

Linguistics 111

Pragmatics I

Introduction and terminology

“When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more, nor less”

(Humpty Dumpty)

“The question is whether you can make a word mean so many different things.”

(Alice)

A: Can you cook?

B: I know how to put the kettle on.

A: How is your son?
B: He' grown another foot.

Sue reported to the committee that Joan learnt that she had failed the exam in March.

“You are a real race-horse.”

Words can convey more and something different
to what they conventionally mean.

How do we manage to figure out how to interpret
a word?

Does it mean exactly what it conventionally
means?

more?

is it a metaphor?

What is pragmatics?

How is it that using language is in general so effortless, when there seems to be no limit to what words can convey or what ambiguities they can give rise to?

Pragmatics seeks to provide an answer to this question.

It is the study of communication – the study of how language is used. It is based on the assumption that there is a division between knowledge of language and the way it is used; and the goal of pragmatics is taken to be that of providing a set of principles which dictate how knowledge of language and general reasoning interact in the process of language understanding, to give rise to the various different kinds of effects which can be achieved in communication.

(Ruth Kempson, 2001)

2 aspects of language

Knowledge of language: semantics (meaning of individual words and how these combine into more complex structures): encoded meanings

pragmatic principles: commonsense reasoning
principles enable different and richer
interpretations: nonencoded meaning

I know how to put the kettle on.

KNOW(Actor: I, Theme: PUT-KETTLE-ON)

reasoning:

B can put the kettle on.

Putting the kettle on does not take much cooking expertise.

--> B admits that she does not know a lot about cooking

other interpretations are of course possible.

Pragmatics: the application of conversational principles to sentence meaning

A: Elton John sang at Diana's funeral. Did you see it?

B: I spent the whole day in Kensington Gardens.
The smell was amazing.

How does B know what 'it' refers to?

Why does talking about Kensington Gardens
answer the question?

Why is 'the whole day' taken to refer to Diana's
funeral?

How does A know what smell refers to?

Knowledge about the English language alone
does not help us to answer most of these
questions.

logical form:

A: Question: X saw Y at time t1

B: X spent day Z at Kensington gardens at time t2, smell-V was amazing at time t3

general pragmatic principles ->

Question: B saw Princess Diana's funeral on Saturday.

B: Spent Saturday in Kensington Gardens. The smell of the flowers outside of Kensington Palace was amazing

sentence meaning as partial specification of
interpretation

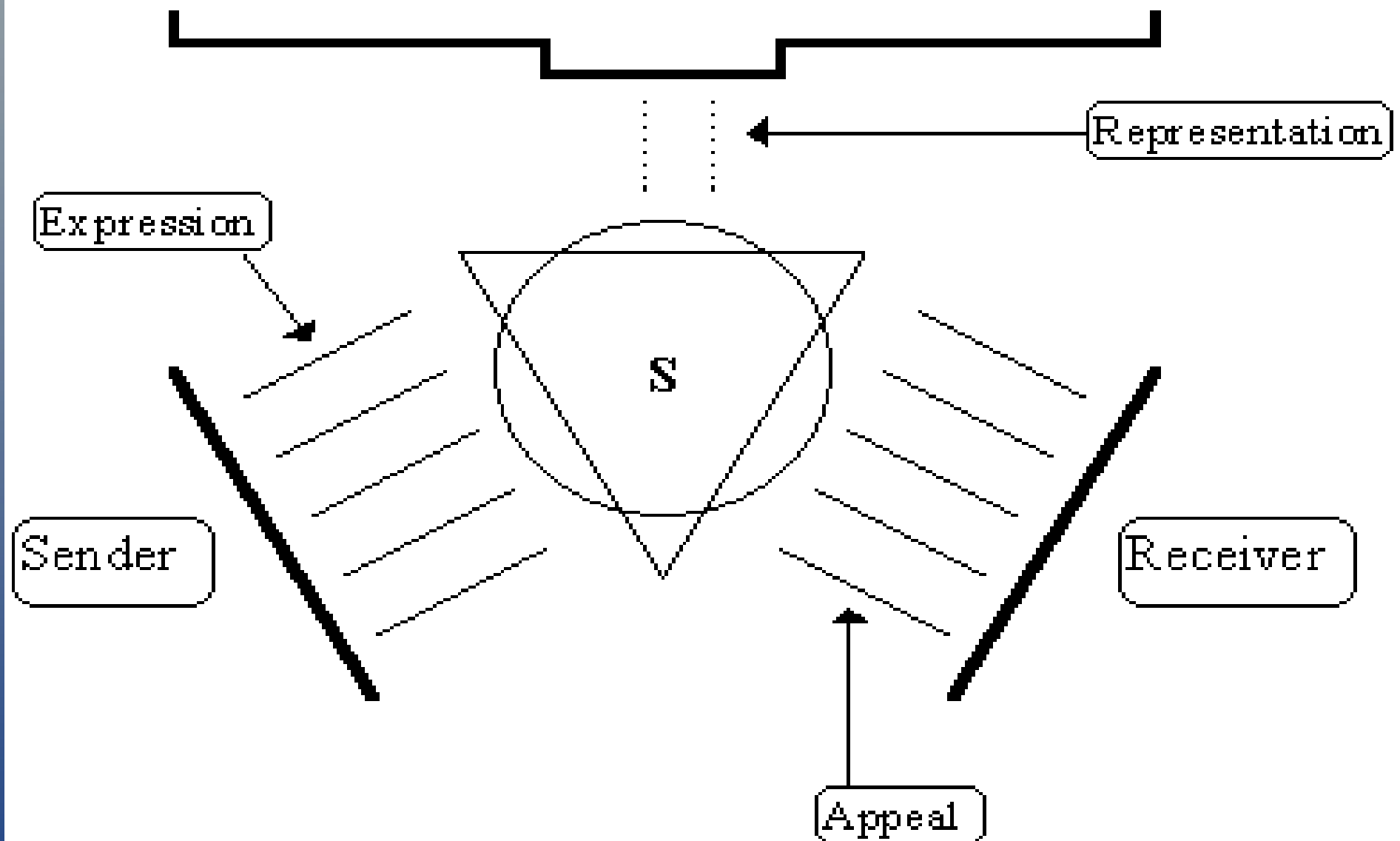
A: Elton John sang at Diana's funeral. Did you see it.

B: I spent the whole day in Kensington Gardens. I felt I had to. The smell was amazing. Incredibly moving.

Knowledge of language: A set of procedures for interpreting utterances.

Models of communication

Objects and States of Affairs



previous slide: Organon Model (Karl Bühler)

Context Referential

Emotive
Addresser

Poetic
Message

Conative
Addressee

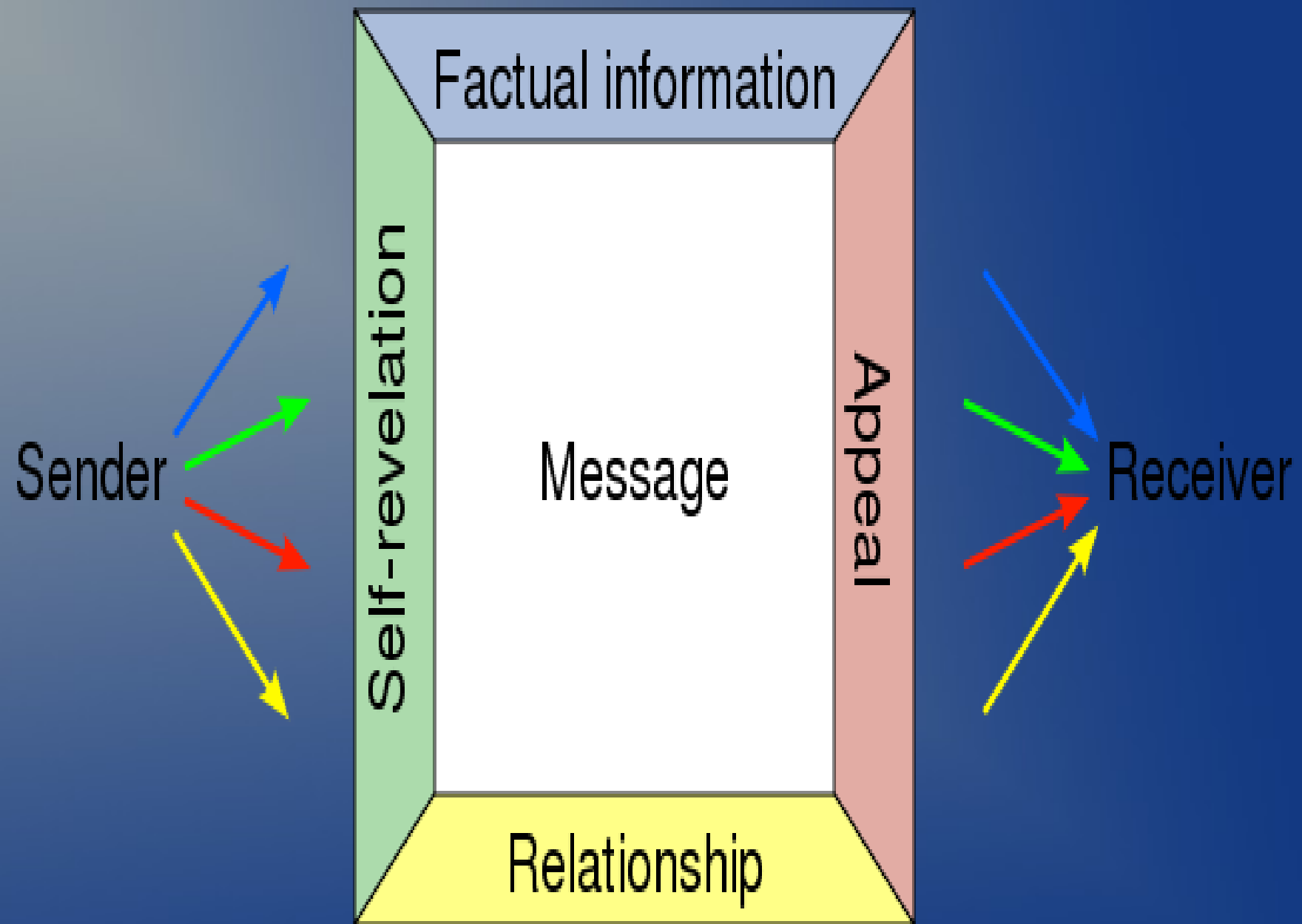
Contact Phatic

Code Metalingual

previous slide: Roman Jakobson's communication
model

Paul Watzlawick: Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect

The four sides model (also known as communication square or four ears model) is a communication model by Friedemann Schulz von Thun.



A man and a woman are eating a home cooked meal together.

The man says: "There is something green in the soup." The woman answers: "If you don't like the taste, you can cook it yourself."

Sender

Matter layer: There is something green.

Self-revealing layer: I don't know what it is.

Relationship layer: You should know what it is.

Appeal layer: Tell me what it is!

Receiver

Matter layer: There is something green.

Self-revealing layer: You do not know what the green item is, and that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Relationship layer: You think my cooking is questionable.

Appeal layer: I should only cook what you know in the future!

Your turn:

Use the organon model and Schulz von Thun's model to analyze the following situations:

A: It is cold in here.

B: [gets up and closes the window]

A to B in a bar.

A: What a wonderful day out there.

B: [continues reading]

Can you think of an example of a communication that ended in a communication breakdown?
Analyze it with either one of the two models.

How do hearers select the interpretation which the speaker intended?

Principles of common sense reasoning
inference

