Introduction to Linguistics (CL1.102)

Summer 2021, IIIT Hyderabad

05 July, Monday (Lecture 15)

Taught by Prof. Aditi Mukherjee

Discourse as Context

Discourse Topic

The discourse topic is a notion of what the discourse is about constructed by the participants. It is a form of knowledge that influences how they interpret what they hear.

Reference and Context

Much of reference involves reliance on context, together with some calculation. There are many ways for this to happen; for example,

- Metonymy – the referent is identified by something associated with it, as in *The cover-up extends to the Oval Office.*
- Synecdoche – the part stands for the whole. For example, *I like to see new faces in class.*

Contronyms are words that can mean completely opposite things in different contexts.

Speech Acts

Speech acts constitute the union of linguistic and social behaviour.

Learning to communicate in a language involves more than acquiring words and their pronunciation. This is the notion of communicative competence, as opposed to linguistic competence.

The functions of language whereby questions are asked or suggestions are made are called speech acts. This term was introduced in *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin, 1975), as a rebuttal to the prevalent philosophy of logical positivists, according to which the basic sentence type is declarative and their meanings are reducible to truth/falsity values.

Austin pointed out that

- not all sentences are statements, and
- grammatically "declarative" sentences are not always actual declarations.

Sentences of the latter type are "performative" utterances – the action is performed by the act of uttering the sentence. The word "hereby" is used in such

sentences. For example, *I apologise for the disruption in class.* Other such verbs are *nominate, name, declare,* etc.

These contrast with non-performative verbs, which describe actions independent of the linguistic act, like *I walked to college.*