

## PATRICIA CANNING AND BRIAN WALKER

# Discourse Analysis

*Discourse Analysis* provides an essential and practical introduction for students studying modules on the analysis of language in use. It explores the ways in which language is used and organised in written and spoken texts to generate meanings and takes into account the social contexts of production, and the social roles and identities of those involved.

Investigating the ways in which language varies according to subject, social setting, and communicative purpose, this book examines various forms of speaking and writing, including casual conversation, speeches, parliamentary debate, computer-mediated communication, and mass media articles. It discusses topics including how we convey more than we actually say or write, the role of politeness and impoliteness in communication, and what makes texts cohesive and coherent. It also shows how particular aspects of discourse analysis can be assisted by corpus methods and tools.

Taking students through a step-by-step guide on how to do discourse analysis that includes the collection of data and presentation of results, the book also documents a text analysis project from start to finish. Featuring a range of examples and interactive activities, as well as additional online support material, this book is key reading for those studying discourse analysis modules.

**Patricia Canning** is an assistant professor at Northumbria University, Newcastle (UK). Her recent publications include journal articles on the linguistic construction of domestic abuse police reports (2022; and with Nick Lynn, 2021). She is co-author of an independent report into what went wrong at the Champions League Final in Paris (2022) and has published research on the narrative evidence following the Hillsborough Football Stadium disaster (2018; 2021; 2023). She is author of *Style in the Renaissance: Language and Control in Early Modern England* (2011).

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# Discourse Analysis

## A Practical Introduction

PATRICIA CANNING AND BRIAN WALKER



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PC and BW  
May 2023

## Notes

1 See Chapter 8

2 Not really

3 See Chapter 6





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# IPA chart

## THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (revised to 2015)

CONSONANTS (PULMONIC)

© 2015 IPA

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	<b>p b</b>		<b>t d</b>			<b>ʈ ɖ</b>	<b>c ɟ</b>	<b>k ɡ</b>	<b>q ɢ</b>		<b>ʔ</b>
Nasal	<b>m</b>	<b>ɱ</b>	<b>n</b>			<b>ɳ</b>	<b>ɲ</b>	<b>ŋ</b>	<b>ɴ</b>		
Trill	<b>ʙ</b>		<b>r</b>						<b>ʀ</b>		
Tap or Flap		<b>ɸ</b>	<b>ɾ</b>			<b>ɽ</b>					
Fricative	<b>ɸ β</b>	<b>f v</b>	<b>θ ð</b>	<b>s z</b>	<b>ʃ ʒ</b>	<b>ʂ ʐ</b>	<b>ç ʝ</b>	<b>x ɣ</b>	<b>χ ʁ</b>	<b>ħ ʕ</b>	<b>h ɦ</b>
Lateral fricative			<b>ɬ ɮ</b>								
Approximant		<b>ʋ</b>	<b>ɹ</b>			<b>ɻ</b>	<b>j</b>	<b>ɰ</b>			
Lateral approximant			<b>l</b>			<b>ɭ</b>	<b>ʎ</b>	<b>ʟ</b>			

Symbols to the right in a cell are voiced, to the left are voiceless. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

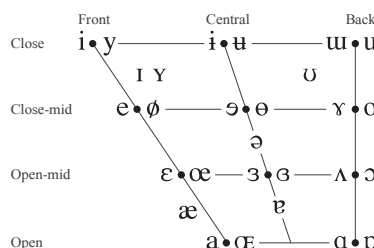
CONSONANTS (NON-PULMONIC)

Clicks	Voiced implosives	Ejectives
<b>ɘ</b> Bilabial	<b>ɓ</b> Bilabial	<b>ʼ</b> Examples:
<b>ɠ</b> Dental	<b>ɗ</b> Dental/alveolar	<b>pʼ</b> Bilabial
<b>ǀ</b> (Post)alveolar	<b>ɗ</b> Palatal	<b>tʼ</b> Dental/alveolar
<b>ǃ</b> Palatoalveolar	<b>ɠ</b> Velar	<b>kʼ</b> Velar
<b>ǂ</b> Alveolar lateral	<b>ɠ</b> Uvular	<b>sʼ</b> Alveolar fricative

OTHER SYMBOLS

<b>ɱ</b> Voiceless labial-velar fricative	<b>ɕ ʑ</b> Alveolo-palatal fricatives
<b>ʋ</b> Voiced labial-velar approximant	<b>ɭ</b> Voiced alveolar lateral flap
<b>ɰ</b> Voiced labial-palatal approximant	<b>ɥ</b> Simultaneous <b>ɰ</b> and <b>ɰ</b>
<b>ʁ</b> Voiceless epiglottal fricative	
<b>ʕ</b> Voiced epiglottal fricative	Affricates and double articulations can be represented by two symbols joined by a tie bar if necessary.
<b>ʡ</b> Epiglottal plosive	

VOWELS



Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel.

SUPRASEGMENTALS

<b>ˈ</b> Primary stress	<b>ˌ</b> Secondary stress
<b>ː</b> Long	<b>ˑ</b> Half-long
<b>˚</b> Extra-short	
<b>˘</b> Minor (foot) group	
<b>˙</b> Major (intonation) group	
<b>ˌ</b> Syllable break	<b>ˌi.ækt</b>
<b>ˌ</b> Linking (absence of a break)	

TONES AND WORD ACCENTS

LEVEL	CONTOUR
<b>˥</b> or <b>˧</b> Extra high	<b>˥</b> or <b>˧</b> Rising
<b>˦</b> High	<b>˨</b> Falling
<b>˧</b> Mid	<b>˩</b> High rising
<b>˨</b> Low	<b>˩</b> Low rising
<b>˩</b> Extra low	<b>˩</b> Rising-falling
<b>˩</b> Downstep	<b>˩</b> Global rise
<b>˩</b> Upstep	<b>˩</b> Global fall

DIACRITICS Some diacritics may be placed above a symbol with a descender, e.g. **ɰ̥**

<b>◌̥</b> Voiceless	<b>◌̤</b> Breathy voiced	<b>◌̦</b> Dental
<b>◌̧</b> Voiced	<b>◌̨</b> Creaky voiced	<b>◌̩</b> Apical
<b>◌̨</b> Aspirated	<b>◌̪</b> Linguolabial	<b>◌̫</b> Laminal
<b>◌̩</b> More rounded	<b>◌̬</b> Labialized	<b>◌̭</b> Nasalized
<b>◌̪</b> Less rounded	<b>◌̮</b> Palatalized	<b>◌̯</b> Nasal release
<b>◌̫</b> Advanced	<b>◌̰</b> Velarized	<b>◌̱</b> Lateral release
<b>◌̬</b> Retracted	<b>◌̲</b> Pharyngealized	<b>◌̳</b> No audible release
<b>◌̭</b> Centralized	<b>◌̴</b> Velarized or pharyngealized	
<b>◌̮</b> Mid-centralized	<b>◌̵</b> Raised	
<b>◌̯</b> Syllabic	<b>◌̶</b> Lowered	
<b>◌̰</b> Non-syllabic	<b>◌̷</b> Advanced Tongue Root	
<b>◌̱</b> Rhoticity	<b>◌̸</b> Retracted Tongue Root	

Typefaces: Doulos SIL (metatext); Doulos SIL, IPA Kiel, IPA LS Uni (symbols)

IPA Chart, <http://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org/content/ipa-chart>, available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Sharealike 3.0 Unported License. Copyright © 2015 International Phonetic Association.

# 1

## Discourse

### Language, context, and choice

#### Introduction

In this first chapter we explain what we mean by discourse and discourse analysis and introduce some of the key concepts and linguistic terminology that we will use throughout this book. We will discuss the notions of **text**, **context**, and **co-text**, before going on to explore the differences between spoken and written discourse. We will also examine the idea of a **standard language** and that some language varieties hold more **prestige** than others. We will discover that when analysing discourse, analysts consider the *form* of language (see levels of language in Figure 1.2), its *function* (e.g. the purpose to which it is put; how it works to achieve certain goals), and the *context* in which the **language event** occurs (e.g. a conversation between friends; a political debate, an opinion piece in the press). Our starting point, perhaps unsurprisingly, is ‘discourse’.

#### What is discourse?

Discourse does not have one single definition and has different meanings even within linguistics. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* online edition (‘Discourse’ 1989), discourse can mean:

- a detailed and lengthy spoken or written discussion of a particular topic;
- spoken communication, interaction or conversation;
- a connected series of utterances by which meaning is communicated.

Although non-technical, these definitions nonetheless provide important information about what discourse *is*. Discourse is connected chunks of spoken or written language (e.g. utterances; sentences) used in interactions for meaningful communication. Discourse, then, is language being used in all its forms (including signed languages) to communicate, interact, inform, and get things done. Simply put, and to quote two pioneers of discourse analysis, discourse is “language in use” (Brown and Yule 1983: 1). Consequently, discourse analysis is not the study of linguistic forms in isolation; it is, as Brown and Yule explain, the study of how linguistic forms **function** when they are **used** in different contexts. Simpson and

Mayr (2009: 5) echo this distinction between linguistic forms and the function of forms in use when they contrast **language** (as a system) with **discourse** (as language in use):

Whereas language refers to the more abstract set of patterns and rules which operate simultaneously at different levels in the systems [. . .] discourse refers to the instantiation of these patterns in real contexts of use.

Importantly, they go on to say that:

discourse works above the level of grammar and semantics to capture what happens when these language forms are played out in different social, political and cultural arenas.

The definition above chimes with that of another discourse pioneer, Mike Stubbs, who described discourse as “language above the sentence or above the clause” (Stubbs 1983:1). Therefore, while discourse is, of course, made up of the building blocks of language, it is greater than the sum of its parts. It is what results when these language forms combine and connect in different ways in different contexts.

Figure 1.1 captures the preoccupations of language and discourse and their relationship to each other. Discourse concerns all of that which pertains to language (such as syntax, lexis, and morphology – see Figure 1.2) but, in addition, it involves the **context** in which language is used (we will say more about context

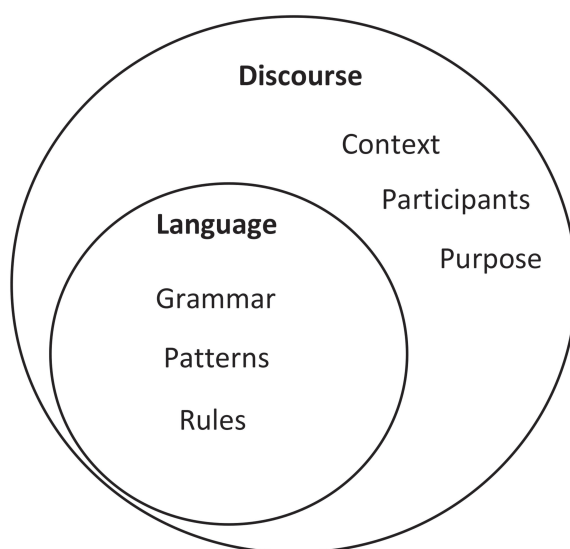


Figure 1.1 Relationship between language and discourse

later in this chapter), the **people** using the language, and the **purpose** served by the language in that context. Discourse, then, is **structural** because it involves the linguistic building blocks set out in Figure 1.2, **cognitive** because it incorporates the mental representations language users hold about the world (we explore this further in Chapter 8), and **social** because “language users engaging in discourse accomplish *social acts* and participate in *social interactions* [that are] embedded in social and cultural contexts” (van Dijk 1997: 2, original emphasis) (we say more about acts in Chapter 4).

### What is discourse analysis?

As we established in the previous section, discourse analysis is not the study of language rules and components in isolation; it is not just about considering clauses and other structures and establishing what words or phrases go where. Instead, discourse analysis studies how language is used in real-life, everyday settings. When we ‘do’ discourse analysis we are looking at how meaning is conveyed between those producing the language and those receiving the language. However, that is not to say an understanding of the language system is not essential for analysing discourse, because it is! Discourse analysis concerns analysing language *forms* and appreciating their *function* in the context in which they occur. Moreover, it involves investigating whether forms combine to create larger units of language, whether these have their own structural patterns, and whether any such patterns relate to meaning. In short, discourse analysis examines how meanings are made and interpreted through linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour in a given situational context. As you might imagine, given the almost endless number of different situational contexts, this makes discourse analysis a broad area of study. Indeed, in the preface to his 1997 edited volume, *Discourse as Social Interaction*, Teun van Dijk acknowledges that given the vast number of discourse **genres** (e.g. argumentation, storytelling), **modes** (e.g. spoken, written, imagistic), and **social domains** (e.g. medical, legal, political), the remit for discourse analysts is so wide that “even two volumes [of his edited collection] are unable to cover everything” (xi). Twenty-five years on, the information and communication technology revolution has increased the scope of ‘everything’ still further, with online interactions and social media now a commonplace way of ‘doing’ discourse.

### The nuts and bolts of language and discourse

In this section, we introduce some of the ‘nuts and bolts’ of a language. This is because for us to be able to analyse discourse in linguistic detail, we need to

know how language is constructed. This section will also provide a vocabulary that will enable us to describe language and discourse. Language operates on several levels from the smallest units through to discourse. Figure 1.2 below shows these structural levels, which we describe below.

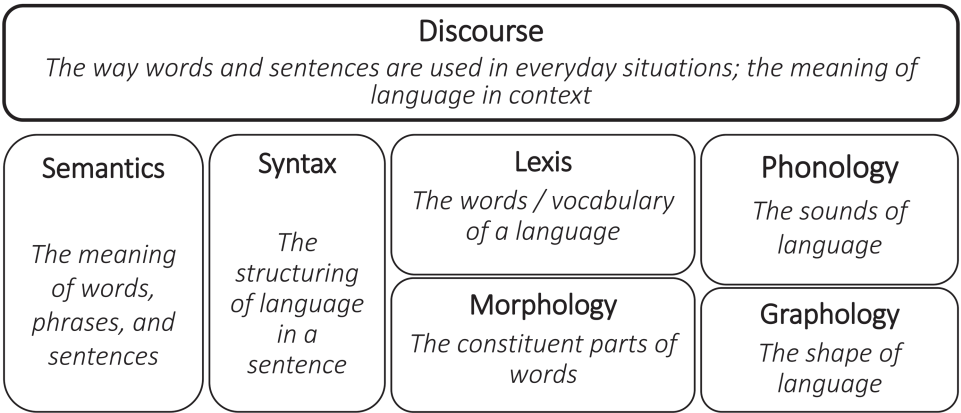


Figure 1.2 The levels of language

## Morphology

Morphology is the study of the smallest units of meaning in language, known as **morphemes**. Words comprise one or more morphemes. For example, ‘books’, contains the morphemes ‘book’ and ‘s’ (see Figure 1.3). The morpheme ‘book’ is what’s known as a **free morpheme** because it can stand on its own as a word. The morpheme ‘s’ that is attached to ‘book’ is known as a **bound morpheme** because even though it carries meaning (in this case, it means ‘plural’) it cannot stand alone and have meaning; it must be bound to another morpheme. For example, we would not say ‘s’ to answer the question ‘what are libraries full of?’

‘books’		
book	+	s
free morpheme	+	bound morpheme

Figure 1.3 Free and bound morphemes in ‘books’

The addition of the bound morpheme ‘s’ to the free morpheme ‘book’ is an example of affixation. In the example in Figure 1.3, the morpheme ‘s’ is a suffix because it attaches to the end of ‘book’. This specific type of suffix is known as an **inflectional suffix** because it carries grammatical information (in this case

‘number’). Inflectional suffixes can also signal tense, possession, or comparison (e.g. ‘-est’). Bound morphemes can also function as **derivational suffixes**. For example, the verb ‘assassinate’ is created by adding the bound morpheme ‘-ate’ to the free morpheme ‘assassin’ (a noun). When the suffix is added, there is a change in grammatical class from noun to a verb, so a new verb (‘assassinate’) is *derived* from a noun (‘assassin’). Some bound morphemes attach to the front of a free morpheme and are known as **prefixes**. These carry a variety of meanings but nonetheless cannot stand on their own as words. For example, the bound morpheme, and prefix, ‘dis’ means ‘not’ or ‘the opposite of’ so when attached to, say, ‘respect’, a new word is derived (‘disrespect’) that means the opposite.

Morphological rules can be manipulated in discourse for a range of different effects. For example, the poetry of E. E. Cummings often plays with morphology in creative ways. For instance, in the poem ‘Love is more thicker than forget’,<sup>1</sup> Cummings describes love as ‘moonly’ and ‘sunly’ which are unusual constructions that, through the addition of the suffix ‘-ly’, change the word class of ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ from nouns to adjectives (you can find the full poem at the *Poetry Foundation* website).

QR 1.1 Link to E. E. Cummings’s poem



New words can also be formed by the merging of two **free** morphemes to form compound words. For example, ‘bookworm’ is a combination of ‘book’ + ‘worm’. In 2020, the Oxford Dictionary’s ‘word of the year’ was expanded to account for an “unprecedented” year and introduced new compounds that included ‘bushfires’, ‘Covid-19’, ‘lockdown’, ‘circuit-breaker’, ‘support bubble’, and ‘keyworker’. As you can see, the words of the year can tell us much about how we use existing language for new concepts, but it can also tell us about the events of that year!

## Phonology

Phonology is the study of the sound system of a language and is concerned with the different sounds that carry meaning, known as **phonemes**. A phoneme is a distinctive sound in any language that, when uttered, makes a difference to meaning and therefore contrasts with other sounds. For example, the vowel sound in the word ‘pip’ is different to the vowel sound in ‘pup’; indeed, it is the only difference between those two words, and it is that difference that affects the meaning of the words. In phonology, ‘pip’ and ‘pup’ are an example of a **minimal pair**, which is a pair of words that differ in one sound only. Therefore, ‘pip’ and ‘pat’ are not a minimal pair because they differ by two sounds. The idea of a minimal pair is to contrast particular sounds to show that they make a difference to meaning. Phonologists aim to identify and quantify the phonemes that comprise a language. For example, with Received Pronunciation

of English (see below), there are said to be 20 vowel sounds (Cruttenden 2001: 91) and 24 consonants (Cruttenden 2001: 149). There are, therefore, many more sounds in spoken English than there are letters in written English, which has just five vowels (aeiou) and 21 consonants (bcdfghjklmnpqrstvwxyz). Consequently, phonologists use an expanded set of symbols (including the letters we know and recognise) to represent the sounds of a language which together make up the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). You can find a copy of the IPA at the start of this book.

Table 1.1 presents a series of words and aims to demonstrate the 20 different vowel sounds in English (assuming Received Pronunciation!) along with the IPA symbol that represents that sound. The IPA symbol is placed between slashes, which is the convention for phonemic transcription.

**Table 1.1** The 20 vowel sounds in standard pronunciation (RP) of British English

pap	/æ/	Parp	/ɑ:/	poser	/ə/	poise	/ɔɪ/
pep	/e/	Perp	/ɜ:/	pun	/ʌ/	pope	/əʊ/
pip	/ɪ/	Peep	/i:/	pain	/eɪ/	pow	/aʊ/
pop	/ɒ/	Paw	/ɔ:/	peer	/ɪə/	pair	/eə/
pup	/ʊ/	Poop	/u:/	pipe	/aɪ/	poor	/ʊə/

When we talk about speaking ‘standard’ English, we mean the variety of the language that is conventionally accepted as the ‘norm’. In the IPA, the ‘norm’ is Received Pronunciation of British English or ‘RP’ for short. The ‘received’ in RP means ‘accepted’ or ‘approved’ and it is therefore the version of spoken English approved by arbiters of the language (in this case, those policing it in the late 1800s). RP then is the point of reference or model that the IPA is based on. This might seem odd given that very few people actually use RP (around 3 per cent of the UK population). In other words, RP’s approval or acceptance is more to do with perceived social status than correctness (we say more about this later). Use QR code 1.2 to find out more about RP at the British Library website and hear what it sounds like (think 1950s English TV/radio announcer at the BBC and you are there).



QR 1.2 Received Pronunciation

Of course, English is spoken in many different regional accents across the world and different accents have a slightly different inventory of phonemes (due to differences in pronunciation) and differ in which phonemes contrast in meaning. For example, with some accents it is doubtful that the difference between /ʌ/ and /ʊ/ is meaningful – e.g. in parts of the North of England, /pʊb/ and /pʌb/ are both places to buy and consume beer (among other things).

According to Crystal (1995: 239), the most frequent vowel sound in English is /ə/, which is known as **schwa** and represents a sort of short ‘uh’ sound. The first 12 vowel sounds in Table 1.1 are known as monophthongs (or pure vowels) because their sound remains fairly constant when they are spoken. The remaining eight vowels are diphthongs because there is perceivable movement (known as a **glide**) between two different sounds. It is also possible to have triphthongs (e.g. words such as ‘power’, ‘prior’ and ‘player’). Such triphthongs involve a diphthong with the addition of a schwa (/ə/) at the end. For example, ‘power’ is pronounced /paʊə/ in standard (RP) English.

In Hiberno-English such as that spoken in the north of Ireland, some triphthongs are spoken as monophthongs. For example, ‘power’ is often pronounced in Belfast as ‘par’ /pɑ:r/. Irish humour can often be self-reflexive and has given rise to many books on what is affectionately called the language of ‘Norn Iron’, itself a non-standard phonological rendering of standard ‘Northern Ireland’. You cannot go far in Belfast without seeing some form of this rich Hiberno-English variant marketed as T-shirts, mugs, and more, as the following example in Figure 1.4 from T-shirt retailer Norn Iron Tees shows.



Figure 1.4 An example of Hiberno-English: ‘power shower’

## Lexis

This is the linguistic term given to the words (or vocabulary) of a language and their different forms. Words can be divided into two general types: **lexical words** that refer to things in the world (ideas, concepts, entities); and **function words** (also known as grammatical words) that help to link the lexical words together to make clauses and sentences (Freeborn 1995: 36). Lexical words are known



as **open class**, because they are being added to all the time as new words are coined to encode new experiences and new ‘things’. Function words are known as **closed class** because they are static (but not totally fixed – consider the more recent introduction of ‘Mx’ as a substitute for the more conventional ‘Ms’ pronoun for women). Words are traditionally assigned to what are known as **word classes** (also known as Parts of Speech) based on what task they are performing in the text they occur. The different word classes with some examples are shown in Tables 1.2 and 1.3. There are four open word classes: verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, and six closed word classes: prepositions, pronouns, determiners, demonstratives, conjunctions, and modal verbs. Note that the same word can perform a different role in different texts and so can be assigned to different word classes. For example, ‘flower’ can be a noun (as in ‘what a lovely flower’), but if you ask, ‘has your agapanthus started to flower yet?’, then ‘flower’ is doing the job of a verb.

Table 1.2 Lexical word classes

Nouns	thinker, book, worm, shelf, case . . .
Verbs	think, book, saw . . .
Adjectives	sunny, bookish, booky, quick . . .
Adverbs	gingerly, bookishly, hurtfully, quickly . . .

Table 1.3 Function or grammatical word classes

Pronouns	her, they, it, we, them, his, Mr, Mx . . .
Prepositions	in, at, above, on, beside . . .
Determiners	a, an, the, some, any, all . . .
Conjunctions	for, and, but, so . . .
Demonstratives	this, that, those, them . . .
Modal verbs	should, shall, would, could, can, may, might, must, ought

## ■ Lexical creativity

New concepts require new words, known as **neologisms**. Neologisms are typically achieved by compounding and blending existing words or by novel affixation. For example, the new word ‘staycation’ (meaning to go on holiday without going abroad) is a blend of ‘stay’ and ‘vacation’; ‘crowdfunding’ is a compound of ‘crowd’ and ‘funding’; and ‘metaverse’ (meaning a virtual meeting space), is formed by replacing the prefix ‘uni’ (meaning ‘one’) in ‘universe’ with ‘meta’ (meaning ‘beyond’ or ‘higher order’<sup>2</sup>). An alternative to neologising is to give

existing words new, additional meanings. It was not so long ago that ‘mouse’ and ‘virus’ referred only to living organisms, yet now they refer to inanimate objects or concepts as well. If we said to you ‘We cannot get our mouse to work’, we doubt you would think we were exploiting our pet rodent for material gain.

Poets and writers are often creative with language and will neologise willy-nilly to suit their needs. An extreme example is the poem ‘Jabberwocky’ by Lewis Carroll, in which there are so many neologisms that the poem seems totally nonsensical (at first). However, linguistic conventions are being adhered to, particularly word-class conventions. In Activity 1.1 below, the first activity in this book, see if you can tell what word classes (noun, verb, adjective, adverb) the neologisms belong to. What do you base your guesses on? How does what you know about language help you to interpret the poem?

### Activity 1.1 Making sense of neologisms

‘Jabberwocky’, by Lewis Carroll

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!  
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!  
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun  
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand;  
Long time the manxome foe he sought—  
So rested he by the Tumtum tree  
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,  
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through  
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!  
He left it dead, and with its head  
He went galumphing back.

“And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?  
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!

O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"  
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

There are linguistic patterns in ‘Jabberwocky’ that indicate that the conventions of English are being followed. Your knowledge of how sentences are constructed (syntax) might help you to interpret ‘toves’ as a noun (and perhaps a material thing), whereas your knowledge of morphology might lead you to conclude that ‘slithy’ is an adjective that is constructed from ‘slith+y’ (much in the same way that ‘curl’ becomes ‘curly’). To take another example, you might have never heard of ‘The frumious Bandersnatch’ but it will not take much effort to discern that ‘frumious’ is an adjective that describes the noun following it, and that the noun is in fact a noun because it follows a determiner (the definite article ‘the’). You might also have deduced that the ‘Bandersnatch’ is a specific name/has a specific referent as it is capitalised (and so graphologically marked – we introduce graphology below). These are just some of the consistent patterns in this neologically rich text.

One neologism that gained traction in 2017 was the word ‘covfefe’, used in a viral tweet on 17 May 2017 by the then president of the United States, Donald Trump. The full tweet read “Despite the constant negative press covfefe”. Widely acknowledged as a typo for ‘coverage’, Trump refused to confirm his error and instead deleted the tweet. When probed by reporters about the nonsensical reference, Trump’s spokesperson, Sean Spicer, replied “I think the president and a small group of people know exactly what he meant” (Estepa 2017). Sometimes discourse communities are *\*really\** small, it seems.

## Graphology

Written language exists as marks on a page (or some other medium). This is known as graphology and refers specifically to such things as typography, punctuation, and the arrangement of any marks that constitute the discourse. The word *\*really\** in the preceding paragraph is graphologically marked as it is enclosed within asterisks. Some fonts, for example, carry meaning and/or are associated with particular discourse types. For instance, this book is written using **Times New Roman** font because this is seen as a ‘serious’ font that is suitable for this sort of text. The **Comic Sans MS** font, however, with its comic book associations would probably be seen as not suitable for a serious academic book. In some discourses, such as social media and other computer-mediated

communication, upper-case letters can be meaningful where they communicate SHOUTING and/or anger. When we refer to the way the text is arranged visually, we are also talking about graphology, and this includes all the meaningful elements of that text (images, colour, space, etc.). The poster in Figure 1.5 is an artistic representation of one that appeared on a few online vegan sites in 2015.

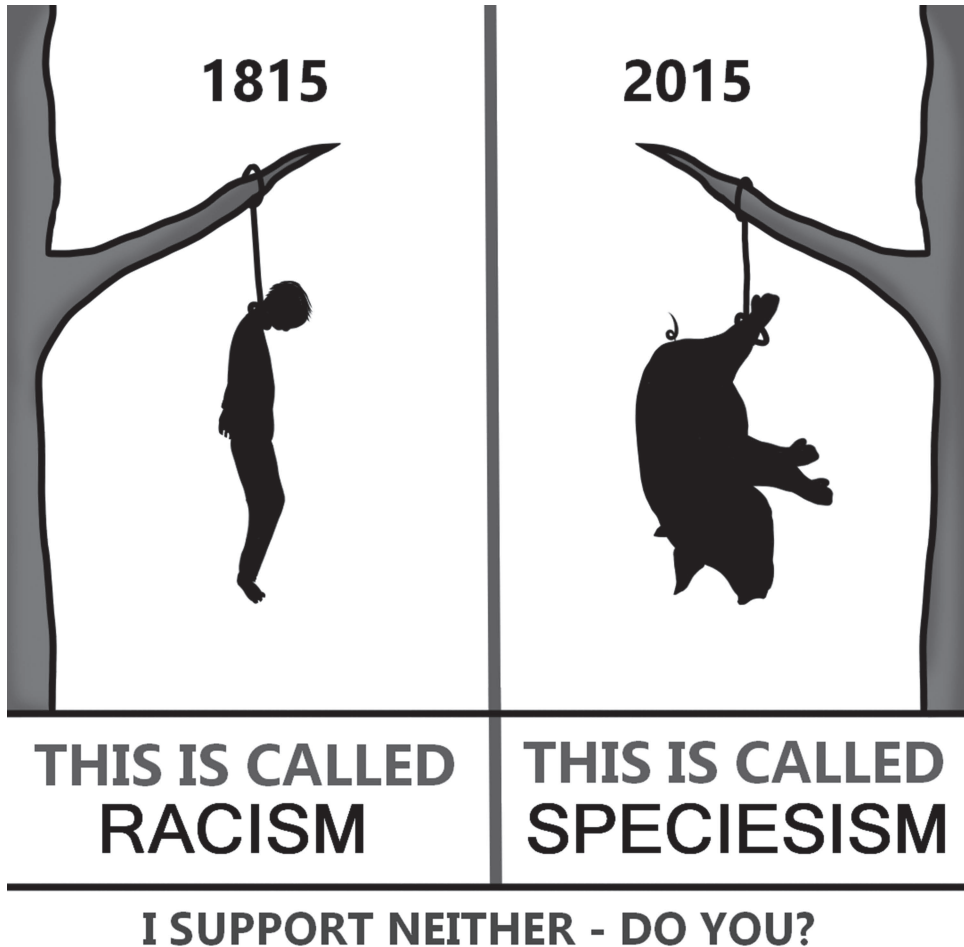


Figure 1.5 Vegan propaganda poster

Writing about the projected equivalence between racism and ‘speciesism’, Twitter user and blogger, Claire Heuchan, shares the poster (citing @veganos Twitter account as the source) in her article condemning the use of “slavery as a tool to promote vegan values” (2015). Heuchan argued that such comparisons were akin to “vegan activists mak[ing] clear that vegan spaces are frequently racist spaces”. The poster uses graphology to promote a relationship of semantic equivalence between two disparate practices to persuade non-vegans to go vegan or in Heuchan’s terms, to “trigger a dietary epiphany”. The division of the

space into two equal parts sets up a parallel between the two images, the two dates, and the two concepts ‘racism’ and ‘speciesism’. This nudges the reader to tease out a connection between them (regardless of whether or not it exists in reality). By making the perceived connection implicit through the graphological arrangement, the text producer relies on the reader picking up the inferential connection. After all, we are more likely to be persuaded by an argument we have helped construct than one that we have invested no time in formulating.

Syntax

This is the linguistic term for clause structure. A clause is an organisational unit of language that is made up of a subject and predicator. ‘We write’ is an example of a clause. The linear line that comprises most European modern languages, as well Southeast Asian, Indian, North American, and South American, is written from left to right, syntactically speaking. Syntax refers to the different structural slots occupied by language tokens such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and grammatical words like conjunctions and so on. Conventionally, these syntactic slots follow a conventional order, so a clause like ‘the dog ate the bone’ follows the conventional Subject-Predicator-Object pattern in English. Sometimes, the syntactic order switches, and we get constructions like that in Figure 1.6 ‘the bone, the dog ate’.

(a)			(b)		
the dog	ate	the bone	the bone	the dog	ate
Subject	Predicator	Object	Object	Subject	Predicator

Figure 1.6 Conventional and unconventional syntax

Both constructions in Figure 1.6 mean the same thing. However, when we encounter construction (b), it seems to communicate more than simply its **propositional** meaning, which is the basic meaning of the clause relating to the entities involved and their relationship to each other (see Chapter 5). Indeed, it implies that the addressee already knows that the dog ate *something*, just not what it was. We explore syntactic ordering and its effects in Chapter 2.

Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning. An important concept in semantics is denotation, or the thing, idea, action or concept that a word refers to. The denotive meaning of a word is sometimes called its primary, core or literal meaning. A word may have a set of possible denotive meanings one of which may be triggered by the surrounding co-text and/or the context in which a word is produced. So, returning to our sentence, ‘the dog ate the bone’, ‘dog’ refers to

a domesticated canine animal, ‘bone’ refers to part of an animal skeleton and ‘ate’ refers ingesting (chewing and swallowing) food via the mouth. A word can also come with associated meanings, which are to do with the feelings or psychological connections a word (or the concept it refers to) evokes. For example, ‘dog’ is sometimes associated with concepts such as loyalty and devotion or companionship. Another aspect of meaning is literal and non-literal (figurative) meanings a word can have. For example, a person can be ‘dogged’ by bad luck, and you might need to ‘bone up’ before an exam. With these uses, ‘dog’ and ‘bone’ no longer refer to their primary meanings but to metaphorical meanings. In Chapter 5, we talk more about semantics including presuppositions and entailments, and in Chapter 8 we deal with figurative meaning.

## Discourse

This brings us back to where we started this chapter – discourse. We defined discourse as ‘language in use’. It concerns meaning above the level of the clause and sentence (syntax). This sentence is a piece of discourse. This book is a bigger piece of discourse characterised by academic writing, with an instructional purpose, with a high percentage of domain-specific lexis (the phrase ‘domain-specific lexis’ being a case in point). In fact, we are actively trying to avoid an overly academic register, and so we hope that this chapter and the rest of this book is NOT characterised by long, embedded sentences, passive structures, third-person pronouns, and lots of what are known as ‘logical operators’ (Sinclair 2004: 7), which include, for example, ‘therefore’, ‘so’, and ‘consequently’. (Okay, apart from that overly long embedded sentence.) Our purpose is to inform, not impress. We failed at the latter long ago.

## Text

When we analyse discourse, we inevitably study texts because, as Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 3) point out, “[w]hen people speak or write, they produce text”. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 3) go on to define text as “any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language”. Text, then, is a single language artefact or “unit of language” that can be spoken, written, signed or otherwise (e.g. image) that is defined by “meaning” (i.e. it makes sense to someone) rather than “form” (i.e. there are no formal restrictions on what counts as a text) (Halliday and Hasan 1976: 1–2). Texts in written form are the typical object of analysis for discourse analysts, which means to study and analyse spoken and signed texts, we must record them in some way and create written transcriptions to allow repeated scrutiny. Audio and video recordings can also be analysed using special software, such as *Praat* (Boersma and Weenink 2023; ‘praat’ means ‘speak’ in Dutch), but this is not



something we will deal with in this book. Text, then, is the object of study but, as Bloor and Bloor (2013: 8) point out, as discourse analysts we must also appreciate that language is used within a particular context and texts emerge from **language events**.

Language event is a general term often used (but less often defined) by linguists ('speech event' and 'communicative event' are also sometimes used). A language event is any event where language has a fundamental role or any event where language happens. For example, chatting to a friend is a language event; it is difficult to chat without using language (in whatever form it might take). Giving a speech is a language event because it would be very difficult to give a speech without using any language. Going for a run, however, is not a language event

### Activity 1.2 HAVE YOU SHEETED?

Consider the example in Figure 1.7, which is a photograph of a real sign board situated somewhere in the UK. Think about the words on the sign and consider their meaning in combination. Do you understand the meaning (or message) that the sign is aiming to convey? What do you need to know to understand the sign? Have you ever sheeted?

*Answer these questions before reading on.*



Figure 1.7 HAVE YOU SHEETED?