

STRUTTURALISMO (99-106 LIBRO 1)

What is language? It is a mean of communication. To understand what is language it is necessary to examine what is that we communicate, the means employed in communicating and the social determinants of and constraints on communication. This will involve into what is known in cognitive psychology as the information-processing model of communication which views language production and comprehension as an active, interpretative, decision making process with interactants bring meaning to words, a view in stark contrast with the Structuralist message model of communication.

When we speak we have a message we want to give or receive. It is impossible not to communicate. If someone asks me a question and I do not answer I'm still giving him a response and I am communicating. My not answering is a signal which will convey a message to him. Language is a form of communication.

The message model of communication:

Source → signal transmitted → transmitter → channel → source of noise → receiver → signal received → destination.

This model of communication is an adaption of Shannon and Weaver's classic work and originated in communications engineering. The message originated by the source is encoded by the transmitter into a signal. The signal is sent over a particular channel to the receiver. The receiver decodes the signal into a message and passes the message on to the destination. The signal transmitter may differ from the signal that is received due to distortions caused by noise in the channel. The addressor encodes the message in a given code and a given medium (spoken or written) and transmits the message via a given channel (air, phone...) to the addressee who decodes the message.

The message model illustrates the components of the communication process. But what means are usually used to encode and decode messages? What does that are the **rules of syntax, morphology and phonology**. The highly codified grammatical descriptions of the structuralists are founded on the premise of 1:1 relationship between form and meaning, a principle which some writers advance explicitly, others implicitly.

“Shut the door” screamingly leaves no doubt as to what is intended

Inserting structuralist grammar as the code into the message model, then the picture of the communication which is obtained is a simple and highly mechanical one in which the only possible obstacle is represented by noise.

Is grammar the core element in the encoding/decoding process? Equating form with meaning (as do the structuralists) poses serious problems, the first being each grammatical structure must have only one meaning. A given form does not necessarily convey only one codified meaning:

“can you swim?”

“can you do that translation?”

“can you come tomorrow?”

The grammatical structure in these examples is identical: the interrogative form of “can”. The dictionary furnished two “meanings” for this item: ability and permission. Each of the two dictionary meanings covers different concepts.

In the first one refers to physical capacities, in the second it refers to knowledge and in the last one it is referred to time availability.

“have you got a match?” In its grammatical, literal, surface, factual or propositional meaning, or sense the addressor would be asking a question to discover something. In real life if someone utters this, you would immediately understand (and decode) that the person was asking me to give him a match. To understand the surface meaning (or grammatical) would be conveyed to me if I consulted a dictionary and a grammar. This type of meaning is generally referred to as the **communicative function of an utterance**.

Communicative intent or purpose > a communicative process of the speaker's desire to convey a message.

Linguistic exponent (LE) > a linguistic form which will express the communicative function (CF), a specific verbal and/or non verbal form in which the message is couched. It may consist of a grammatical pattern, an idiomatic expression or facial expression, gesture and posture.

The difference between the communicative function and the grammatical function of a linguistic exponent is obvious if we think to the metaphorical device that are available in the language.

- 1) "this food is not fit for pigs" (hyperbole)
- 2) She's really beautiful! (irony or sarcasm)
- 3) He is old ad a methusalah (simile)
- 4) A living death (oxymoron)
- 5) Mary is a block of ice (metaphor).

In all these examples communicative function differs from grammatical functions.

Adopting the concepts and the terminology that have just been introduced, two general principles which are in stark contrast to the structuralists view a 1:1 relationship between form and meaning may be asserted:

- 1) The first is that a **linguistic exponent may perform several communicative functions;**
- 2) The **communicative function of a linguistic exponent may or may not be equatable to the grammatical function of that linguistic exponent.**

16) Shut the door

17) Help me

Clearly the imperative is not an unequivocal indicator of an order, its grammatical definition. While they might convey an order they could also represent an infuriated reprimand.

The corollary of this first Principle is that a **communicative function may be performed by several linguistic exponents.**

In conclusion there is no 1:1 relationship between form and meaning, between grammar and communicative functions. A grammatical structure may be fulfilled by various linguistic exponents. There is a third crucial defect in the message model: **it takes no account of the speaker's intention in transmitting a signal, which, because communicative and grammatical functions may differ, results in the hearer having to interpret the signal.**

AUSTIN (106-108 LIBRO 1)

Speech acts: the distinction between grammatical function and communicative function originates in the philosophical theory of speech acts, first pronounced by Austin and developed with Searle. The theory has now many ramifications such as Leech. Austin's theory was a reaction against the restrictive view of meaning held by logical positivists, according to whom **the only fully meaning utterances were empirically verifiable statements.** In the **positivists** view, an ideal language **would directly reflect the structure of reality.** Every simple expression of the language would have a **single meaning and this could be described in terms of the relationship holding between the expression and the object which the expression stood for.** Sentences were **descriptions or propositions** which could be verified for their **true/false value.**

What is intended by **propositional meaning?**

The meaning of a sentence (**sentence meaning**) may be regarded as a proposition or set of propositions enunciating **facts, or informations expressed in accordance with the rules of grammar and lexis.**

- 1) My son threw a brick at the window
 - a. Someone threw a brick at the window
 - b. My son threw something at the window
 - c. I have a son
 - d. I have a child
 - e. My child threw a brick
 - f. My son did something

In other words (1) contains all the propositions (a-f) and it is said to **entail (a-f).**

The entailment of a sentence are those propositions that can be logically deduced from it in isolation from any context - the proposition must be true whenever the sentence expresses a true claim, on a linguistic level. So, (1) is true and also (a-f) must be true.

So entailment is the relation which holds between the proportions listed under the first sentence and the corresponding proposition on the second sentence.

The first property of entailment is that it is **context-independent**, since it depends entirely on the meaning of the constituents of the sentences.

The second one is that **the truth of the entailed proposition must follow from the truth of the entailing proposition.**

Another type of relationship between propositions is **equivalence**: semantic equivalence can be defined as mutual entailment:

“John killed the wasp”. “the wasp was killed by John”

It is true that he killed the wasp, then is also true that the wasp was killed by John and viceversa.

Another one is **contrariety** that may not be simultaneously true, although that may be simultaneously false

“John killed the wasp” “the wasp is alive”

They can be both false because if the wasp is actually dead but it was Bill who killed it, then both sentences can be false.

Contradiction: these propositions must have opposite truth values in every circumstances. They cannot be either both true or false. One member must be true and the other false. Contradiction is bi-directional.

“The wasp is dead”. “the wasp is alive”

Presuppositions:

“I’m glad you got the job”

he is not telling her that she’s got the job, the function of the clause “you got the job” is to specify what is it that the speaker is glad about. The truth of the expressed proposition is assumed to be common knowledge shared by speaker and addressee.

This is a typical example of **presupposition**: the speaker presupposes that the hearer got the job and expresses his pleasure. The difference between entailment and presupposition is the fact that presupposition is not affected by ordinary sentence negation.

Austin accepted the existence of a class of utterances expressing propositions which could be verified for their true/false value. To this class of utterances he applied the term “**constative**”. He also saw that when we speak, describing some events we might or might not be true, this is not the only act we can perform. We also use words to do things such as “persuade, advise, request, promise”. Indeed we use speech to **actually perform an action.**

“I do” in a marriage ceremony

“I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth”

“I give and bequeath my house to my brother”

In these examples it is clear that the sentence is not to describe. None of the utterances is true or false. Austin dubbed such utterances “**performatives**” indicating that “**the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action**”.

Performative verbs that is those verbs of one of whose functions is to signal specific specific acts, they can be used either performatively or descriptively. The performative use of performative verbs is extremely restricted grammatically. They must be in **simple present text, they may be active or passive; if active, they must be in the first person.**

“**i promise to pay you next week**”

“**I declare John Smith the duly elected member of this constituency**”

The performative hypothesis: there are certain types of utterances whose properties seem to suggest that even implicit performatives have a hidden or underlying explicit performative verb. This is the essence of **performative hypothesis**, theory developed but soon abandoned in which behind every utterance there is a **performative verb**, such as “to order” “to warn” “to admit” that make the illocutionary force explicit. Austin realised that often the implicit performatives sound more natural and do not always have an obvious explicit performative understood.

“I’ll be back” can mean “I promise that I’ll be back” or “I warn you that I’ll be back”

Austin soon realised that the distinction between **saying and doing was untenable since something is so is in itself an act of doing**. Constative utterances are just one kind of performative. Consequently Austin elaborated on his theory, drawing a distinction between **locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts**:

- i) **A locutionary act is an act of saying**: the uttering of a sentence with determinate sense and reference; the actual phrase and its meaning comprising any of all components;
- ii) **An illocutionary act is the act performed in uttering that sentence, the force or the intention behind the utterance**; stating, asking for an information, ordering, accusing, denying;(what the speaker is doing with his words)
- iii) **A perlocutionary act is the act of bringing about effects on the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of the addressee by means of uttering a sentence**, such as persuading someone to do something... (the hearer’s reaction)

Austin introduced the concept of **illocutionary uptake** to refer to the addressee’s understanding of utterance, both as regards to locutionary and illocutionary force, thus providing for the eventuality that the addressee might attribute a different meaning to utterance than the one intended by addressor, eliciting an unwanted perlocutionary effect.

“shot him”

“you can’t do that”

The locutionary act performed by the first sentence is an order. Depending on the circumstances, it could desire to convey the illocutionary force of ordering; while such an utterance might bring about the intended perlocutionary effect of persuading or forcing the addressee into shooting.

Similarly the grammatical function of the second sentence is a declaration of inability. It may also perform the communicative function of prohibiting, expressing protest.

According to Austin we communicate because we have a purpose we wish to achieve, a **perlocutionary effect** we wish to bring about.

“I’ve got a flat tyre”

Uttered to a petrol station attendant would constitute an illocutionary act of asking for a service with a perlocutionary effect (or goal) if making the attendant fix the tyre.

Austin’s formulation begs the question on how one and the same linguistic exponent can perform three different types of act, acts problem that is complicated by the fact that there is no simple 1:1 form-meaning correlation. To solve this problem Austin and Searle posited various **felicity conditions** which an illocutionary act must fulfil if it is to be successfully comprehended.

Speech act theory also brought into the terms **direct speech act and indirect speech act**. Many linguists have taken direct speech act as referring to an utterance where **locutionary and illocutionary force coincide**, and an indirect speech act as one where **sense (grammatical function) and force (communicative function) diverge**.

The **felicity conditions** are that the context and roles of participants must be recognised by all parties, the action must be carried out completely, and the person must have the right intentions.

Participants need to understand the language, the speech is embedded in a context that is conventionally recognised and the speaker must be sincere.

A) there must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect;

- The circumstances and persons must be appropriate as specified in the procedure;

B) The procedure must be executed completely and correctly

C) Often the persons must have the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions and the relevant parties must do that.

The first three conditions stipulate **social conditions regarding the roles, rights and duties of interactants within the context of the speech event and the specific linguistic formulae**. If these conditions are not fulfilled, the act will “misfire”, it be null and void. Austin’s second condition states that an incorrect or incomplete procedure will also invalidate the act.

Austin’s first conditions also share common ground with **Gricean conversational principles and maxims**.

Austin’s third condition is even more closely to **Gricean maxims**, basically to the maxim of **quality > sincerity conditions**.

A comparison of the **austinian and gricean typologies** reveals that they exhibit two fundamentally diverse orientations. The main thrust of **austinian felicity conditions** is **sociological** in that they devote greater attention to the social conditions which determine whether a given social action is or not legitimate according to the values, morals and customs. **Grice's maxim of quality** falls within this field. The remaining maxims identified by Grice together with the principles investigated by Leech tackle the problem more from the **perspective of sociolinguistics** in the sense that they pertain more to the **dimension of communicative process**.

Speech acts can be classified into different classes:

- 1) **Assertives:** these commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition: **state, suggest, boast, complain, claim, report, warn;**
- 2) **Directives:** these have the intention of eliciting some sort of action on the part of the hearer: **order, command, request, beg, beseech, advise, warn, recommend, ask;**
- 3) **Expressives:** these make known that speaker's psychological attitude to a presupposed state of affairs: **thank, congratulate, condole, praise, blame, forgive;**
- 4) **Declaratives:** these are said to bring about a change in reality, the world is no longer going to be the same after they've been said. They cause a change in the world over and above the fact that they have been carried out: **resign, dismiss, divorce, christen, name, open, excommunicate, sentence, consecrate, declare.**

According to felicity conditions in the case of declarative speech act, the person performing the act must have authority to do it and must do it with appropriate actions.

For **sincerity conditions** to be fulfilled, the person performing the act must have appropriate beliefs or feelings. In performing an act of asserting, the speaker must believe the proposition he is expressing. If the sincerity conditions are not met, the act is actually performed, but there is said to be an **abuse**.

The hearer should recognise the speaker's intention to perform the illocutionary act in question in uttering the words in question. This is called **uptake**. Uptake must be distinguished from **acceptance**.

CONTEXT (119-129 LIBRO 1)

Meaning potential > the concept of meaning potential is a direct extension of the fact that a **linguistic exponent** may express various communicative forms.

"It's raining"

At its face value, this sentence will inform us that outside water is presently falling from the sky. In this case, **form and meaning** would be at one. But we can however imagine other communicative forms which the same utterance could fulfil:

- 1) two strangers sitting on a train and one of them realises that it's raining. This type of communication is called "**phatic communion**" the aim of the speaker is not to inform his travelling companion about the weather conditions outside but to establish a relationship with him. It's a way to start a conversation. Many interpretations are possible. The point about meaning potential is not the fact that a linguistic exponent can cover more than one communicative form. Since there is no 1:1 relationship between form and meaning, it is **impossible to predict what communicative form or any linguistic exponent could fulfil**. Hence a **linguistic exponent has meaning potential** it might mean anything, including the opposite of its surface meaning as jokes, irony or sarcasm.

While grammatical structures have **meaning potential**, it might be believed that lexical terms have clearly meaning strictly defined by a dictionary. Word-like structures may be **polysemic** and can have more than one codified meaning. Some polysemic items may appear to have clearly demarcated boundaries (child may refer to a young human) other terms can comprehend a wide range of meanings whose boundaries are blurred. The **relativity** of lexical items is attributable to personal and social differences: what is intended by a word varies from person to person, from society to society. Relativity has brought us across the border separating "**denotation**" from "**connotation**". **Connotative meaning is the extra meaning a word acquires by virtue of the extension of its core denotative meaning**. Connotative meaning may refer to socially defined meaning, emotional or affective meaning and collocation. **Collocation refers to relationship holding between parts syntagms which are generally composed of a noun and a verb or a noun and an adjective**. Connotation normally implies the view that meanings of words are vague. A word may perform a communicative function which does not correspond to its denotational meaning or its codified connotations.