

1. Relevance Theory

A cognitive model of utterance understanding in which we are said to use **inferencing**

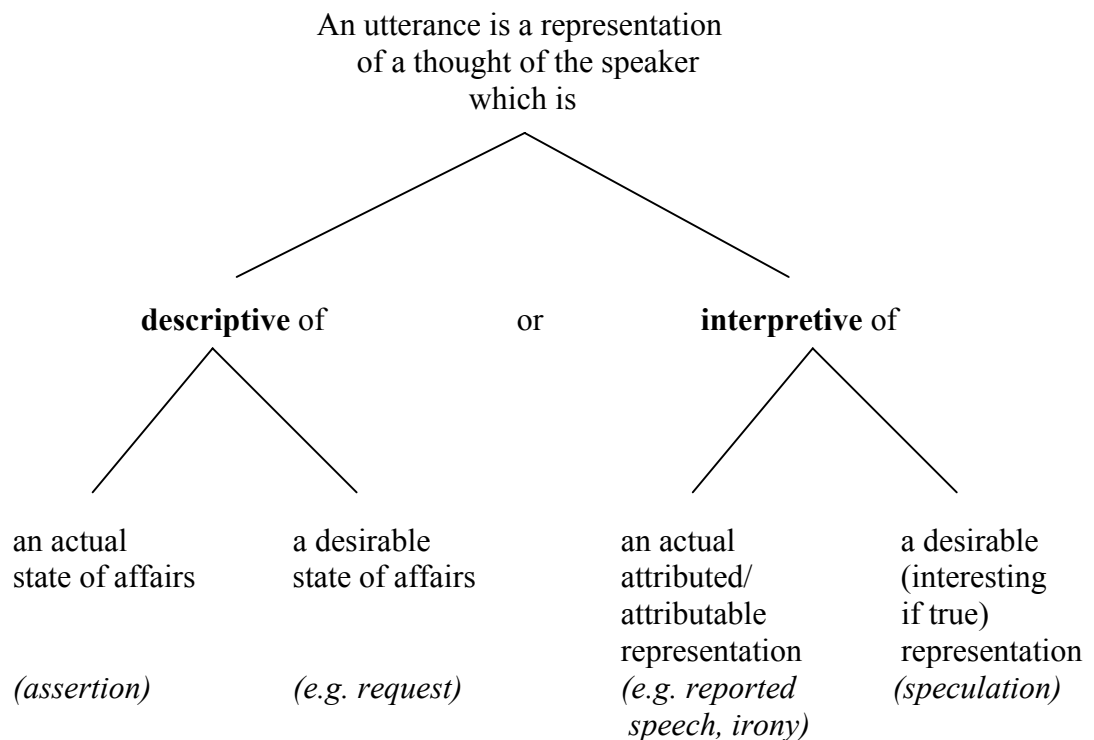
- to develop full propositional form from decoded linguistic material, (e.g. disambiguation, reference assignment, enrichment),
- to derive implicatures.

The first principle of relevance: a general cognitive principle
The second principle of relevance: a communicative principle

Some terms and concepts from relevance theory:

- Context: Includes long and short term memory, preceding discourse, immediate physical environment, all of which can be brought to bear on inferencing processes.
- Encyclopaedic information: all the information which might be associated with a concept attached to a lexical item.
- Poetic effects: effects which achieve relevance by allowing for the derivation of a wide array of (indeterminate) weak implicatures.
- Loose use: used to describe the relationship between the utterance and the thought represented in metaphor, (but also evident in other types of utterance).

Descriptive and Interpretive use: (diagram adapted from Sperber and Wilson 1995:232)



2. Metarepresentation

A representation of a representation is a metarepresentation.

Can be: public (usually linguistic), or
 private (mental)

Linguistic metarepresentation = interpretive use

Metarepresentation is one of a number of 'offline' cognitive activities also including:

Planning actions

Simulating movement

Pretend play

Supposition

Fiction

Episodic memory

Mind reading (a type of mental metarepresentation)

See Cosmides and Tooby 2000

3. Interpretive use, metarepresentation and literary voice

Porphyria's Lover

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with heart fit to break. 5
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneel'd and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
Which done, she rose, and from her form 10
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soil'd gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And call'd me. When no voice replied, 15
She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair, 20
Murmuring how she loved me - she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me for ever. 25
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:
So, she was come through wind and rain. 30
Be sure I look'd up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipp'd me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do. 35
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around, 40
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,

I warily oped her lids: again Laugh'd the blue eyes without a stain.	45
And I untighten'd next the tress About her neck; her cheek once more Blush'd bright beneath my burning kiss: I propp'd her head up as before,	50
Only, this time my shoulder bore Her head, which droops upon it still: The smiling rosy little head, So glad it has its utmost will, That all it scorn'd at once is fled, And I, its love, am gain'd instead!	55
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how Her darling one wish would be heard. And thus we sit together now, And all night long have not stirr'd, And yet God has not said a word!	60

(Robert Browning, 1834)

Workshop activity

Consider the use of voice in the following texts.

Whose voices are represented, and how?

What are the effects of representing these voices in this way?

How might these effects change if the passages were written differently?

Long Distance

I

1 Your bed's got two wrong sides. Your life's all grouse.

2 I let your phone-call take its dismal course:

3 *Ah can't stand it no more, this empty house!*

4 *Carrots choke us wi'out your mam's white sauce!*

5 *Them sweets you brought me, you can have 'em back.*

6 *Ah'm diabetic now. Got all the facts.*

7 (The diabetes comes hard on the track

8 of two coronaries and cataracts.)

9 *Ah've allus liked things sweet! But now ah push*

10 *food down mi throat! Ah'd sooner do wi'out.*

11 *And t'only reason now for beer 's to flush*

12 *(so t'dietician said) mi kidneys out.*

13 When I come round, they'll be laid out, the sweets,
14 *Lifesavers*, my father's New World treats,
15 still in the big brown bag, and only bought
16 rushing through JFK as a last thought.

II

17 Though my mother was already two years dead
18 Dad kept her slippers warming by the gas,
19 put hot water bottles her side of the bed
20 and still went to renew her transport pass.

21 You couldn't just drop in. You had to phone.
22 He'd put you off an hour to give him time
23 to clear away her things and look alone
24 as though his still raw love were such a crime.

25 He couldn't risk my blight of disbelief
26 though sure that very soon he'd hear her key
27 scrape in the rusted lock and end his grief.
28 He *knew* she'd just popped out to get the tea.

29 I believe life ends with death, and that is all.
30 You haven't both gone shopping; just the same,
31 in my new black leather phone book there's your name

32 and the disconnected number I still call.

Tony Harrison, 1984

Extract from *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen

(Catherine and Eleanor – Catherine is asking Eleanor about her mother, who died some years earlier.)

‘Was she a very charming woman? Was she handsome? Was there any picture of her in the Abbey? And why had she been so partial to that grove? Was it from dejection of spirits?’ – were questions now eagerly poured forth; - the first three received a ready affirmative, the two others were passed by; and Catherine’s interest in the deceased Mrs. Tilney augmented with every question, whether answered or not. Of her unhappiness in marriage, she felt persuaded. The General certainly had been an unkind husband. He did not love her walk; - could he therefore have loved her? And besides, handsome as he was, there was a something in the turn of his features which spoke his not having behaved well to her.

‘Her picture, I suppose,’ blushing at the consummate art of her own question, ‘hangs in your father’s room?’

‘No; - it was intended for the drawing-room; but my father was dissatisfied with the painting, and for some time it had no place. Soon after her death I obtained it for my own, and hung it in my bed-chamber – where I shall be happy to shew it to you; - it is very like.’ – Here was another proof. A portrait – very like – of a departed wife, not valued by the husband! – He must have been dreadfully cruel to her!

Catherine attempted no longer to hide from herself the nature of the feelings which, in spite of all his attentions, he had previously excited; and what had been terror and dislike before, was now absolute aversion. Yes, aversion! His cruelty to such a charming woman made him odious to her. She had often read of such characters; characters, which Mr. Allen had been used to call unnatural and overdrawn; but here was proof positive of the contrary.

Extract from *How late it was, how late*, James Kelman

(Sammy, the central character, has just woken up in a cell after getting into a fight with the police.)

He was lying on his side on the bunk. How had he got up? He had got up himself man how had he managed it. There was a blanket, he got his hand on it and pulled, it wouldna budge, it was tight in, it was under his body, fuck, under his body, he closed his eyes. Next time he woke the breathing was worse but it was the lungs, that was where it was hurting, no so much the ribs. He lay there a while, breathing wee bits at a time, no changing his position till the side of his head got sore and he turned onto his front. The screw again. Sammy thought he could see the eye in the gloom. Then it was daylight. He was staring at the ceiling, seeing pictures in the cracks in the paint. He wasna feeling so hot. Before he had been good. Now he wasna. There was things out his control. There was things in his control but there were other things out, they were out his control, he had put them out his control.

Later he was up and making the steps to the wall, and back again, wondering what the hell day it was cause he was in deep shit with Helen; that would be it man she would pap him out the door for good. His gear would be out in the corridor. Once he got home, he would find it lying there, in a fucking heap. Auld Helen man what can ye do.

4. Relevance theory and the interpretation of sound patterning

- 364 / / - / - / - / - /
True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance,
- 365 - / - / - / - / - /
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.
- 366 - / - / - / - / - /
'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence,
- 367 - / - / - / - (l) - /
The Sound must seem an Echo to the Sense.
- 368 / - - / - / - / - /
Soft is the Strain when Zephyr gently blows, s, z, (δZ)
- 369 - - / / - / - / - /
And the smooth Stream in smoother Numbers flows; s, z
- 370 - / / / - / - / - /
But when loud Surges lash the sounding Shore, s, z, Σ
- 371 - / / / / - / - / - /
The hoarse, rough Verse should like the Torrent roar. s, Σ
- 372 - / - / / / / / - /
When Ajax strives, some Rock's vast Weight to throw, s, z, /ksstr/, /ksv/
- 373 - / / / - - - / / /
The Line too labours, and the Words move slow;
- 374 - / - / - / - / - /
Not so, when swift Camilla scours the Plain, s
- 375 / - - / - / - / - / - /
Flies o'er th'unbending Corn, and skims along the Main. s

from *An Essay on Criticism* Alexander Pope 1711

Workshop activity

Can the relevance theory notion of poetic effects help to account for how sound patterning might affect interpretations of these poems?

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
And live alone in the bee loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

W.B. Yeats 1890

Don Juan (extract)

54
Young Juan now was sixteen years of age,
Tall, handsome, slender, but well knit; he seemed
Active, though not so sprightly as a page,
And everybody but his mother deemed
Him almost a man, but she flew in a rage
And bit her lips (for else she might have screamed),
If any said so, for to be precocious
Was in her eyes a thing the most atrocious.

55
Amongst her numerous acquaintance, all
Selected for discretion and devotion,
There was the Donna Julia, whom to call
Pretty were but to give a feeble notion
Of many charms in her as natural
As sweetness to the flower or salt to Cupid,
But this last simile is trite and stupid.

George Gordon Byron 1824

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