# Pragmatics

the study of how to interpret
language in context

# Radio Programme

| | |
|---|---|
| MAX | A couple of questions very easy to answer for a radio programme we're doing. The first of the questions is *What* would you say language is? |
| WOMAN | Language ... well it's the dialogue that people speak within various countries. |
| MAX | Fair enough aaand *what* would you say it's *made* out of? |
| WOMAN | (*Pause, 8 seconds*) It's made out of (*puzzled intonation*) |
| MAX | Hmmm. |
| WOMAN | Well I don't know you'd tell what it's *made* out of ... It's a person's *expression* I suppose is it? |
| MAX | I haven't got the answers, I've only got the questions (*laughing*) |
| WOMAN | (*simultaneously: small laugh*) |
| SID | That's not *bad* though. |
| WOMAN | Well it's an *expression,* it would be a person's *expression* wouldn't it? |
| SID | That's a good answer. |
| MAX | Thank you very much |

# Alternative formulations

- previously to Sid:

  "Two questions that you can answer briefly..."

- to woman:

  "A couple of questions very easy to answer..."

- "... questions very easy to answer..."
  - previously to Sid: "Two questions that you can answer briefly..."

    **[you are busy, you can answer briefly]**

  - to woman: "...easy..."

    **[you are likely to be nervous, not used to dealing with definitions, this is easy (even) for you]**

# Alternative formulations

- "Tell me what language is!" $\rightarrow$
  - "What is language?"

  - "(If I were to ask you what is language, then) what would you say language is?

  - "(I might not even ask (because I cannot presume to impose) ... and even if I were to ask, you might either not answer, or answer only hypothetically, ...

*[gendered roles, middle-aged to elderly, middle-class to middle-class]*

# Radio Programme

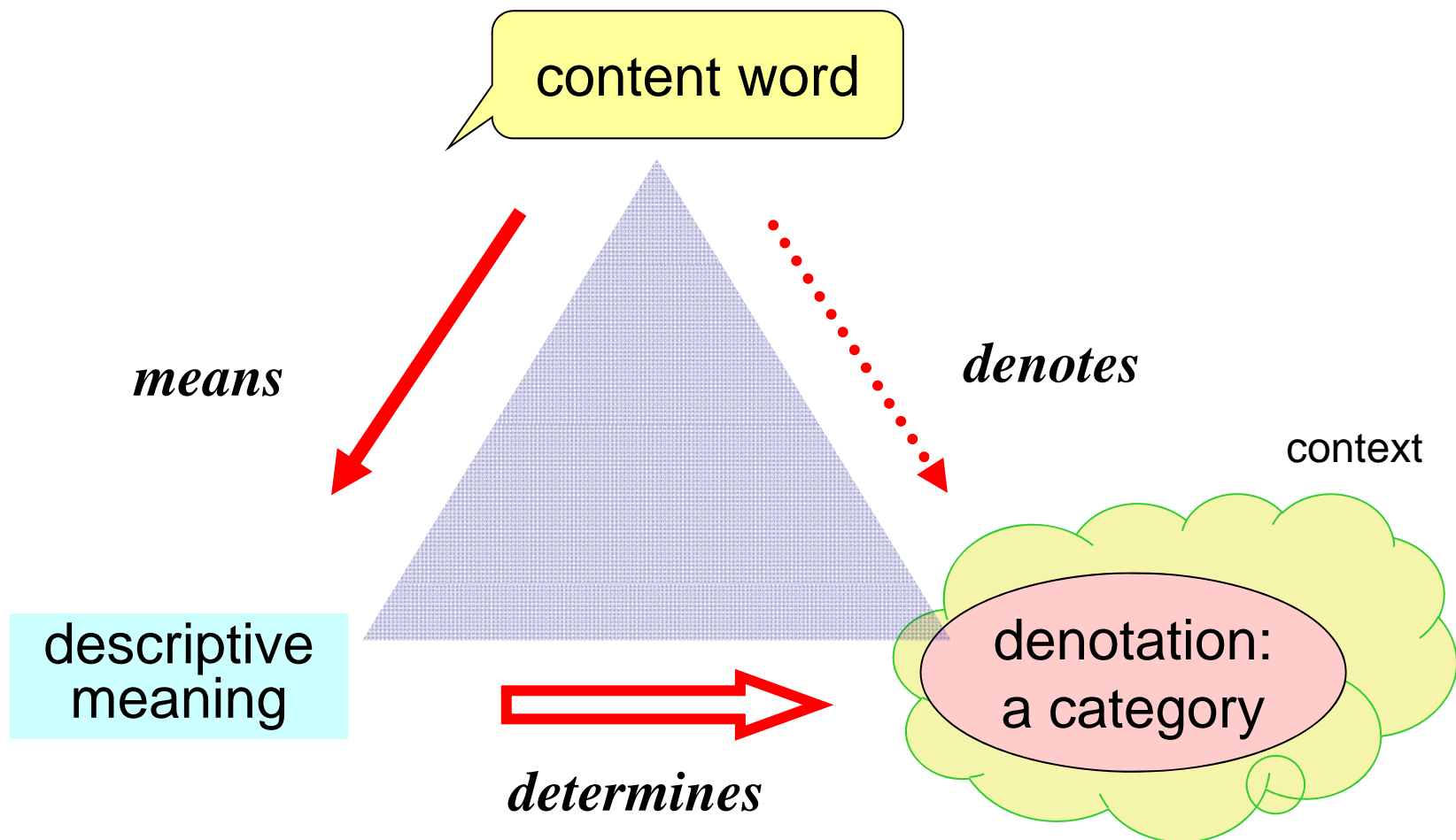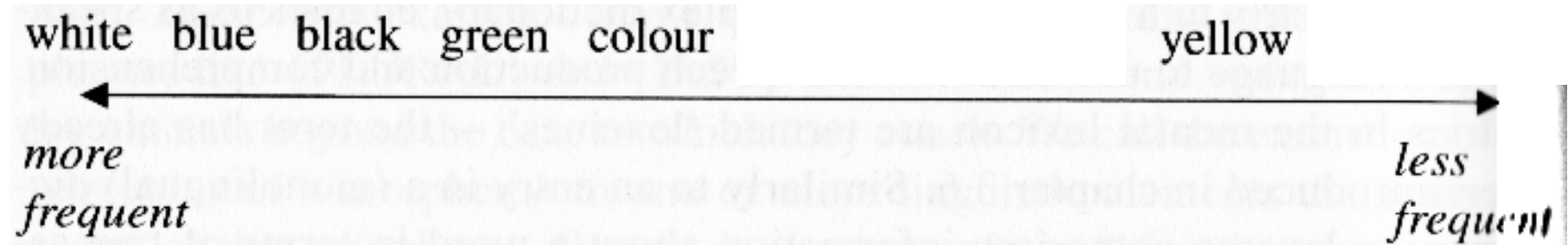| | |
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# Pragmatics

- how do we move from these 'utterances', occuring one after the other very quickly, to a **contextualised interpretation**?

- there is a lot of knowledge in our heads about how interaction works…

- … but it is not all in our heads!
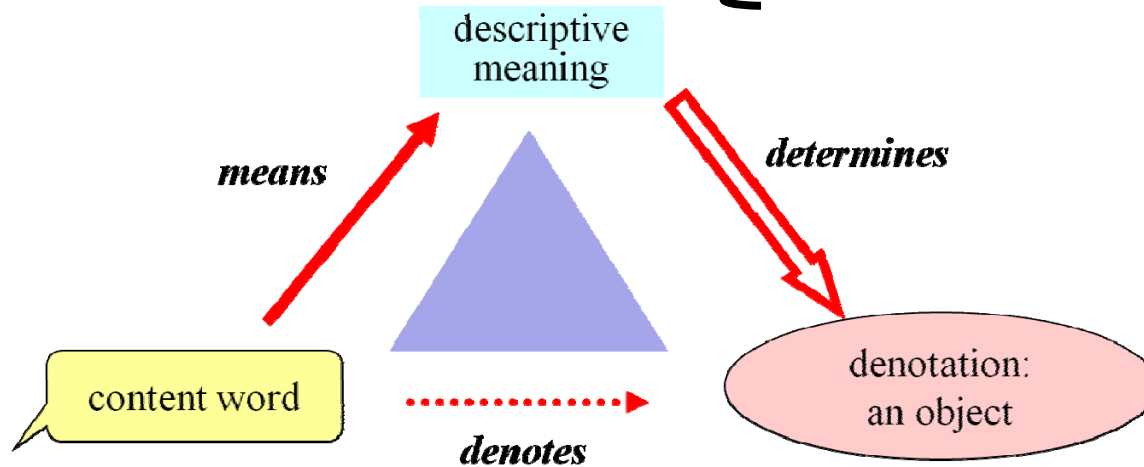we are not just making it up!

# Semiotic Triangle: words

content word

*means*

*denotes*

context

descriptive meaning

*determines*

denotation: a category

# Connotations

white  blue  black  green  colour                                    yellow

←————————————————————————————————————————————→

*more
frequent*                                                            *less
frequent*

# Connotations

white  blue  black  green  colour  blood  communist  yellow  flag  bright

more frequent ←——————————————————————→ less frequent

# Denotations



(6) Boxes?

a.

b.

categorization

descriptive meaning

**means**

**determines**

content word

**denotes**

denotation: an object
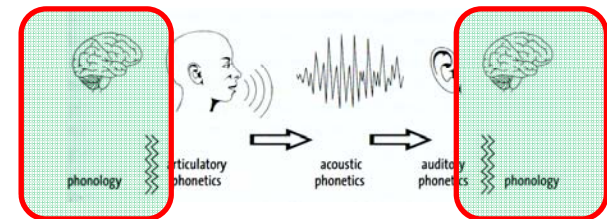
phonology — articulatory phonetics — acoustic phonetics — auditory phonetics — phonology
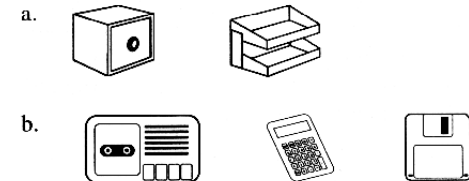
# Semantic / Pragmatic Distinction

(11) We would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused.

(12) a. 'An entity comprising the writer of this sentence and other people ('*we*')
  express their wish ('*would like*')
   to say that they are sorry ('*to apologise*')
    in case something has become the cause of ('*for ... caused*')
     problems which annoy someone ('*any inconvenience*').'

b. 'The construction company, who have set up this road sign,
  want to apologise
   to me, the reader of this sentence,
    for the delay,
     which they acknowledge to be their fault.'

# Pragmatic
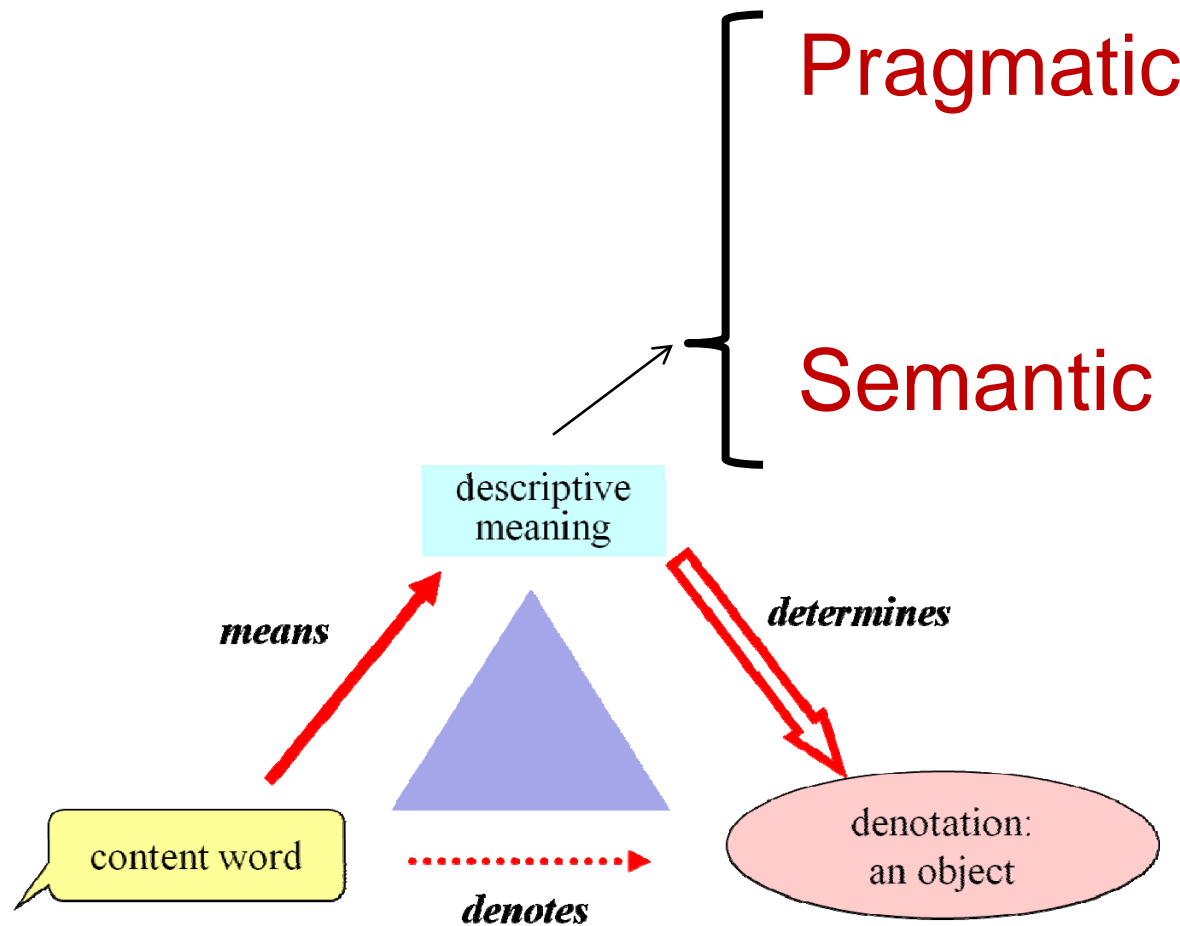
- interprets semantics with respect to **specific situational contexts**

# Semantic

- **independent** of context
- built up from lexical items combined following the rules of syntax

descriptive meaning

*means*

*determines*

content word
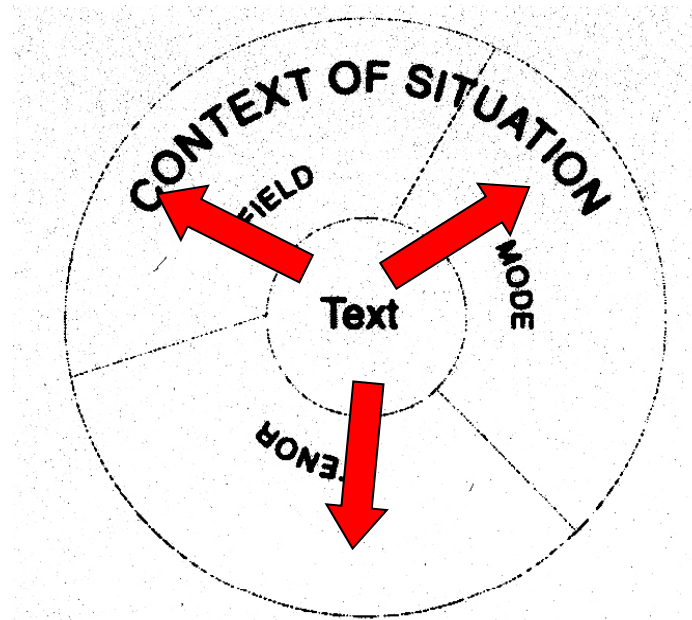
*denotes*

denotation: an object

# Building up context

- some words, phrases, grammatical patterns are particularly involved with **context**

"deixis"

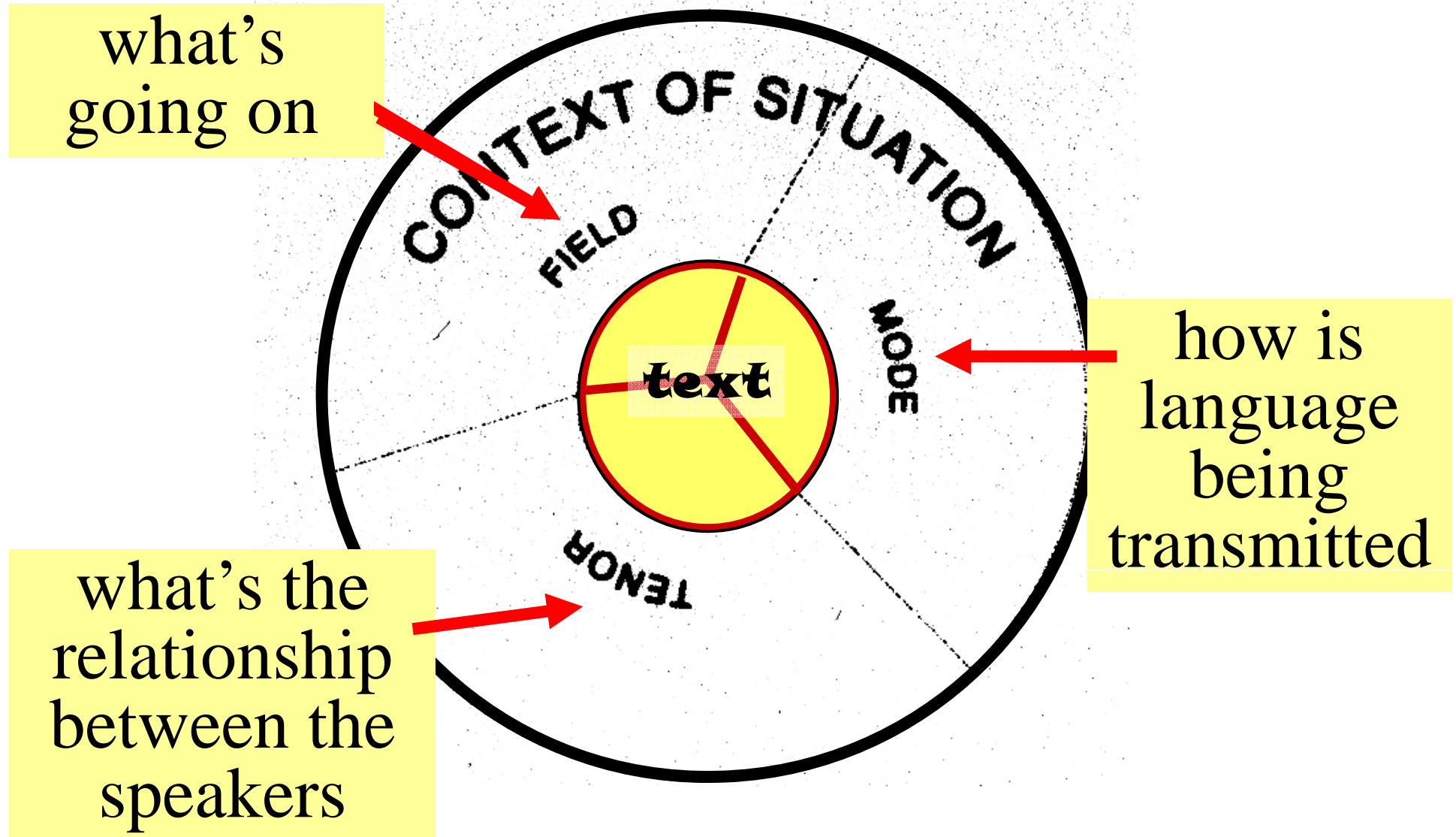**deictic expressions**:
Plag *et al.:* p146ff

# Deixis categories

| personal pronouns |
|:---:|
| *I, you* |
| |

**words**

**grammar**

# The contexts of text



what's going on

CONTEXT OF SITUATION

FIELD

MODE

text

how is language being transmitted

what's the relationship between the speakers

TENOR

# Deixis categories

| personal pronouns | politeness markers | places | times | discourse |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *I, you* | *Du / Sie* | *here, there* | *now, then* | *this, it, that* |
| 'agreement' $\emptyset$ / -s | Japanese: '*giving*' | German: *hin- / her-* | 'tense' **-s, -t** | Japanese: *-wa, -ga* |

what's going on

what's the relationship between the speakers

how is message is organised

# But is that enough?
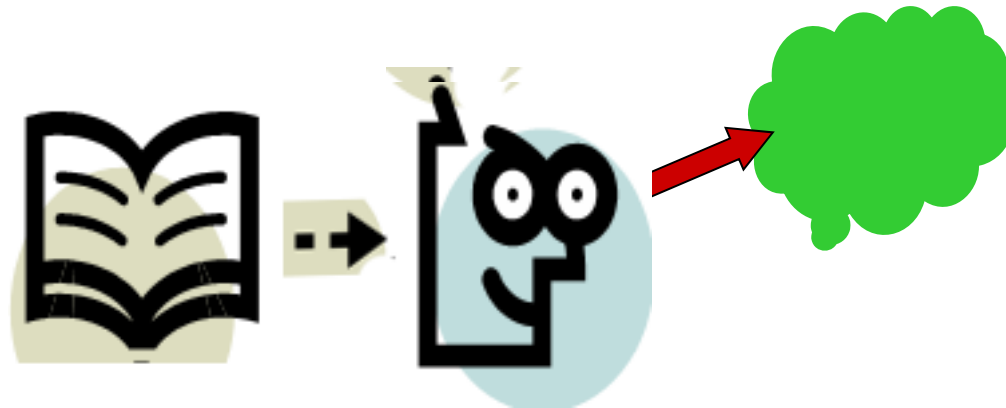
# How to interpret?

- Can I have a drink, David? (modulated interrogative)
- Where's the drinks, David? (wh-interrogative)
- Give me a drink, David (imperative)
- I want a drink (declarative)
- What I'd do for a drink! (exclamative)
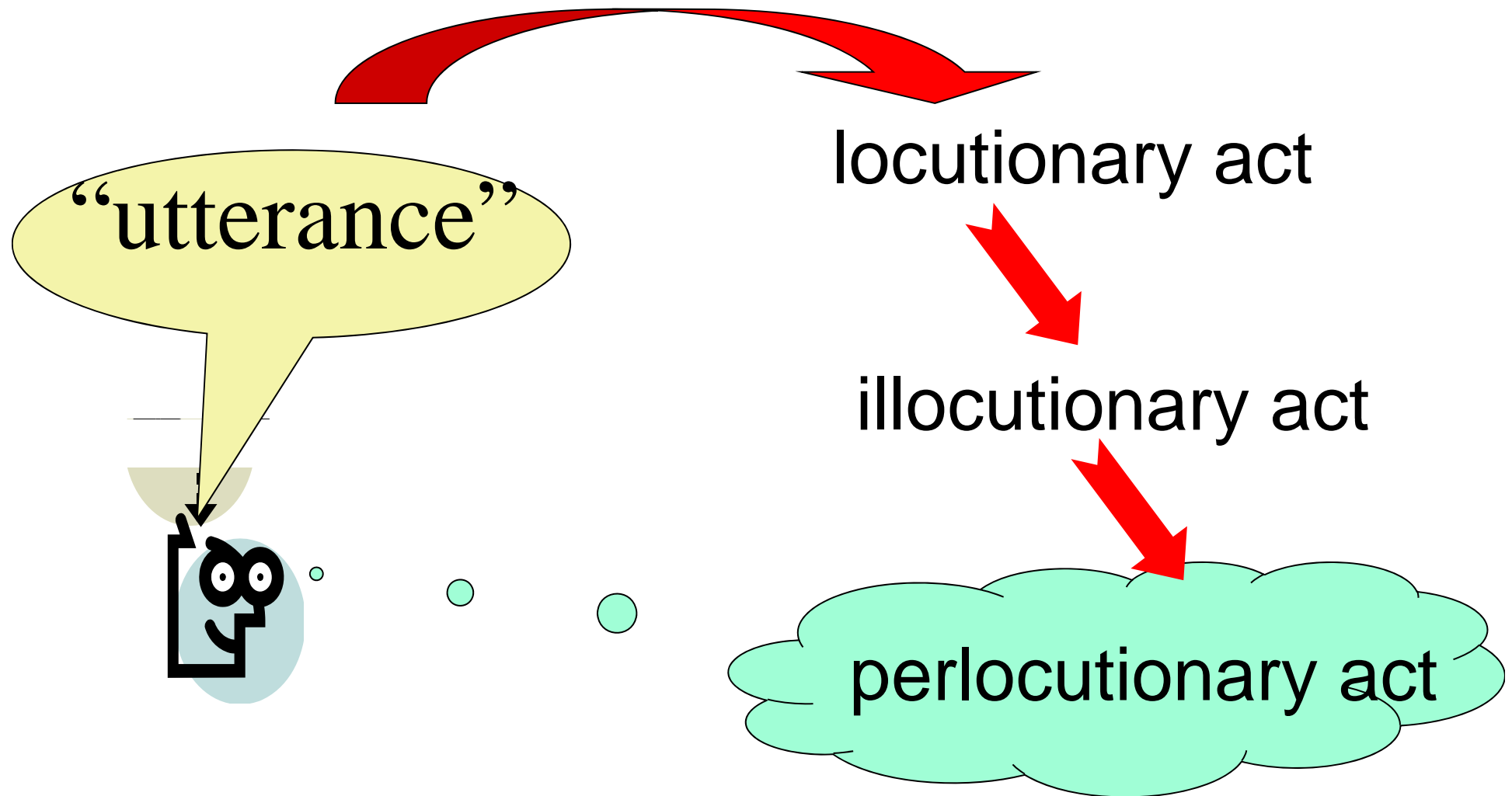
**Pragmatics**.

# John Austin (1962)

- "How to do things with words"

  - Suggestion: utterances are **actions**

# **Performatives** (John Austin)

- I **pronounce** you man and wife.

- I **christen** this ship the Titanic.

- I **arrest** you in the name of the law.

- I **bet** you 10 Euros that it will rain tomorrow.
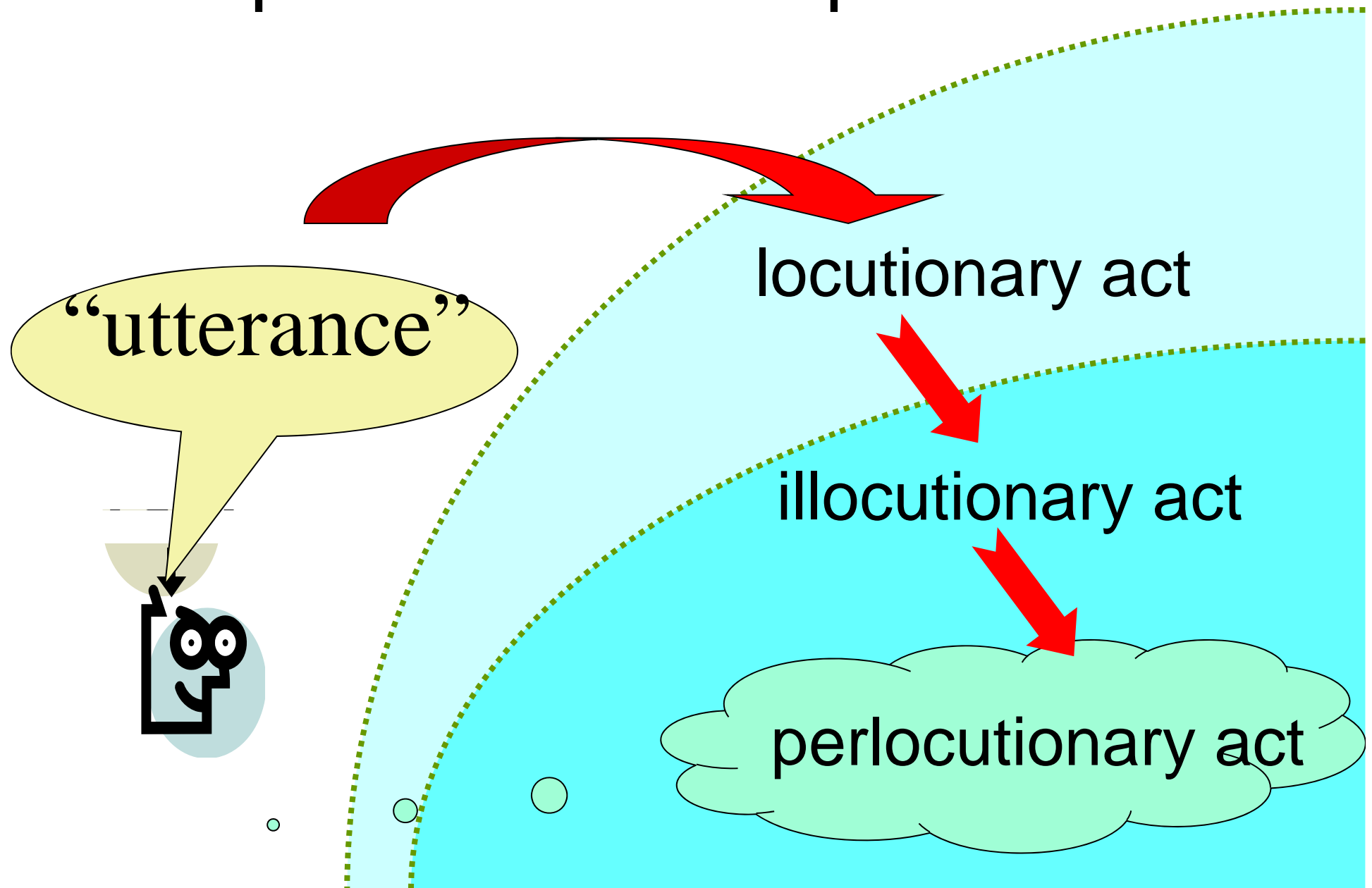
*How to do things with words* (1962)

The problem of interpretation

"utterance"

locutionary act

illocutionary act

perlocutionary act

# Austin / Searle: linguistic utterances as SPEECH ACTS

- the **locutionary** act: the utterance itself and its direct meaning

- the **illocutionary** act: the particular force that the utterance has as making a statement, of offering, ordering, promising, etc.

- the **perlocutionary** act: the particular effects of an utterance on an audience depending on the particulars of the speech situation and that audience.

# The problem of interpretation

"utterance"

locutionary act

illocutionary act

perlocutionary act

# The problem of interpretation



semantics

syntax

phonology

"utterance"

phonetics

locutionary act

illocutionary act

perlocutionary act

pragmatics
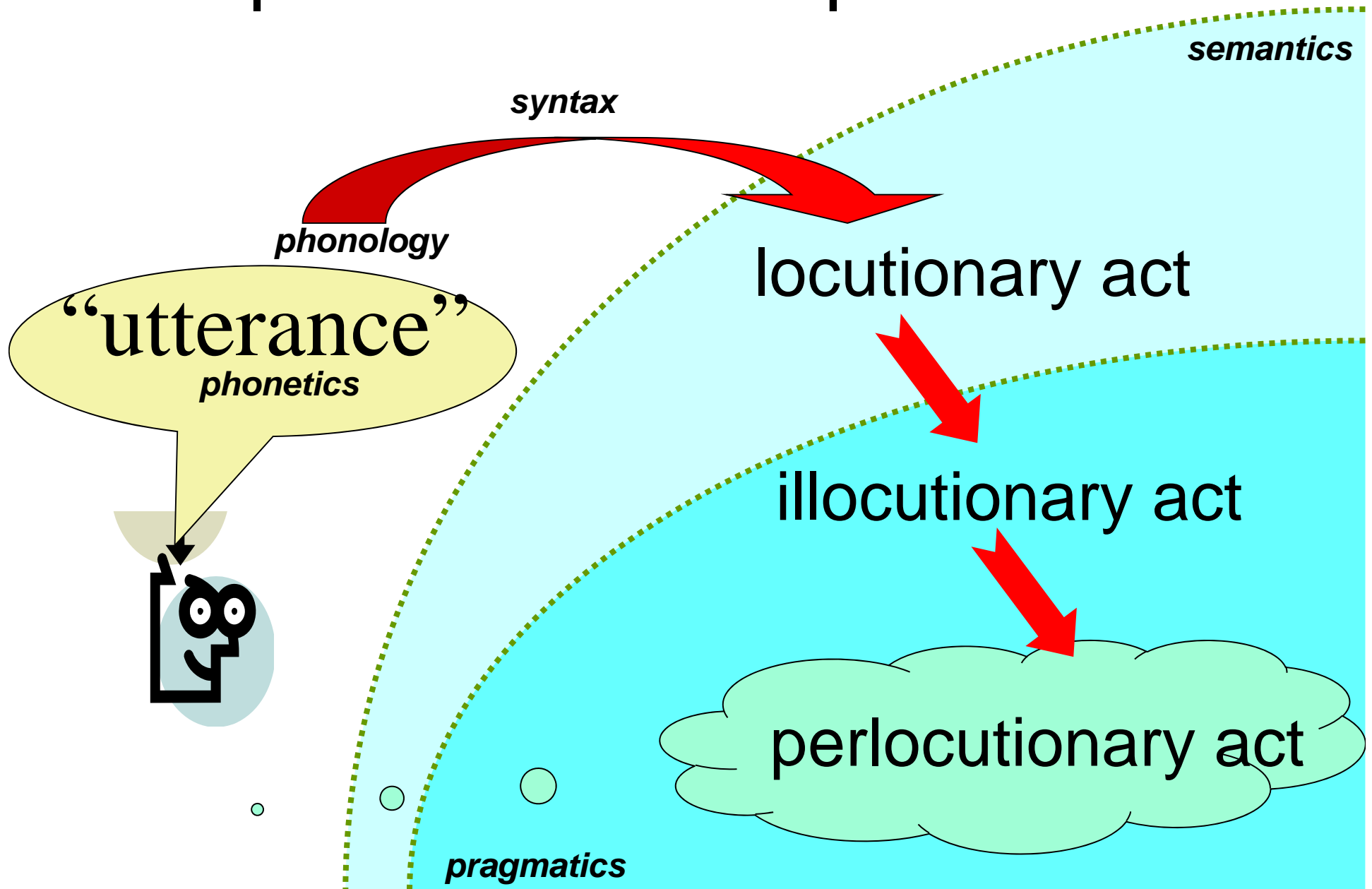
# John Austin (1962)

- "How to do things with words"

  - Suggestion: utterances are **actions**

  - Several types can be distinguished:
    - **declarations**
    - **assertives**
    - **expressives**
    - **directives**
    - **commissives [commitments]**

# John Austin (1962)

- "How to do things with words"

  - Suggestion: utterances are **actions**

  - **but how do you know which actions?**
  - **especially with the many many kinds of 'non-directed' speech acts!**

# Utterance Interpretation

- Early attempts tried to say when a speech act could be present and when not:

    – 'felicity' conditions

    – what conditions are necessary in order to make a speech act successful...

# Speech Act Interpretation

- **'Illocutionary Force Devices'**
  - can we find bits of linguistic form that *indicate* what kind of speech act is being performed?

  - sometimes!
    - 'please'
    - 'hereby'
    - explicit speech act verb: 'assert'

  - but often not… ☹

# Speech Act Theory

- Originally due to John Austin (1960) 'How to do things with words'
- focused early on 'performatives': sentences that 'make themselves true': e.g., *"I pronounce you man and wife."*
- Most developed by John Searle:
  - *linguistic acts: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, perlocutionary acts.*
- Maxims of cooperation: H.P. Grice

# Problem…

- Language interpretation becomes a major feat of logical inference!

- Do we really run through all these conditions, strategies, plans, and maxims: just to say or understand:

  "can you pass the salt?"

# Utterance Interpretation

- Appropriate interpretation obviously depends on many kinds and sources of additional knowledge
  - world knowledge
  - interpersonal knowledge

    *background knowledge*

  - situational knowledge
  - linguistic knowledge
  - *interactional* knowledge

# Pragmatics: the Gricean Maxims & The Cooperative Principle

- The maxim of **RELEVANCE**

- The maxim of **QUANTITY**

- The maxim of **QUALITY**

- The maxim of **MANNER**

# 'Violation' of maxims leads to further inferences…

- Will you do the cooking and washing up this evening?
- I'll do the cooking…

# 'Violation' of maxims leads to further inferences…

- Will you do the cooking and washing up this evening?
- My great-aunt is having her 78th birthday…

# 'Violation' of maxims leads to further inferences…

- Will you do the cooking and washing up this evening?

- Were it the case that this evening were a normal evening in which there were the usual round of chores and tasks which might require some attention by all of us at some stage, then it could be presumed that it may be the case that ….

# 'Violation' of maxims leads to further inferences…

- Will you do the cooking and washing up this evening?
- Yes. [lying]

# Shift in Linguistic Theorising

- de Saussure thought that most spoken language was full of errors and inconsistencies, and so not the real object of linguistic investigation

  – parole    - **performance**

  – langue    - **competence**

  **Noam Chomsky (1960s)**

# Possible **requests**

- I hereby request you to open the window.

- Open the window.

- Please could you open the window?

- Would you mind possibly opening the window?

- Might it be possible for you to open the window a bit?

- Whew! It's really hot in here isn't it?

**Strategies for achieving requests**

**politeness**
Brown & Levinson

How to get a pen from someone else

say something → say nothing (but search in bag...)

on record → off record "I forgot my pen"

face saving act → bald on record "Give me a pen"

positive politeness "How about letting me use your pen" → negative politeness "Could you lend me a pen"
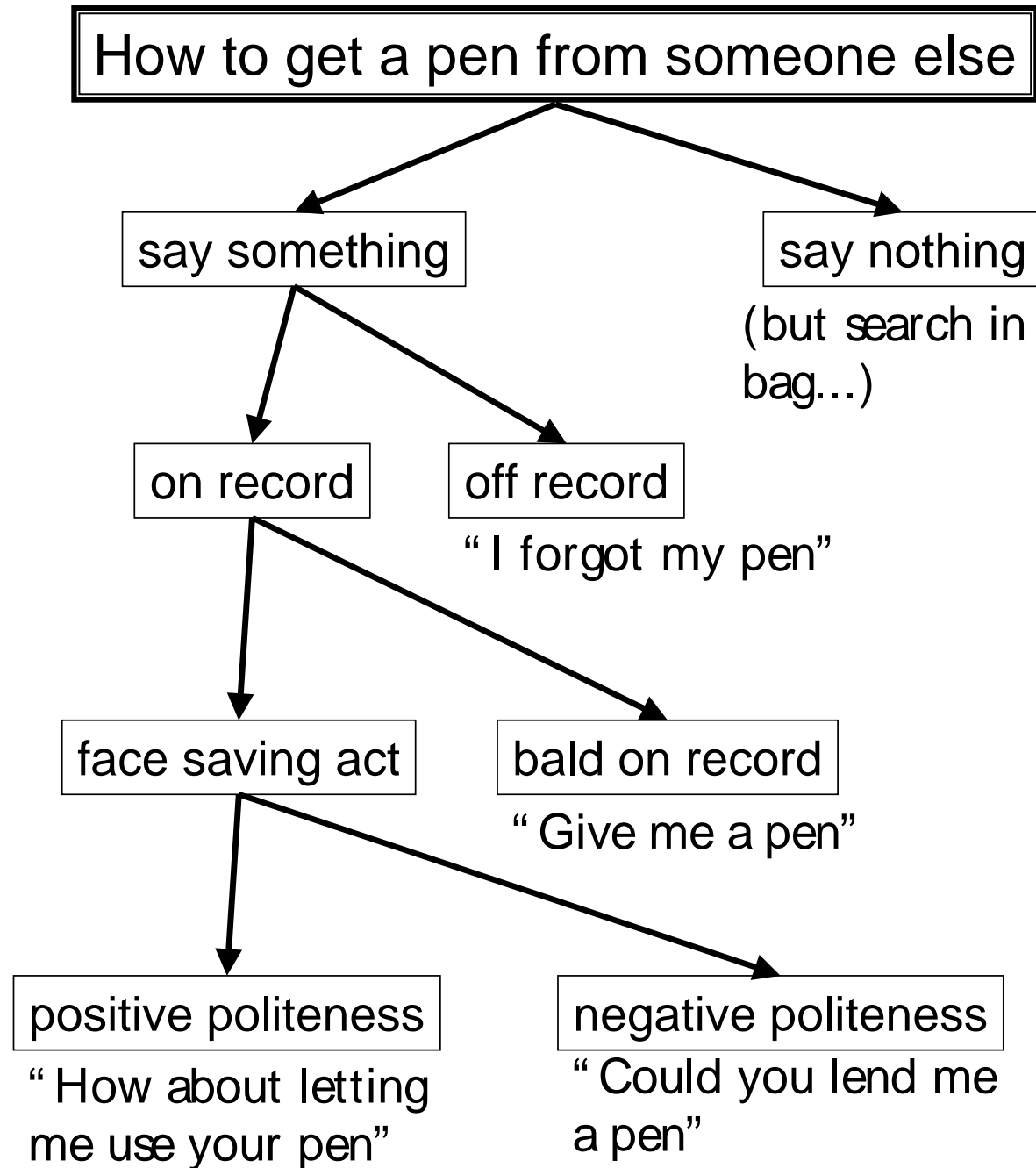
**Strategies for achieving requests**

**politeness**
Brown & Levinson

**also cultural differences**

```
                          request
                         /       \
              say something       action
                /        \
          on record      off record
           /      \
   face saving act   bald on record
        /        \
positive politeness   negative politeness
```
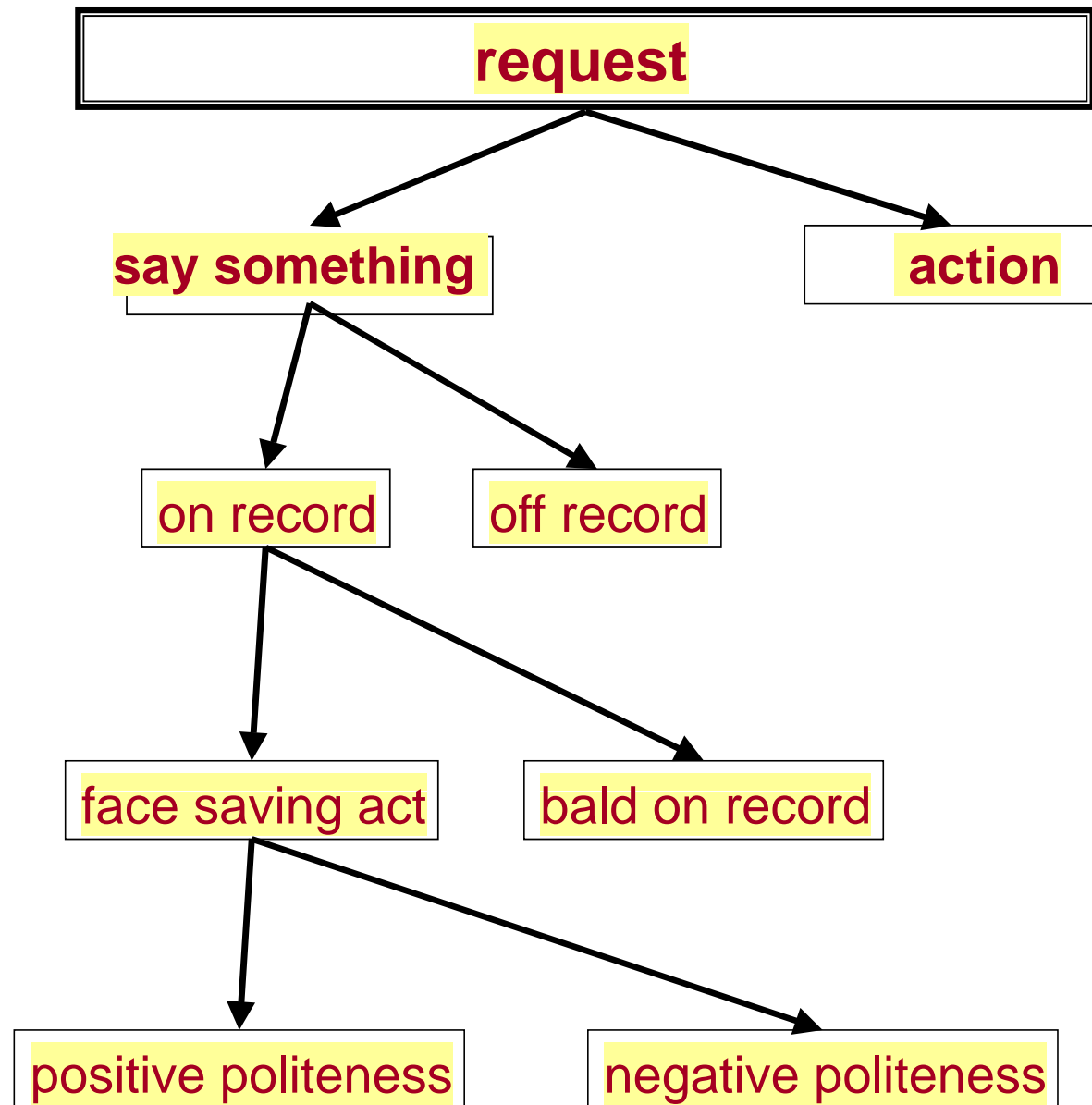
# Conversation Analysis:
# **Adjacency Pairs**

- Greetings
- Closings
- Question-Answer
- Invitation-Response
- Request-Comply

"ethnomethodology"

Garfinkel

- *normative, accountable*
- *conditional relevance of second part*
- *noticeable absence*
- *preferred/dispreferred trajectories*

# Example interaction:
# **noticeable absence**

| 1 | Child | Have to cut these Mummy. |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | | (1.3) |
| 3 | Child | Won't we Mummy. |
| 4 | | (1.5) |
| 5 | Child | Won't we. |
| 6 | Mother | Yes. |

# Example interaction:
# side sequences

| 1 | OFFER | You wanna join us? |
|---|-------|--------------------|
| 2 | PROBLEM | aven't got any money |
| 3 | OFFER | eat you. |
| 4 | CHECK | lly? |
| 5 | ACCEPT | hat's great. |
| 6 | ACCEPT | I guess I'll come along. |

ethnomethodology:

WE KNOW HOW TO INTERPRET SPEECH ACTS
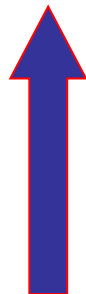BECAUSE OF THEIR POSITION IN SEQUENCE

# Example interaction:
## preferred and dispreferred second parts

| 1 | A | You coming down early? |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | B | Well, I got a lot of things to do before getting cleared up tomorrow. |
| 3 | A | I w- probably won't be too early. |

# Sequences and Pre-Sequences

**PRE-REQUEST** *A* **1** Hi. Do you have uh size C flashlight batteries?

**GO AHEAD** *B* **2** Yes sir.

**REQUEST** *A* **3** I'll have four please.

**RESPONSE** *B* **4** [turns to get them]

positions in sequence

# Sequences and Pre-Sequences

**PRE-REQUEST** *A* **1** Hi. Do you have uh size C flashlight batteries?

GO AHEAD *B* **2** Yes sir.

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positions in sequence

# Sequences and Pre-Sequences

**PRE-REQUEST** *A* **1** Hi. Do you have uh size C flashlight batteries?

**OFFER** *B* **2** High energy?

**ACCEPT** *A* **3** Yes please.

**RESPONSE** *B* **4** [turns to get the

positions in sequenc

# Radio Programme

Max: radio program host
Sid: a previous interviewee
Woman: current interviewee

| MAX | A couple of questions very easy to answer for a radio programme we're doing. |
|---|---|
| **PRE-QUESTION** | |
| **QUESTION** | The first of the questions is *What* would you say language is? |
| **ANSWER** | Language ... well it's the dialogue that people speak within various countries. |
| **ACCEPT** | Fair enough aaand *what* would you say it's *made* out of? |
| WOMAN | (*Pause, 8 seconds*) It's made out of (*puzzled intonation*) |
| MAX | Hmmm. |
| WOMAN | Well I don't know you'd tell what it's *made* out of ... It's a person's *expression* I suppose is it? |
| MAX | I haven't got the answers, I've only got the questions (*laughing*) |
| WOMAN | (*simultaneously: small laugh*) |
| SID | That's not *bad* though. |
| WOMAN | Well it's an *expression,* it would be a person's *expression* wouldn't it? |
| SID | That's a good answer. |
| MAX | Thank you very much |

# Radio Programme

Max: radio program host
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*side sequences*

MAX — A couple of questions very easy to answer for a radio programme we're doing.
The first of the questions is
*What* would you say language is?

WOMAN — Language ... well it's the dialogue that people speak within various countries.

**QUESTION**
**ANSWER**
Fair enough aaand *what* would you say it's *made* out of?
N — (*Pause, 8 seconds*) It's made out of (*puzzled intonat* ...

**QUESTION**

MAX — Hmmm.

**ANSWER**
**ANSWER**
N — Well I don't know you'd tell what it's *made* out of ...

**ANSWER**

It's a person's *expression* I suppose is it?

**QUESTION**

I haven't got the answers, I've only got the questions

**ACCEPT**
(*laughing*)

**ANSWER**

WOMAN — (*simultaneously: small laugh*)

**ACCEPT**

SID — **ACCEPT** That's not *bad* though.

WOMAN — Well it's an *expression,* it would be a person's *expression*

**ANSWER** wouldn't it?

SID — **ACCEPT** That's a good answer.

MAX — Thank you very much