

# THE LANGUAGE - CULTURE RELATIONSHIP

## Group 2:

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# Outline

- 
- Overview
  - Meaning as sign
  - Meaning as action
  - Implications in ELT

# THE RELATIONSHIP OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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# LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY THEORY

- *Different people speak differently because they think differently, and they think differently because their language offers them differently. (Boas, F.)*
- *The structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one thinks and behaves. (Sapir, E. & Whorf, L.)*

# WHORF'S EXAMPLE



**Linguistic meaning:**  
without gasoline



**Mental interpretation:**  
not dangerous



**Action:**  
Smoke or throw  
cigarette butts

→ “Language filters their perception and the way they categorize experience” (Whorf, L.).

# LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY THEORY

## ***Sapir–Whorf hypothesis's insights:***

- Language reflects culture and constrains the way people think.
- Culture is expressed through the actual use of the language.

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

## **Language expresses cultural reality.**

- *Words express facts, ideas or events that are communicable.*
- *Words reflect attitudes, beliefs, and points of view.*

## **Language embodies cultural reality.**

- *The (spoken, written, or visual) medium people choose to communicate with one another create meanings that understandable to the group they belong to.*

## **Language symbolizes cultural reality.**

- *Language is viewed as a symbol of social identity.*

# COMMUNITIES OF LANGUAGE USERS

- Discourse communities = common ways in which members of a social group use language to meet their social needs
- Members of the same discourse community share common ways of thinking, behaving, and valuing.

E.g. *“I like your sweater!”*

- *“Oh, thank you!”* (said Americans)

- *“Oh, really? It’s already quite old”* (said the French)

→ Language is not a culture-free code, distinct from the way people think and behave, but it plays a major role in the perpetuation of culture.



# MEANING AS SIGN

Language can mean through what it refers to as an **encoded sign (semantics)** and through what it does as an action in context (**pragmatics**).

# THE LINGUISTIC SIGN

- Humans' capacity to create **signs** that mediate between them and their environment
- A signifier and a signified

signifier → **“ROSE”**



← signified

- A sign: neither the word nor the object but the **relation** between the two
- **Arbitrariness** of the linguistic sign

# THE NON-ARBITRARY NATURE OF SIGNS

- For native speakers, linguistic signs are the **non-arbitrary, natural** reality they stand for.

# THE MEANING OF SIGNS

- Denotative

Ex: Rose **denotes** a sweet-smelling flower.

- Connotative

Ex: Rose **connotes** love, passion and beauty.

- Iconic

Ex: “Whoops!”, “Wow!”

# CULTURAL ENCODINGS

- Every discourse community encodes their experience differently.
- Different signs denote reality by cutting it up differently.

Ex: In Bavarian German, **das Bein** denotes the whole leg from the hip to the toes.

In English, there are three words **hip, leg, foot**.

- Cultural encodings can change over time in the same language.

# CULTURAL ENCODINGS

- The encoding of experience differs in the nature of the cultural associations.

Ex: *dusha* (Russian) and *soul/ mind* (English)

- With the same **speech community**, signs might have different semantic values for people from different **discourse communities**.

Ex: different cultural literacy

# SYMBOLS

- Signs are naturalized and conventionalized.

Ex: In Vietnamese: khoẻ như trâu

In English: strong as a horse

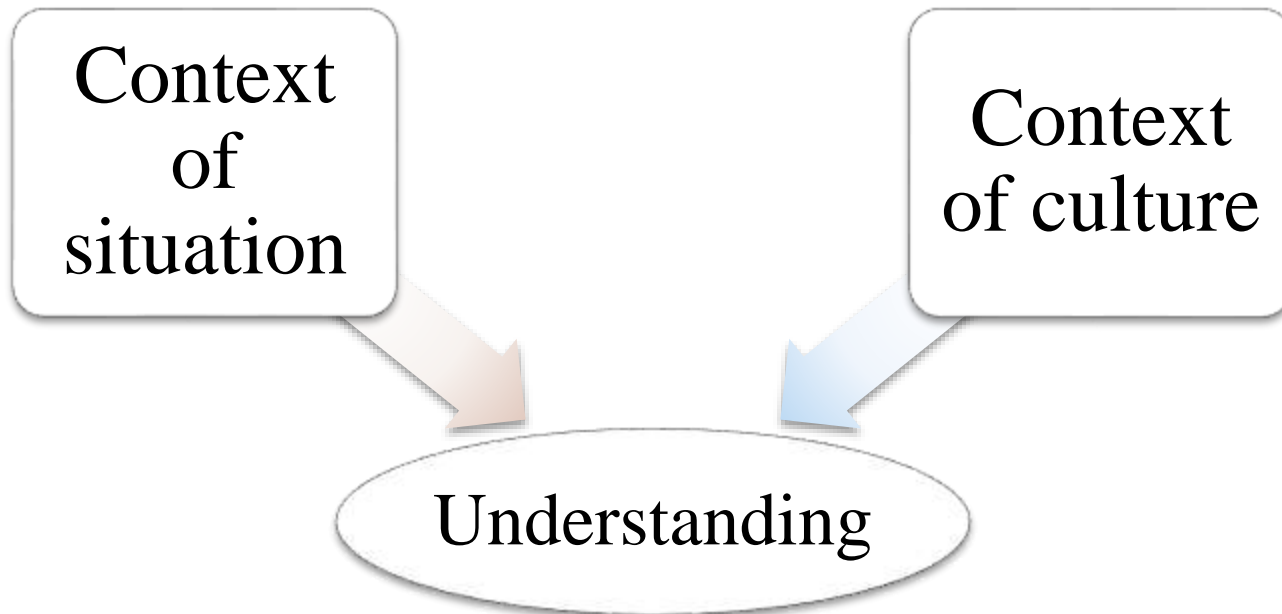
# MEANING AS ACTION





# MEANING AS ACTION

Meaning is not in words, but in **actions**.  
*(Goethe's Dr. Faust)*



# How is pragmatic meaning culturally realized in verbal exchanges?

Structures of expectation

Contextualization cues

Pragmatic coherence

The co-operative principle

Participants' roles and the co-construction of culture

<b>Structures of expectation</b>	The expectation of certain behaviors of others
	Different in cultures
<b>Contextualization cues</b>	Help speakers clarify or guide listeners' interpretations of what is being said: verbal, paraverbal & non-verbal signs
	E.g. “ <b>I</b> need to get in <b>there</b> . Can you open <b>the</b> door?”
	→ <b>Situated inferences</b>

<p><b>Pragmatic coherence</b></p>	<p>Created in the minds of speakers and hearers by the inferences they make → Relate speaker to speaker within the larger cultural context of communication</p>
<p><b>The co-operative principle</b></p>	<p>The assumption that in conversation, speakers will not say more than is necessary for the purpose of the exchange.</p> <p>4 maxims: relevant, clear, understandable &amp; true</p>
<p><b>Participants' roles and the co-construction of culture</b></p>	<p>Play various social roles</p> <p>Culture is jointly constructed through language in action</p> <p>E.g: Mary: Mommy, sock. – <u>dirty</u></p> <p>Mommy: Yes, <u>they are all dirty</u>. I know</p>

# IMPLICATIONS IN ELT

Tickoo, M. L. 1995. *Language and culture in multicultural societies: viewpoints and visions*. SEAMEO. Singapore.

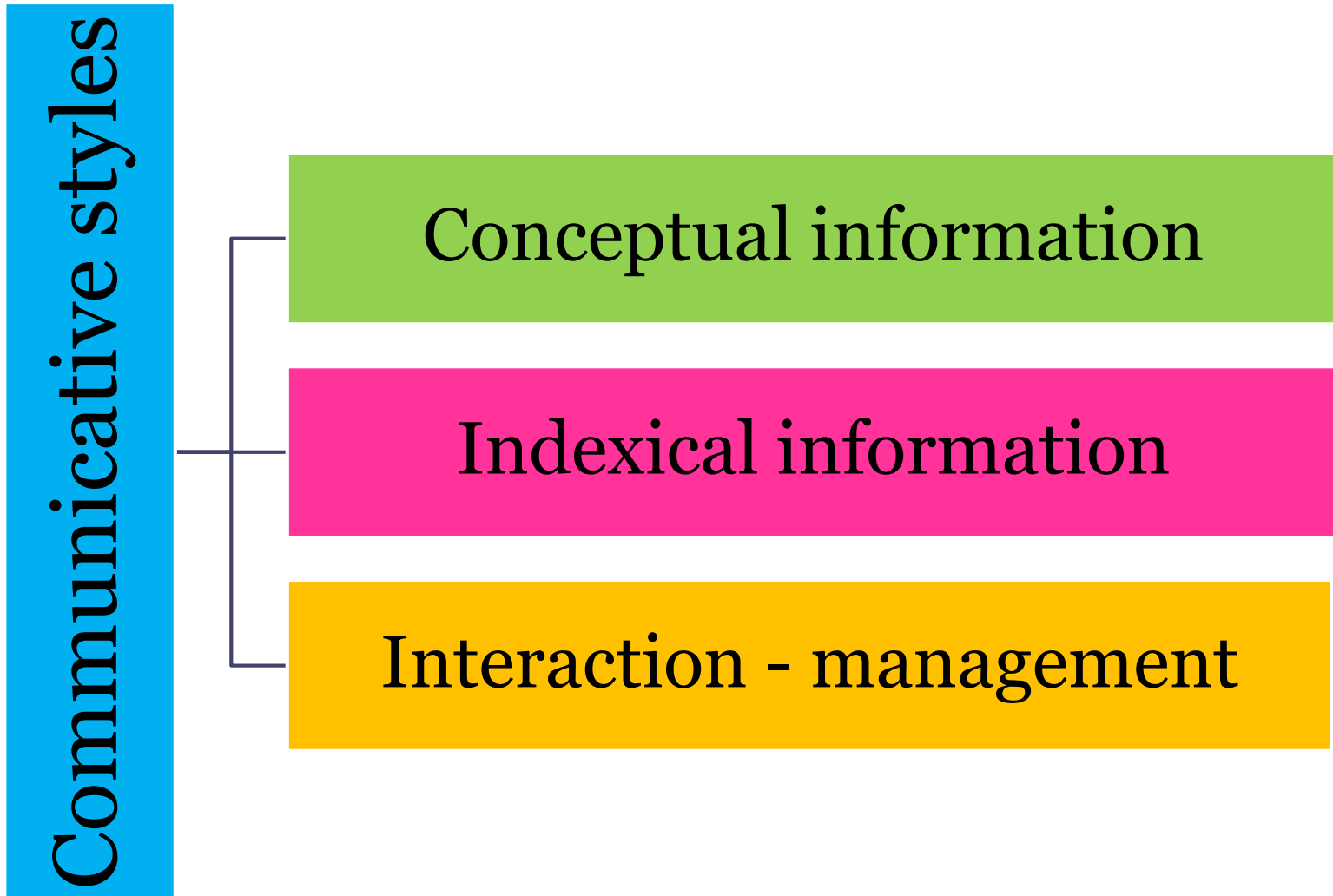
# CULTURAL MEANING

- ✓ Definition of culture

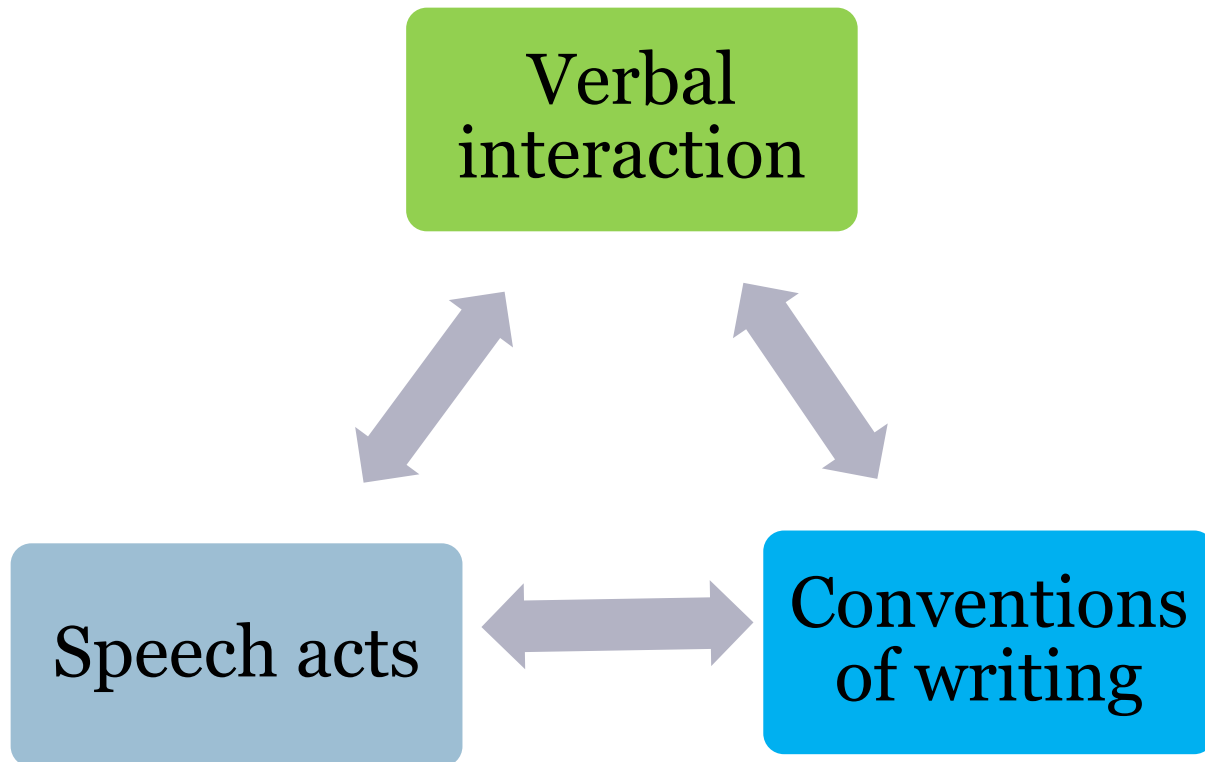
- Be defined as shared knowledge - “what people must know in order to act as they do, make the things they make and interpret their experience in the distinctive way they do”

- Both our knowledge and use of language are intertwined with cultural meaning

# COMMUNICATIVE STYLES



# INTERACTION OF CULTURAL MEANING AND COMMUNICATIVE STYLES





# SPEECH ACT

## ✓ Definition of speech act:

- Uttering a string of meaningful sounds:
  - + the act of speaking
  - + a variety of acts: informing, questioning, ordering,...
- No true or false in the utterances, they are the means of performing acts which may be felicitous or infelicitous

## ✓ Challenges in speech act:

- Interactants do not share the same background knowledge in such situations.
- People interact culturally different
- Miscommunication

# CONVENTIONS OF WRITING

- ✓ Difference between spoken and written languages

## Spoken languages

- Use rhythmic patterns and non linguistic cues (gestures, postures, ...) → provide information
- Use false starts, hesitations, repetitions, etc.
- Use many less precise expressions (thing, stuff, ...)
- Some meanings may be conveyed by pointing or glancing or other devices.  
E.g.: I like this one.

## Written languages

- Use structure of the text and language itself
- All words have to be edited
- Use greater pressure for precision
- Referential, sequential and other relationship are convey by using linguistic markers.  
E.g.: I like the white car with the blue interior.

# 3 CHALLENGES FOR TEACHER PREPARATION

Rethinking the Subject Matter

Teacher Development

Institutional and Professional Support

# References

Kramsch, C. 1998. *Language and culture*. Oxford: OUP.

Tickoo, M. L. 1995. *Language and culture in multicultural societies: viewpoints and visions*. SEAMEO. Singapore.

THANK YOU!

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