

The ontology of narrative: cross-medial concerns

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Århus, January 2009

The Goals

- Approaching the ‘blackbox’ of narrative
 - from a linguistic perspective
 - but with a linguistic perspective particularly concerned with a transmedial/cross-modal account of meaning-making
- Finding a definition of narrative that is sustainable across semiotic modalities...

Some issues

- Much of the linguistic input to narratology came in the 1960s and the views of language and the language system available now have little resemblance to that.

Does this add anything?

- Particularly important for transmedial narration, because not much of that originating linguistic material carries across semiotic modalities!

Method

- A rational reconstruction of narrative
 - A rational reconstruction of **language** as a dynamic social semiotic system
 - A consideration of genres within that system
 - Narrative as a genre
 - A consideration of what happens in different modes

Creeping up on issues such as focalisation, narration, etc. from behind

Requirements

- Need theories of language such that:
 - language is treated essentially in context
 - language is treated essentially as text-making

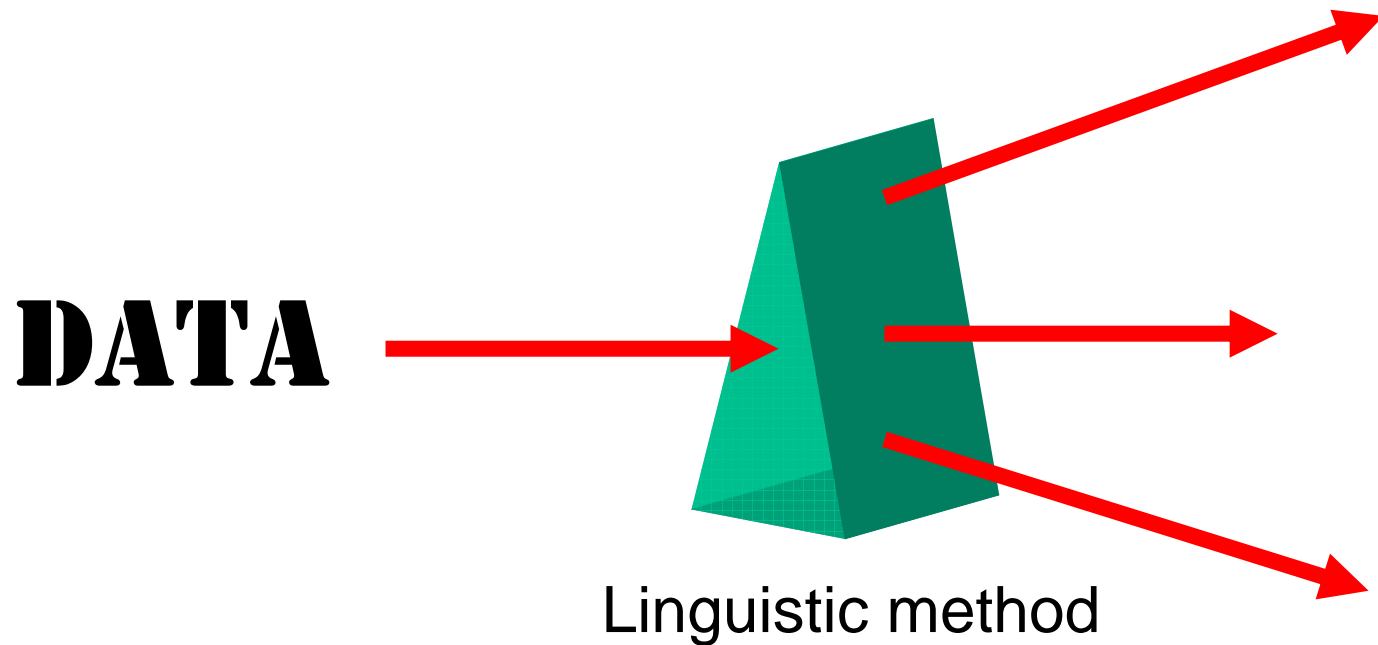
Hallidayan:

Socio-Semiotic

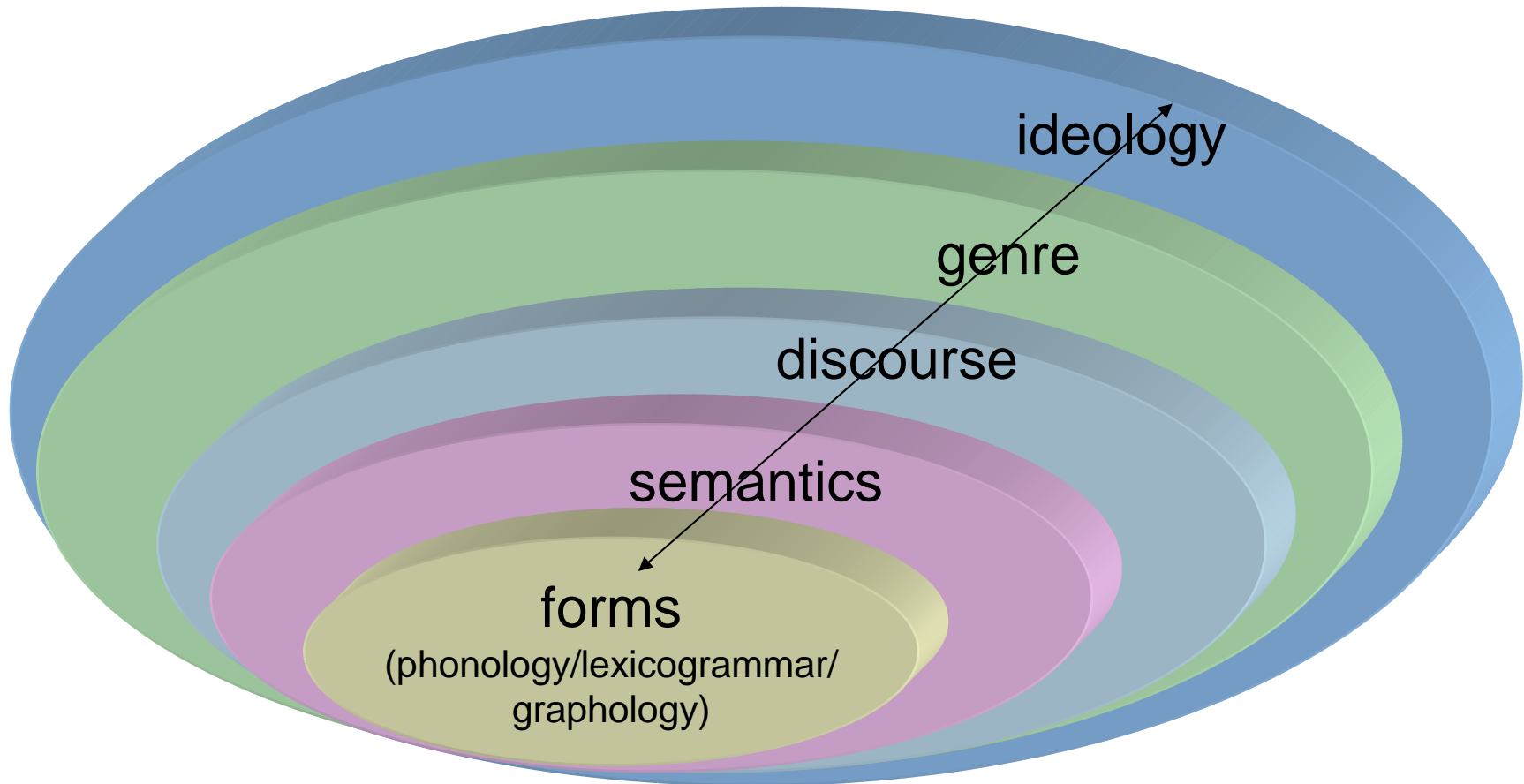
Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Basic Divisions of Language within SFL

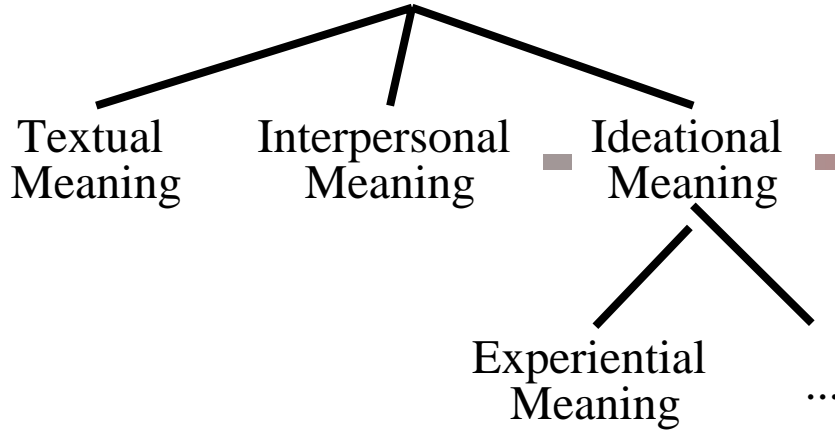
- linguistic stratification: strata
- diversification of meaning: metafunctions



Linguistic Strata



Types of Meaning



Metafunctions

sentence

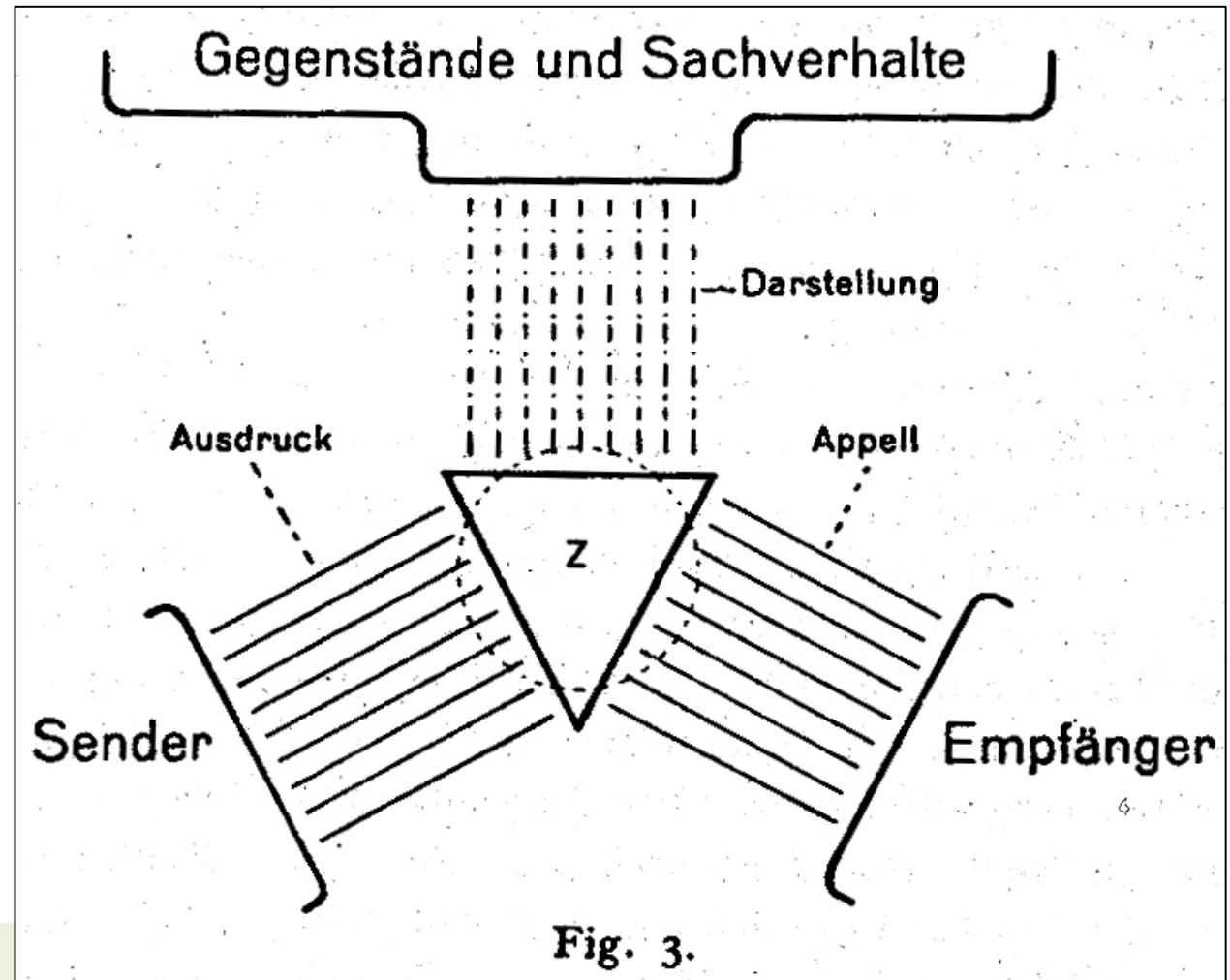
ideational

textual

interpersonal

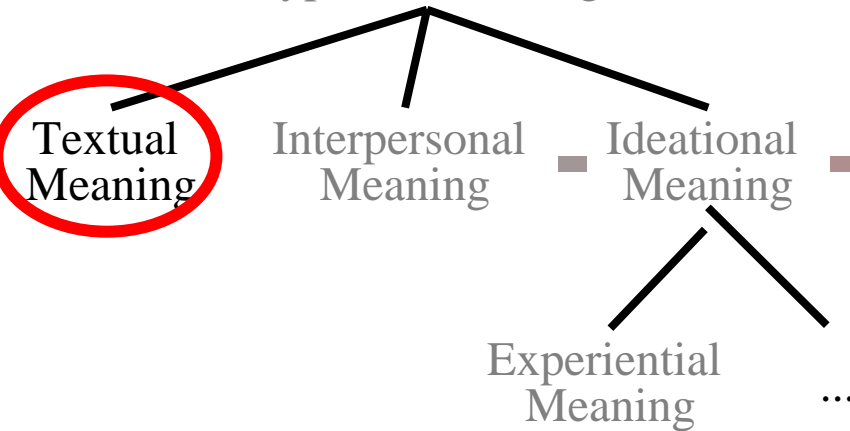
Karl Bühler (1934)

Sprachtheorie The 'Organon Model'



Bühler (1918)
“Dreifach ist die
Leistung der
menschlichen
Sprache, Kundgabe,
Auslösung und
Darstellung”

Types of Meaning



Metafunctions

sentence

textual

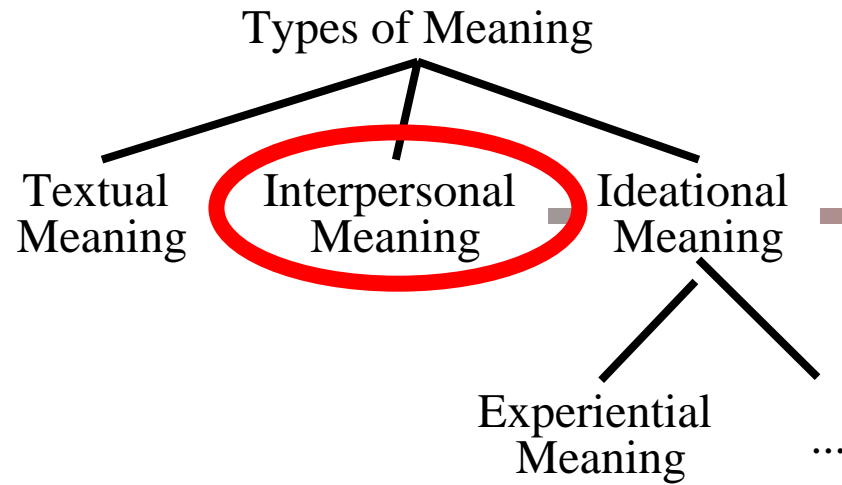
At all seats you can listen to
3 ICE Programmes (classical,
pop, fairy tales) over the
headphones.

Screens to watch the ICE
video programme you will find
in the backrests of the seats
in the first class coaches.

Textual Variation

- Fred went to the sea because he wanted to swim
- Because he wanted to swim, Fred went to the sea.

Metafunctions



sentence

interpersonal

Speaker 1 And then at that time **did you** give him the gun?

Speaker 2 **It was probably** about that time.

Speaker 1 **Did you** have at that time some talk about the incident?

Speaker 2 **I did.**

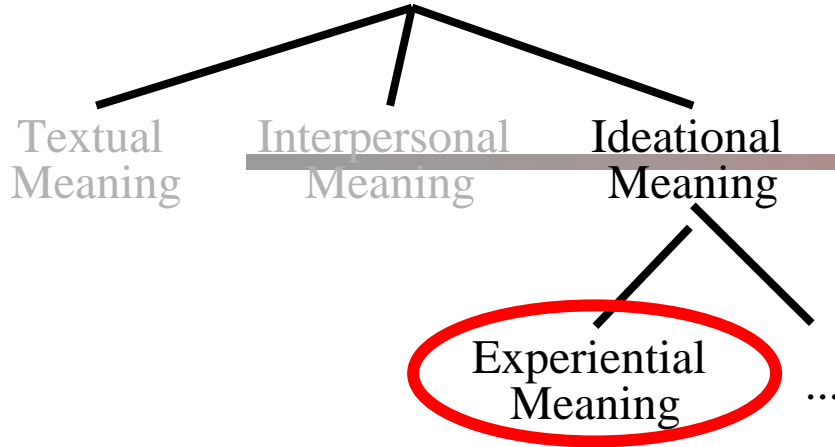
Speaker 1 And at that time, **was the man R** still in the back room?

Speaker 2 Yes, **I think** he was.

Speaker 1 **Perhaps I should** ask you as a matter of finality **were you** in the lounge room when Mr. R was escorted through the house?

Speaker 2 No sir, **I don't think** so, no.

Types of Meaning

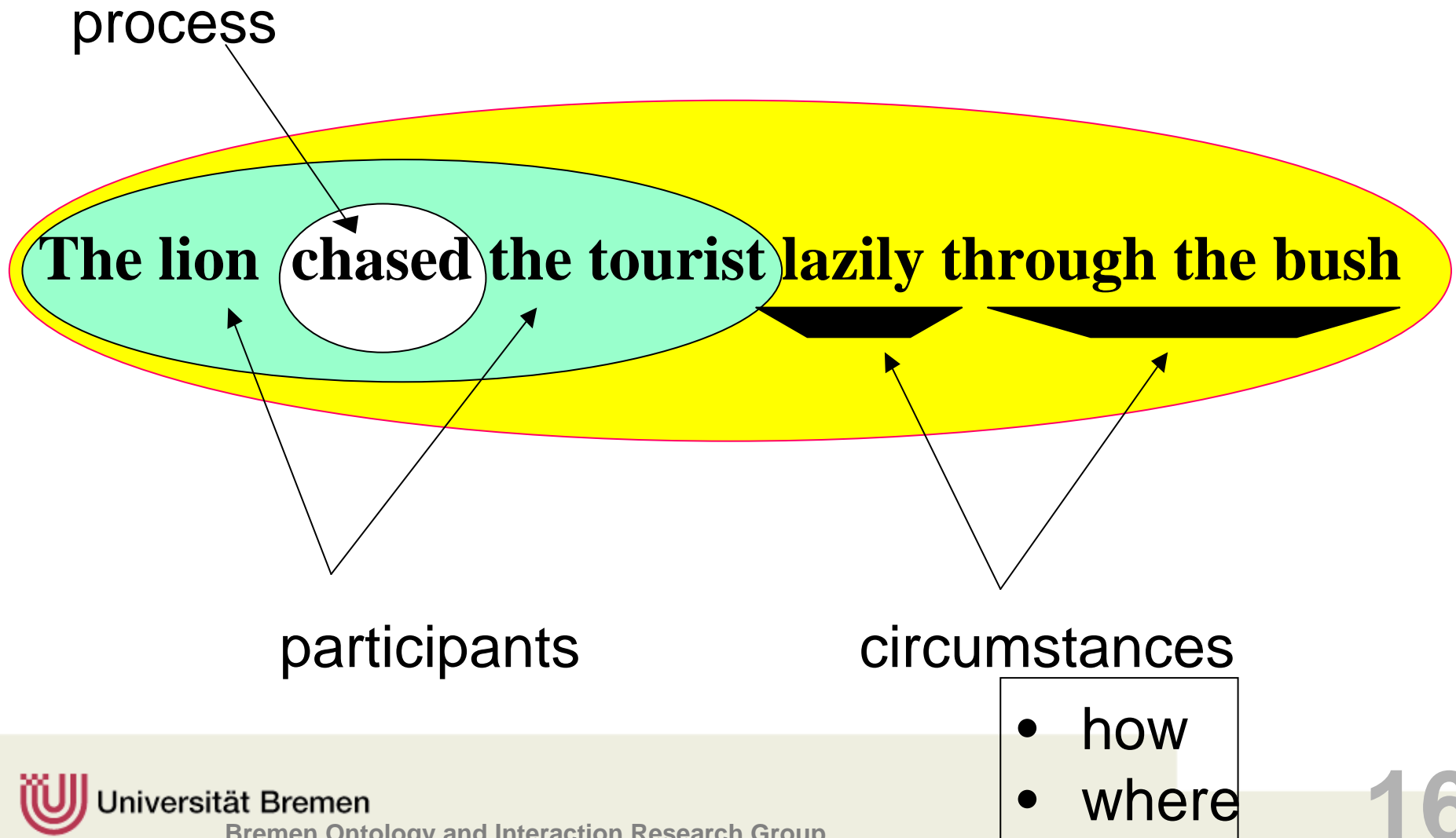


Metafunctions

experiential

sentence

A clause analysis



who?

what?

Telecom employees

are likely to strike

when?

within a week

who?

what?

Telecom employees

are likely to strike

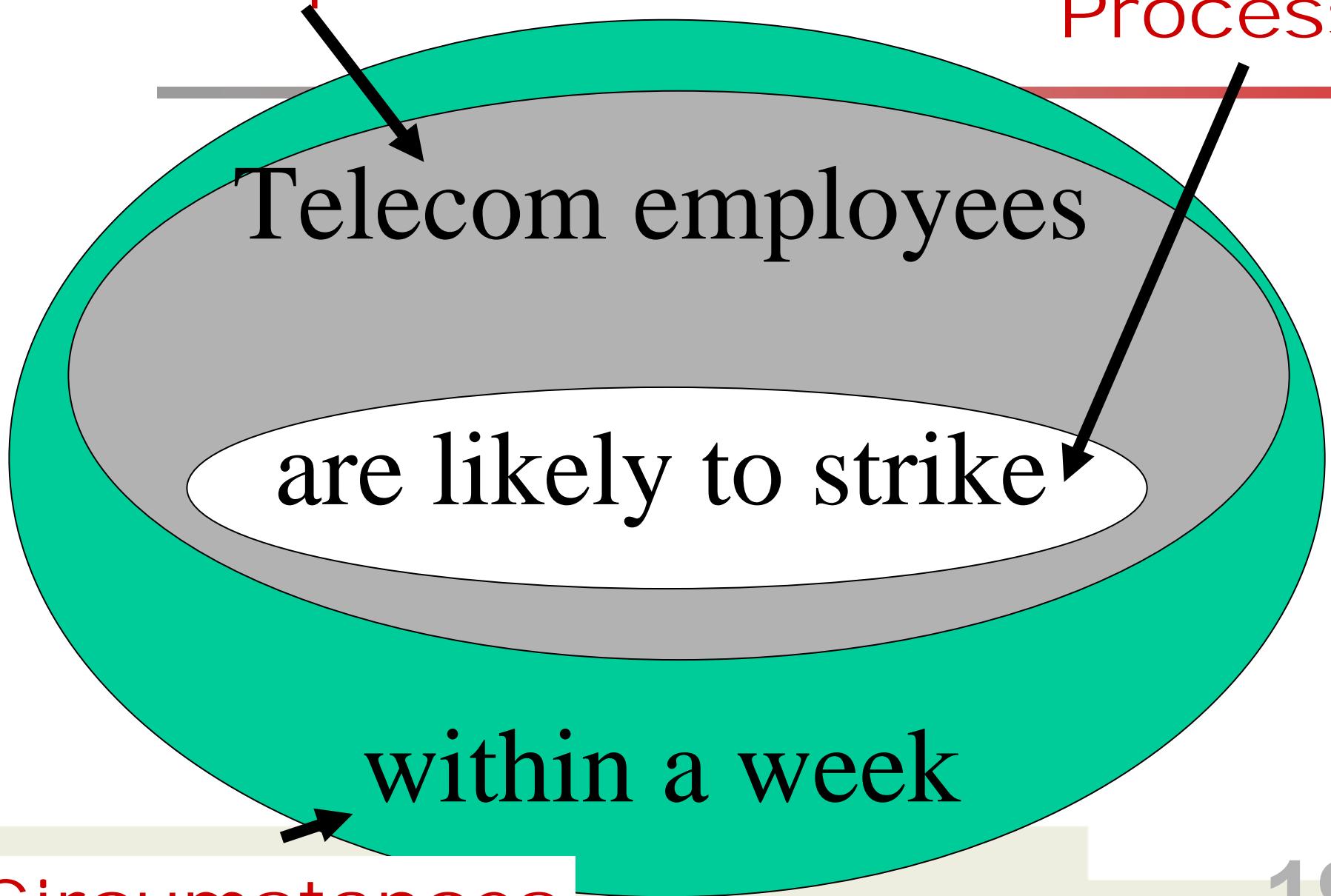
within a week

when?

ten

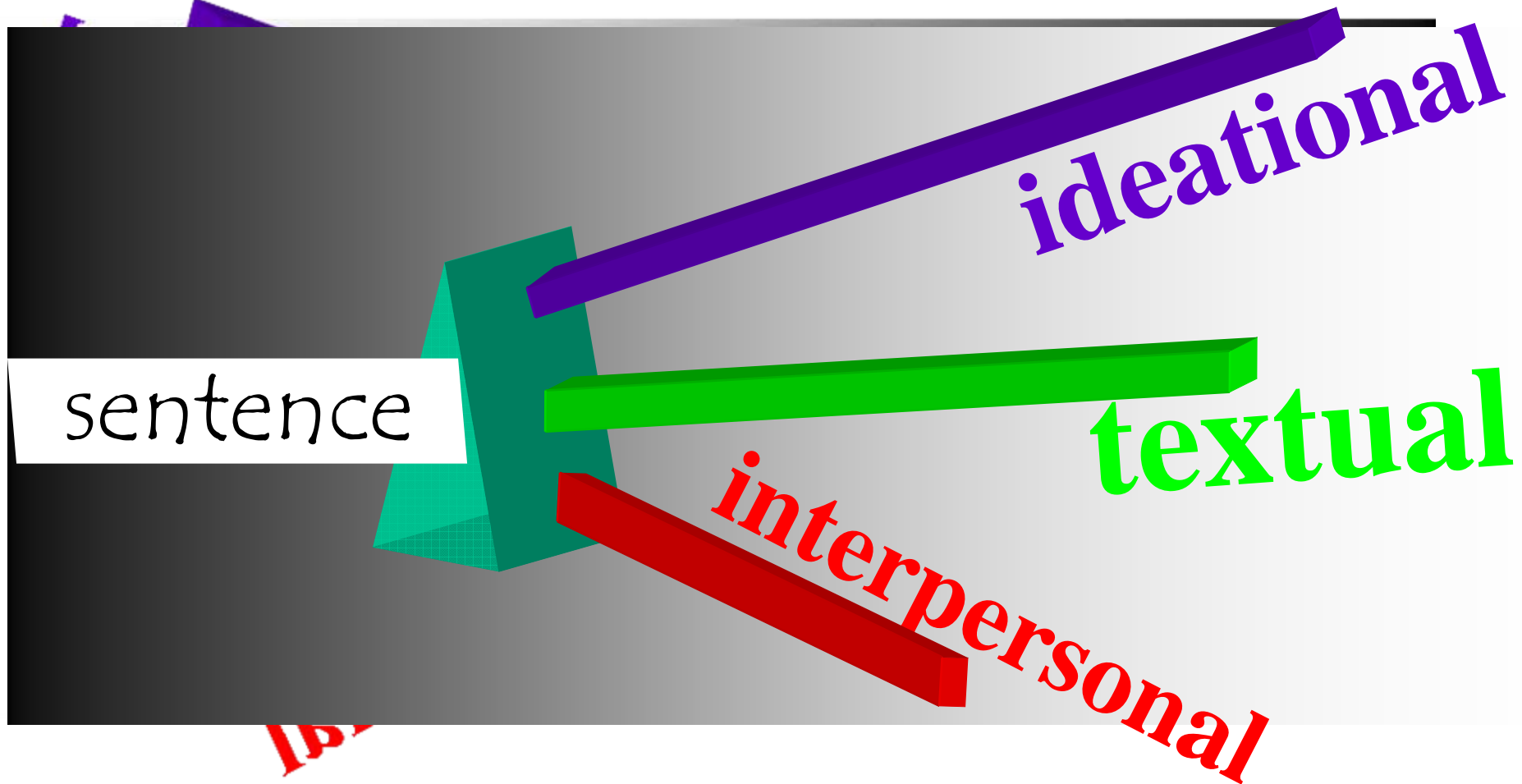
Participants

Process



Circumstances

Metafunctions



Consequences

- Any clause **commits** to a combination of semantic configurations drawn from these three meaning-making resources



Consequences

- There is an activity of 'chasing'
- There are two entities involved: one classified as 'lion', the other as 'tourist'
- There is a temporal relationship of precedence to some textual speaking time.
- Etc.



Semantic Configurations

- This area of meaning has been mapped out in considerable detail

Motivation for the map: grammatical reactances

Halliday & Matthiessen (1999)
Construing experience through meaning

Traditional grammar

- “In traditional grammar, only certain grammatical categories were taken into consideration; these categories were (i) overt and (ii) word-based.”

Whorf... Halliday ...

- “We consider not only overt categories but covert ones. ... [Whorf] made the distinction between **overt** categories or phenotypes and **covert** categories or cryptotypes.”

'Reactances'

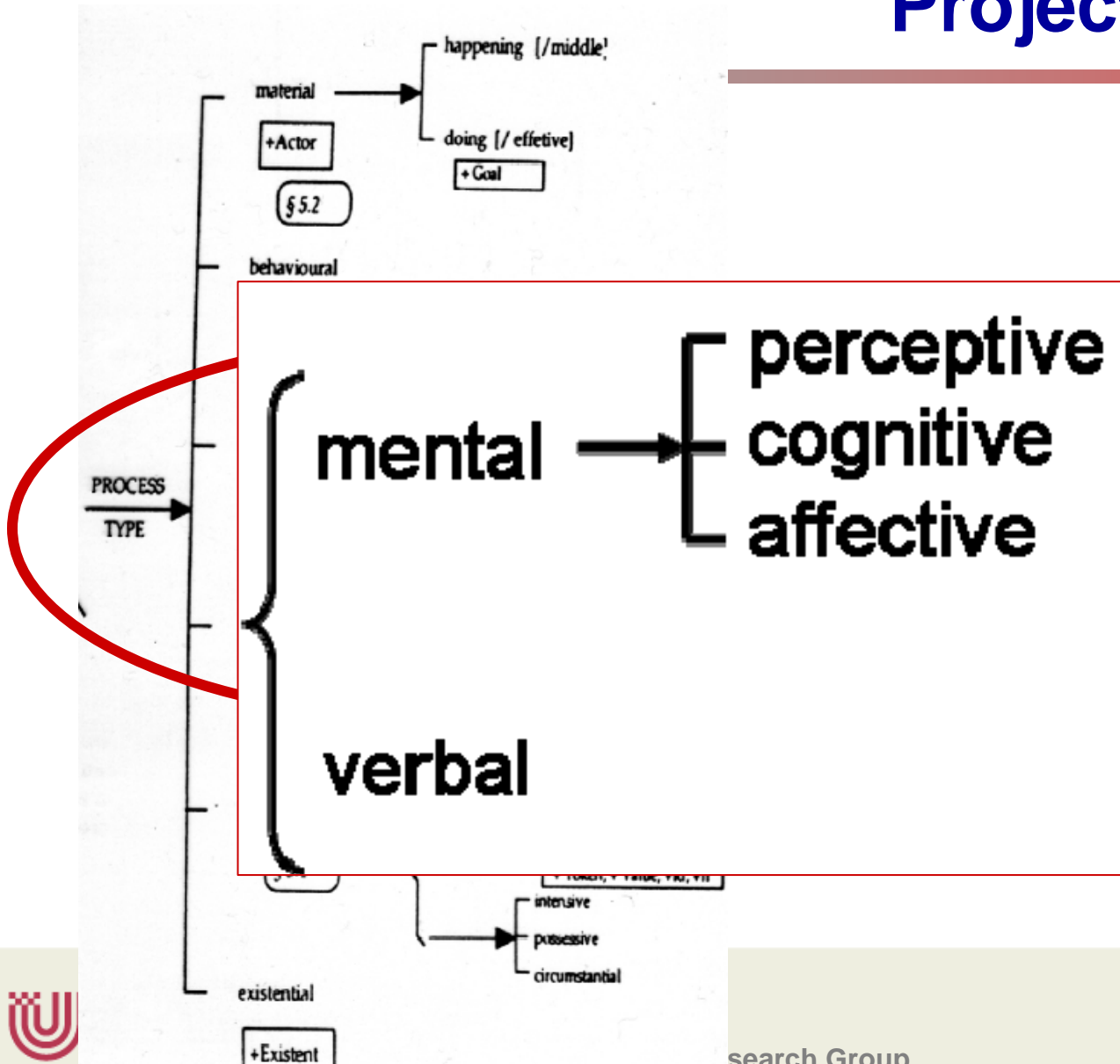
Whorf... Halliday ...

	[material]	[mental]
unmarked present	He's playing	He thinks so
directionality	She built it	She likes it / It pleases her
phenomenality	He ate it.	He thinks he'll eat it
consciousness	It struck the shore	It finally struck him that...
pro-verb	What'd he do with it?	no pro-verb

Semantic Configurations

- This area of meaning has been mapped out in considerable detail
 - One area:
 - *projection*

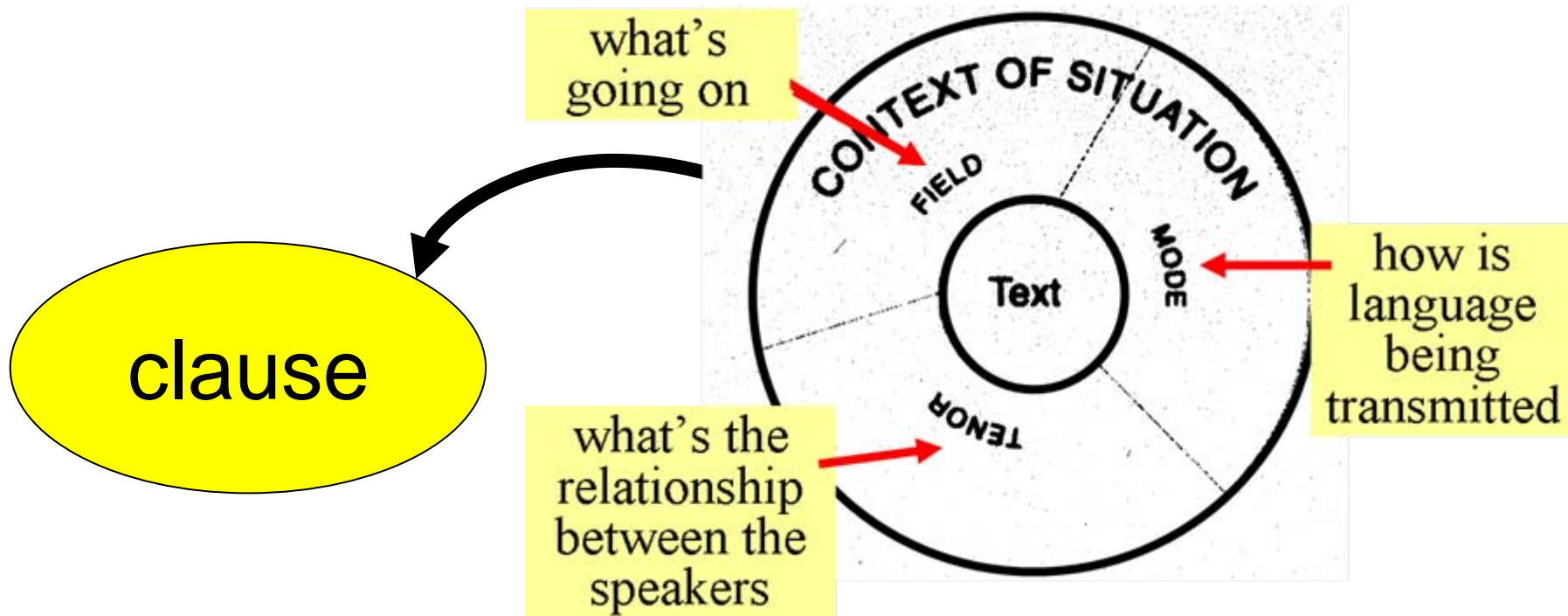
Types of activities Projecting



Indefinite Recursion

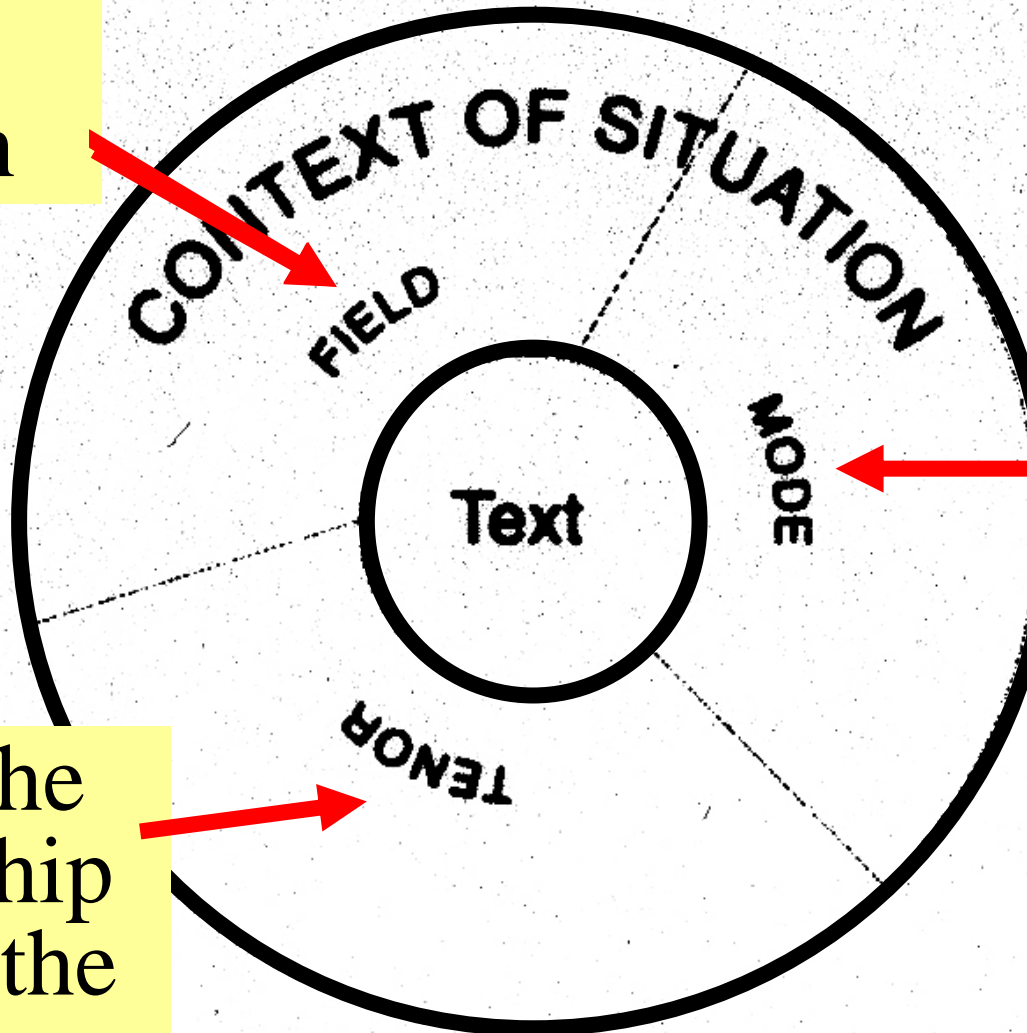
X says
that Y believes
that Z sees
that A hopes
that ...

Contextual Commitments



self-enunciation

what's
going on



how is
language
being
transmitted

what's the
relationship
between the
speakers

Semantic Configurations

- This area of meaning has been mapped out in considerable detail
 - Activities of particular classes, entities of particular classes, qualities, evaluations, etc.
 - Temporal relations
 - Functional ‘slots’ for speakers, hearers, etc.: deixis, personal pronouns, etc.
 - Sayings, tellings, showing, believings

Moving on to interpretation...

From semantics ...

... to discourse

Discourse Interpretation

van Leeuwen & Kress

development of modes

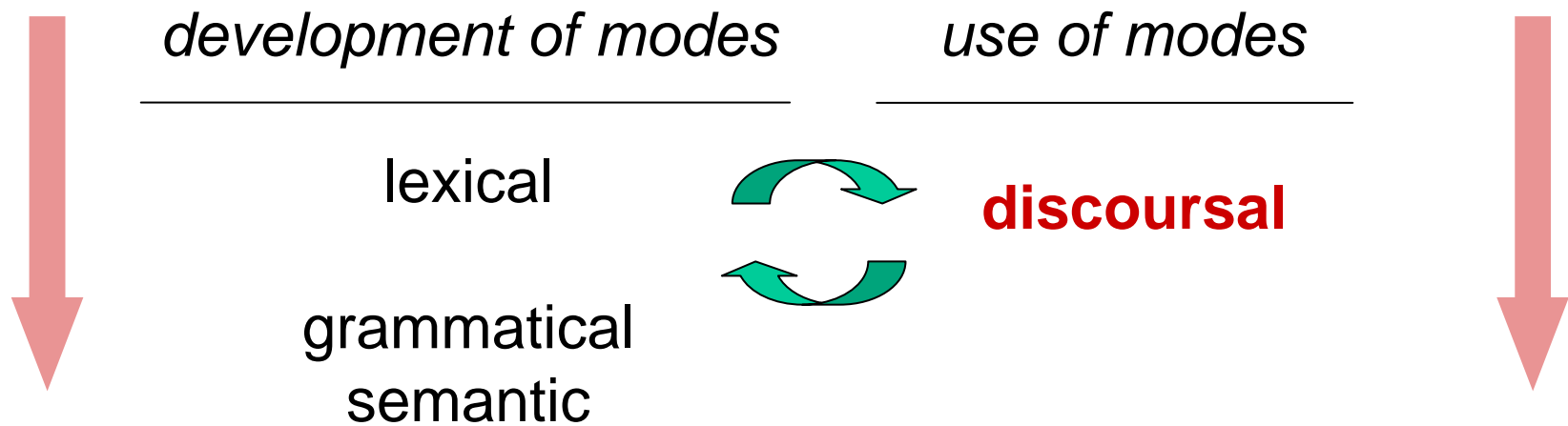
lexical

grammatical – semantic

discoursal



Discourse Interpretation: across all genres



Linguistic approaches to text/discourse meaning

- Nowadays there is a rich array of approaches to describing the meaning of texts quite precisely:
 - Rhetorical Structure Theory
 - Conjunctive Relations
 - Generic Structure Potential
 - Segmented Discourse Representation Theory ←

Linguistic examples of discourse interpretation at work

1. Max stood up. John greeted him.

Discourse interpretation at work

1. Max stood up. John greeted him.
2. Max fell. John pushed him.

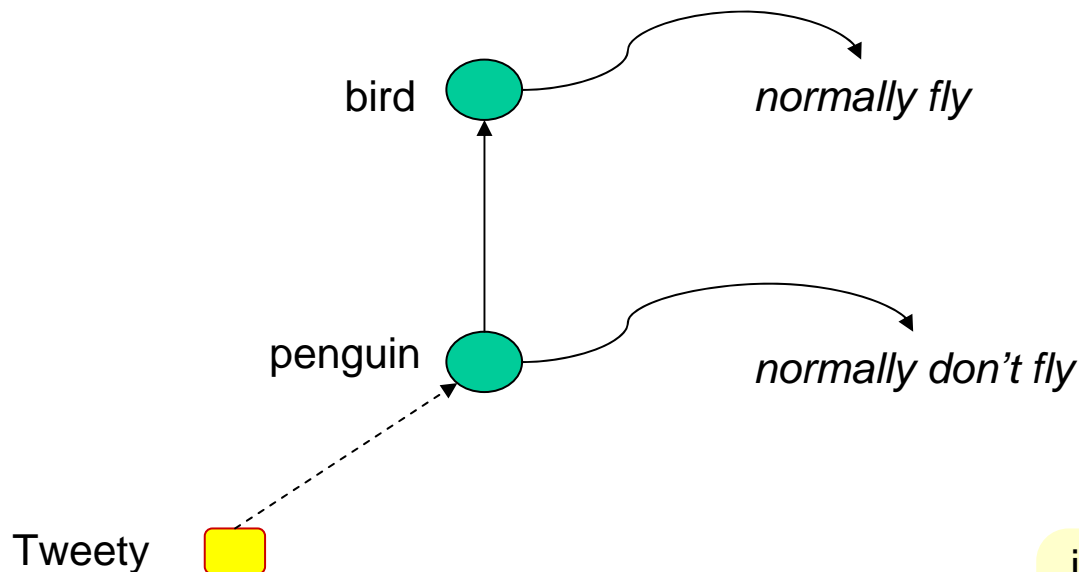
Mechanisms of the Analysis: Defeasible Deduction Rules

- **Defeasible Modus Ponens**
 - E.g., birds normally fly, Tweety is a bird; so Tweety flies
- **The Penguin Principle**
 - E.g., Penguins are birds, birds normally fly, penguins normally don't fly, Tweety is a penguin; so Tweety doesn't fly.
- **Nixon Diamond**
 - E.g., rejects:
 - Quakers are pacifists, Republicans are not, Nixon is both a Quaker and republican
 - Therefore Nixon is a pacifist and is not a pacifist

Mechanisms of the Analysis: Defeasible Deduction Rules

The Penguin Principle

- E.g., Penguins are birds, birds normally fly, penguins normally don't fly, Tweety is a penguin; so Tweety doesn't fly.

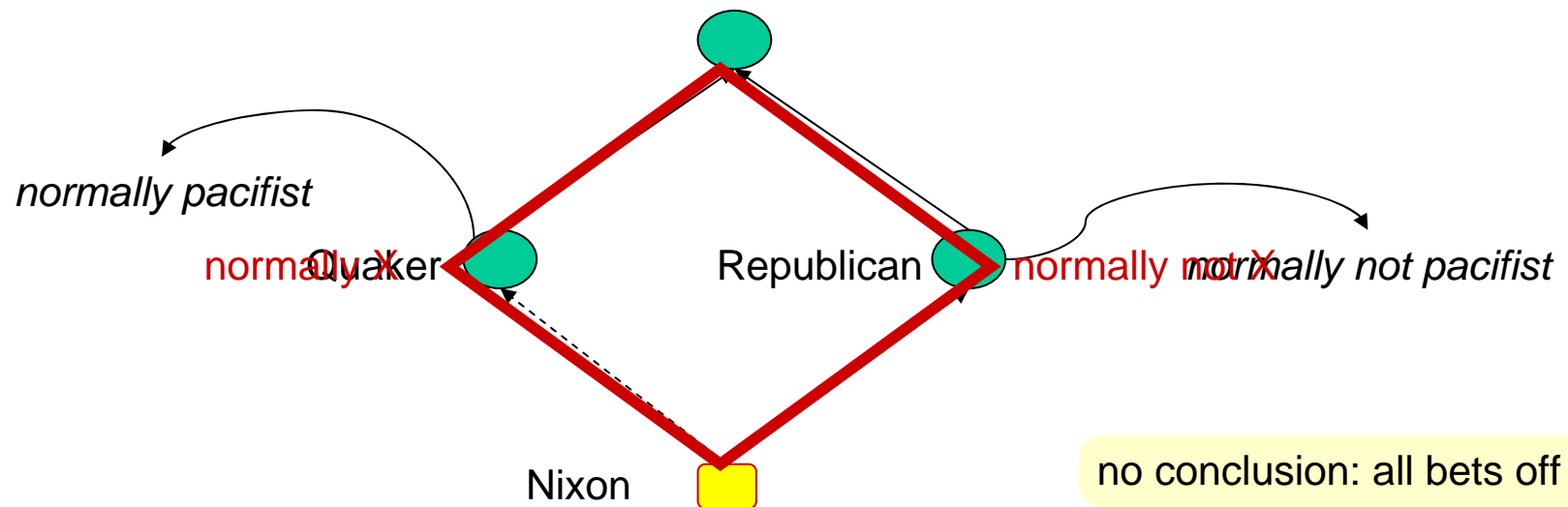


i.e., take the most specific case

Mechanisms of the Analysis: Defeasible Deduction Rules

Nixon Diamond

- Quakers are pacifists, Republicans are not, Nixon is both a Quaker and republican
- Therefore Nixon is a pacifist and is not a pacifist ✗



Mechanisms of the Analysis: Discourse Relations

- **Narration**

- If we add b into a discourse interpretation then we might deduce that b adds to an unfolding storyline
- If *Narration* (a, b) then a happens before b

- **Explanation**

- If we are adding b into a discourse interpretation and b causes a then we might deduce that b is an explanation of a

Discourse interpretation at work

a **b**
1. Max stood up. John greeted him
simple past simple past

2 possible rules: narration, explanation

1. assume narration
2. then b follows a
3. no further deduction necessary at this point

discourse
interpretation



1. *b follows a*

Discourse interpretation at work

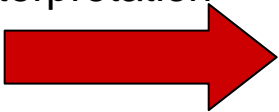
a **b**
2. Max fell. John pushed him.
simple past simple past

2 possible rules: narration, explanation

1. assume narration
2. then b follows a
3. but this is in conflict with world knowledge that pushing can cause falling, i.e., a follows b.
4. most specific wins
- 5.

***b causes and explains a
(and comes before a)***

discourse
interpretation



Discourse structure is functional

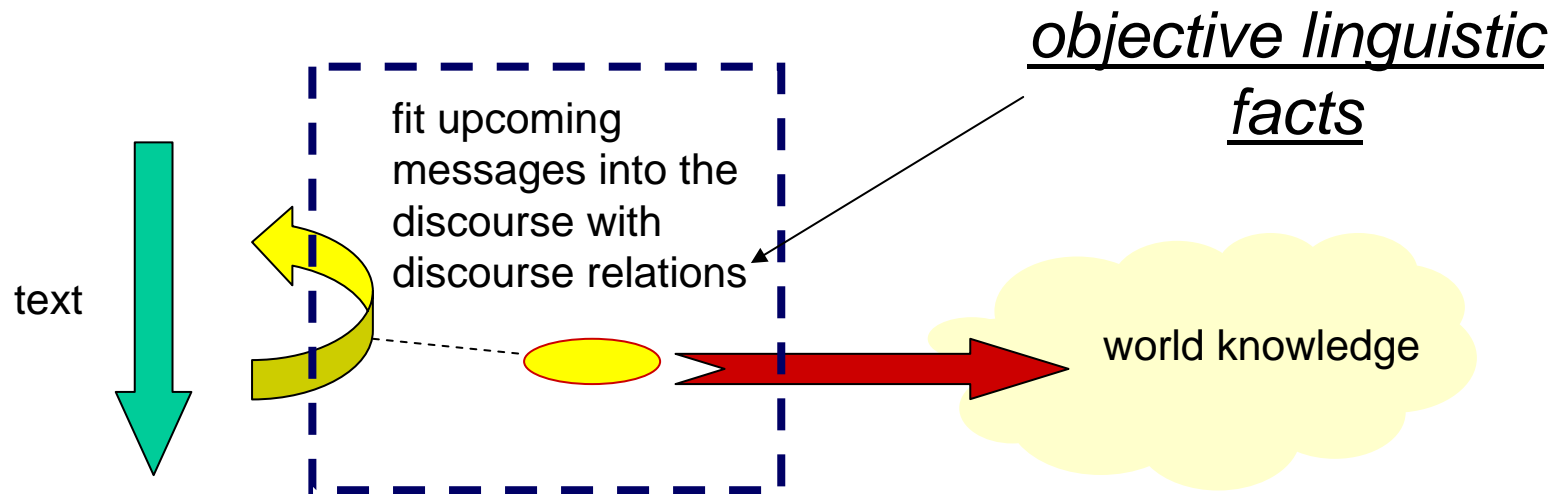
- What is the interpretation, as it happens, of a stream of discourse?
 - expectation generating...
 - convention...
 - intended...
 - method...

Formal Discourse Semantics (Asher, Lascarides)

- Defeasible rules of interpretation can be applied:
 - To uncover interpretations dynamically
 - To explain how interpretation works so flexibly
 - But also, to show how interpretation is sensibly *constrained*.
- Interesting treatment of **logogenesis**

Basic Principle

- The discourse relation rules control when and how world knowledge is considered in the interpretation process



“dialogue between micro and macro”

Now...

- How much of this potential is available across semiotic modes?

Moving across Semiotic Modes: a Starting Point

- “... a specific colour, as signifier, has, first of all, of itself, a potential for meaning as a signifier due to and in its materiality and interaction with the physiology of bodies.
- Second, it also has meaning potential because of its cultural history.”

(Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p59)

What is a semiotic mode?

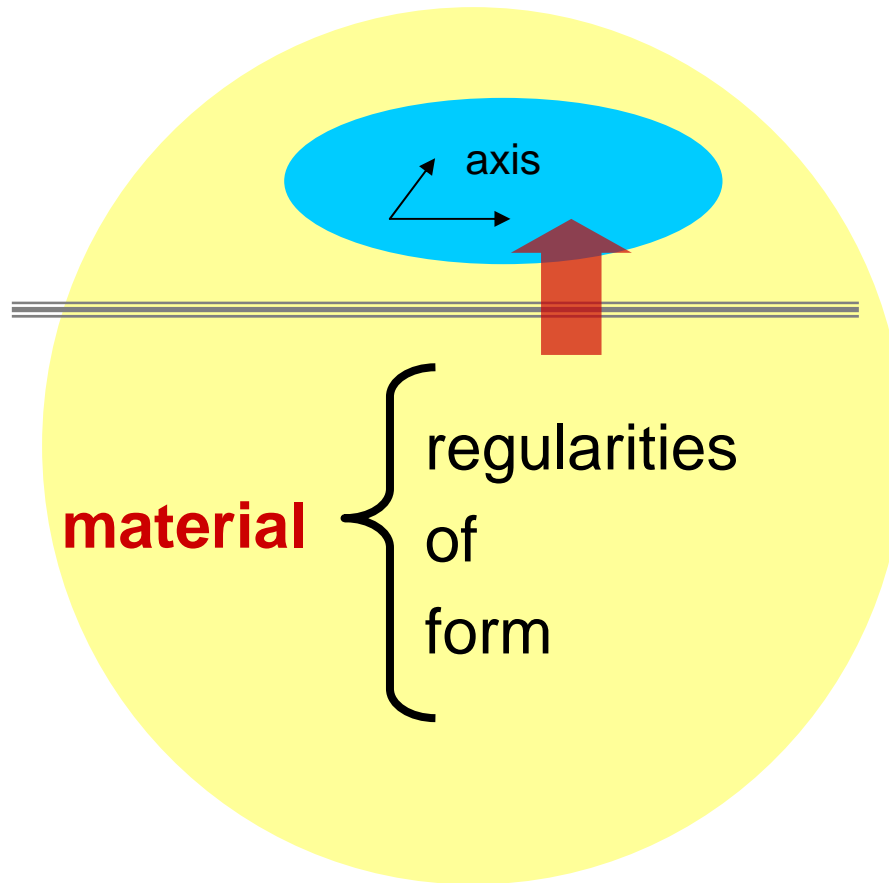
“... the question of whether X is a mode or not is a question specific to a particular community. As laypersons we may regard visual image to be a mode, while a professional photographer will say that photography has rules and practices, elements and materiality quite different from that of painting and that the two are distinct modes.”

(Kress et al. 2000, p43)

Semiotic Modes: Material substrates

- A semiotic mode can come into being when there is some material substrate that is sufficiently 'controllable' as to admit of purposeful articulations

Semiotic Code / Resources



- paradigmatic systems of choice
- syntagmatic organisation imposing structure

Semiotic Modes: meanings

- Broad distinction between 'sign' and 'symptom'
- Articulation of the material carries patterns that are

**interpretable
in
context**

← **semiotic code**

← **discourse**

- Meaning-making

Early 1980s electric typewriter

Example from:
Sue Walker (2001)
*Typography and
language in everyday
life*. Longman, p82



Coin operated photocopying

■ OPENING HOURS

THE COIN-OPERATED PHOTOCOPYING SERVICE IS OPEN DURING NORMAL LIBRARY HOURS. IT CLOSES WHEN THE FIRST LIBRARY CLOSING BUZZER SOUNDS - 15 MINS. BEFORE THE LIBRARY CLOSING. ANY COPYING ALREADY PAID FOR AT THAT TIME MAY BE COMPLETED, BUT NO FURTHER COINS MUST BE INSERTED. USERS MUST LEAVE THE LIBRARY AT CLOSING TIME.

■ HOW TO USE THE PHOTOCOPIERS

THE MACHINES ARE FITTED WITH MICROPROCESSOR-BASED COINBOXES, WHICH WILL ACCEPT COINS OF DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS: 50p, 10p, 5p AND 2p. FOUR MACHINES WILL PRODUCE SIZE FOR SIZE A4 COPIES AND ONE MACHINE WILL PRODUCE SIZE FOR SIZE A3 COPIES.

THE CHARGES ARE: A4 :4p PER COPY
A3 :5p PER COPY

IF YOU ARE COPYING MORE THAN ONE SHEET YOU MAY PAY FOR SEVERAL SHEETS BEFORE YOU START - THE COINBOX DISPLAY WILL SHOW YOU HOW MANY SHEETS YOU HAVE PAID FOR; THIS MEANS YOU WILL NOT ALWAYS NEED CHANGE FOR LARGE COINS. REMEMBER THAT THE MACHINES DO NOT GIVE CHANGE; ONLY INSERT SUFFICIENT COINS FOR THE NUMBER OF COPIES YOU REQUIRE.

■ CHANGE

TWO CHANGE MACHINES ARE PROVIDED; THESE GIVE THE FOLLOWING CHANGE OPTIONS:

50p = 5 x 10p 10p = 2 x 5p
10p = 5 x 2p

USERS REQUIRING CHANGE OTHER THAN THIS MUST OBTAIN IT ELSEWHERE (EG LLOYDS BANK IN THE STUDENTS UNION OR WHITEKNIGHTS HOUSE). CHANGE FOR NOTES - £1, £5, AND £10 - IS AVAILABLE AT THE CONTROL DESK IN THE EVENINGS AND AT WEEKENDS. CHANGE IS NOT AVAILABLE AT OTHER TIMES.

■ BREAKDOWNS

TO REDUCE THE FREQUENCY OF MACHINE JAMS AND BREAKDOWNS PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING HINTS:

- X MAKE SURE THE ORIGINAL IS TIGHT UP AGAINST THE RIGHT-HAND EDGE OF THE GLASS PLATEN.
- X MAKE SURE THE BLUE PLATEN COVER IS CLOSED DURING THE PHOTOCOPYING PROCESS.

IF THE MACHINE SHOULD BREAKDOWN THE VISUAL DISPLAY UNIT WILL START TO FLASH. REPORT THE PROBLEM AND MACHINE NUMBER AT THE ENQUIRY DESK AND A MEMBER OF STAFF WILL ATTEND TO YOU.

YOUR CREDIT WILL CONTINUE TO BE DISPLAYED ON THE MACHINE. IF YOU HAVE TO MOVE TO ANOTHER MACHINE DUE TO MACHINE FAILURE, YOUR CREDIT WILL BE REIMBURSED.

■ COPYRIGHT

REMEMBER THAT THE PHOTOCOPIES MAY ONLY BE USED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE COPYRIGHT ACT. PLEASE REFER TO THE ACCOMPANYING NOTICE AND BOOKLET, OR ASK A MEMBER OF LIBRARY STAFF IF YOU ARE IN ANY DOUBT ABOUT WHAT YOU MAY COPY.

Mid 1980s desktop published

Example from:
Sue Walker (2001)
*Typography and
language in everyday
life*. Longman, p82



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COIN OPERATED PHOTOCOPYING

Opening hours

The coin operated photocopying service is open during normal Library hours. It closes when the first Library closing buzzer sounds - 15 minutes before the Library closes.

Any copying already paid for at that time may be completed, time permitting, but no further coins must be inserted.

How to use the machines

The machines are fitted with microprocessor based coinboxes, which will accept coins of different denominations: 50p, 10p, 5p and 2p.

Four machines will produce size for size A4 copies and one machine will produce size for size A3 copies.

The cost per copy is: A4 = 5p; A3 = 7p.

If you are copying more than one sheet you may pay for several sheets before you start - the coinbox display will show you how many sheets you have paid for; this means you will not always need change for large coins.

Remember that the machines do not give change; only insert sufficient coins for the number of copies you intend to do.

Change

Three change machines are provided; these give the following change options: a) £1 = 2 x 50p; b) 50p = 5 x 10p & 10p = 5 x 2p; c) 10p = 2 x 5p. Users requiring change other than this must obtain it elsewhere (eg Lloyds Bank in the Students Union or in Whiteknights House). Change for notes - £5 and £10 - is available from the Control Desk in the evenings and at weekends. Change is not available at other times.

Breakdowns

To reduce the frequency of machine jams and breakdowns please remember the following hints:

- * Make sure your original is tight up against the right hand edge of the glass platten.

- * Make sure the blue platten cover is closed whilst photocopying.

If the machine should breakdown the visual display unit will start to flash; (-3: paper jam and -1: no paper). Report the problem and machine number at the Enquiry Desk and a member of Staff will attend to you. Your credit will continue to be displayed on the machine. If you have to be moved to another machine due to machine failure, your credit will be reimbursed.

Copyright

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Late 1980s desktop published

Example from:
Sue Walker (2001)
*Typography and
language in everyday
life*. Longman, p82



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LIBRARY PHOTOCOPYING

Opening hours

The Library photocopying service is open during normal Library hours.
It closes when the first closing buzzer sounds - 15 minutes before the Library closes.
Any copying already paid for at that time may be completed, time permitting, but no further copying must be started.

How to use the machines

The machines are fitted with microprocessor based vendors, which will accept either coins of different denominations (£1, 50p, 10p and 2p), or credit cards which are only available from the University Bookshop.
Four machines will produce size for size A4 copies and one machine will produce size for size A3 copies

Copy costs

Cash copying

A4 (single copy) = 6p; (multiple copies) = 5p each
A3 single & multiple copies = 8p each
Insert coins equal to the value of copies required.
The machines do not give change.

Card copying

A4 single and multiple copies = 5p each
A3 single & multiple copies = 7p each

Change & Credit Cards

Three change machines are provided; these give the following change options:
£1 = 2 x 50p, 50p = 5 x 10p & 10p = 5 x 2p.
Users requiring change other than this must obtain it elsewhere (eg Lloyds Bank in the Students Union or in Whiteknights House). Change for notes (£5 and £10) is available from the Control Desk in the evenings and at weekends. Change is not available at other times. Change is provided for photocopying only.

Credit Cards for the value of £5.00 can be purchased only from the University Bookshop.
Please make cheques payable "the University of Reading".

Breakdowns

To reduce the frequency of machine jams and breakdowns please remember the following hints:

- * Make sure your original is tight up against the right hand edge of the glass.
- * Make sure the blue lid is closed whilst photocopying.

If the machine should breakdown report the problem and machine number to the Enquiry Desk and a member of Staff will attend to you.
Your credit will continue to be displayed on the machine.

Copyright

Remember that the photocopiers may only be used in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act. Please refer to the accompanying notice and booklet, or ask a member of Library Staff if you are in any doubt about what you may copy.

Units and Meaning

- The basic parts of this document have not changed
- Various typographical extensions have come into play
- But what does it mean? And how do we know?
 - sequence?
 - collection?
 - alternatives?

without context,
we don't know!

Basic Phenomenon

Much of the meaning assigned to varied semiotic organisations are of this kind:

... **situated discourse interpretation**

1972

1994

Gannet

Family SULIDAE. Gannets

Sula bassana

No. 27



This great bird has the magnificent wings and flight of a giant Gull, and a wing-span of nearly 6 ft. It can sight a fish from a great height while on the wing and will drop like an arrow into the water after its prey. The plumage is white with a tinge of buff on the head and neck, and dark brown, almost black, wing-tips. Immatures are first dusky all over, later piebald or white sprinkled with dark spots.

Haunt The coast and sea, and at breeding time rocky isles and stacks, chiefly on the north and west of the British Isles.

Nest Of seaweed and tufts of grass or thrift; on the rocky ledge of a stack or island in a great colony with others.

Eggs 1, nearly white, chalky. April or May.

Food Fish.

Notes Short and harsh.

Length 36 or 37 in (91 or 94 cm)

Status Resident

~~Rules~~ of filmic organisation

- looking up at a character indicates power
- looking down on a character indicates powerlessness
- fade-to-black punctuates scenes
- stick to the 180° rule to avoid confusion

Looking up at a character indicates power

The Birds



Looking down on a character indicates powerlessness

Wall Street



Fade-to-black separates scenes

Three Colours:
Blue



Fade-to-black separates scenes

Three Colours:
Blue



Respect the 180° rule

Eyes Wide Shut



Respect the 180° rule

Eyes Wide Shut



What kind of structure is this?

- **discoursal** not syntactic
- defeasible / abductive (Pierce)
- relationships to linguistic discoursal structures currently receiving detailed study

Semiotic modes as achievements

van Leeuwen & Kress

development of modes

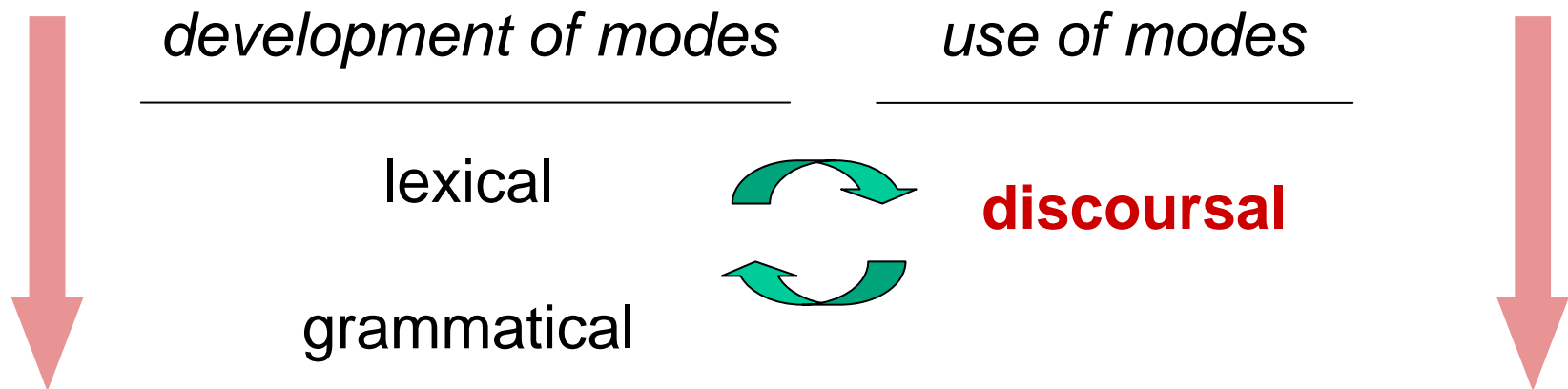
lexical

grammatical

discoursal



Semiotic modes as achievements



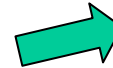
Successive syntagmatic development

2 shots

difference

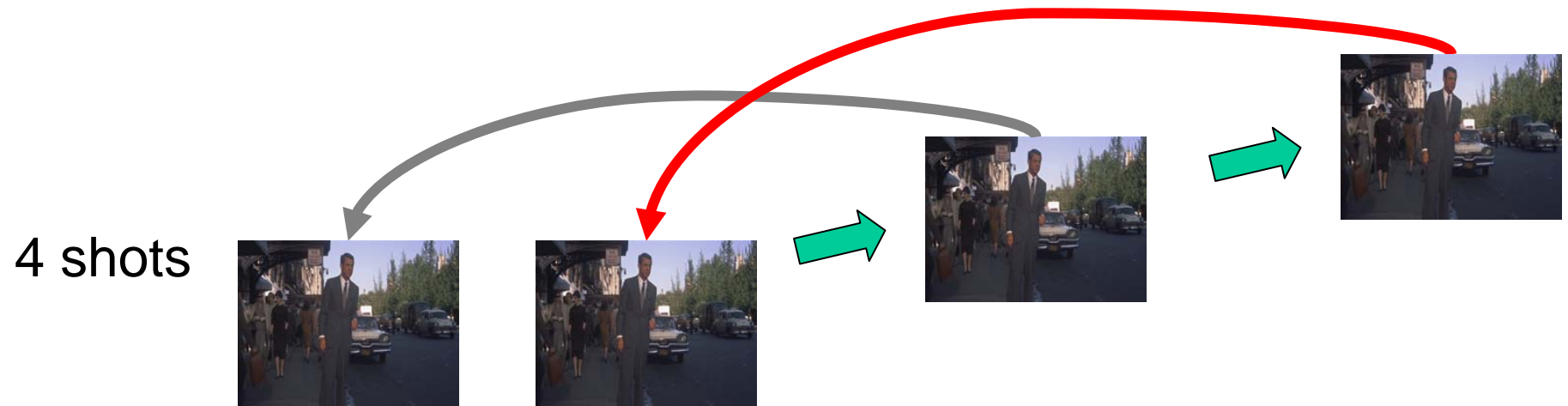


3 shots

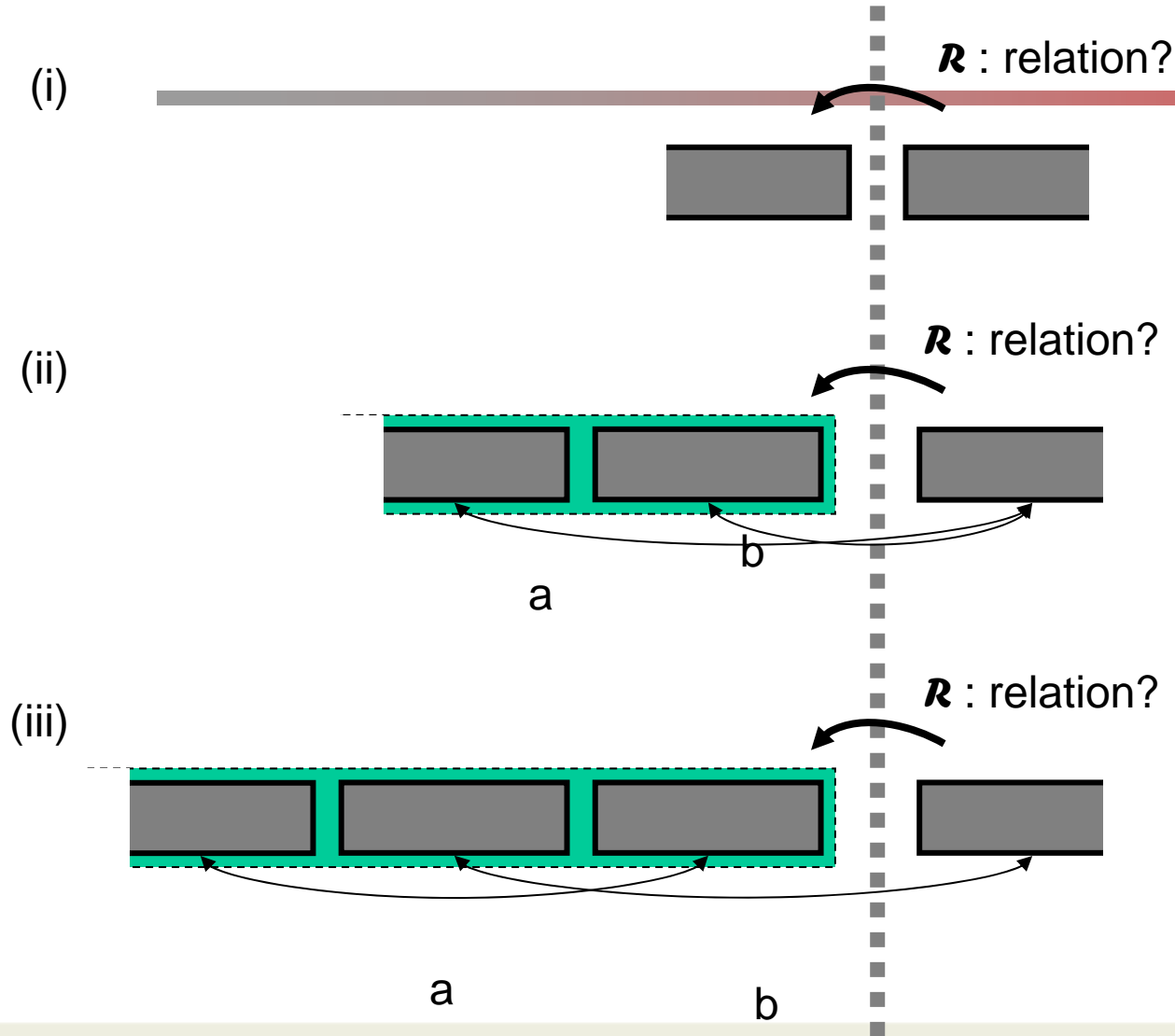




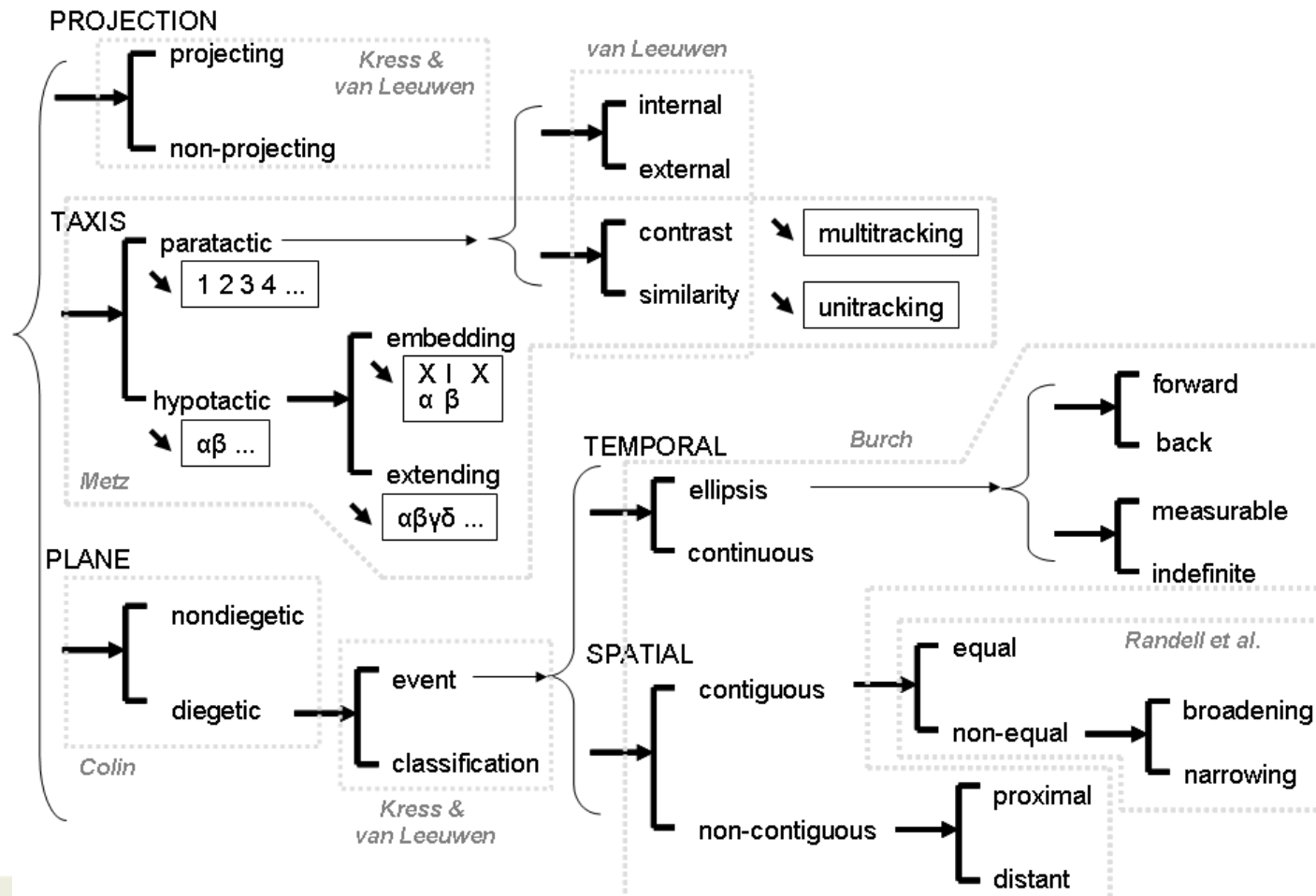
Successive syntagmatic development



Successive syntagmatic development



Filmic Paradigmatic Organisation



Point-of-View: Projection



R : relation?



person shown in
such a way that a
gaze vector is
derivable

object shown:

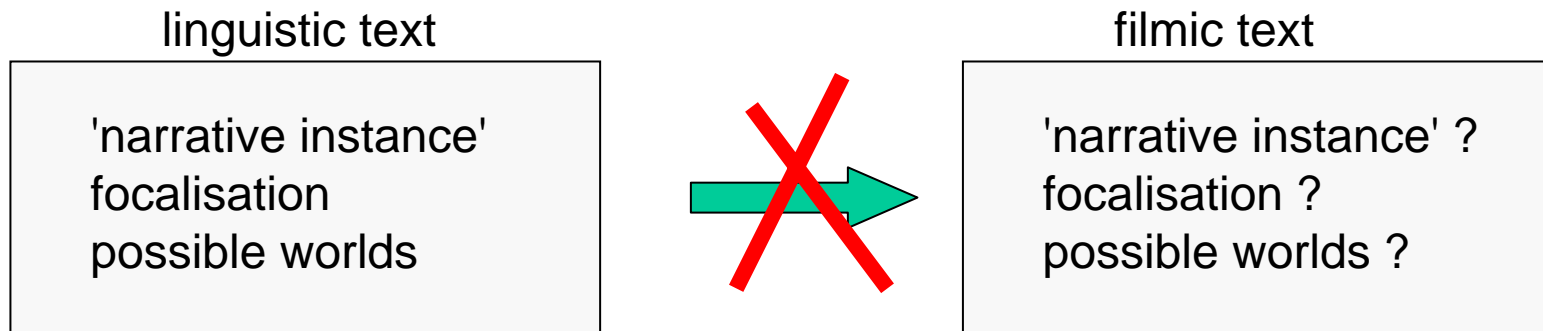
↑
explicitness

with cues:

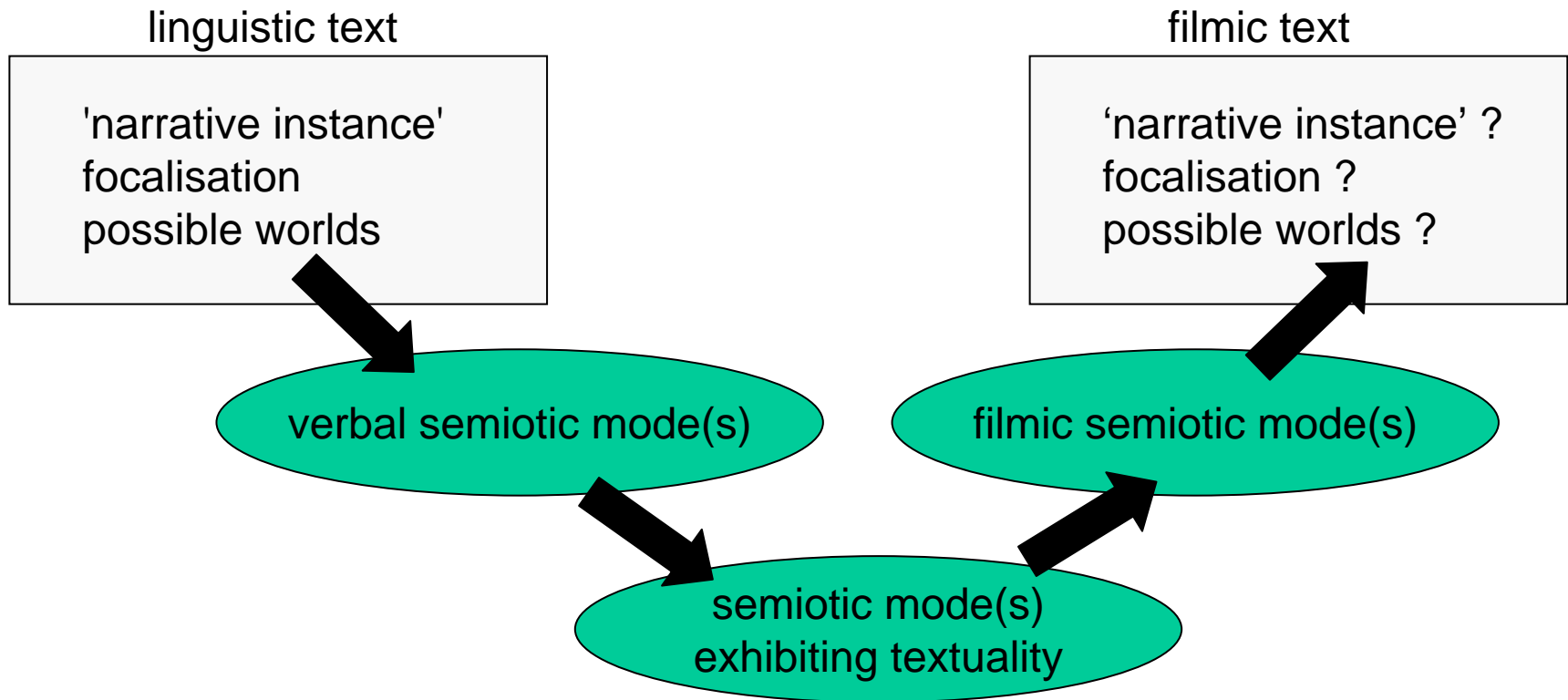
explicitly framed
close-up
visual effects suggesting 'subjectivity'
spatially proximal
potentially of 'interest'



A problematic approach



A better approach



Conclusion

- **Discourse Relations**
 - are linguistic facts, but are ontologically distinct in that they feed into **abductive** processes
 - they apply across modalities
- Terms such as focalisation, etc. appear to refer to **similar classes of entities**
- We are actually only at the beginning of really being able to apply much of narrative concerns across modalities
- Need: **significantly more** empirical study