DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 028 174 24 TE 001 327

Unit 1001: The Nature of Meaning in Language.
Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Center for Curriculum Development in English.
Spons Agency-Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
Bureau No-BR-5-0658
Pub Date 68
Contract-OEC-SAE-3-10-010
Note-58p.
EDRS Price MF-$0.50 HC-$3.00
Descriptors-Abstraction Levels, Communication Problems, Composition (Literary), *Curriculum Guides, *English Instruction, Expressive Language, *Grade 10, *Language, Language Role, Language Universals, Linguistics, Literature, Nonverbal Communication, Oral Expression, Secondary Education, Semantics, Symbols (Literary), *Verbal Communication
Identifiers-Minnesota Center Curriculum Development in English, *Project English

This 10th-grade unit in Minnesota's "language-centered" curriculum introduces the complexity of linguistic meaning by demonstrating the relationships among linguistic symbols, their referents, their interpreters, and the social milieu. The unit begins with a discussion of Ray Bradbury's "The Kilimanjaro Machine," which illustrates how an otherwise obscure story becomes meaningfully clear as the referent emerges. Word-referent relationships ranging from denotation to connotation are illustrated by (1) Susanne Langer's analysis of the relationships between words and their referents, (2) selections from Paul Wendt and Vance Packard which point out the dimensions of extra-linguistic meaning, and (3) selections from Charlton Laird and S. I. Hayakawa which demonstrate referential and expressive meaning and the primacy of spoken language. Students are asked to construct a communication model to further clarify the symbolization processes of language. Included are lectures, inductive discussion questions with sample answers, and a bibliography on semantics. (JB)

Unit 1001

The Nature of Meaning in Language

Grade 10

CAUTIONARY NOTE

These materials are for experimental use by Project English fellows and their associates who contributed to their development.

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Introduction for the Teacher

The rationale underlying the study of language reflected in these materials may be quite simply stated. It is that the study of language is an overarching aspect of total human behavior must be viewed as energizing the total function of the language arts curriculum in its assumed responsibility to improve the skill and precision with which the tools of language are employed. It is the belief expressed here that this objective can most readily be achieved in a curriculum which stresses the study of language by its users. To the extent that such a study encourages the individual's serious contemplation of his own language and the language of others, we may encourage a more truly universal educational purpose. By viewing language as a characteristic act of human behavior, susceptible to a variety of kinds of examination, we may encourage greater appreciation and sensitivity toward language, the use of which is the instrument of man's greatest accomplishments and the source of his greatest failings.

Accordingly, the materials included reflect several general considerations or strategies for exploring the question of meaning. The introduction of certain basic concepts from the area of "General Semantics" is intended at once to increase sophistication in the individual's use of his own language, while increasing appreciation for the range and variety of symbolic behavior in general. The view of language as behavior encourages measuring communication in terms of its purpose. It implies the recognition of purpose in the adaption to the subtle interrelations of situation, user, audience and subject matter. Thus such materials as are here included are not to be regarded as final or complete. They are complete only in their commitment to the urgency of developing language instruction that will assist young people in achieving sensible and accurate notions of and about language as they confront it. In the words of Kenneth Burke, the materials are intended to contribute to the development of that "stage in the confronting of a problem...where one steps aside as thoroughly as possible and attempts in the spirit of absolute linguistic skepticism, to meditate upon the tangle of symbolism in which all men are by their very nature caught."

One of the frequent questions students ask a teacher is, "What do you mean?" One of the purposes of this unit is to approach meaning from a different point of view, asking "How do you mean?" The answers to the questions of how language means are extremely complex, and it is certainly not the purpose of this unit to make linguistic philosophers out of tenth grade students. It is the purpose, however, to give the students added insight into the processes of meaning, to acquaint them with terms that are applicable in the analysis of meaning in practical and artistic language, and to familiarize them with methods of applying their understanding of meaning processes in their own writing and speaking. As the unit is constructed, the rationale for examining linguistic meaning from several points of view is two-fold. The use of several dimensions will point out the complexities of meaning, and it is quite likely that students will find these overwhelming. On the other hand, the terms do provide operational bases from which students can attempt to study of the complexities of meaning; studying meaning from highly general terms is hampered by a lack of concrete starting points that the various dimensions provide. It is intended that students will learn to study meaning from limited perspectives before trying to put them together in any comprehensive study.

NOTE TO THE TEACHER

Procedures, Sample Questions for Discussion, Sample Introductions, and Sample Summaries are supplied for your guidance. It is assumed that you will adapt these to your own classes and students. Special attention should be paid to the places in the unit where the word, "ATTENTION" is used. This serves to call to your attention the specific kinds of important generalizations which might be drawn at that point.

This unit is designed for an inductive classroom technique, and the problems of developing materials for inductive teaching are numerous and obvious. The lecture sections and transitional sections are artificial, and this would be obvious to students if these sections were read by the teacher exactly as they appear in the unit. The writers of the unit quite naturally render these passages in written style and frequently make them too formal for classroom reading. They are meant only as suggestions. The same statement must be made about the discussion questions and the sample student responses. The teacher should freely change these suggested remarks and questions to suit himself. Students may seldom respond to questions in exactly the same way suggested in the unit. The teacher will frequently find it necessary to ask additional questions and make additional comments to elicit similar answers to those included here.

MATERIALS NEEDED

"A Feeling about Life," Saturday Review, July 29, 1961.

Bradbury Ray. "The Kilimanjaro Machine," Life magazine, 58:68-72; January 22, 1965.

Frye, Northrop. The Educated Imagination (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964)

Hayakawa, S.I., "How Words Change Our Lives," Saturday Evening Post, December 27, 1958.

_____. "Is She Skinny, Thin, or Svelte?" Literary Cavalcade, March, 1949.

Laird, Charlton. "The End and Means of Meaning," in The Miracle of Language (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1953).

Langer, Susanne. Philosophy in a New Key. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948). (Also available in paperback--Mentor Books, MP 475)

Packard, Vance. "The Automobile as a Status Symbol," in The Status Seekers (New York: Pocket Books, 1959).

"The Hero of the Code," Time, July 14, 1961.

Time magazine, December 13, 1954.

Wendt, Paul. "The Language of Pictures" in The Use and Misuse of Language, ed. S. I. Hayakawa (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1962) pp. 175-183.

CONTENT OUTLINE

I. Introduction: The Symbol-referent relationship

   A. Reading selection: "The Kilimanjaro Machine" by Ray Bradbury

   B. Discussion of allusion and the process of reference in this short story

II. The process of symbolization

   A. Extra-linguistic symbol process

      1. Visual art forms

      2. Object symbols

      3. Gestures as symbols

   B. Linguistic symbol processes

      1. Signs and symbols, referents, and interpretants

      2. Speech sounds as symbols: The primacy of spoken language

      3. Perspectives of meaning: Semantics

   C. Communication and meaning

      1. Referential and expressive meaning

      2. A communication model and the relevance of the model to the process of meaning in language

III. Unit activities

IV. Final examination

V. Teacher references

Sample Introduction

NOTE: While this introduction, like others in the unit can be read to the class, it will probably be more comfortable to paraphrase this lecture, emphasizing major ideas.

One question that we frequently ask and hear is, "What do you mean?" On the surface, this seems to be a rather simple question, and, in informal situation, people provide answers with little or no serious thought. In most cases, people will probably restate what they have just said, revise the statement in some way or amplify their original statement by adding more information. The immediate problem, of course, is that the word "mean" has several possible definitions. We assume that words "mean" something, but we also use the word "mean" to refer to a person's intentions, purposes, or motives. These are only two "meanings of meaning" that we use so casually, but even these two are enough to cause considerable confusion. I hope some of you have already noticed that I've worked myself into a corner; the phrase "meaning of meaning" keeps going in a circle. During the next few weeks, we will be studying the processes of meaning in language. While I hope you can increase your understanding of these processes on a somewhat practical level, I doubt that we will be able to solve the philosophical questions about the "meaning of meaning." This, however, is not our job; we are going to be more concerned with finding some of the apparent ways in which language means and finding some of the perspectives from which we can study something as elusive as meaning. In

Sample Introduction Continued

other words we will be looking for a general process through which language means, and we will be looking for more specific ranges or perspectives within this process. Confused? You probably haven't thought about this matter in much detail before. In a way, I suppose we could say that people are overlooking one of the most important subjects possible when they don't think about the process of meaning; after all, it is one of the most central processes in human behavior. Taking another view, however, it isn't surprising that we don't think about this in depth. For one thing, meaning is so closely tied to so many aspects of life that we can't often take time for serious reflection about meaning. For another thing, the processes of meaning are so closely and basically interwoven into our personal thoughts, emotions, and actions that it is difficult to talk objectively about them.

Recognizing these difficulties, we are going to try this in this unit. We're going to start by taking a rather general look at meaning--the "meanings" of a short story.

Procedure: Have students read Ray Bradbury's "The Kilimanjaro Machine; in Life magazine, 58: 68-72. Jan. 22, 1965.

Directions: I want you to start reading this short story I'm passing out now. It's quite short, so we'll take class time to read it. If you recognize anything about the "old man" in this story, I'd like you to refrain from blurting it out until we discuss the story. Sit, and smile knowingly, meditating upon the implications of your insight.

NOTE: It is assumed that at least some high school sophomores will not recognize the rather obvious reference to Hemingway and the allusions to his works. When class discussion begins, it will be quite apparent that those students who recognize these will more thoroughly understand the story. Their responses to the short story can be profitably used to demonstrate the additional meaning resulting from familiarity with the referent in the story. If no students recognize this, it is recommended that you proceed as the unit is written.

Sample Discussion Questions

NOTE: The teacher will probably wish to discuss these in much greater detail.

1. I want to begin discussion by looking at the story itself, not considering any other information that we have gained from other sources. Before we talk about specific actions or characters, I'd like to know what your general reactions are; how do you feel about the Bradbury story?

   (Student reactions might vary considerably, so allow some time for the expression of these responses. It might be quite helpful to write down a few of these reactions for later discussion.)

2. What's the physical scene of this story?

   (Ketchum, Idaho. The impression is given that this is a rather old "Western" town near Sun Valley.)

3. What characters do we see in this story?

   (The narrator, an old hunter in a saloon, and an old man on the road.)

4. All right, we have some very general information about the scene and the actors; let's look more specifically at the scenes in which these actors are introduced.

   (The narrator is shown driving his Time Machine-safari truck, arriving in the town. The old hunter is introduced in a saloon. The old man is shown walking down the road.)

5. Looking at the first part of this story, what is the function of the discussion between the narrator and the hunter?

   (This provides background information that shows something of the narrator's purpose and the methods he intends to use to achieve that purpose.) (Specifically, we find out that the narrator feels that a particular man has

Sample Discussion Questions Continued

has died the "Wrong death," and that he is looking for this man so he can take him, through his Time Machine, back to a "better death.")

6. What indications are given about the narrator's feelings about his purpose and the "old man"?

   (It is immediately apparent that he is emotionally involved in this matter. His reactions to the grave, to the information given by the hunter, to the references to "his books," and to the old man himself suggest something close to reverence. This is particularly evident in the passage in which the narrator is thinking about the "fuel" or "gas" that has been put in the truck.)

7. There are several indications in this story that the narrator feels a strong sense of commitment to carry out his plans; can you find any of these?

   (The amount of preparation he has gone through. His willingness to "go through" with it without regard for the risks; he isn't certain that it will work, but he's willing to try.)

8. Our discussion of the narrator shows him as having an extremely deep and personal commitment; does this rather emotional tone carry over in the narrator's actions when he meets the old man on the road?

   (No, his conversation with the old man is brief and understated. The reader gets the impression that the narrator wants to strongly persuade the old man to go with him, but he doesn't try to do it this way when he actually confronts the old man.)

NOTE: If some students have recognized the reference to Hemingway at this point, the teacher should stress the underlined phrase.

9. All right, there is clearly something about this old man that causes the narrator to offer his invitation the way he does. Let's shift emphasis now, and we'll try to put together a picture of the old man <u>from the information included in this story only</u>. What are the physical characteristics described in the story?

   (Wearing a heavy sweater. Wearing steel-rimmed glasses. Very old and very tired.)

Sample Discussion Questions Continued

10. What does Bradbury manage to tell us about his past?

    (We know he was a writer; the narrator and the hunter make several references to his books. We can also see that the old man gives special significance to the date, January 24, 1954, and he eventually decides that he'd like to go back to that date if the results could be different. It's fairly obvious that he was in an airplane crash but survived it.)

11. What are the implications of the hunter's comment about his reading of this particular writer's books?

    (The hunter mentions two things: that he never read books, but that he had read and enjoyed this writer's books, and that some of the "cowpokes" had read the Spanish stories about bull-fighting with great interest. In both cases the readers are men who don't read books as a rule, but there is some quality about this writer's books that appeals to them.)

12. What word does the hunter use when he talks about his experience with this writer's books?

    ("touched" instead of "read")

13. Where else do you see the word "touch" in this story?

    (The hunter surprised the narrator by "touching" the truck, "as if feeling for the life, and approving what he sensed beneath his hand." The narrator also uses the word when he is thinking about the "fuel" used in his truck. The old man is also shown "touching" the doorsill of the truck.)

NOTE: Students may not find this relationship easy to understand. If the teacher wishes to discuss this in more depth, the term PHATIC COMMUNION might be introduced.

14. Do you see any relationships between the use of words like "touching," "sensing," and "testing" and the kind of communication that frequently goes on in this story?

    (In several places in the story there is an unspoken communication between the men. They seem to "sense" each other's thought, even though the thoughts are not expressed.)

Sample Transition

By now some of you might have some ideas about the identity of the old man in this story. I think that it is safe to say, however, that even though we have spent some time discussing this story, its meaning is still somewhat obscure to many of you. The ending, certainly, still holds back from the reader the key to this story's meaning--that is, if the reader hasn't recognized the old man by the end of the story. There wasn't very much physical description of this man in the story; there was much information given, though, by the allusions to his books. Since you haven't perhaps used the word "allusion" before, I'm going to give you a short passage from a book that might help explain this to you.

Procedure: Read or distribute copies of Northrop Frye's discussion of allusion from The Educated Imagination (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), pp. 67-70. Beginning with "A more common way" and ending with "learn the multiplication table."

NOTE: The teacher may wish to discuss the Frye article in greater depth.

In this excerpt from Northrop Frye's book, the term allusion is used in a rather specialized way. If you look this term up in a dictionary, you'll probably find it defined as "indirect reference." This, essentially, is the way Frye uses it, but in a more specific sense, allusion, as we see the term used here, is related specifically to literature. In this sense, an allusion is a reference in one piece of literature to something in another piece of literature. As we relate this process to "The Kilimanjaro Machine," it might be helpful to concentrate on the comment, "the only inspiration worth having is an inspiration that clarifies the

the form of what's being written." There are a number of rather obvious allusions to the "old man's" books in Bradbury's story; if these allusions have the function of clarifying something in this story, perhaps they are worth having."

Sample Discussion Questions

NOTE: The teacher may find it necessary to provide some of these allusions if students are unable to find all that are listed here.

1. Let's go over this short story and identify the literary allusions.

   (the Michigan stories.....
   Spanish stories.....
   the bullfight stuff .....
   the rhythm of his way of saying.....
   the Ressurection and the Life.....
   Lazarus, come forth.....
   reading up the mountains in the snow .....
   out in a boat somewhere along the Florida Coast
   rain in Paris.....
   sun in Madrid.....
   snow in the high Alps.....
   smoke off the guns in the Tyrol.....
   shine of light off the Gulf stream.....
   explosion of bombs or explosions of leapt fish
   That's my albatross.....
   Kilimanjaro.....
   frozen carcass of a leopard.....

2. I think we should probably clarify one thing immediately. It would be most unreasonable to expect high school sophomores to have read all the literature that is alluded to in the Bradbury story. As a matter of fact, I think it's quite doubtful that most English teachers have read all of these. Looking just at these allusions, though, I think you can begin to make certain inferences about the writer in question. Are all these related to the same author?

   (No, "the Resurrection and the Life" and "Lazarus, come forth" are allusions to the Bible. "That's my albatross" is an allusion to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,")

3. All right, looking at the rest of these allusions, what kind of conclusion can you make about the writer, judging from the subject matter that is implied?

Sample Discussion Questions Continued

(The writer quite obviously wrote about a wide variety of subjects, including bull-fighting, war, fishing, and hunting. If his personal experience formed the basis for his writing, one could probably conclude that he was adventurous, masculine, and interested in widely varying subjects. There is also an indication that he had a distinctive "way of saying" that was both popular and "infectious.")

NOTE: If students do not yet recognize Hemingway, the teacher should introduce the name at this point.

4. All right, now coupling this background of the writer with other references and indications in the story, do you recognize this writer?

(Ernest Hemingway.)

NOTE: Students will not be able to recognize all of these titles. The teacher can provide those which were not recognized. Some class time might be allowed for brief discussions of the contents of those books that students have read. In these discussions any information that will meaningfully relate to the Bradbury story should be emphasized.

5. This name is the key to the understanding of this story, but the name alone is certainly not enough. If you have read any of Hemingway's works before, you can now begin to see some of the meaning in this story. At least some of you, however, have not either read or heard of Hemingway, and to you this short story is still obscure. Before we really begin understanding this, we are going to have to discover as much as possible about Hemingway and the references to him in this story. Do you recognize any of Hemingway's books or short stories in these allusions?

(Those most likely to be recognized would probably be For Whom the Bells Tolls, The Sun Also Rises, The Old Man and the Sea, A Farewell to Arms, and Death in the Afternoon, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and "The Killers."

NOTE: If the teacher has any photographs of Hemingway these would be helpful. See Life magazine, July 14, 1961 and September 1, 1952.

6. Does Hemingway fit the limited description found in Bradbury's story?

(Yes, he wore steel-rimmed glasses and was often pictured in a heavy sweater.)

7. Now that we have identified the writer as Hemingway and found the titles of some novels and short stories that are alluded to, there are some other references in this story that relate to Hemingway's life; do you recognize any of these?

(The several references to African safaris and the fishing trips off Florida. Hemingway was well-known for his hunting and fishing.)

8. Does the date, January 24, 1954, mean anything to you?

(Probably not.)

Sample Discussion

It would be understandable that you don't recognize this date, so I'll tell you about it. On that date, Hemingway was in an airplane crash on Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa. For a day, at least, he was thought to be dead. In the Bradbury story, you can see several comments about this crash, but they don't seem particularly meaningful until we know about the real crash on that date, which the "old man" calls a "good day."

Procedure: Pass out copies of the Hemingway article in Time magazine on December 13, 1954. Have students read the section beginning with "When his plane crashed" and ending with "but I assure you it is only temporary."

Because you were a little young to be reading newspapers in 1954, I'm, passing out an excerpt from Time that mentions the accident. For those who don't know much about Hemingway, this article will give you some insight into Hemingway's personality.

1. What is your reaction to Hemingway after reading this article, granting, of course, that this article is a bit sentimental and "popularized"?

(If all that is in this article is true, the impression must be that Hemingway was a rather exciting personality. Regardless of how we view Hemingway, we are almost forced to admit that he was not the kind of writer to withdraw into an "ivory tower.")

I said that this article was perhaps a bit "sentimental." The fact that this widely circulated magazine chooses

to write about him in this way, we might add, reflects the popular view of Hemingway at that time. While "swash-buckling," "bronze god," and "bullfight-loving Lord Byron" might be rather strongly worded, this does, in fact, parallel the view of Hemingway that was popular in 1954.

Sample Discussion Questions

NOTE: If students have any previous knowledge of Hemingway, class discussion should be directed toward drawing as complete a picture of Hemingway as possible.

2. Do you see any indications of this kind of feeling in "The Kilimanjaro Machine?"

(Yes, throughout the short story, the narrator and hunter both seem to be awed by the writer.)

I realize that the best way for you to become better acquainted with Hemingway is to read some of his books, but I also realize that this is not possible at this time. There are, however, a few major ideas that are recurrent in Hemingway's writing that we can talk about. These center around the character in Hemingway's novels and short stories known as the "code hero." Hemingway's conception of the hero is somewhat described in the readings you have now.

Procedure: Pass out copies of "The Herb of the Code," Time, July 14 1961, and "A Feeling about Life," Saturday Review, July 29, 1961.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. If you had to summarize the Hemingway notion of heroism briefly, what would be the key words you would use?

(Courage, style, grace under pressure, and the code.)

2. What does this phase "grace under pressure" mean?

(The hero is placed in situations where the pressure is severe--the article in Time says that this usually means a threat of death. The hero is judged by the way he handles himself under this pressure; the "code"

requires that he act with the "certain style for the sake of style.")

3. There are several of these "situations" mentioned in the reading you have done: bullfighting, war, fishing and hunting. Do these things just happen to the heroes, or do they go out deliberately looking for them?

(They deliberately place themselves into the situations.)

Sample Summary

By now, we have moved some distance away from the Bradbury short story. We have been gradually putting together a picture of Hemingway, so that we might understand more about the Bradbury story. I think it's safe to say at this point, that the typical view of Ernest Hemingway shows him as masculine, adventurous, and extremely concerned about the "style" of man's conduct when he is under pressure. For the most part, reading his novels will amplify and illustrate these qualities. Remembering Hemingway's conceptions of courage and style, examine the section of the July 14 Time article beginning with "'All stories' and ending with "part of his cheeks."

While you are reading, try to relate this information to our other comments about Hemingway and about the Bradbury story.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. What is your reaction to Hemingway's death?

(Allow general discussion about this. Students might disagree about the "style" of Hemingway's death, and they should be allowed to discuss their views at this point.)

ATTENTION

Additional discussion might be necessary to elicit this reaction from students.

2. How does the method Hemingway used relate to other comments we have made about his life and his writing?

   (The suicide seem incongruous with the other things we have found out about Hemingway.)

3. Why does this seem to be "incongruous"?

   (All the statements about courage, style, grace, the adventurous personality, and the confrontations with danger and death suggest that Hemingway was just not the type to commit suicide, especially using this method; this hardly seems like "grace" or "style.")

Let me add a little more information here. It is well known that Hemingway had been having some serious health problems just before his death. I'd also like to point out the use of some terms that are frequently used in connection with Hemingway and his novels' heroes. In the reading you have done, there are frequent uses of terms like "ritual" and "ceremonial" to describe the actions.

Continued Discussion Questions

4. Now, does this lead you to change your opinions about Hemingway's method of dying?

   (It is quite likely that student disagreement will still be shown. Students who feel that the suicide was incongruous might use the health problem as an example of pressure, suggesting that suicide does not show "grace." Other students might defend the suicide as having "ritualistic" style and as being better than slow degeneration through sickness.

NOTE: Students might be asked to provide more examples from the text of the story. Further discussion of the story, especially specific comments of the characters, might be profitable at this point.

5. Apparently you are not going to agree completely about the implications of Hemingway's dealth, and this, certainly, is reasonable. After all, we are not here to pass final verdicts about this. We can, however, place Bradbury's opinion; what indications do you find in the short story that suggest his opinion?

   (Throughout the story, there are references to the "right death" and the "wrong death." It

is obvious that the narrator feels very strongly about his mission and about the reasons for his mission. The reaction of the old man to the suggestion of "going back" reflects the en entire Hemingway legend; we again see him abiding by his code. We sense that the old man regrets the "wrong death," and through the descriptions of the cloudy day breaking into full sunlight, the author takes us from the negative to the positive.)

Sample Summary and Transition

When I told you about this unit the other day, I said the title was "The Nature of Meaning in Language"; I'm sure at least some of you are, at this point, completely confused by the way we started the unit. From a start that suggested the study of specific meaning processes, we suddenly began talking about a short story and Ernest Hemingway.

Sample Discussion Questions

ATTENTION

If students cannot reach this conclusion, the teacher can either ask more leading questions or simply provide the answer, but this should be the last alternative.

1. Now I'd like you to try to analyze the motives of an English teacher (sometimes a rather formidable task); why did I start the unit this way?

   (We're supposed to be talking about meaning, and the Bradbury short story had very little meaning for some of us at first. After we learned something about Hemingway, the story became much more meaningful and much less confusing.)

2. All right, now I want you to try to generalize about this; how does this apply to meaning in language?

   (Simply reading or hearing the words does not guarantee complete understanding. It is necessary to know something about the thing referred to by the words.)

Sample Introduction

This entire discussion can be specifically related to one of the fundamentals of meaning in language.

Throughout this unit, we will be concerned with the

relationships between words and the things words refer to --the referents. In the case of the short story, all of you could understand the words well enough; Bradbury doesn't use many words you've never seen before, but even then, the full understanding of the story wasn't automatic by any means. There were several kinds of references to places, books, authors, and ideas that simply were not understood at first. In order to more fully understand the meanings of this short story, we were forced to look more deeply into these references, and as soon as we knew more about them, the story took on much more direction and meaning. Perhaps we could summarize this concept by saying that a more complete understanding of both the words and their referents is essential to more complete communication. In fact, as we found, perhaps painfully, when we began working with this short story, a breakdown in communication can occur when any one of three things happens:

1. The words themselves are not understood.
2. The referents of the words are not understood.
3. The relations between words and referents are not understood. In the case of this short story, the breakdown occurred because the referents were not understood. Later, we will be looking at communication problems relating to the other two possibilities.

ATTENTION

Stress the underlined conclusion.

ATTENTION

These generalizations might well be discussed at greater length if the students show interest and readiness. Specific illustrations of some of the referents which were not understood and resulted in confusion would probably help here.

Getting back, though, to the fundamental WORD - REFERENT relationship, we need to discuss the processes of reference in greater detail. In almost any treatment of this topic, the terms SIGN and SYMBOL are usually found. I think most of you can easily see some fundamental similarities in the general uses of these terms--both could be said to "stand for" something. Of the two terms, SIGN is probably the most frequently used (traffic signs, signs of life, bill board sign, etc.). The term SYMBOL unfortunately might have a somewhat negative connotation for some of you if you have been forced to labor over a particularly difficult poem "to find the symbols." Hopefully, I will be able to expand your notion of the symbol to include something more than the specific literary device.

I mentioned that these terms, SIGN and SYMBOL, are frequently found in discussions of the nature of meaning. In all honesty, I should tell you that the philosophers, linguists, psychologists, literary critics, and the myriad of other people who have occasion to use the terms do not always agree on the meaning of the terms and on the kinds of distinctions between them. The most understandable and most persuasive that I have seen, however, comes from Susanne Langer's book,

Philosophy in a New Key, and I think her definitions provide an appropriate basis for our discussions of the nature of meaning. I'm giving you some readings from this book, and while you're reading through these, I'd like you to find and write down in your notes the important ideas Langer suggests. After you have finished this, we'll discuss the excerpts with special emphasis on these main points you have been able to find.

Procedure: Pass out copies of the selection from Susanne Langer's book pp. 58-62 beginning with "There are, first of all, two distinct functions" and ending with "'What about James?'" The edition referred to here is a Mentor paperback published in 1964. Ask students to hand in notes when they have finished. If students will be allowed to keep these excerpts, they could simply underline important passages.

Note: The teacher should examine the students' notes on this excerpt and check whether the following basic points have been included:

1. Both SIGNS and SYMBOLS can have "meaning."
2. A sign indicates the existence--past, present, or future--of a thing, event, or condition.
3. A natural sign is a part of a greater event, or of a complex condition, and to an experienced observer it signifies the rest of that situation of which it is a notable feature.
4. Signs and their objects stand in a one-to-one correlation.
5. In a pair of items, whether one item is sign of object depends upon the interpretant's relationship to that item.
6. We may produce arbitrary events, purposely correlated with important ones that are to be their meanings.
7. These arbitrary signs, like natural signs, have a one-to-one relationship with their objects.
8. The interpretation of signs is the basis of animal intelligence.
9. Signs, especially artificial signs, are especially vulnerable to misinterpretation.
10. The interpretation of signs is the most elementary kind of intellection.
11. Symbols are not proxy for their objects, but are vehicles for the conception of objects, and it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly "mean."
12. Signs announce their objects; symbols lead us to conceive or think about their objects.

ATTENTION

Student responses in this discussion will, of course, vary widely, and the teacher might find it necessary to discuss these items at greater length, especially to illustrate these concepts for students.

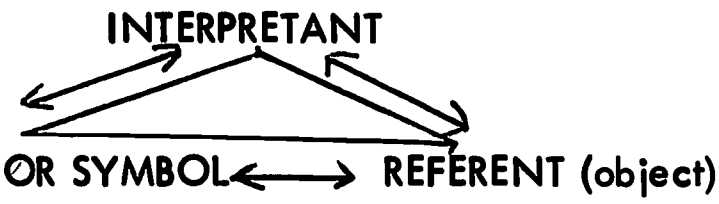
Sample Transition from Langer reading.

ATTENTION

Stress underlined material

Up to this point, we have been conveniently avoiding one of the most important aspects of meaning--people. In the discussion we just finished, we were talking about signs and symbols almost as though the signs and symbols in themselves possess that function we would call "meaning." I say "almost" because we have not been rejecting the fact that people are central to the "meaning" of signs and symbols, but we have, for all practical purposes, somewhat overlooked this aspect. Perhaps this is so obvious that we tend to take it for granted, but I think it is necessary to state openly that meaning is a function that is directly dependent on the interpretant (to use Langer's term). Signs and symbols do not mean by themselves. In the case of signs, both animals and people can be the interpretants, but in the case of symbols, interpretation and use are human behaviors. When human beings put these signs and symbols to use, any full understanding of the meaning process must take into account the nature of the human factor, and it is in this that the nature of meaning becomes so complicated and difficult to make sweeping generalizations about. Now, when we talk about meaning, we have at least a three-cornered consideration; we can show this as a triangle, but we must also avoid thinking about these only as a neat equilateral triangle; the lines aren't always as neat as some would like them to be.

Procedure: Draw this diagram on chalkboard.



We use a triangle here simply because we have three items that are related to each other. In this way we can talk about the three separate parts and show the interrelationships in various directions.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. Do you see any problems in using a diagram like this?

   (As we've already suggested, this seems to make these relationships rather simple and direct; in actual usage, this might not be so clearly drawn.)

2. You may find it difficult to view this process within the classroom and this lesson, but do you see what we are doing with this diagram?

   (In effect, we are <u>symbolizing</u> this meaning process by constructing the geometric figure.)

3. According to Langer, then, what are we supposed to do with this diagram that is a symbolization?

   (The symbol is supposed to lead us to think about the process symbolized by the diagram.)

4. Then can you say that the diagram <u>is</u> the relationship between sign/symbol, interpretant, and referent?

   (No. The diagram <u>represents</u> the process; it isn't the process itself.)

ATTENTION

Stress the distinction here.

Sample Introduction

We're going to be looking at these relationships in much more detail later in the unit. At this point, we at least have the basic notion that signs and symbols represent something (their referents), and they represent their referents <u>to</u> someone.

Sample Introduction Continued

The next excerpt you are going to be reading deals with the problem of meaning in pictures, and we are going to try to look at some of the symbol processes <u>out-side</u> of language before we get into the nature of meaning <u>in</u> language. I want you to be especially aware of some of the similarities between pictures and language and the way in which the meaning is related to the viewer.

Procedure; Directions for the study of Wendt excerpt.

In much the same way you wrote down notes on the Langer excerpt, I want you to find the important state-ments in this essay by Paul Wendt, paying particular attention to those aspects I just mentioned. When you have finished these, we will use them for class discussion. I'll want you to do more than simply recognize important statements, though; I'll expect you to begin relating these statements to our previous class discussion. Now you are going to need to recognize the statement and the important implications it has for the problem of meaning.

Pass out copies of Paul Wendt's article, "The Language of Pictures" in <u>The Use and Mis-use of Language</u>, ed. S.I. Hayakawa (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1962), pp. 175-183.

Discussion of Wendt Excerpt

NOTE: The teacher should examine the students' notes on the excerpt and check whether the following basic points have been included. It might be profitable to discuss each point individually, especially trying to draw relationships between this excerpt and previous readings, lectures, and class discussions.

1. The first sentence of paragraph one and the last sentence of paragraph two are concerned with <u>written</u> words, not spoken words.
2. Photographs range from realism to high level abstraction.
3. Pictures, like language, can be highly persuasive.
4. Photography has a content of meaning partly intentional, partly extensional.
5. The effect of a photograph depends upon the past experience of the viewer.
6. In photography, composition is highly important.
7. Pictures have affective connotations.

8. Photography has syntax especially in the case of motion pictures, presenting a flowing discourse of picture surrogates.
9. It is important to remember that pictures, like words, are merely surrogates for reality, not reality itself.
10. Like a paragraph, a motion picture sequence is a highly structured time-space analysis and synthesis of reality.
11. Pictures, like words, must make a logical continuity, according to accepted rules.
12. Paragraphing in motion picture photography is accomplished by the traditional fade-in and fade-out.
13. The pace of the narrative is determined more by the film editor than by the script.
14. Every photograph is an abstraction of an object or an event.
15. By manipulation of the variables at his command, he lets us "see" the event as he thinks it should be "seen."
16. Pictures can be symbolizations. (Is he talking about symbolization in the same way Langer does?)
17. It is a paradox that the most graphic pictures are symbolic.
18. They are at the same time very real and very symbolic.
19. "A picture is a map...a configuration of symbols which make it possible for us to interpret the picture, provided that we have enough experience..."
20. We "bring meaning" to pictures as we do to words. Pictures can be interpreted on many levels.

To The Teacher: In the discussion following the reading of Wendt's "The Language of Pictures" the teacher may wish to supplement the examples by distributing photographs from books and periodicals. The school library should be able to provide numerous excellent examples, especially from photographic anthologies and pictorial magazines. Some teachers would be able to find good examples in their files of pictures used on bulletin boards. Should the teacher wish to use them, there are a number of rather powerful examples from the photographic coverage of President Kennedy's funeral. It should be recognized, though, that some of these pictures might be too emotionally charged for some students. Another possibility for use at this time would be a motion picture if time and availability allow. A picture chosen for this purpose should probably be well known for photographic quality.

Sample Conclusion and Transition

One of the interesting things about our discussions of the photograph as a symbol is that we tend to think of a photo as a rather realistic record of its subject. I don't think it should take much argument, however, to show that we don't, in fact, believe this entirely. If you will think back to the last time you were a subject of a photo, I think most of you will remember that you probably were somewhat disappointed, angry, amused, or whatever the

Sample Conclusion and Transition Continued

case might be. We have a tendency to react to pictures by saying things like, "That isn't a good picture of me." We clearly see, at least once in a while, that the photograph is not "real" as we might think. You might try to remember this discussion when you have pictures taken for the school yearbook. I'd predict that you will probably reject at least half of the proofs because they "don't look like you."

Perhaps it is easier to see other art forms as symbols, especially when you look at examples that are clearly not attempts at realism. Very briefly, I'd like to talk about such art forms as painting and sculpture, and we are going to try to apply what we have said about the use of symbols to these forms.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. What question is a parent likely to ask when shown a rather abstract painting done by his pre-school child?

   (What is it?)

2. What kinds of responses do you have when you are confronted with a modern abstract painting?

   (Student responses will vary a great deal. Some will probably indicate confusion, some contempt, some, especially those with any experience with abstract painting, with more definite responses.)

3. Suppose you are walking through an art exhibit and you see a painting that seems to make no sense to you; what do you do next?

   (Many students might indicate that they would look for a title.)

Sample Discussion Questions Continued

4. Why would you look for a title? What good does this do?

   (It might give some hint about the painter's intentions.)

5. In other words, if you know the name, perhaps you will be able to "see" more in the picture; what if the picture is titled only by a number of even untitled? What happens then?

6. Why would you have freedom to decide what the painting is all about? Do you actually have complete freedom, with no guides for interpretation?

   (Actually, there might be several things about the painting that lead most people to interpret it in a rather similar way: color, composition, shape, these can be highly conventional; the example of the color red suggesting warmth, action, possibly violence is one such possibility.)

NOTE: Students may have difficulty identifying the notion of conventional techniques. The teacher may have to provide this.

7. For the moment, let's assume that these conventions aren't operating; then would the viewer have this freedom of interpretation?

   (Probably.)

8. Well then, how would this viewer go about interpretating the painting; how could he find "meaning" in it?

   (His past experience would probably affect his interpretation; he wouldn't have much else to go on.)

NOTE: The teacher might find it quite helpful to provide an example of a highly abstract painting, letting students discuss interpretations and their rationales behind them. An example of the Rorschach test would probably be interesting to students also. In many ways the Thematic Apperception Test is more illustrative of this, but students are probably not familiar with this test; an example would be necessary.

9. How does this relate, then, to our discussion of symbol referent, and interpretation?

   (In abstract painting and sculpture, the referent might not be clearly identified. This illustrates the high degree of influence on meaning within the interpretant. In Wendt's words, the interpretant "carries meaning to it.")

10. Does this remind you of any psychological tests?

    (This is quite similar to the process in the Rorschach test, in which an ink blot is interpretated by a person.)

11. Why does the psychiatrist ask someone to interpret the ink blots? What is he trying to learn?

    (Abnormal conditions might be indicated by highly unconventional responses. Also the subject of the test might consistently identify certain forms suggestive of his feelings toward certain things.)

12. Why, in psychological tests such as this, are personality characteristics shown or suggested to the people who interpret tests?

    (As we have been discussing, the individual's personality is highly related to the way he sees meaning in symbols. This kind of psychoanalysis essentially reverses the process, attempting to discover personality by analyzing meaning responses.)

Sample Transition to Discussion of Objects as Symbols.

While we're discussing the use of symbols in forms other than sounds and printed words, we might look at a somewhat more immediate type of symbol--objects. I think most of you will probably have more experience with these than you have had with art forms. Remember that, in Langer's terms, the symbol "leads us to think about its referent."

Sample Discussion Questions

NOTE: If the teacher already does this, reverse the direction and use a six-year-old Ford instead.

1. Suppose you saw me drive in the parking lot here at school in a new Rolls-Royce; how would you react?

   (It would look a bit incongruous in the teachers' parking lot.)

2. Why should you be surprised by this? There are thousands of Rolls-Royce automobiles in the world.

   (There may be thousands, but they aren't driven by teachers in public high schools.)

3. If I can't drive a Rolls-Royce, then what kind of cars would you expect me to drive?

   (Something a little less conspicuous and certainly something cheaper.)

4. Aside from the fact that I can't afford a $14,000 automobile, why would it be strange to see teachers driving them?

   (Cars like the Rolls-Royce are status symbols, and only certain types of people seem appropriate owning them.)

All right, there is a symbolic content here. As a matter of fact, there is a rather stock comedy situation in which the poor man suddenly becomes extremely wealthy, but he looks very much out of place in his new limousine.

5. It's rather obvious, of course, but what kind of symbols are these?

   (Status symbols.)

Procedure: Distribute copies of "The Automobile as a Status Symbol" from Vance Packard's, The Status Seekers. (N.Y.: Pocket Books, Inc. 1959)

As long as we're talking about the automobile as a status symbol, let's look at a selection from Vance Packard's book, The Status Seekers. I should mention that this book was written in 1959, so the advertising slogans will have changed; perhaps you can bring this up to date with the current ad slogans for some of these.

NOTE: The material from The Status Seekers is fairly obvious, so a structured discussion has not been included. If the teacher wishes, the class might spend some time discussing these examples, especially noting the ways in which the automobile marketing situation has changed since 1959.

Following the reading and discussion of the Packard selection, the discussion can be shifted to other kinds of object symbols with which the students have had contact. The teacher should try to direct students to symbols other than status symbols and to do more than merely cite long lists of examples. The usefulness of the discussion to this unit is to be found in the investigation of the way the symbols operate, rather than the symbols themselves. Heaviest emphasis should be placed on the different ways in which object symbols might be interpreted by different people or different groups of people.

Sample Introduction

Before we move into linguistic meaning specifically, there's one more area we ought to explore. We've been talking about signs and symbols and their referents, and we've discussed numerous forms of symbols, ranging from art to advertising. Now I think we should at least recognize that there are human actions besides writing or speaking that have the capability of symbolizing.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. You have all had the experience of watching someone else talking on the telephone; can you think of anything that people are likely to do that has very little value in a telephone communication?

   (In most circumstances, people use gestures, either when they are talking or when they are reacting to something the other person has said. Obviously, these gestures are not visible to the other person in the usual telephone communication.)

2. If these gestures can't be seen by the other person, what possible reason could there be for making the gestures?

   (As far as the communication situation is concerned, the physical gestures, unless they affect the voice, have no value. The individual making the gestures is probably doing so unconsciously; he is accustomed to making physical gestures when he talks.)

3. What are some of the gestures we might expect?

4. Is it enough to dismiss these as merely habitual behavior? Are these "natural" habits to all people?

   (No. While in fact many such gestures could be called habitual behavior, we must at least recognize that they are learned behaviors. Paralleling written and spoken language, gestures are conventional; people learn to agree upon the meanings of widely used gestures within a culture.)

ATTENTION

Students may find it difficult to reach this generalization this early. Additional discussion may be necessary.

Sample Discussion Questions Continued

5. Assuming that we have a direct communication situation, and that the people involved can see each other, what values might gestures have?

   (Many gestures, especially facial expressions, can influence the meaning of the spoken language. For instance, we can make some judgments about the person's attitude toward what he is saying by the expression on his face; if he is sneering, for example, we might detect a note of irony, even though he doesn't change his voice.)

6. If we accept this notion that gestures add to to meaning of an utterance, what implications does this have for someone being trained as a speaker? What precautions should he take?

   (The gestures used should be appropriate for what he is saying; they should not distract from it. One should not try to gesture merely for the sake of gesturing; the gesture should have a reason behind it.)

7. Just as an interesting sidelight, the Roman teachers of rhetoric and oratory tended to heavily emphasize the proper use of gestures. Quintilian, for example, said that the speaker must never gesture with the left arm, and this rule was carefully followed until well into the 20th century. Can you think of any reason why the Roman orator should not have used his left arm to gesture?

   (The Romans wore loose fitting clothing togas, which were held in place by the left hand. If they gestured widely with the left hand, their togas would have fallen off.)

8. I think we need to make at least one other point about gestures; can we say that the only functions of gestures are to add to the meaning of a spoken message?

   (No. Many gestures are meaningful by themselves, and the person does not need to say anything accompanying them. While there are plenty of examples of this in normal communication, perhaps the most obvious illustration is the sign language used by some deaf people. In this case, the entire

NOTE: The teacher might find it helpful to ask students to provide examples.

communication is carried on through the use of highly conventional gestures.)

Supplementary Activities:

If time permits and if the teacher wishes to make additional assignments, students can be asked to write short papers or prepare speeches explaining the various aspects of signs and symbols that have been discussed in the unit by this time. Students can be asked to demonstrate their understanding of concepts by clearly showing the generalization and supporting it with good examples.

Sample Introduction

Up to this point in the unit, we have been talking primarily about some extra-linguistic aspects of meaning--meaning processes that lie essentially outside the realm of language. In effect, all of these discussions have been for introductory purposes, trying to build an understanding of the process by which signs and symbols "mean" something to people. Perhaps the most important concept discussed so far is the complex set of relationships between signs or symbols, their referents, and the people who use them. It might be helpful at this point to refer back to the excerpt by Susanne Langer that you read earlier in the unit. I'm going to give you another short excerpt from her book that should give you a little more insight into what we "mean" by "meaning."

Procedure: Pass out copies of pp. 55 and 60 (to "The other terms about it" of Langer's Philosophy in a New Key.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. What are the two aspects of meaning that Langer mentions?

   (Logical and psychological)

2. How are these different?

   (Logically, the sign or symbol in question must have the capability of meaning; here the emphasis is on the sign or symbol itself. Psychologically, the sign or symbol must mean something to somebody; here the interpretant is the crucial factor.)

Sample Discussion Questions Continued

3. All right, you identified the two factors; are we safe in studying them independently, ignoring the other factor?

   (No. They are very closely related. Whether a sign or symbol can logically mean something might well be highly influenced by the psychological makeup of the interpretant.)

4. In the last paragraph of this excerpt, the most important idea is that there is no quality of meaning. This is a major statement about the nature of meaning, and we ought to discuss it a little further; what are the implications of this statement? What kinds of generalizations can we draw from this?

   (If this is true, the notion that a given word "naturally" must mean a particular thing is false. It follows from this that the symbols we use are arbitrary and conventional; people from other cultures use different sounds or words to refer to the same thing.

   The statement that meaning is a function allows us to explain the widely differing meanings of a particular symbol, depending upon those who make use of the symbol. The use of the term "function" suggests the kinds of relationships we were discussing when we talked about symbols, referents, and interpretants. If there were a quality to meaning, these relationships wouldn't have such a wide range of interactions.)

ATTENTION

Student responses will vary greatly at this point. Considerable additional discussion might be necessary to bring out these generalizations. The teacher might wish to provide these in a somewhat more directive manner if students are unable to do so.

Sample Transition

Now that we are moving into the area of linguistic meaning, there are a few points that should be clarified immediatel y, since most of the unit from now on will be based on them directly or indirectly. Since we are going to be talking about meaning in language, I think it is time to set up a definition of language that we can use throughout the rest of the unit.

Procedure: Either as an evening assignment or as a classroom activity, ask students to attempt a definition of language. In class discussion, establish the following definition:

"Language is a system of learned, conventional oral symbols held in common by the members of some community for the conduct of relatively precise patterns of human interaction. It can be viewed as a social product and as personal behavior."

Sample Lecture

It is quite likely that this definition of language does not particularly excite you; language is something that is so close to us that it is taken for granted most of the time. However, if we are going to undertake any serious study of language, it becomes necessary for us to identify our subject matter rather carefully. The definition I have given you is fairly popular with the people who study language, but this was not always the case; some rather heated controversy in academic circles has centered around the ways in which language has been defined. Being somewhat realistic about the matter, though, I wouldn't expect most of you to get as excited about this as the linguists, the psychologists, the anthropologists, and all the other people in fields related to language. In short, the way in which language is defined has probably not been thought of as a major issue by most high school students. However, in order to gain insight into the ways in which meaning functions in language, we are going to have to look at this definition for a few major ideas. I'd like to call your attention to the underlined words in this definition.

Sample Lecture Continued

The systematic nature of language is not going to be a primary concern in this unit; in other units you will study or have studied this aspect is more thoroughly treated. Briefly stated, this is the grammatical part of the study of language--the description of the systems of language.

Of more importance to this particular unit are the next four underlined terms: learned, conventional, oral symbols. I would hope that the statement that language is learned can be agreed upon at this point. If language were instinctive, we could logically expect that children who are raised in isolation, without anyone teaching them language, would develop normal language behavior. This is only a small aspect. but the body of knowledge here simply does not show this development. In the few cases of this that have been studied, the language behavior has been severly retarted.

The term "conventional" is highly important to this unit. Looking back to the second excerpt from Langer, you will remember that meaning was described as a function, not a quality. Symbols have meaning because people are able to come to at least partial agreement on those meanings. It is "conventional" in our culture that "dog" usually means a particular four-legged animal, and because this is

Sample Lecture Continued

conventional, people can usually tell what you mean when you say "dog."

The next term, "oral," has been perhaps the most controversial part of this definition. By our definition, speech is the primary form of language. The students of language have not always been willing to allow speech a more important position than writing; they have, rather, viewed writing as the most important aspect of language. There are many reasons why this assumption has been made in the past, but we can't go into all of these now. One is that the study of language has traditionally centered around the Greek and Latin languages, and these were preserved primarily in the written form. Simply stated, it was easier to give primary emphasis to the most available form of Greek or Latin. It is still essentially true that writing is the more permanent form of language, although our methods of preserving speech might change this in the future. In another sense, it is also obvious that the most emphasis in the schools is still on written language. This is true in this particular class. Since written language has occupied the primary place in the schools and essentially still does, it has been rather easy for people to assume writing as the primary form of language. It does not take much thinking, however, to recognize that writing

Sample Lecture Continued

is not the primary form. How many of you learned to write before you learned to speak? How many people are there who can use language without being able to write the language? If we look at the functions of writing in our language, we are forced into the conclusion that our writing system is an attempt to represent the spoken language. We are also forced into the conclusion that our particular system of writing has some difficulties in representing speech; indeed, many of your spelling problems are related to this, since we can use many different combinations of letters to represent the same sound. An example of this is George Bernard Shaw's spelling of "fish." Using the spelling, "ghoti," Shaw comes up with what he calls an acceptable spelling of this word-- (gh as in "enough," o as in "women," and ti as in "attention"). It is not our purposes here to delve into the reasons for the differences in English spelling, but this does demonstrate the varying possibilities for representing the same sounds. Since we have defined language as a system of oral symbols, the sounds symbolizing some referent, it follows that writing is a system of symbols to represent sounds; we have, as a result, a set of symbols representing another set of symbols that in turn represent the referents. Perhaps this sounds a little over-simplified,

Sample Lecture Continued

but we'll be clarifying this as we study the rest of the unit. For our purposes in the discussion of meaning, while we will be using both written and spoken words, we will in the long run be talking about the spoken language.

Sample Introduction to Discussion of Semantics

Keeping in mind the primary function of speech and the secondary function of writing, we're now going to move into the study of semantics. If you look up the term "semantics" in a dictionary, you will find it defined as "the science of meaning." Some dictionaries go further than this and qualify this statement by showing how the next few days I hope to give you an understanding of semantics that goes further than the rather simplified "science of meaning." By this time most of you should already recognize that the processes of meaning are too complicated to be defined by a simple statement.

Earlier in this unit, we talked about the interrelationships between the symbol, its referent, and the interpretant. By now perhaps many of you already recognize that these relationships are central to the study of meaning, whether extralinguistic meaning or linguistic meaning. By amplifying our study of this rather limited three-part structure, we can find and discuss the wide range of complexities that make up the process of meaning.

Sample Lecture Continued

Briefly stated, we're going to study the range between the specific meaning in which one symbol suggests a very limited number of referents and the more general meaning in which the individual symbol might have an almost limitless number or range of referents. In our discussions of this, we are going to have to pay particular attention to the role of people in this entire process; we'll try to examine the relatively personal aspects of meaning in the individual as well as the more general social implications when symbols are used in communication through language.

Procedure: Pass out copies of Laird's "The End and Means of Meaning, in The Miracle of Language. (Greenwich Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1953)

Rather than trying to cover the many aspects of semantics solely through class discussion, I'm going to give you two rather short excerpts that I think will cover the material more quickly. Then we'll discuss some of the individual matters which are brought out by these two writers. As you have done with some of the excerpts earlier in the unit, I'd like you to take notes as you read these two excerpts, writing down the important statements for later discussion.

NOTE: Again, if students are allowed to keep these excerpts, they might simply underline the important passages.

Directions for class discussion of Excerpt # 10:

Check through student notes to see that the following statements have been identified. Subsequent class discussion can then be centered around these ideas. Students should be expected to recognize the importance of these statements and discuss their implications with reference to previous class discussions. Considerable time might be necessary to thoroughly cover some of these topics.

1. Meaning is a function of social agreement.
2. "Exact communication is impossible among men."

3. "Highly varied feelings" are influences on meaning.
4. "Meanings exist only in minds, and minds result from beings and experiences; no two of them are alike, nor are the meanings they contain."
5. "Still granted that meaning is not and never can be exact, there remains a body of agreement as to the association to be connected with certain sounds which is staggering to contemplate."
6. Written language is more permanent than spoken language.
7. Man's complex communication systems set him apart from the rest of the animals.
8. "When we study language we are to a remarkable degree, studying human nature."
9. Language reform is not a panacea for social change.
10. Some students of language have advanced the notion that we could achieve complete harmony by achieving exact communication. How does the statement, "Civilized man cannot live without religion," affect this notion?
11. Language is constantly changing.
12. Language has not ever been able to survive unless rooted in common speech.
13. Language is both highly individual and highly social.

Procedure: Pass out copies of S. I. Hayakawa's "How Words Change Our Lives," Saturday Evening Post, Dec. 27, 1958.

This second excerpt on semantics is, in many ways, very similar to Laird's. You are to do the same kind of note-taking with this excerpt that you did for the last. As you are reading, you should be particularly aware of the areas of agreement between these two writers, asking yourselves, "Can I find an understandable theory of semantics that covers the complexities of linguistic meaning adequately?"

Directions for class discussion of Hayakawa excerpt: Identify and discuss the following passages, using the same procedures used with the Laird excerpt.

1. The end product of education, yours and mine and everybody's, is the total pattern of reactions and possible reactions we have inside ourselves.

2. A "pattern of reactions" is the sum total of the ways we act in response to events, to words and to symbols. Our reaction patterns--our semantic habits, as we may call them--are the internal and most important residue of whatever years of education or miseducation we may have received.

3. Semantics is sometimes defined in dictionaries as "the science of the meaning of words"--which would not be a bad definition if people didn't assume that the search for the meanings of words begins and ends with looking them up in a dictionary. To define a word, as a dictionary does, is simply to explain the word with more words. Defining words with more words, in short, gets us at once into what mathematicians call an "infinite regress."

4. To a person who asked for a definition of jazz, Louis Armstrong is said to have replied, "Man, when you got to ask what it is, you'll never get to know," proving himself to be an intuitive semanticist as well as a great trumpet player.

5. "The true meaning of a term is to be found by observing what a man does with it, not by what he says about it."

6. Semantics--especially the general semantics of Alfred Korzybaki (1879-1950), Polish-American scientist and educator--pays particular attention not to words in themselves, but to semantic reactions--that is, human responses to symbols, signs and symbol-systems, including language. I say human responses because, so far as we know, human beings are the only creatures that have, over and above that biological equipment which we have in common with other creatures, the additional capacity for manufacturing symbols and systems of symbols. When we react to a word, we are not reacting to a set of sounds, but to the meaning with which that set of sounds has been symbolically endowed. A meaning with which that set of sounds has been symbolically endowed. A basic idea in general semantics, therefore, is that the meaning of words (or other symbols) is not in the words, but in our own semantic reactions.

7. Semantics is therefore a social study, basic to all other social studies. We all tend to believe that the way we use words is the correct way, and that people who use the same words in other ways are either ignorant or dishonest.

8. Most words have more meanings than dictionaries can keep track of. And when we consider further that each of us has different experiences, different memories, different likes and dislikes, it is clear that all words evoke different responses in all of us.

9. Words being as varied in their meanings as they are, no one can tell us what the correct interpretation of a word should be in advance of our next encounter with that words.

10. A reasonably sane individual will react to each of these events in his own way, according to time, place, and the entire surrounding set of circumstances; and included among those circumstances will be his own stock of experiences, wishes, hopes and fears.

11. Such fixed and unalterable patterns of reactions--in their more obvious forms we call them prejudices--are almost inevitably organized around words.

12. Alfred Korzybski, the founder of general semantics, called such short-circuited responses "identification reactions." He used the word "identification" in a special sense; he meant that persons given to such fixed patterns of response identify (that is, treat as identical) all occurrences of a given word or symbol; they identify all the different cases that fall under the same name.

13. General semantics is a comparative study of the kinds of responses people make to the symbols and signs around them.

14. The capacity for seeing similarities is necessary to the survival of all animals. The pickerel, I suppose identifies all shiny, fluttery things going through the water as minnows, and goes

after them all in pretty much the same way. Once in a while, however, the shiny, fluttery thing in the water may happen to be not a minnow but an artificial lure on the end of a line.

15. The problem of adequate differentiation is immeasurably more complex for men than it is for pickerel. The signs we respond to, and the symbols we create and train ourselves to respond to, are infinitely greater in number and immeasurably more abstract than the signs in a pickerel's environment.

16. Part of our identification reactions are simply protective mechanisms inherited from the necessities of survival under earlier and more primitive conditions of life. Further identification reactions are caused by communal patterns of behavior which were necessary or thought necessary at one stage or another in the development of a tribe or nation.

17. Modern means of mass communication and propaganda certainly have an important part to play in the creation of identification reactions.

18. Unlike the languages of the sciences, which are carefully constructed, tailormade, special-purpose languages, the language of everyday life is one directly inherited and haphazardly developed from those of our prescientific ancestors: Anglo-Saxons, primitive Germanic tribes, primitive Indo-Europeans. With their scant knowledge of the world, they formulated descriptions of the world before them in statements such as "The sun rises." We do not today believe that the sun "rises." Nevertheless, we still continue to use the expression, without believing what we say.

19. It is apparent, then, that the common-sense opinion of most people, "We call a spade a spade because that's what it is," is completely and utterly wrong. We call it a "spade" because we are English-speaking people, conforming, in this instance, to majority usage in naming this particular object.

20. And here we come to another source of identification reactions--an unconscious assumption about language epitamized in the expression "a spade is a spade," or even more elegantly in the famous remark "Pigs are called pigs because they are such dirty animals." The assumption is that everything has a "right name" and that the "right name" names the "essence" of that which is named.

21. Once we recognize the absurdity of these identification reactions based on identities of name, we can begin to think more clearly and more adequately. To realize fully the difference between words and what they stand for is to be ready for differences as well as similarities in the world.

22. When we talk or write, the habit of indexing our general terms will reduce our tendency to wild and wooly generalization. "To a mouse, cheese is cheese--that's why mousetraps work."

Sample Review: Before moving on to further material, establish the following generalizations:

NOTE: The teacher might wish to construct a quiz using these generalizations.

1. Symbols (including words) do not, in themselves, possess meaning--meaning is found in the human responses to symbols.

2. Words can be used to refer to quite limited and specific things, and they can also be used to refer to an almost limitless variety of things.

3. The meaning or meanings of a symbol are the products of the interpretant's experience; to use Hayakawa's terms, this experience consists of both education and miseducation.

4. Single words are not likely to convey full meaning; a more comprehensive interpretation is likely to demand knowledge of the context in which the words are used.

5. Depending upon the context and the interpretants, the referents of a symbol may range from highly concrete to highly abstract.

6. Dictionary or lexical meanings might serve to suggest by synonyms and explanation the generalized meanings that are likely to be associated with words, but they do not demonstrate semantic responses.

7. Meaning is, at the same time, both highly individual and highly social.

8. While everyday language makes few attempts to carefully specify meanings, certain specialized language situations are aimed primarily at specificity (scientific language). Other language situations, such as persuasion and literature, often purposely avoid specificity.

9. While "identification responses" are highly related to social problems of many varieties, we cannot expect language reforms to serve as a panacea for these problems. The problems lie in the responses to language, not in the language itself.

Sample Introduction

Throughout our discussions of meaning, we've been using the term "reference" rather heavily. As some of you have perhaps already noticed, there can be more to language than sheer reference. Especially when we find that the reference is not specific, it becomes apparent that reference is not the only form in which we are likely to find language used. The other use here is expressive language. George Bernard Shaw explains it this way. If you are in the dentist's chair and something he does hurts, you respond by saying something like "ow"; this is the expressive function of language. On the other hand, the same "ow" can be made referential; the dentist simply tells you, "Say, 'ow' if this hurts."

To further explain this, I'm passing out another short excerpt by Hayakawa.

Procedure: Pass out copies of Hayakawa's "Is She Skinny, Thin, or Svelte?" Literary Cavalcade, March, 1949.

Class discussion should probably not be necessary. Students may wish to try "conjugating" a few of the examples.

Sample Introduction to Discussion of Communication

While we can and should recognize both the expressive and referential uses of language, we still must recognize that you are under more pressure to learn to use referential language than expressive. When we are talking about the use of language, it is important to keep in mind that the use of language involves communication. Perhaps some of you have previously studied the process of communication.

For you, this will be review. For others, this may be new material. We are going to be trying to explain the important aspects of communication by the use of the communication model, showing as completely as possible the important influences of meaning on communication.

Sample Lecture

The Process of Communication and the Communication Model

Resulting from our discussions within this unit, and possibly resulting from previous experiences with the study of communication, I think most of you already recognize that communication can be an extremely complicated topic. Especially when we consider the many possible forms of communication, it becomes very difficult to discuss communication in simplified terms. Within the broad range of communication, we could be studying the communication systems of lower animals, or we could move all the way to the kind of communication sometimes mentioned in the Bradbury short story we read earlier in this unit. In that case, there were times when the narrator and the old man communicated without saying anything. We could range from the exacting communication of the scientist to the loaded communication of the persuader to the artistic communication of the poet or fiction writer and even to the rather special type of communication in the everyday

Sample Lecture Continued

social pleasantries like "Good morning." Recently an even more complex kind of communication has been developed--the communication between machines, in which computers can exchange information by telephone. One of the things we will be trying to do is to find the basic similarities in this wide range of communication situations, and if we can do that, to find a way of explaining these basic ingredients, showing how specific cases relate to the general process. This may sound terribly difficult, but I think we can probably identify most of the basic aspects quite quickly in class discussion.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. First of all, we need to identify the three basic parts of a communication situation.

   (Sender, message, receiver.)

NOTE: Students might not suggest these particular terms, but they will probably approximate them.

2. While I could agree that these are the basic parts, I would ask if we necessarily have to say that two people are involved.

   (There could be any number of people involved; there could be a large audience of receivers.)

3. Could there be fewer than two people?

   (One person could be talking to himself, and we could call this a form of communication.)

4. All right, let's just list some examples of situations in which we find these three parts.

   (Allow students to suggest situations. Try to elicit a broad range of possibilities.)

5. Can we continue to use the terms "sender, message, and receiver?" Remember that we are trying to find an explanation that works for all communication situations and that explains fairly accurately what is happening during the communication. Let's start with the first term; is "sending" all you do when you say something to somebody?

   (No. If sending were the only function, this would assume that the message is something that already exists and that all the person needs to do is dispatch it. To be adequately descriptive, we need to show that the message is the product of thinking.)

6. All right, suppose you are thinking about something that you want to communicate to someone else; what do you have to do next?

   (You have to put your thoughts into some form that can be communicated to someone.)

If you will remember one of the Langer excerpts you read earlier, this is where the logical and psychological aspects of meaning become important. The form must be capable of carrying meaning, and it must mean something to the person you are trying to communicate with.

Sample Summary

Perhaps you have heard the statement that language is a code in an earlier unit. If we define a code as a conventional system of symbols that represent usually agreed upon things, then language can be thought of as one form of code. Applying this same definition to other communication situations, we could also call the warning cries of animals as a sort of code. If you want to think about electronic types of communication, the radio, telegraph, etc., these too fulfill our definition of a code. For the purposes of our discussion, we will be using the "code"

notion for our terminology, and the result is this arrangement:

Write on chalkboard

ENCODER ----------> MESSAGE -------> DECODER
(Coded)

The ENCODER is the person who changes thoughts into the coded MESSAGE and sends the message to the DECODER. The DECODER is then the receiver of the message, which he must translate into his own thoughts.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. Now do you see any ties between this process and the things we've been saying about meaning?

   (Since meaning is a product of an individual's experience, and since all people have different experience, the same message might not mean the same thing to encoder and decoder.)

NOTE: Ask students to provide examples of this.

2. How does the device of "indexing" relate to this"

   (If a word were used that has many meanings, the encoder would have to identify which meaning he is using.)

3. Would this guarantee perfect communication then?

   (No. The individual interpretations would still be different because of different experiences with the word or the referent.)

4. If everyone has different meanings then, how can we possibly hope to communicate with each other?

   (Through a process of general agreement, we can communicate within a margin of difference. We can communicate adequately and effectively, but not "perfectly".)

ATTENTION

Stress this point.

Sample Introduction and Discussion

The three-term structure we have so far does show some of the major aspects of the communication process, it does not tell us everything we need to know about communication. One thing that is omitted, for instance, is the way in which the message travels between encoder

and decoder. As a general term that would include all kinds of communication situations, I would suggest using the term "CHANNEL." This, then, is the means by which the communication takes place.

Write CHANNEL on chalkboard.

1. Can you identify some of the possible channels we might find?

   (Speech, writing, other sounds, electronic signals, pictures, etc.)

2. Comparing situations in which ditterent channels might be used, can you see any influences the channel might have on the communication itself?

   (As we mentioned earlier, when the channel is speech in a face-to-face situation, the decoder might have other indications of meaning than he would have in a writing situation. Some channels might be more appropriate for certain messages.)

NOTE: Try to elicit additional illustrations.

If we're going to use the term "channel," we will need to change our diagram somewhat. While these might not be a completely accurate visual representation, perhaps it will be adequate for our purposes.

Write on chalkboard

ENCODER-----MESSAGE-----CHANNEL-----DECODER

While this completes the process in the transmission and reception of the message, it still fails to show two things: the indications of the results of the communication, and the problems which might decrease the effectiveness of the communication.

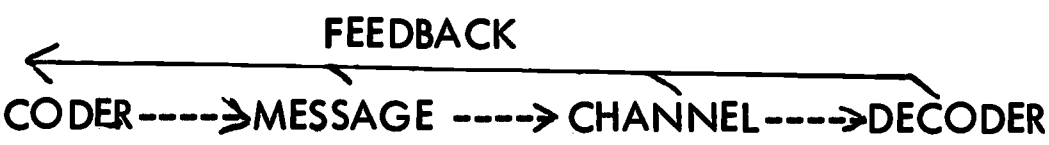
We've been talking about communication as if it were only a one-way process. I'm sure you all can see that

there are other possibilities here. If you are trying to answer a question I ask in class and I frown or groan while you are talking, this should tell you something. On the other hand, if I smile and nod my head, there is another indication for you. While you are talking to people, whether you consciously plan to or not, you tend to watch their facial expressions, since these can tell you whether the person is understanding you. As an example, I'm sure most of you have tried asking for something from your parents by dropping subtle hints and watching for their reactions. If they react negatively to your subtleties, you change your approach. This, for most of you, is almost habitual behavior in informal conversation, and it does work. It's strange, though, that many high school students deliver classroom speeches without taking their eyes off the scene out the window. Perhaps it's because you don't want to know what is happening. It is reasonable, though, to try to take advantage of the reactions of your audience by carefully watching them; if additional explanation is necessary, you can usually, you can usually see this and change the speech to accommodate it. If your audience already understands, you can avoid boring them by moving on to some other point. I've been talking about this as if it were extremely simple to observe; that's a gross over-simplification. These indications of the effectiveness or the

consequence of the communication might be very subtle or obvious, and these indications might come from several places and might appear in many forms. The general term we will use for these indications is "FEEDBACK." Feedback may originate in any part of the communication process, and we can show its origins and its directions on our diagram like this:

Ask students to provide examples of situations showing different types of feedback.

Write on chalkboard



The other communication factor we have not yet labeled is "NOISE." "Noise" is a technical term used by those who study communication, referring to any form of interference to the communication process. Thus, this could be noise in the general sense, as when a truck drives by when you are talking. If you don't compensate for the interference, the communication is hampered. This need not, however, be limited to sounds that make it difficult to communicate. We must show that interference can take place in other forms of communication that do not rely upon the transmission of sounds.

Write NOISE on chalkboard.

1. What kind of noise might be experienced when the communication situation is television?

   (The picture going out or static in the sound.)

2. What kind of noise or interference occurs when you hear the term "morphophonemics"?

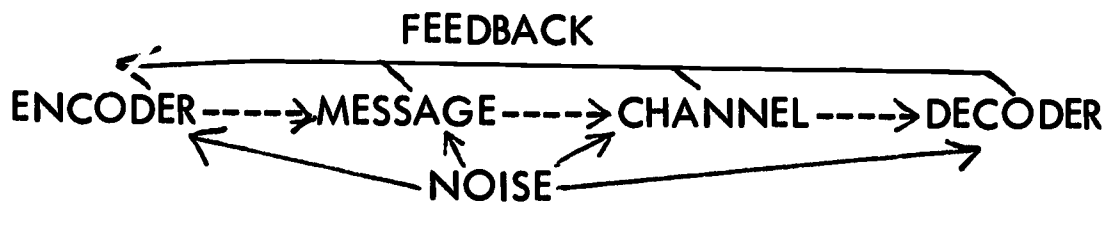
   (We don't know what it means, so the communication is not effective until we do.)

3. What might the decoder be doing that would be called noise?

(Daydreaming.)

In order to show that noise or interference can occur in any part of the communication model, we could add it to our diagram this way:

Write on chalkboard.



Suggested Activity

Describe one or more communication situations, identifying the parts in terms of the communication model. Discuss problems, influences, etc. that are inherent to the particular situation. Suggest ways in which problems might be avoided. Relate the analysis specifically to the process of meaning.

Sample Unit Activities

1. Speaking or writing assignment:

   Read additional material on the life of Ernest Hemingway, including some of his most important works, and relate this material to the Bradbury story, "The Kilimanjaro Machine," especially demonstrating how added knowledge in this area contributes to a more thorough understanding of the story.

2. Speaking, writing, or discussion assignment:

   Through the use of examples from a variety of situations, evaluate one of Langer's central ideas, that man has a need to symbolize, in addition to the other needs: physiological, safety, and esteem.

3. Speaking or writing assignment:

   Using examples, discuss the symbolic process associated with the visual arts, objects, or gestures.

Sample Unit Activities
Continued

4. Speaking or writing assignment:

Recalling the excerpts and discussion on semantics, describe situations in which "identification responses" are found. It should be stressed that these might be either negative or positive. As a subordinate question, what would be the effects if we indexed all meanings of words? In this assignment, it is important that students realize that some categorical responses are highly necessary, while other categorical responses result in the "allness" difficulty, in which all things named by a word are considered identical.

5. Using the Semantic Differential:

Using words chosen either by the teacher or by the class, students fill out the semantic differential form by marking along the scale, showing relative reactions. One form should be used for each word, and students should not be given more than a minute or two to complete each form. Interesting responses are most likely to be found if related words are used. For instance, words might be taken from the school situation: "teacher, principal, assistant principal, librarian, superintendent, student, senior, sophomore, etc." After scoring the forms, the students should be able to readily see that semantic responses to the same words vary a great deal.

SAMPLE

WORD	_____	
Simple	_____	Complicated
Good	_____	Bad
Usual	_____	Unusual
Active	_____	Passive
Important	_____	Unimportant
Meaningful	_____	Meaningless
Idealistic	_____	Realistic
Stable	_____	Changeable
Valuable	_____	Worthless
Interesting	_____	Boring

NOTE: Additional information on the semantic differential is available in Osgood's articles in Psycholinguistics, edited by Sol Saporta.

UNIT 1001 - Final Examination

Part One: True - False

_____1. Language is a code.

_____2. Writing is the primary form of language

_____3. It is necessary to distinguish between words and things.

_____4. From a "semantic" point of view, perfect communication among men is possible.

_____5. Gestures can function only to add to the meanings of accompanying words.

_____6. A given word must be either referential or expressive; it cannot be both.

_____7. While any interference in communication is called "noise," it is through feedback that the encoder recognizes that interference is taking place.

_____8. A symbol must not only be capable of conveying meaning; it must mean something to someone.

_____9. Meaning is both a highly personal and a highly social phenomenon.

_____10. Rational language behavior, in order to be free from prejudice, must rely heavily on identification responses.

Part Two: Short Answers

For each item marked "false" in part one, provide a brief explanation showing why you marked it as you did.

UNIT 1001 - Final Examination

Part Three: Essay Answers (NOTE: You might wish to allow students to choose only some of these questions.)

1. Describe a situation in which the problem of "allness" in meaning might have or has had undesirable results.

2. Discuss the adequacy of this definition: "Semantics is the science of the meaning of words."

3. "Man, when you got to ask what it is, you'll never get to know." Discuss Louis Armstrong's answer to the man who wanted a definition of jazz. Why did Hayakawa call Armstrong "an intuitive semanticist"?

4. Describe the interrelationships between the symbol, the interpretant, and the referent in spoken language. In what ways are these interrelationships different in written language?

5. Using the communication model and its terminology, explain the essential differences between the writing situation and the speaking situation. How would this affect your work in written composition?

6. Reconstruct the communication model we used in class and define the terms briefly. Describe a communication situation, identifying the important aspects of the situation in terms of the model. Suggest methods of avoiding problems that can be predicted in the situation.

7. Discuss the differences between a lexical definition of "happiness" and the meaning suggested by the statement, "Happiness is a warm puppy."

TEACHER REFERENCES

Berlo, David K., The Process of Communication. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960.

Several important concepts treated in the unit materials are discussed by Berlo in language and style that puts the book within reach of better-than-average students. See particularly sections on "definition" and "the origin of speech."

Brown, Roger, Words and Things. Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958.

Critchley, MacDonald, The Language of Gesture. London: Edward Arnold Co., 1939.

Book is particularly useful in emphasizing general cross-cultural similarities of specific gesture patterns, as well as suggesting the ritualizing or stylizing of non-verbal communication in forms of drama and dance.

Hall, Edward T., The Silent Language. New York: Premier Books, 1961.

The entire volume provides a most useful reference in keeping with content development in the unit. It is especially helpful in treating the cultural varieties of expressing time and space. See particularly Chapters 8-10.

Goffman, Erving, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Anchor Book: Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc. 1959.

Written primarily as a sociological investigation of the applicability of dramatistic terminology to describe human communicative settings, the book is valuable as a source of anecdotal support and illustration of extra-linguistic meaning.

Hayakawa, S.I., Language, Meaning and Maturity. New York: Harper and Bros., 1954.

Introductory readings are particularly valuable in describing primary contributions of General Semantics to communication study. The range and intrinsic interest of several of the selections may well make the practice of assigning individual better-than-average readers to key essays for reporting good practice.

_____. The Use and Misuse of Language. Premier Books, T 166 (Paperbound), 1962.

Hoijer, Language in Culture. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954.

Most valuable volume encompassing a series of scholarly discussions of linguistic relativity and determinism. See particularly Fearing's essay on the conceptions of Whorf.

Langer, Susanne K., Philosophy in a New Key. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1948. (Also available in paperback - Mentor Books, MP475.)

Mrs. Langer's explanation of signs and symbols forms one of the primary bases for this unit. While not suitable for general student reading, this book should prove to be most helpful to the teacher.

Lee, Irving J., Language Habits and Human Affairs. New York: Harper and Bros., 1941.

The book represents in quite readable form, anecdotally laced, the principle contributions of the Korzybski school. Chapters 1-6 are of particular relevance.

_____. Customs and Crises in Communication. New York: Harper and Bros., 1954.

A collection of readings related in their illustration of communications break-down. Valuable as a source of illustrative material, as well as a source of "models" for "case-study" analysis.

Frye, Northrop, The Educated Imagination. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1964.

An excellent and readable book for the teacher of English. Many applications beyond the subject matter of this unit.

Gleason, H.A., An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1955.

Hockett, Charles D., "The Origin of Speech," Scientific American.

Packard, Vance, The Hidden Persuaders. New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1957.

Packard vividly illustrates the manipulation of object language in the manipulations of mass-audience persuaders. Suitable for selected student reading to increase appreciation for the practical impact of language study as well as illustrating the communicative function of status symbols.

_____. The Status Seekers. New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1959.

Saporta, Sal, Editor. Psycholinguistics. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1959.

While this is an excellent book of readings on psycholinguistics, it is also quite technical. Unsuitable for general class reading, but an excellent teacher reference.

Sapir, Edward. Culture, Language and Personality. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961.

Generally excellent collection of essays by the great American linguistic pioneer. Recommended as a teacher reference for general background. Sapir's style provides its own further recommendation.