

## LEC 8: Laminar Semiotics

### “Semiotics” = Making Meaning

- When some researchers study meaning-making with language, they only consider the words.
- Often assume that meaning is “looked up” in memory, to decode auditory input, and encode vocal output.

### But... Words *live* in Conversation

- The word’s ecology includes multiple types of semiotic resources with which they must coordinate
- e.g. Gesture, Gaze, Facial Expression, Intonation, etc. As well as Cognitive Artifacts & Participants’ History

### From our view... **Conversation** is a collaborative reconfiguring of laminated semiotic resources

- So, meaning is not something you look up & match to the other guy’s – it is generated anew in each conversation
- This is NOT to say that memory does not play a part, only that what is remembered is not “meaning”
- Instead, memory is one more resource for the current, context-specific & collaborative meaning-making process

### **Semiotic Resources** - The media we use to communicate

- Semiotic resources are layered together in complex displays, creating public structures, transformed by the interlocutors
- We can document these configural transformations by tracking changes in, and relations between, observable media
- What are the **media of information flow** - in this dynamic, distributed system?

### **Lexicon** - The morphemes of a language (“dog”, “eat”, “-ing”, etc.)

- These involve complex associations, developed thru experience with interlocutors, in material & social contexts
- They are organized (Syntax) into elaborate sequences that have pragmatic & epistemic consequences
- Includes affect words (“sad”, “terrible”, “no”) that can help establish “Evaluative Stance” of speaker (more below)

### **Affect** – Our displays of emotion and arousal

- Visio-Spatial: Facial expressions, Posture, Movement used for true, exaggerated, or inhibited evaluative displays
- Simultaneous w/lexical, modifies meaning – e.g. serious words/silly face, positive words/doubtful face, etc.
- Auditory/Vocal: Intonation, Prosody, Amplitude
- e.g. Emphasis can highlight, disambiguate, implicate: “*He* insulted *her*” vs. “He *insulted* her”
- Cultural norms of the duration of a pause between turns; Can lead to inter-subject or cross-cultural inferences
- e.g. Too slow, seem stupid, resistant, require prompting; Too fast, seem aggressive, impatient, disinterested

### **Gesture** – Dynamic arrangements of motion - Mac Neil’s (1992) categories (NOTE: not always mutually exclusive!)

**Emphatic** - (AKA “Beat”) Simple, often rhythmic; Void of propositional or topical content;

- Used to add emphasis, esp when synchronized with other modalities

**Iconic** - Bear perceptual similarity to concrete entities and events; Transparent relationship to Referent

- Map across media (e.g. hand as man), or be portion of activity (reach part of carryactivity)

**Emblematic** - Culture-specific rituals; May be derived from other categ’s, but now a conventional symbol

- Can be used in place of words, with established associations

**Metaphoric** - Enact relationships in space & time that map to another domain or refer to an abstract topic

- e.g. Point forward for future, behind for past (or reverse, if from Aymara culture)

**Indexical** - (AKA “Deictic”) Pointing, (w/hand, chin, head, eyes, etc.)

- Plus nonverbal: e.g. Attention-getting noise (“ahem”), Gasp of discovery-like surprise
- Often accompanied by deictic terms (“here”, “there”, “you”, “this”, “that”)
- Usually environmentally-coupled, with object, place, or person.

- Gestures can bear various relations to lexical resources:

- Augment (provide same info), Complement (provide additional related info), or even Contradict words

- Gestures can also create spaces that themselves become semiotic resources

- e.g. Enfield 2005: Describe Laos’ rules governing marriage by naming kin roles while pointing to diff areas of space
- He & wife at mid height, their older siblings aligned above, younger aligned below, then...
- “Draws” connections between spaces/people who are (parallel) vs. are not (diagonal) allowed to marry

### **Attention** – Acts/displays of procuring, and sharing, sensory information

- Eye direction, head and/or body re-orientation, reach, point, etc.
- Communicate focus of speakers attention; Coordinate attention across interlocutors (e.g. gaze follow)

### **Material Environment**

- Including Objects (in-/animate, artifacts), Substrates, and Stimuli (lights, sounds, smells, etc)
- Objects are handled, pantomimed, pointed to, named; Substrates used as “canvas”; Stimuli named, imitated; Etc.

## Laminar Semiotics

- These resources are layered together (gesture + words + facial expression, etc) into multi-modal displays
- Speaker produces
  - e.g. **VIDEO Wedge**: “hybrid”/2 hands, “you went to do service”/move 1 hand, “you went to learn”/move other
- Plus, in conversational exchanges, interlocutor transforms certain layers of other’s output while retaining others
  - e.g. TONY: “Why don’t you get out of my yard!” CHOPPER: “Why don’t you *make me* get out of the yard!”
  - e.g. JOHN: “I’m going to the store” MARY: “Which store are you going to?”
  - e.g. SUE: “There is a new Chris Pine movie coming out” SALLY: “Oooo! I loved him in Star Trek!”

## **Configural Transformations**

- These laminate, multi-media structures are transformed, as a conversation proceeds, in a variety of ways . . .

### **Transform from one medium to another**

- e.g. A says “Pick up the blue one”, B picks up the blue object: Transform from lexical to enaction
- e.g. **VIDEO Rowww**: Mimic of audible oscillation in a machine’s operation converted to up/down motion

### **Imitation**

- “Reported speech” - Lexical copying, quoting other’s words or co-referring
  - e.g. “And so *she* says, ‘well I don’t care!’” e.g. “Dad said it was ok” e.g. “They say it’s going to rain”
- Social imitation/synchrony indicates attunement to other, promotes pro-sociality (e.g. people more helpful if imitated)
  - e.g. **VIDEO RollingChairs**: Excited friends imitate posture and to/from arm movements
- Can pantomime routines associated w/procedure or w/present (or imaginary) object; To refer, teach, etc.
  - e.g. **VIDEO Pitcher**: She says “pitcher” to describe shape of bay, He mimics pouring to ask if that kind of pitcher
- Impersonate - Replay gestures, strike attitudes, etc. to refer to/comment on absent (or present) person or view
  - e.g. **VIDEO: DoNotFlush** He changes voice, posture when adopts role of ‘The Authority’
- These and many other transforms enable interlocutors to co-accomplish cognition during conversation
  - Consider the case of “Chil” **VIDEO Seven** (Goodwin, 2000 - See Recommended Readings, and required Goodwin 2013)
  - Chil had left frontal lobe stroke: Can produce only 3 words (“Yes”, “No”, “And”), nonverbals, & gesture w/only left hand
  - But, in collaboration with his interlocutors, he can engage in coherent, meaningful conversation
  - They transform configurations of shared resources through (among others) the following co-operations...

### **Secure Orientation**

- Chil’s addressee Pat is at first looking elsewhere;
  - He holds up a hand and produces an “intonational tune”, drawing her attention
  - He immediately, sharply raises his hand, positioning it directly in line with their mutual gaze (see figure 4.2)
- **VIDEO Linosite**: Bonobo inf touches mom & draws her atten, or aligns w/her eyes, before performing “pick-me-up” gesture

### **Parsing Activity**

- Above, Chil establishes a “stage” for his subsequent hand gestures
  - During negotiation, as Pat verbalizes interpretations of his gestures, he moves his hand in/out of this space
  - e.g. 5 fingers, then 2, without leaving stage = 7 But 5, hand removed & returned to stage, 5 again, not = 10!
- **VIDEO Frustration**: Bonobo infant destabilizes hug routine by pulling away, then re-approaches to re-gesture for carry

### **Negotiating “Activity Frame”**

- Chil uses hand-shape to represent numbers (per # of fingers extended)
  - But there are competing “activity frames” – i.e. Number as a TIME or as a SUM of potential diners
  - Pat at first acts in keeping with TIME activity frame, but Chil’s staging and re-staging during negotiation destabilizes that activity frame in favor of the SUM activity frame.
- **VIDEO GetOff**: Bonobo infant initiates carry activity, but mom persists in sit-and-hug activity

### **Taking an Evaluative Stance**

- Chil can still say “No!” with expressive intonation & turning away to make his evaluation clear
  - Often involves repeating part of other’s utterance, with new inflection or phrasing
  - Can include gestures: e.g. emphatic, iconic, even metaphoric
- e.g. **VIDEO Ghandi**: Use hands to represent good (simul with “Ghandi”) as up, bad as down