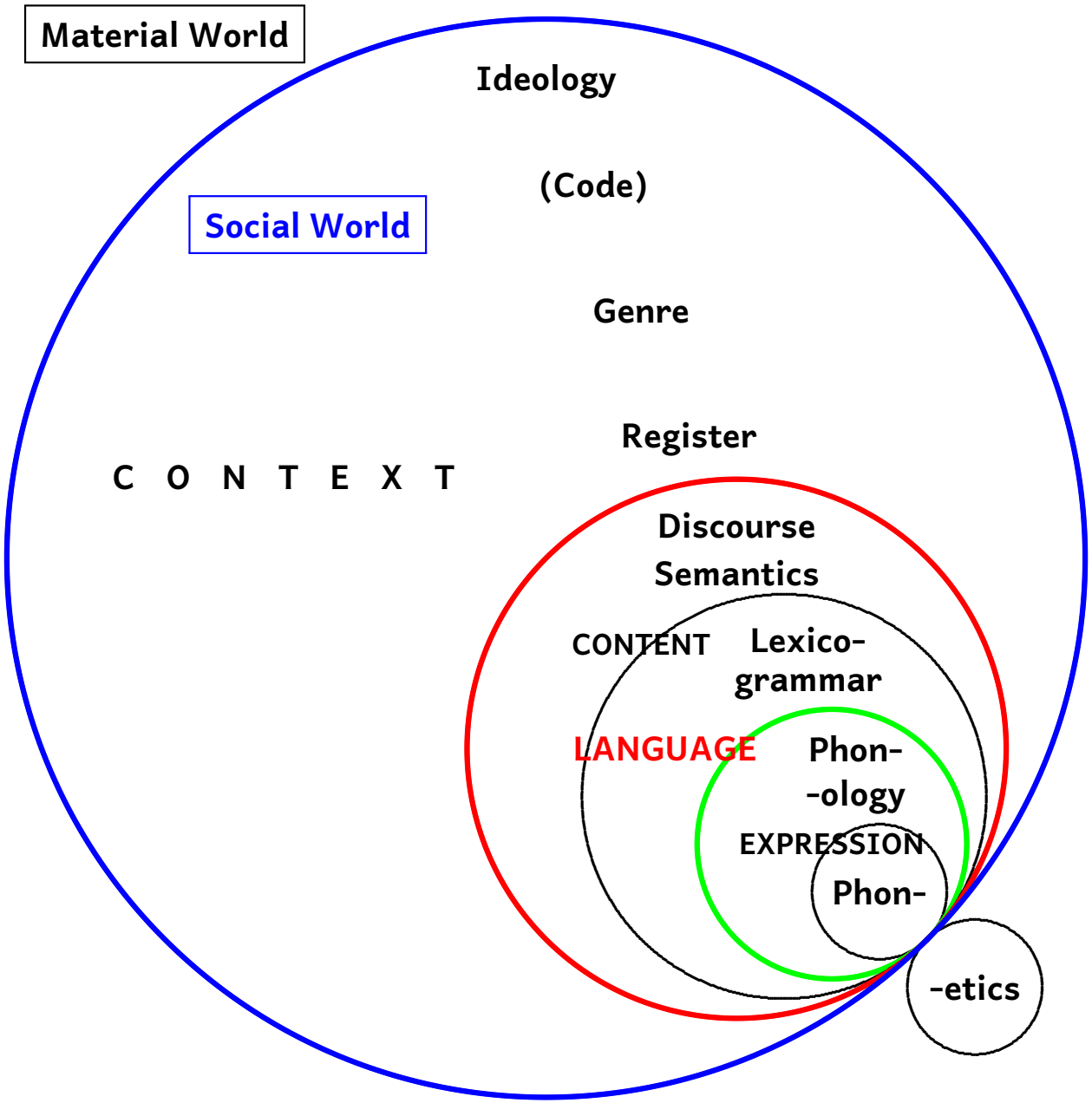
INDIVIDUATION

AXIS

DELICACY

Homework for Week 4

Envoi



Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

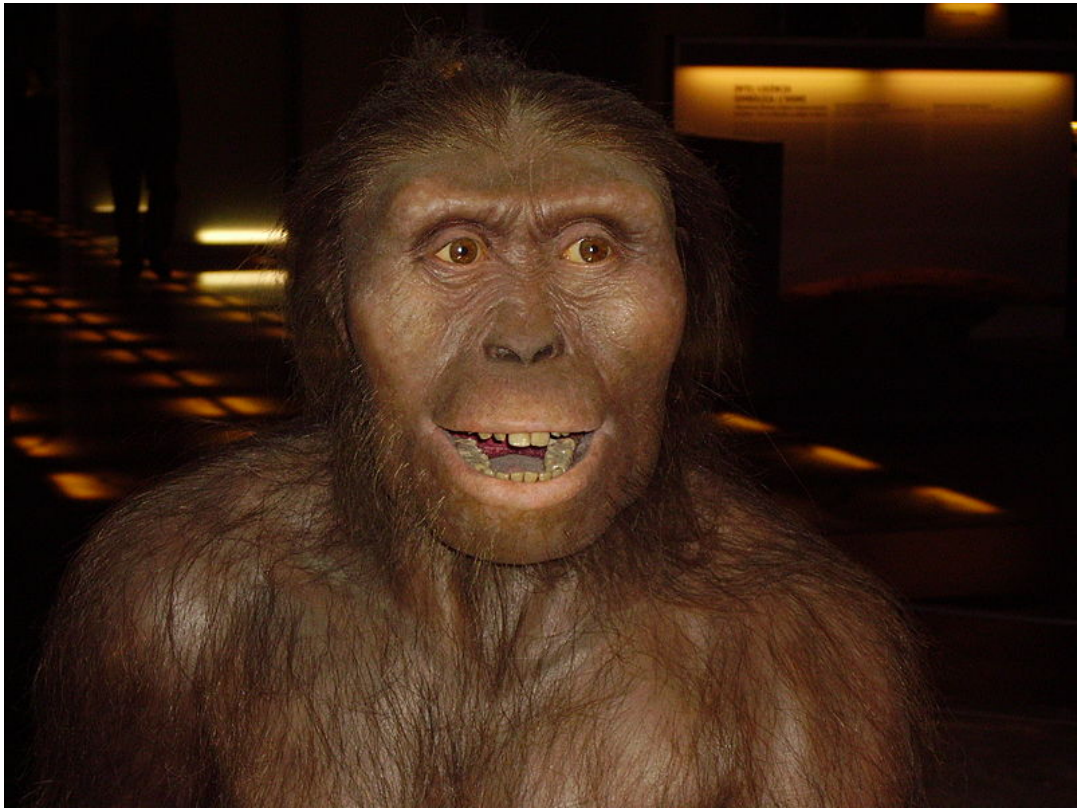
Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

2) Ideology is historically conditioned



Source: Wikipedia / Licence: CC by SA 2.0

It's 3.2 million years ago. You're an *Australopithecus afarensis*. What is thinkable? What is doable?

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

3) Rank: bigger units made up of smaller ones (1)

The rank scale in grammar:

clause	an asteroid killed the dinosaurs						
group	an asteroid		killed		the dinosaurs		
word	an	asteroid	killed		the	dinosaurs	
morpheme	an	asteroid	kill	ed	the	dinosaur	s

3) Rank: bigger units made up of smaller ones (2)

The rank scale in phonology:

tone group	ən **æst** ə rɔɪd **kɪld** ðə **daɪn** ə sɔːz								
foot	ən	**æst** ə rɔɪd			**kɪld** ðə		**daɪn** ə sɔːz		
syllable	ən	æst	ə	rɔɪd	kɪld	ðə	daɪn	ə	sɔːz
phoneme	ə n	æ s t	ə	r ɔɪ d	k ɪ l d	ð ə	d aɪ n	ə	s ɔː z

3) RANK: the central unit at each stratum

SEMANTIC STRATUM	GRAMMATICAL STRATUM	PHONOLOGICAL STRATUM	*treated in Unit:*
text			
stage			
phase			
figure/message/move	***clause***	tone group	*13, 14, 15*
participant	group/phrase	foot	*11, 12*
	word	***syllable***	*6, 7*
	morpheme	phoneme	*6, 7*

... ***syllables*** in English are either strong or weak.
... ***syllables*** in English make up feet, and are made up of phonemes.
... ***syllables*** in English realise morphemes, or words, or 'Mood Blocks' — "I'll", "you're", "she's", "he'd" ...

3) RANK: a structure is a configuration of functional roles

A unit is “made up of” smaller units… but how?

syllable	strɛŋθs sɔːz			(bigger unit)
(STRUCTURE)	Initial	Nucleus	Final	← functional roles
phonemes	s s t r	ɔː e	z ŋ θ s	(smaller units)
treated in Unit:	***7***	***6***	***7***	

or:

syllable	strɛŋθs sɔːz			(bigger unit)
(STRUCTURE)	Onset	Rhyme		← functional roles
		Nucleus	Coda	
phonemes	s s t r	ɔː e	z ŋ θ s	(smaller units)

4) Functional components of language and structural types (1)

Metafunctions: Functional components of language — internal reflections, within the architecture of language as a system, of the general functions language serves in society

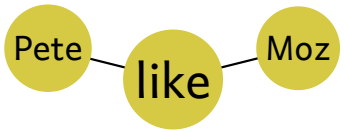
Function of language		Examples	Structural type
ideational	logical	—Chris said … that Jane thought … that Tom had claimed … that Peter likes Mozart	linear (“string”-like)
	experiential	—the dinosaurs died —an asteroid killed the dinosaurs —Peter likes Mozart —Sally’s the cleverest girl in the class	nuclear (“particle”-like)
interpersonal		—he likes Mozart —he’s, like, sooo totally into Mozart —I suspect he’s possibly rather fond of Mozart, wouldn’t you say?	prosodic (“field”-like)
textual		—an asteroid killed the dinosaurs —they were killed by an asteroid —they were killed by one —it was an asteroid that killed them	culminative (“wave”-like)

4) Functional components of language and structural types (2)

<table>
<tr><th>Function of language</th><th>Examples</th><th>Structural type</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">⟶
(natural logic)

reflecting upon the world

(experience)
⟶</td><td>modification, quotes/reports, subordination, coordination, apposition, …</td><td rowspan="2">Chris said …
that Jane thought …
that Tom had claimed …
that Peter likes Mozart


</td><td>linear

(“string”-like)</td></tr>
<tr><td>processes, participants, circumstances …</td><td>nuclear

(“particle”-like)</td></tr>
<tr><td>acting upon the world by interacting with the other people in it:
mood, modality, negation, attitude, …</td><td>? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?
? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?
suspect…possibly…rather…wouldn’t
? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?
? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?</td><td>prosodic

(“field”-like)</td></tr>
<tr><td>creating relevance:
theme–rheme structure,
information structure, …</td><td>they were killed by an asteroid</td><td>culminative

(“wave”-like)</td></tr>
</table>

4) Functions of language associated with *pitch* (dt.*Tonhöhe*) changes

in English: **intonation** (see Units 13–15)

logical	yes	e.g. ways of joining clauses together
experiential	no	
interpersonal	yes	e.g. what you feel and want
textual	yes	e.g. what is ‘given’ and what is ‘new’?

in Chinese: **lexical tone**

experiential	yes	e.g. distinguishing between different concepts 媽 mā ‘Mutter’ 蔴 má ‘Hanf’ 馬 mǎ ‘Pferd’ 罵 mà ‘fluchen’

5) Instantiation: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)

('Pünktlichkeit')		('Verabredung')
culture		**situation**
language		**text**
(Partikel)		(*noch! schon!*)
POTENTIAL	———	ACTUAL
climate		weather

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

5) Instantiation: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)

('Pünktlichkeit')		('Verabredung')
culture		**situation**
language		**text**
(Partikel)		(*noch! schon!*)
POTENTIAL	———	ACTUAL
climate		weather

- Today's weather is an actual instance of the climate.

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

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('Pünktlichkeit')		('Verabredung')
culture		**situation**
language		**text**
(Partikel)		(*noch! schon!*)
POTENTIAL	———	ACTUAL
climate		weather

- The climate is the potential for weather.
- Today's weather is an actual instance of the climate.

Outline
From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order
Signs and semiotic systems
Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language
Manifestation
Stratification
Rank
Metafunction
Instantiation
Individuation
Axis
Delicacy
Homework for Week 4
Envoi

5) Instantiation: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)

- This text is an actual instance of the German language.

('Pünktlichkeit')		('Verabredung')
culture		**situation**
language		**text**
(Partikel)		(*noch! schon!*)
POTENTIAL	———	ACTUAL
climate		weather

- The climate is the potential for weather.
- Today's weather is an actual instance of the climate.

5) Instantiation: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)

- The German language is the potential for German text(s).
- This text is an actual instance of the German language.

('Pünktlichkeit')		('Verabredung')
culture		**situation**
language		**text**
(Partikel)		(*noch! schon!*)
POTENTIAL	———	ACTUAL
climate		weather

- The climate is the potential for weather.
- Today's weather is an actual instance of the climate.

5) Instantiation: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)

- This situation is an actual instance of German culture.
- The German language is the potential for German text(s).
- This text is an actual instance of the German language.

('Pünktlichkeit')		('Verabredung')
culture		**situation**
language		**text**
(Partikel)		(*noch! schon!*)
POTENTIAL	———————	ACTUAL
climate		weather

- The climate is the potential for weather.
- Today's weather is an actual instance of the climate.

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

5) Instantiation: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (1)

- German culture is the potential for German situations.
- This situation is an actual instance of German culture.
- The German language is the potential for German text(s).
- This text is an actual instance of the German language.

('Pünktlichkeit')		('Verabredung')
culture		**situation**
language		**text**
(Partikel)		(*noch! schon!*)
POTENTIAL	———	ACTUAL
climate		weather

- The climate is the potential for weather.
- Today's weather is an actual instance of the climate.

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

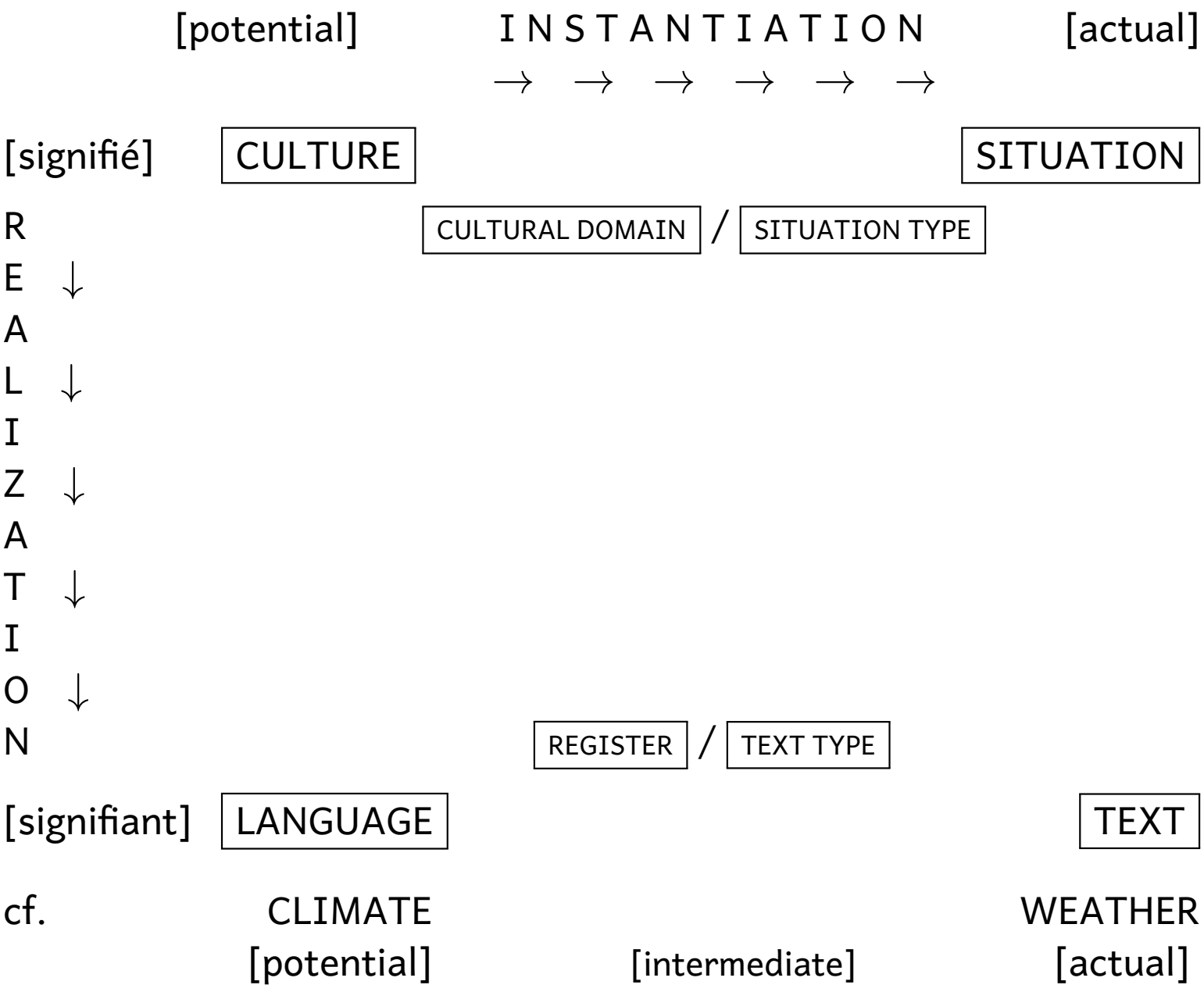
Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

5) Instantiation: from potential (=system) to actual (=instance) (2)



Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

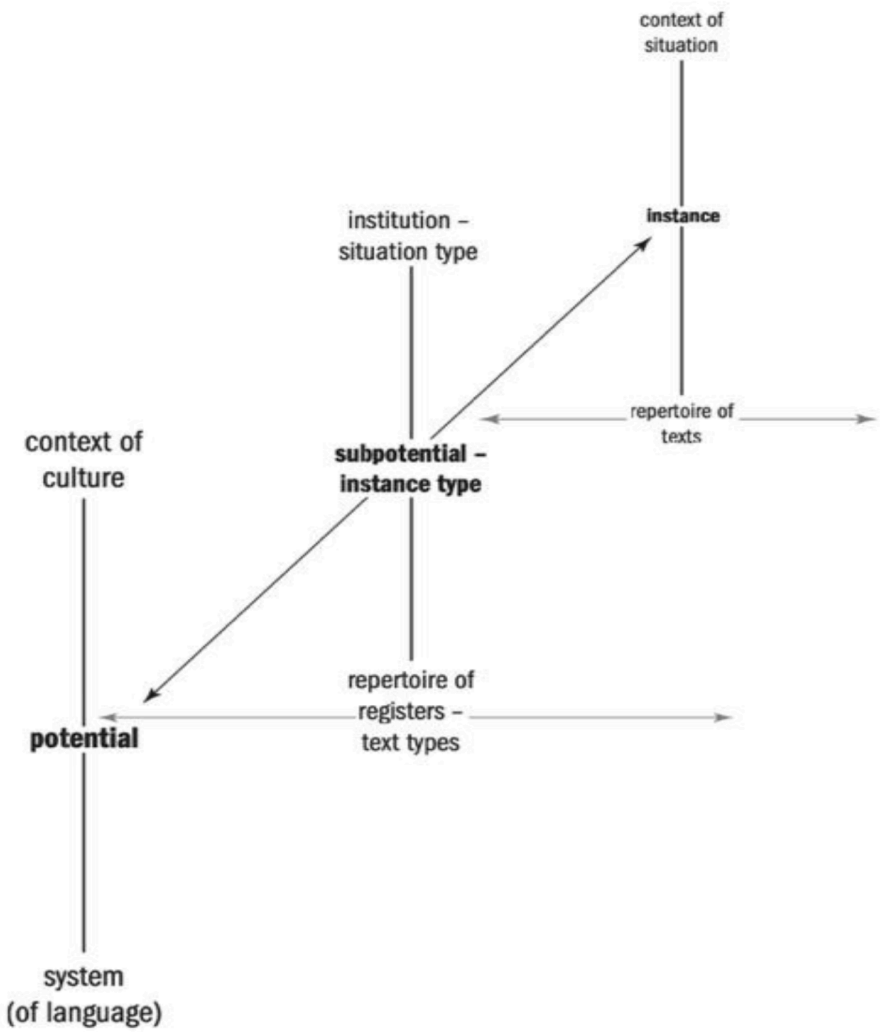
Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

6) Individuation: reservoir (collective potential of 'language *use*') vs. repertoire (individual potential of the 'language *user*'))



Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 28; cited in Yu 2023:3280 / fair use

The Cline of Instantiation, also showing Individuation

The syllable and its environments

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

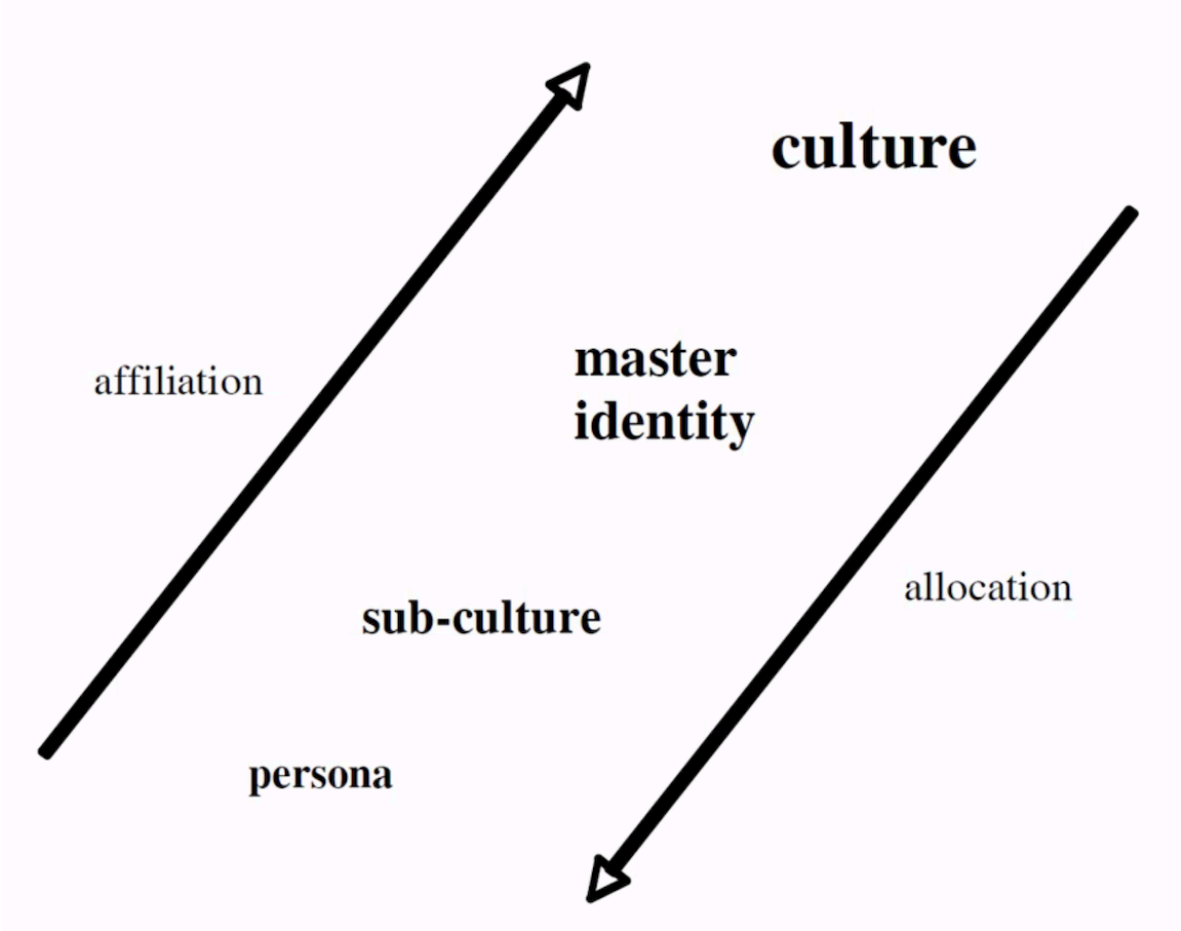
Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

- Manifestation
- Stratification
- Rank
- Metafunction
- Instantiation
- Individuation
- Axis
- Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

6) Individuation: reservoir (collective potential of 'language *use*') vs. repertoire (individual potential of the 'language *user*')



Martin 2009:565 / fair use

The Cline of Individuation

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

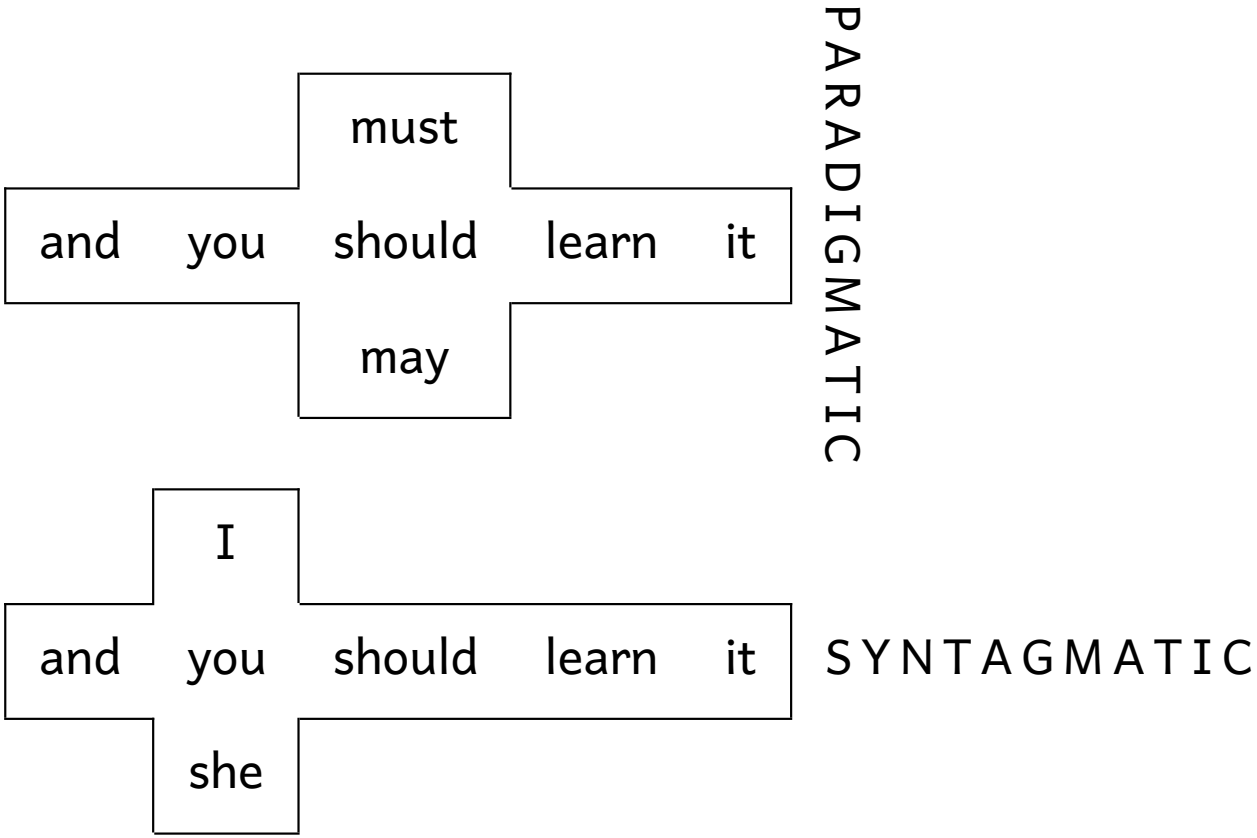
Homework for Week 4

Envoi

7) Axis: choice (paradigmatic) vs. chain (syntagmatic)

		must		
and	you	should	learn	it
		may		
	I			
and	you	should	learn	it
	she			

7) Axis: choice (paradigmatic) vs. chain (syntagmatic)



7) Axis: there is choice and chain in phonology, too

		.
		.
		f
		θ
.		s
.		ʃ
f		v
θ		ð
s	ɔː	z
ʃ		ʒ
v		
ð		m
z		n
		ŋ
h		
m		l
n		
w		
l		

The syllable /sɔːz/ exists in English*, as do

/fɔːθ fɔːs fɔːm fɔːn fɔːl θɔːz θɔːn sɔːs sɔːn sɔːl ʃɔːz ʃɔːn ʃɔːl vɔːn hɔːs hɔːz hɔːn hɔːl mɔːf mɔːs mɔːz mɔːn mɔːl nɔːθ nɔːs nɔːz nɔːm wɔːf wɔːz wɔːm wɔːn wɔːl lɔːz lɔːn .../

***N.B.: This list is for *British* English.**

7) Syntagmatic boundaries — at the edges of the building blocks

When units (phonemes, syllables, …) are put together, their edges rub against each other:

phonology:	k	ɪ	l	d		ð	ə	***Units 6, 7***
phonetics:	k^h	ɪ	ɬ	d		ð	ə	***Units 8, 9***
	$k̟^h$	ɪ	^{w}	d̪		ð	ə	***Unit 10***

Or should we abandon “building blocks” (units) altogether, and just have “overlapping waves” in our theory?

8) Delicacy: ‘broad’ vs. ‘narrow’ transcriptions

A ‘broad’ (less delicate) transcription, making only the minimum necessary number of distinctions:

[ɹed]

A ‘narrow’ (more delicate) transcription, making as many distinctions as possible:

[ɹ̠ʷe̞d̺˕]

Homework for Week 4

- The homework to be completed before week 4 is:
  Learn the adjectives corresponding to the Places of Articulation for consonants:
  `https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Places_of_articulation.svg`

Outline

From matter to meaning: language in the evolutionary order

Signs and semiotic systems

Dimensions in the Systemic Functional theory of language

Manifestation

Stratification

Rank

Metafunction

Instantiation

Individuation

Axis

Delicacy

Homework for Week 4

Envoi

Envoi (1)

How can you tell that this is French just by listening to it?

Un petit d'un petit /
S'étonne aux Halles /
Un petit d'un petit /
À degrés te fallent /
Indolent qui ne sort cesse /
Indolent qui ne se mène /
Qu'importe un petit /
Tout gai de Reguennes?

from the mediaeval manuscript "Mots d'heures: gousses, rames".

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Envoi (2)

Now compare this strangely similar English poem. How can you tell it is English, just by listening to it? (What about the rhythm?)

Humpty Dumpty /
sat on a wall /
Humpty Dumpty /
had a great fall /
And all the King's horses /
and all the King's men /
Couldn't put Humpty /
together again.

source: the traditional collection "Mother Goose Rhymes"

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Axis
Delicacy
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Envoi