Learnable Linguistics for Business Leaders

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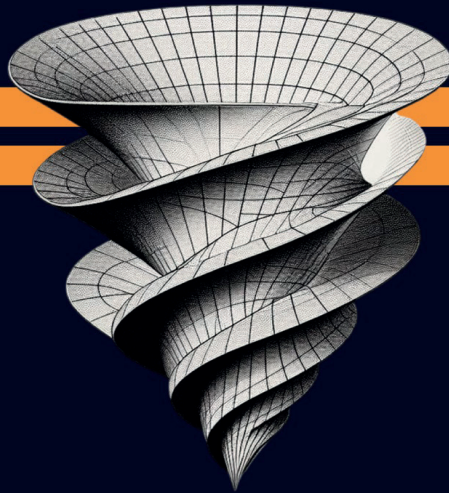
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Learnable Linguistics
for Business Leaders

Language structures and dynamics that affect human
decision-making and behaviors in life and in business

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Foreword

By PROF. CHRISTIAN LECHNER
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Leaders in today's fast-paced business world need more than just management skills; we need to be strategists, communication experts, coaches and mentors who can foster growth and development within their organizations and their teams. *Learnable Linguistics for Business Leaders* builds on the foundation set by the same authors in *Learnable Theory & Analysis*.[1] This book dives into the critical role language plays in shaping our decisions, actions and, ultimately, business success. As Ludwig Wittgenstein had argued, the limits of our language are the limits of our world and language shapes the way we see and understand the world around us.

This book is a guide for leaders who want to understand how the words they use limit and, at the same time, expand the reality in which they live and operate. It's about seeing beyond the surface of language to the deeper patterns that influence how people think and act. By exploring concepts like the ***umbra cone***, which represents the shadow language casts on human perceptions, leaders can start to recognize its hidden influences in communication.

The authors leverage the idea of ***learnables*** – the cognitive frameworks they thoroughly addressed in their previous publication – which humans pick up and develop through language. Magni, Marchetti, and Alharbi, in the pages that follow, clearly reveal how language describes and hides parts of reality, and how the understanding of these mechanisms can offer an edge to individuals, both in life and in business. The book provides a few analytical tools and among these some synthetic representations of humans' cognitive and linguistic processes that explain the way people represent the world and how such constructions impact our behaviors and decision-making.

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[1] Magni, Luca, Giorgio Marchetti, Ahlam Alharbi. 2023. *Learnable Theory & Analysis.* Rome: Luiss University Press.

A concise and engaging text that familiarizes readers with words traditionally used in Linguistics, such as ***Semiosis***, ***Lexicon***, ***Grammar***, ***Syntax*** and ***Semantics***. Terms that the authors here invite to reconsider in light of the most recent research findings in neurosciences and with an eye on their auspicated use in managerial contexts. Furthermore, the book introduces brand new concepts – i.e., ***Linguistic Exorcisms*** and ***Complementary Semantics*** – the relevance of which the authors explain via clear, actionable examples. Examples that readers can leverage to disambiguate the contexts where they compete and to more effectively lead their teams to success, by informed talking and purposeful walking.

This text shows how language can be used to gain tangible specific advantages, whether we are listening or giving a presentation, negotiating a deal, or inspiring our teams to tackle a new challenge. It shows how the right words can motivate and influence, and how the wrong language can distract us and others from the game in business. Research in psychology has shown how reframing concepts through relabeling can de-escalate conflicts, stimulate learning and favor positive outcomes and this book contributes to this line of reasoning.

Learnable Linguistics for Business Leaders is for leaders who want to communicate with more impact, understand their social environments better, and make decisions based on a clearer view of the world where they belong. It is about becoming a more effective leader by being more aware of the language we are exposed to and use daily.

This book gave me new insights on how language shapes the world and therefore I invite you to start from here the journey to master the art of language in leadership. Take this opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how language shapes the reality around us and within our businesses, and how we can use Learnable Linguistics to drive success and growth in our organizations.

Introduction
By Luca Magni

In the summer of 2003, I found myself sitting on a bench of the magnificent park, just a stone's throw away from the town center of Pinzolo, in the province of Trento, Italy. The park is a treasurable place for children and adults alike. It beckons visitors from all over the world with its vast, joyful, and fully equipped playgrounds, where the kids can free their energy and their parents can socialize and relax while supervising them from a distance. As you enter the park, you are greeted by a multitude of sand pools, slides, climbing frames, and outdoor wooden playhouses, all surrounded by lush green lawns and towering pine trees. A sunny morning, my youngest daughter, a curious three-year-old, was playing in the kitchen-like furnished area of a colorful wooden playhouse. With her tiny hands, she was gathering stones, leaves, and twigs, arranging them on the children-sized table inside the playhouse. She was somehow pretending to cook a feast or host a grand party. The open doors and windows of the house allowed me to watch and witness her imaginative play, and I couldn't help but being amused by her innocent joy. For a while, she was the sole inhabitant of her little abode, until a young boy of similar age approached the house. As he entered, my daughter paused, unsure of how to react to this unexpected visitor. Detecting her hesitation, the boy's mother got closer to my daughter, she smiled and greeted her in Italian: "Hello little girl". My daughter did not reply. The lady got closer to the playhouse: she noticed that my daughter was blond, fair skinned and still staring at her son, with her light green eyes wide open. "Hello little girl" repeated the woman, probably wondering why the girl had not responded to her previous greeting. "Are you Italian?" she added. My daughter turned towards the woman and very resolutely replied: "No, I am Ludovica".

This heartwarming anecdote is often shared at our family reunions, usually after a satisfying dinner. As we gather around the table, sipping our coffees, we always take a moment to recall the cherished memories of when we all lived together under one roof. Throughout the years, this memory has consistently reminded me of the significance of nouns and their role in the psycholinguistic development of human beings. This is true for nouns that identify individuals, as well as for the ones that distinguish objects and concepts within a community. Countless studies have emphasized that nouns serve as children's initial linguistic tools for identifying and categorizing the world around them. Numerous researchers have also delved into the key function of nouns in the progression of human symbolization

(Gentner, 1981). It was Ludovica's innocent response to the lady in Pinzolo, though, that led me to reflect on the importance of nouns as a means of identification which I more recently expanded into studies on their central role in reasoning and communication. By referencing this family event, my aim is to trigger the attention on the impact of nouns and set the stage for the captivating explorations on language that lie ahead. Here we are about to embark on a fascinating journey into the intricate world where nouns play a very relevant role, adjuvated by verbs and other linguistic elements. It is indeed through a reflection onto the representational function of words and the rules dictated by grammar and syntax that we will delve into the profound influence of language on human decision-making, business behaviors, and other managerial matters.

In *Learnable Linguistics for Business Leaders*, Giorgio Marchetti, Ahlam Alharbi and I continue our investigation into the attentional priorities enacted by language. Our collaborative research began almost two years ago.[2] We started highlighting the neurolinguistic dynamics that sustain human symbolization processes and delimit the cognitive horizons of individuals and communities. We distinguished the universal cognitive horizon, which we assumed reflective of prebirth species-specific neural functionalities and experiences, and generative of subsequent attentional and inhibiting features deriving from the exposure to more culturally specific contexts. We labelled the first *Learnable* (using the neologism in its singular and capitalized form) and the second *learnables* (using the plural and non-capitalized option). Learnable and learnables have been thereafter studied via their causal powers, whose manifestation has been traced respectively in the most general and universal aspects of language and in the specificities and uses of different languages and jargons. It is along such paths that the following chapters will dive into the meaning of words, their direct or metaphorical impact, on human decision making and behaviors.

In the pages that follow, we will illustrate how lexicon, grammar, and syntax govern the composition and use of linguistic symbols. In lexicon we connect the meaning of words to the affordances they evoke, while in grammar we consider how the structure and organization of such affordances and their elaboration occur in language, and in syntax we focus

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[2] The Theory of Learnable is rooted in the studies of many scholars such as Roy Bhaskar, Pierre Bourdieu, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Silvio Ceccato, Giacomo Rizzolatti, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, whose investigations led to the definition of Learnable as the set of neural activation patterns, with retrograde effects, which accompany and guide human attention, in experience and interpretation of reality.

on further and more complex attentional and inhibitory mechanisms, activated by the order of words in phrases. We will explore various components of language, such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and other attentional operators. This exploration will include the examination of how different elements function independently and when they combine in utterances and written texts. By analyzing their impact on human communication and on the assimilation of external reality, we count to better explain the role of the language we speak in the shaping and understanding of our world. Firstly, we aim at uncovering the pivotal role of nouns and how they influence human thinking. Secondly, we will discuss some key linguistic principles that can be utilized to achieve diverse managerial goals. Thirdly, we aim to unlock the potential of Learnable Linguistics and explore its effective adoption in business.

Learnable Linguistics for Business Leaders is in this respect a ground-breaking text that explores the fascinating realm of language, going beyond its traditionally recognized function of conveying messages. Within these pages, we go through five distinct instances where language transcends the verbal and the intangible, transforming into tangible decisions and observable behaviors. Such instances are covered by the five chapters composing this text where the mediation of words is disclosed, via their engaging and enchaining power on listeners and speakers, with the exemplification of the counterintuitive effects of conciseness and verbosity, and their capability to bridge walking to talking, in life as well as in business. Through meticulous investigations, we uncover the inner workings of language, revealing its immense power to shape and influence both individuals and organizations. This book takes a unique approach by seeking to uncover the embodied meanings that words carry and the impact they have when used in isolation or combined in different contexts. By dissecting these linguistic mechanisms, we do not only gain a deeper understanding of the situations we describe, but also unveil the potential for further analysis and the predictive use of Learnable Linguistics in the realms of business and management studies.

Throughout the chapters of this book, we uncover how language engages listeners, enchains speakers, explores the delicate choice between verbosity and brevity, paves the way for effective resolution of paradoxes, and, finally, reveals the learnable aspects embedded within speakers. Each chapter offers a rich exploration of the specific cases where language goes beyond communication, providing valuable insights and practical applications of Learnable Linguistics in business settings. By embracing the conceptual challenges that traditionally pertain to the field of Humanities

and applying just a few key linguistic notions to the realm of business, this book aims to empower readers with the knowledge and tools necessary to harness the transformative power of language. Whether you are a seasoned business leader, an aspiring entrepreneur, or a student of management sciences, *Learnable Linguistics for Business Leaders* invites you on a thought-provoking journey that will revolutionize the way you perceive and utilize language in life and in business.

As amply discussed in Magni, Marchetti, and Alharbi (2023), learning and language are closely interdependent and linked to the cognitive constraints that limit human exploration and explanation of reality. Learnable is indeed a neologism that was introduced in 2011 to indicate the constraint to human accessibility of reality. It derives from the specificities of the neurophysiological substratum characterizing human symbolic representative systems, where language – with its semantics, grammar and syntax – supports the construction and elaboration of beliefs, metaphors, and similes. Learnable Theory recognizes that previous experiences and learnings shape subsequent ones, and that language plays a crucial role in this process. Language embedded learnables, on the other hand, provide the patterns and the structures that shape our thinking and perception of reality. They can either expand or limits our thoughts, sometimes well beyond reasonable measures, depending on how aware we are of their influence. Languages perpetuate biases, stereotypes, and cultural norms that constrain users' understanding and exploration of reality. By recognizing and understanding the way in which each language constrains and influences thinking, speakers and listeners can become more critical consumers of language. Their awareness may challenge and reshape language choices, it can create the conditions for a more inclusive and diverse cultural environment, where different perspectives and ideas can be considered and valued.

Learnable and language support one another, as language reiteratively participates in human symbolic representational processes and therefore offer deconstruction paths viable to Learnable Analysis. In Learnable Analysis, metaphors, similes, and other linguistic elements are examined in their impact on individual and group attentional processes, as well as on their explanations and explorations of reality. This recognizes the importance of understanding how language shapes human cognitive constraints and affects both perception and cognition. We believe that individuals can liberate themselves from the limitations imposed by language and broaden their thinking and behavioral choices by actively interacting with language and understanding its essential components. This

awareness allows us to foster more inclusive and diverse team dynamics, where diverse voices are valued and integrated into decision-making processes. It also helps us identify and challenge biases and stereotypes perpetuated through some linguistic choices, enacting language modifications and/or other counterbalancing measures. Ultimately, learnable and language are interrelated in their influence on the cognitive constraints they impose on the exploration and explanation of reality. By understanding and actively engaging with both, we expect to overcome limitations and foster greater understanding and innovation.

Language is a powerful tool that not only helps us communicate but also shapes our thoughts and perceptions. The way we use language, the words we choose, and the structures we employ can either expand or limit our thinking capabilities. In this book, we will explore various language schemes that restrain and influence our ability to think critically and understand complex ideas. A linguistic option that seems to limit our critical thinking is the use of absolute terms. When we employ words like "always" or "never", we create a black-and-white view of the world, leaving no room for nuances or exceptions. This clearly hinder our ability to consider alternative perspectives or entertain complex ideas that may not fit neatly into these rigid categories. Additionally, the overuse of jargon or technical language within a particular field can also create a barrier to understanding for those outside of that discipline, further limiting our ability to think critically about complex ideas.

For example, if we always categorize political ideologies as either "left" or "right", we may overlook the existence of centrist, or independent viewpoints, that offer unique solutions to societal issues. Similarly, when scientists use excessive scientific jargon in their research papers, it becomes challenging for non-experts to comprehend and engage with important scientific discoveries, potentially hindering the progress of interdisciplinary collaboration. This highlights the importance of adopting a more nuanced and inclusive approach when analyzing and discussing complex ideas. By broadening our perspective and considering alternative viewpoints, we can foster a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter at hand. Moreover, using clear and comprehensible language in academic and scientific discourse is crucial for ensuring that knowledge is accessible to a wider audience, facilitating the exchange of ideas, and promoting interdisciplinary collaboration. This approach also helps preventing the propagation of biases and promotes a more objective analysis of different perspectives. Additionally, adopting a nuanced and inclusive approach encourages critical thinking and challenges the status quo, leading to the

generation of innovative ideas and solutions. Ultimately, by embracing a more open-minded and inclusive approach, we can create a more equitable and informed society that values diverse perspectives and fosters intellectual growth.

a. Deviant thinking patterns

Below is a list of *dysfunctional thinking patterns* that are depicted as examples of deviancy. My stand here is that such deviancies derive from linguistic discrepancies, which represent quite a frequent occurrence, rather than exceptions, when human learnables are stretched beyond their reach. In other words, different forms of dysfunctional thinking originate, are influenced, and often stubbornly reinforced by specific and highly recognizable schemes that are conveyed and signaled by recognizable linguistic uses. Some of the most frequent and relevant of such schemes are considered in the following chapters, and they are thoroughly deconstructed. Learnable Analysis does not address such phenomena from a psychological point of view, but from a specifically linguistic one, providing a framework where linguistic consistencies and discrepancies are presented, highlighted with the traps they dissimulate within the sequences of nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, etc. I list some of the most publicly discussed dysfunctional thinking patterns, here below, as readers might be willing to reconsider each of them, from a pure linguistic perspective, once they have completed this book and have gained a deeper understanding of Learnable Linguistics.

- **Binary thinking** consists of the tendency to see things in terms of only two opposing options, without considering the nuances and complexities that exist in between. This form of thinking can limit our understanding of complex issues by oversimplifying them. For example, viewing a political debate as a simple choice between left and right fails to acknowledge the multitude of perspectives and potential solutions that exist (Fisher and Frank, 2018).

  Binary thinking can limit our ability to see the underlying reasons behind someone's actions or beliefs, preventing us from engaging in meaningful dialogue and finding common ground. Embracing a more nuanced perspective can foster a

more inclusive and compassionate society, where we recognize that individuals are not defined solely by their perceived "good" or "bad" qualities. By acknowledging the limitations of binary thinking, we can move towards appreciating the intricacies of human experiences and perspectives. This shift allows us to better understand the circumstances and motivations that shape individuals' actions. It also opens the door to empathy and understanding, enabling us to bridge divides and work towards solutions that benefit everyone involved. Ultimately, embracing nuance promotes a more harmonious and connected world where we can celebrate the richness and diversity of human existence.

- **Black-and-white thinking** is another language scheme that can restrain thought capabilities (Bonfá-Araujo and Atsushi Oshio, 2022). This pattern of thinking involves perceiving situations or people as either completely good or completely bad, with no room for shades of grey. This can lead to a narrow-minded approach where individuals fail to recognize the complexities and contradictions that exist in the real world. For instance, labelling someone as a "hero" or a "villain" based solely on one action disregards the complexity of their character and the context surrounding their choices. This black-and-white thinking can also lead to snap judgements and unfair treatment of others. By labelling someone as either good or bad, we overlook their potential for growth and change. It is important to embrace the nuances and subtleties of situations and people, as this allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the world and promotes empathy and open-mindedness.

Rather than succumbing to the limitations of binary, black-and-white thinking and/or labelling, we should strive to see the beauty and complexity that lie within the shades of grey. It is by recognizing the complexity of human experiences and perspectives, that we can break free from simplistic judgements and stereotypes. The Learnable Linguistic approach we share in this book is not meant to only foster personal growth and self-reflection, but it also cultivates a society that values inclusivity and respect for all individuals.

With an appreciation for nuance, we can create a more compassionate and empathetic world that thrives on unity rather than division. By embracing the diversity of cultures, traditions, and beliefs, we open ourselves up to new ideas and ways of thinking. This allows for a greater exchange of knowledge and understanding, ultimately leading to innovative solutions and progress. Furthermore, celebrating the richness of human existence promotes a sense of belonging and shared humanity, reminding us that we are all interconnected and deserve equal respect and opportunities. In doing so, we pave the way for a brighter future where acceptance and cooperation are the driving forces behind our collective success.

- **The either-or fallacy** is a language scheme that limits thought capabilities by presenting a false dichotomy. It falsely suggests that there are only two mutually exclusive options when there can be a multitude of possibilities and perspectives. By recognizing and avoiding the either-or fallacy, we open ourselves up to a more inclusive and diverse way of thinking. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues and encourages collaboration and compromise. Ultimately, breaking free from the constraints of the either-or fallacy fosters a society that embraces nuance and values the contributions of all its members. This shift in mindset promotes empathy, nurturing dialogue and understanding rather than division and polarization. It encourages us to seek common ground and find creative solutions that benefit everyone involved. Embracing a more inclusive way of thinking also helps to dismantle stereotypes and biases, creating a safer and more inclusive environment for marginalized communities. In doing so, we create a society that celebrates diversity and harnesses the power of collective intelligence to tackle the challenges we face. This approach also fosters a sense of belonging and mutual respect among individuals, fostering a stronger sense of community and cooperation. By embracing empathy and inclusivity, we can break down barriers and build bridges between different groups, ultimately leading to a more harmonious and equitable society for all.

- **Generalizations and stereotypes**: language schemes that involve generalizations and stereotypes can hinder our ability to think critically and objectively. When we make assumptions about individuals or groups based on limited information or preconceived notions, we fail to recognize their unique qualities and experiences. This can lead to biased and narrow perspectives, preventing us from fully understanding the complexity of human diversity. By breaking free from the constraints of generalizations and stereotypes, we open ourselves up to a world of new perspectives and ideas. Embracing diversity and individuality allows us to appreciate the richness that different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences bring. It is through this understanding that we can work towards a more inclusive and harmonious society where everyone is valued for their unique contributions. Moreover, recognizing and celebrating diversity fosters empathy and compassion for others. When we embrace the uniqueness of individuals, we develop a deeper understanding of their struggles, joys, and aspirations. This empathy allows us to build stronger connections and bridge the gaps that divide us, ultimately leading to a society that thrives on cooperation and mutual respect. In this inclusive environment, each person's voice is heard and valued, promoting innovation and creativity that can drive societal progress. Ultimately, by fully embracing human diversity, we unlock the true potential of our global community and pave the way for a brighter and more harmonious future. However, a detailed counterexample to this perspective is the reality of systemic racism and discrimination that still exists in many societies.

  Despite the notion of valuing diversity, almost any society is characterized by marginalized groups that face barriers and inequality in various aspects of life, such as education, employment, and access to healthcare. These disparities hinder their ability to fully participate and contribute to society, undermining the idea of an inclusive environment that promotes cooperation and mutual respect. Moreover, the persistence of systemic racism and discrimination not only perpetuates social injustice but also perpetuates a cycle of

disadvantage for individuals in such marginalized groups. This cycle further reinforces stereotypes and prejudices, making it even more challenging for these groups to overcome the barriers they face and achieve equal opportunities. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge and address these systemic issues to truly create an inclusive society that embraces diversity and fosters equal opportunities for all. By addressing racism and discrimination, society can begin to dismantle the structures that uphold inequality and create a more just and equitable future. This requires not only individual efforts to challenge biases and prejudices but also systemic changes in policies and institutions. By actively working to break the cycle of disadvantage, we can create a society that values and respects the rights and dignity of every individual, regardless of their race or background. Only then can we truly achieve a society where everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive and succeed.

- **Euphemisms and doublespeak** are language schemes that aim to soften or conceal the truth. While they may serve various purposes, such as maintaining social harmony or avoiding offence, they can hinder critical thinking. By obscuring the true nature of a situation or concept, euphemisms and doublespeak prevent us from fully understanding and engaging with important issues. The deceptive language may mislead or manipulate people, which can result in a lack of accountability and transparency in our society. Additionally, euphemisms and doublespeak can inhibit meaningful conversations and debates, as the true intentions and implications behind certain words or phrases may be hidden. To truly create a brighter and more harmonious future, it is crucial that we promote honest and clear communication, free from euphemisms and doublespeak, to foster understanding, progress, and unity. By actively encouraging open and transparent dialogue, we enable individuals to express their thoughts and concerns without fear of manipulation or misinterpretation. This not only promotes accountability but also allows for constructive criticism and the exchange of diverse perspectives.

Embracing honest communication helps to build trust and strengthen relationships within our society, paving the way for collaboration and collective problem-solving. Ultimately, it is through clarity and sincerity in our language that we can foster a more inclusive and equitable world for all. To achieve this, it is crucial to prioritize effective communication skills. Active listening, for instance, plays a vital role in understanding others' viewpoints and fostering empathy. By truly hearing and acknowledging different experiences and opinions, we can bridge gaps and find common ground. Additionally, being mindful of our own language and its potential impact is essential. Choosing words carefully and considering their potential implications can prevent unintended harm and promote a more respectful and inclusive dialogue.

Some may argue that promoting diversity and inclusivity can lead to slower decision-making processes as more time may be spent discussing and considering different perspectives, potentially hindering efficiency in certain situations. For example, in a marketing team, promoting diversity and inclusivity can lead to a wider range of perspectives on target audiences, resulting in more effective and innovative campaign strategies. However, during time-sensitive decision-making processes, such as launching a new product, the need to consider different viewpoints may slow down the process and potentially impact efficiency. This highlights the delicate balance that organizations must strike between fostering diversity and inclusivity and maintaining efficiency. On the one hand, diverse perspectives can bring fresh ideas and insights to the table, enhancing problem-solving and decision-making. On the other hand, in fast-paced environments where quick decisions are crucial, the time taken to consider different viewpoints can be seen as a hindrance. It is important for teams to find a middle ground where they can leverage the benefits of diversity while still ensuring efficiency and timely execution. For example, in a software development team, having members from diverse backgrounds can lead to innovative solutions and improved user experiences. One developer may bring expertise in accessibility, ensuring that the product is inclusive and usable for all users. However, when facing tight deadlines, the team must strike a balance between incorporating diverse perspectives and making timely decisions to meet project milestones. They can establish structured

brainstorming sessions or allocate specific time slots for discussions to ensure inclusivity without compromising efficiency.

b. The interplay between language and thought

Language is not merely a medium for communication; it is also a powerful tool that shapes our thoughts, beliefs, and actions. The words we choose and the language schemes we employ can significantly influence our cognitive capabilities and the way we perceive the world around us. This *intricate interplay between language and thought* is evident in various linguistic mechanisms, such as metaphors, analogies, framing, priming, and the use of loaded language and emotional appeals. Each of these schemes can subtly, yet profoundly, affect our understanding and decision-making processes.

- **Metaphors and analogies** are powerful language schemes that help us make sense of complex ideas by relating them to familiar concepts. However, they can also shape our perception and understanding of those ideas. Metaphors and analogies can influence how we think about certain topics, framing them in a particular light and potentially limiting alternative interpretations. For example, if we use the metaphor of "war" to describe a competitive business environment, it may lead us to view competitors as enemies and approach the situation with a combative mindset. On the other hand, if we use the analogy of a "journey" to describe the same situation, it may encourage a more collaborative and cooperative approach. Therefore, while metaphors and analogies can enhance our understanding, it is important to be mindful of their influence and consider multiple perspectives.

  By consciously choosing and critically analyzing the language schemes we use, we can broaden our thinking and avoid narrowing our understanding of complex ideas. Additionally, the use of metaphors and analogies can also help bridge communication gaps and foster empathy among individuals with different backgrounds or perspectives.

When we frame complex ideas in familiar terms, it becomes easier for others to grasp and relate to them. This can be particularly valuable in interdisciplinary or cross-cultural discussions where diverse viewpoints are at play. Moreover, by encouraging a collaborative and cooperative approach, metaphors and analogies can promote constructive dialogue and problem-solving, ultimately leading to more effective solutions.

However, it is crucial to recognize that not all metaphors and analogies are created equal, and some may inadvertently reinforce existing biases or misconceptions. For example, when discussing climate change, using the metaphor of a "ticking time bomb" can effectively convey the urgency and potential catastrophic consequences. However, if used carelessly, it may reinforce the misconception that climate change is a singular event rather than a complex and ongoing process. Therefore, it is important to choose metaphors and analogies thoughtfully and ensure they accurately represent the nuances of the topic being discussed. Metaphors and analogies play a crucial role in shaping how people understand complex issues. They can simplify concepts and make them more relatable, but they also have the power to perpetuate existing biases or misconceptions.

Therefore, it is essential to select metaphors and analogies carefully, ensuring they capture the complexity and ongoing nature of the topic at hand. By doing so, we can effectively communicate the urgency and gravity of issues like climate change without oversimplifying or misrepresenting them. Metaphors and analogies can serve as powerful tools for raising awareness and mobilizing action on pressing issues. For instance, comparing the Earth's delicate ecosystem to a finely balanced house of cards can illustrate the fragility and interconnectedness of our environment. However, it is crucial to strike a balance between simplification and accuracy, as oversimplifying complex issues can lead to misunderstandings or complacency among the public.

Using metaphors and analogies can help make complex issues more relatable and understandable to a wider audience. For example, comparing deforestation to a cancerous tumor spreading through a body can highlight the destructive nature of this issue. However, it is important to ensure that these metaphors accurately capture the essence of the problem and do not oversimplify or distort the facts. By striking a balance between simplification and accuracy, we can effectively engage the public and inspire meaningful action towards addressing pressing issues.

- **Framing and Priming**. Framing refers to the way information is presented, which can influence how we perceive and interpret it. By highlighting certain aspects or emphasizing specific details, framing can lead us to focus on aspects of an issue while ignoring others. Similarly, priming occurs when the language used in a certain context influences our subsequent thoughts and behavior. These language schemes can impact our decision-making and behavior, shaping the context in which we perceive information. For example, studies have shown that individuals who are presented with information framed in a positive way are more likely to perceive it favorably and make decisions based on that positive frame. On the other hand, if information is framed in a negative manner, individuals may view it with skepticism or even disregard it completely. Similarly, priming can have subtle yet powerful effects on our behavior. For instance, if individuals are primed with words associated with aggression, they may subsequently behave more aggressively in analogous situations.

Overall, framing and priming illustrate the significant role that language and context play in shaping our perception and decision-making processes. These concepts highlight the importance of being mindful of how information is presented and the potential impact it can have on our thoughts and actions. It also raises questions about the ethical implications of using framing and priming techniques to influence others. Should we strive for objective and unbiased communication, or is it acceptable to strategically shape information to

achieve desired outcomes? As we delve deeper into the study of language and cognition, it becomes clear that understanding these phenomena is crucial for effective communication and navigating the complexities of human behavior. Furthermore, the study of framing and priming can also shed light on how individuals interpret and perceive information differently based on their own experiences and beliefs. This knowledge can help us develop more inclusive and persuasive communication strategies that take diverse perspectives into account and avoid unintentional biases. Ultimately, striking a balance between objective communication and strategic shaping of information is essential to fostering meaningful dialogue and achieving desired outcomes in a responsible manner.

For example, in a workplace setting, a manager may need to communicate a new policy to their team. They can use their knowledge of individual differences in perception and interpretation to tailor the message in a way that resonates with each employee's unique perspective. By acknowledging and addressing potential biases or misunderstandings, the manager can ensure that the communication is inclusive, persuasive, and ultimately leads to a better understanding and acceptance of the new policy. A counterargument to this viewpoint is that tailoring the message to individual perspectives may lead to inconsistencies and confusion within the team as different interpretations of the policy arise. Additionally, spending excessive time and effort on individual tailoring may hinder productivity and efficiency in the workplace. For example, when implementing a new remote work policy, the manager can tailor their communication to address the concerns and preferences of each team member. By acknowledging different working styles and providing specific examples of how the policy benefits everyone, the manager can foster a sense of inclusivity and encourage acceptance.

However, if the manager spends too much time on individual tailoring, it may lead to inconsistencies in how the policy is understood, causing confusion and potential conflict within

the team. Moreover, excessive effort in customization may also result in a delay in implementing the policy, which could hinder productivity and efficiency. Therefore, it is important for the manager to strike a balance between addressing individual concerns and ensuring a consistent understanding of the policy across the team. This can be achieved by setting clear guidelines and expectations while also allowing for some flexibility to accommodate different preferences within reasonable limits. Additionally, the manager should communicate the reasons behind the policy and its benefits to the team, creating a sense of shared purpose and understanding. By involving the team in the decision-making process and seeking their input, the manager can foster a sense of ownership and commitment to the policy. Regular feedback and open communication channels will also help address any concerns or challenges that arise during the implementation phase, allowing for adjustments and improvements to be made as necessary. Ultimately, a well-balanced and inclusive approach to policy implementation will promote a positive work environment and enhance overall team performance.

- **Loaded language and emotional appeals** are language schemes that aim to evoke specific emotions or reactions from the audience. By using emotionally charged words or phrases, speakers or writers can manipulate our emotions and bias our thinking. As a result, we might be more influenced by the emotional appeal than by the evidence or logic put forth, which can hinder our ability to think critically and objectively. For example, a political candidate might use loaded language and emotional appeals in their campaign speeches to sway voters. They may use phrases like "fighting for the American dream" or "protecting our values" to appeal to patriotic emotions and create a sense of urgency. By doing so, they can evoke strong emotions in the audience and create a sense of loyalty and support, even if their policies or track record may not align with the voters' best interests.

  Since emotions frequently influence people and emotional responses largely supersedes rational analysis, loaded

language and emotional appeals can be successful. However, it is important for voters to remain vigilant and evaluate candidates based on their actions and policies rather than solely relying on emotional appeals. By critically examining a candidate's track record and analyzing their proposed policies, voters can make informed decisions that align with their own best interests and the overall well-being of the country. When used in the context of team dynamics, loaded language and emotional appeals can have a detrimental impact on overall team performance. Instead of fostering a collaborative and rational environment, these tactics can create division and hinder effective communication among team members. By relying on emotional manipulation rather than logical reasoning, teams may struggle to make well-informed decisions and find it difficult to reach consensus. To enhance overall team performance, it is crucial to promote open and unbiased communication, encouraging members to base their opinions on evidence and logical reasoning rather than falling prey to loaded language and emotional appeals.

c. Language schemes impact society

The language schemes we encounter in media and political discourse, education, and everyday interactions can profoundly influence society and the individuals within it. Understanding the impact of these schemes is crucial for fostering a more informed and critical populace.

- **Media and political discourse**. Language schemes play a significant role in shaping public opinion and social dynamics through media and political discourse. The way issues are framed, the use of loaded language, and the influence of metaphors and analogies all contribute to how we perceive and understand current events. It is crucial to critically analyze the language used in the media and politics to ensure that we are not being unduly influenced or manipulated. For example, during an election campaign, politicians may use euphemistic language to downplay controversial policies or actions. By using phrases like

"enhanced interrogation techniques" instead of "torture", they can manipulate public perception and soften the impact of their actions. Similarly, the media may employ sensationalized headlines or biased language to sway public opinion towards a particular viewpoint or agenda on issues such as immigration or climate change. Being aware of these language schemes allows individuals to approach media and political discourse with a critical eye and discernment.

It is important to analyze the language used in media and consider the underlying motives behind it. By doing so, individuals can better understand the true implications of policies or actions and make informed decisions. Additionally, seeking out diverse sources of information can help counteract the influence of biased language and provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues. This is particularly important in an era where misinformation and disinformation are rampant. With the rise of social media and the ease of sharing information, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction. This is why critical thinking skills and media literacy are crucial today. By questioning and verifying the information we consume, we can avoid falling prey to manipulation and propaganda. Moreover, by seeking out diverse perspectives and engaging in civil discourse, we can broaden our understanding and challenge our own biases. In a world where echo chambers and filter bubbles are prevalent, it is essential to actively seek out differing viewpoints and engage in respectful dialogue with those who hold opposing opinions. This not only helps us develop empathy and understanding but also allows us to critically evaluate our own beliefs and potentially reshape them based on new information. By actively seeking out diverse perspectives, we can break free from the limitations of our own echo chambers and contribute to a more informed and inclusive society.

However, it is important to acknowledge that actively seeking differing viewpoints does not guarantee a productive exchange of ideas. In some cases, engaging in respectful

dialogue with individuals who hold opposing opinions may result in unproductive arguments or even reinforce existing biases. It is crucial to approach these conversations with an open mind and a willingness to listen, as genuine understanding can only be achieved through respectful and empathetic communication. Additionally, it is important to recognize that not all perspectives are equally valid or based on accurate information, and critical thinking skills are necessary to discern between constructive dialogue and harmful misinformation. In order to foster a healthy and productive conversation, it is essential to remain objective and avoid personal attacks or defensiveness. It is also helpful to research and verify information before engaging in a discussion, as misinformation can easily spread and hinder progress. By promoting a culture of intellectual curiosity and respectful debate, we can create an environment where diverse perspectives are valued, and progress can be made towards finding common ground.

- **Education and language instruction**. Language schemes also have an impact on education and language instruction. The language used in educational settings can either encourage critical thinking or stifle it. By promoting diverse perspectives and inclusive language, educators can foster an environment that encourages open dialogue and multiple viewpoints. Conversely, if language schemes that restrain thought capabilities are perpetuated in education, it can hinder intellectual development and limit students' ability to think critically. For example, if a school only teaches one dominant perspective in history classes and avoids discussions on controversial topics, students may not be exposed to different viewpoints and may lack the ability to critically analyze historical events. This can create a narrow-minded understanding of the world and hinder their growth as independent thinkers. On the other hand, in a classroom where teachers actively encourage students to engage in debates, consider multiple perspectives, and challenge existing ideas, students are more likely to develop critical thinking skills and become well-rounded individuals capable of understanding complex issues. When exposed to diverse

viewpoints, students learn to question assumptions and consider alternative explanations, fostering a more nuanced understanding of history. Additionally, engaging in debates allows students to develop their communication skills and learn how to respectfully disagree with others, preparing them for future academic and professional endeavors.

For example, in a history class, students may engage in a debate about the causes of World War II. By researching and presenting different perspectives, they can gain a deeper understanding of the political, economic, and social factors that contributed to the war. Through respectful disagreement and critical analysis of evidence, students can develop their ability to think critically and communicate effectively. This prepares them for future endeavors such as writing research papers or participating in academic conferences, where they will need to consider multiple viewpoints and articulate their own arguments in a clear and persuasive manner. Additionally, by engaging with diverse perspectives, students can challenge their own biases and broaden their worldview, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic society. Ultimately, the ability to consider multiple viewpoints and effectively communicate one's own arguments is a crucial skill for success in both academic and professional settings. In academic settings, students are often required to write research papers and participate in class discussions, both of which require them to consider multiple viewpoints and effectively communicate their own arguments. By doing so, students not only demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter but also showcase their critical thinking and analytical skills.

Moreover, the ability to consider multiple viewpoints and articulate one's own arguments is highly valued in professional settings as well. Whether it be in a boardroom meeting or a client presentation, individuals who can present well-reasoned and persuasive arguments are more likely to be successful and influential. For example, in a boardroom meeting, a marketing executive may need to present a new advertising campaign to their colleagues. To convince the

team of the campaign's effectiveness, the executive must consider potential objections and counterarguments and address them in their presentation. By anticipating and addressing these opposing viewpoints, the executive demonstrates their critical thinking skills and increases the likelihood of gaining support for their proposal. Similarly, in a client presentation, a salesperson might need to persuade a potential customer to choose their product over competitors. To do so, the salesperson must thoroughly understand the customer's needs and concerns and tailor their pitch accordingly. By addressing these specific pain points and showcasing the unique benefits of their product, the salesperson can effectively position themselves as the best solution for the customer's requirements. This approach not only highlights their persuasive abilities but also increases their chances of winning over a potential customer.

In our daily interactions, whether personal or professional, language plays a pivotal role in shaping our thoughts, behaviors, and decisions. However, not all language use is constructive; some can be counterproductive, subtly influencing our reasoning and decision-making processes in ways that are not always apparent. Counterproductive language schemes can range from marketing jargon that distorts reality to everyday colloquialisms that reinforce stereotypes. To ***navigate through the maze of language and maintain clarity of thought***, it is crucial to adopt strategies that can help us recognize and overcome these schemes. This text delves into various approaches, such as developing awareness and mindfulness, promoting diverse perspectives, and using inclusive language, to empower individuals to think critically and make informed decisions.

d. Developing awareness and mindfulness

The first step in overcoming counterproductive language schemes is to develop awareness and mindfulness. By being conscious of the language we encounter and use, we can begin to recognize when some form of rationality inhibiting language is employed. This awareness allows us to question and challenge the language used, ensuring that we are engaging in critical thinking rather than accepting information at face value. For

example, let's say a potential customer is reading a product description that uses overly positive language and exaggerated claims. By being aware of language schemes, the customer can recognize that the language is designed to manipulate their perception and create unrealistic expectations. With this awareness, they can question the claims made and make a more informed decision about whether to trust the product and its benefits. By critically analyzing the language used in marketing materials, customers can also identify any potential hidden costs or limitations that may not be explicitly mentioned. This allows them to make a more balanced judgement and avoid falling for deceptive tactics that could lead to dissatisfaction or regret.

Ultimately, being vigilant about language schemes empowers consumers to make informed choices and protect themselves from misleading information. In addition to analyzing marketing language, customers can also benefit from seeking out independent reviews and testimonials from other users. These real-life experiences can provide valuable insights and help customers determine if the product truly lives up to its claims. Additionally, customers should take advantage of free trials or guarantees offered by the company to test the product for themselves before making a final decision. By taking these precautions, customers can ensure that they are making a well-informed purchasing decision and minimize the risk of being misled by persuasive marketing tactics.

One important factor to consider when evaluating customer reviews is the credibility of the source. It is essential to look for reviews from verified purchasers or reputable sources to ensure the authenticity of the feedback. Furthermore, it is crucial to read a variety of reviews to get a comprehensive understanding of the product's strengths and weaknesses. This will help customers form a balanced opinion and make an informed decision based on their specific needs and preferences. However, even with verified purchasers and reputable sources, there can still be instances of biased or manipulated reviews. Competitors or individuals with ulterior motives may post fake positive or negative reviews to sway public opinion. Additionally, relying solely on customer reviews may not provide a complete picture, as individual experiences and preferences vary greatly, making it important to consider other factors such as personal research and expert opinions.

It is also worth noting that some products or services may have many reviews, making it difficult to sift through all of them and determine their credibility. In such cases, it can be helpful to look for patterns or common themes among the reviews to get a better understanding of the overall consensus. Additionally, seeking recommendations from trusted friends or family members who have personal experience with the product or service

can provide valuable insights that complement customer reviews. Furthermore, it is important to consider the source of the reviews. Some websites may have stricter guidelines in place to ensure the authenticity of the reviews, while others may be more lenient and allow for biased or fake reviews. Checking for verified purchase tags or looking for reputable review platforms can help identify trustworthy sources. Lastly, it is essential to keep in mind that individual preferences and experiences may vary, so it is crucial to read a range of reviews to get a comprehensive understanding before taking a decision.

e. Promoting diverse perspectives and inclusive language

Furthermore, an inclusive approach fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance among individuals from various backgrounds, which can lead to increased collaboration and cooperation. This can result in the development of more comprehensive and effective solutions to complex problems, as diverse perspectives bring unique insights and experiences to the table. For example, in a workplace that embraces an inclusive approach, employees from different cultural backgrounds are encouraged to share their perspectives and ideas during team meetings. This allows for a more holistic understanding of the issues at hand and promotes innovation within the organization.

Additionally, an inclusive approach can also lead to improved customer relations, as diverse teams are better equipped to understand and cater to the needs of a wider range of clients. Furthermore, an inclusive approach fosters a sense of belonging and psychological safety among employees, which enhances their overall job satisfaction and productivity. This can result in higher employee retention rates and a positive work environment where everyone feels valued and respected. Ultimately, embracing diversity and inclusivity can contribute to the long-term success and growth of the organization. For example, a company that embraces diversity and inclusivity may implement training programs that educate employees on cultural competency and sensitivity. This can help employees better understand and cater to the needs of clients from different backgrounds, leading to improved client satisfaction and increased business opportunities.

Moreover, by creating an inclusive work environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and safe to express themselves, employees

are more likely to collaborate effectively and bring their diverse perspectives to problem-solving, ultimately driving innovation and growth for the organization. Furthermore, fostering diversity and sensitivity can also enhance the organization's reputation as a socially responsible and ethical entity, attracting top talent and loyal customers who align with these values. Moreover, promoting diversity can contribute to a broader range of ideas and perspectives, leading to more creative solutions and a competitive edge in the market. In addition, diversity within an organization can also lead to increased employee engagement and satisfaction. When employees feel valued and included, they are more likely to be motivated and committed to their work. This can result in higher productivity levels and a positive work environment. Furthermore, diverse teams can also better understand and cater to the needs of a diverse customer base, allowing for improved customer satisfaction and loyalty. Overall, promoting diversity within an organization has numerous benefits that can positively impact its success and growth.

Promoting diverse perspectives and using inclusive language is another strategy to counteract language schemes that restrain thought capabilities. By actively seeking out different viewpoints and engaging in respectful dialogue, we can broaden our understanding and challenge our own biases. Using language that is inclusive and fair also fosters an environment that encourages critical thinking and open-mindedness. For example, in a workplace setting, a manager can promote diverse perspectives by forming diverse teams for projects, ensuring representation from different backgrounds and experiences. This allows for a variety of ideas and approaches to be considered, leading to more innovative and well-rounded decision-making. Additionally, using inclusive language in meetings and discussions can create a safe space for individuals to express their opinions without fear of exclusion or marginalization. This encourages everyone to contribute their unique perspectives and results in more thoughtful and inclusive decisions.

Furthermore, when organizations prioritize diversity and inclusion, it can lead to a stronger and more dynamic workforce. By bringing together individuals with different backgrounds, skills, and perspectives, teams can benefit from a wider range of ideas and problem-solving approaches. This diversity can foster creativity and innovation, as well as improve overall team performance and productivity. Inclusive language plays a crucial role in creating an environment where everyone feels valued and respected, which in turn enhances collaboration and cooperation among team

members. It allows individuals to feel comfortable and empowered to share their ideas and contribute to the collective success of the organization.

A counterargument to the input could be that too much focus on inclusivity and diversity may lead to a lack of cohesion and shared values within a team, potentially hindering effective communication and decision-making processes. However, research has shown that diverse teams often outperform homogeneous teams in terms of innovation and problem solving. By embracing different perspectives and experiences, diverse teams can bring a wider range of ideas to the table, leading to more creative solutions and better outcomes. Therefore, while it is important to strike a balance between inclusivity and cohesion, fostering an inclusive environment can ultimately benefit the team's overall performance. Furthermore, diversity in teams can also lead to increased adaptability and resilience. When faced with challenges and obstacles, diverse teams are more likely to come up with innovative and flexible approaches to overcome them. This ability to adapt and think outside the box can give diverse teams a competitive edge in today's rapidly changing and complex business environment. In addition, an inclusive team culture can also contribute to higher employee satisfaction and engagement, as individuals feel valued and respected for their unique contributions. Ultimately, fostering inclusivity can lead to a more dynamic and successful team dynamic.

f. Book contents and structure

Learnable Linguistics for Business Leaders concentrates on language schemes that seem to have a relevant influence on daily life and business thinking and capabilities. In our analysis we considered numerous instances where language goes beyond pure communicative goals, which are commonly attributed to verbal exchanges. The chapters proceed as follows:

Chapter 1 - *What it is in language that engages listeners*. Giorgio Marchetti takes us on a journey into the often-unnoticed linguistic mechanisms that most effectively captivate listeners' attention and guide their behavior. Marchetti explores the influence of grammatical classes such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and relators in shaping our attention and actions. Through an analysis grounded in needs, affordances, and the selection and combinations of these affordances, Marchetti reveals the hidden power of language in engaging and influencing listeners. Drawing

inspiration from Berger's *Magic Words*, this chapter sets the foundation for understanding the profound impact that language can have on our interactions and highlights the strategies that can be employed to effectively captivate and guide listeners.

Chapter 2 - *How language enchains speakers*. I delve into the empowering nature of language for business speakers. I uncover the enchanting power of language and its ability to empower people in business, enabling them to communicate effectively and leave a lasting impact on their audiences. This chapter addresses topics such as public speaking skills and effective communication strategies. Here I also introduce the concept of linguistic exorcisms, shedding light on how some very basic understanding of linguistics can break speakers and listeners free from constraints and empower speakers to communicate their thoughts and ideas with confidence avoiding/debugging any misunderstanding.

Chapter 3 - *Why more is less and why less is more*. Ahlam Alharbi explores cases when excessive and formally richer language or information can have a negative impact. This chapter explores the importance of brevity and clarity in business communication, highlighting how concise and minimalist language can be more effective in conveying some messages.

Chapter 4 - *Where the talking paves the way to new walking*. It addresses the delicate theme of the use of language to shape public opinion and create novel realities. Here, Ahlam Alharbi brings our attention onto the use of paradoxical adjectives, reflecting on the grammatical discrepancies and the novel meanings they enact, thereafter fostering the emerge of new learnables and social transformations. She emphasizes how language can pave the way for walking, enabling new grounds for dialogues and shared understandings.

Chapter 5 - *When the walking paves the way to new talking*. It delves into the way our use of language helps us to grasp and articulate new concepts. It uses Moravia's experiences in the Sahara as a case study to demonstrate how we typically try to make sense of unfamiliar situations by relating them to our existing knowledge. The chapter emphasizes the cognitive journey we undertake when we encounter new experiences, which often do not match our previous understanding or expectations. When faced with such novel scenarios – like navigating the unfamiliar desert tracks instead of the well-defined roads we know from the Western world – it forces us to expand our mental frameworks. This process not only broadens our vocabulary but also our conceptual grasp, as we are compelled to integrate and reconcile these new experiences

with our prior knowledge, leading to a richer and more diverse understanding of the world.

The book ends with a clear invitation to recognize and understand the language schemes that restrain and influence business. It invites readers to become more critical consumers and users of language. Business leaders can create a more informed and tolerant organizations where language does not limit but rather expands human thoughts and perceptions. By being more aware of the language schemes that shape their own thinking, business leaders can also foster a more inclusive and diverse team dynamic. A call that goes beyond any philanthropic aim is meant to feed long-lasting and sustainable business success. Unbiased organizational cultures and environments can indeed promote greater innovation and problem-solving abilities, as different perspectives and ideas are valued and integrated into the decision-making process. Ultimately, by breaking free from the constraints of business language schemes, we can create a more dynamic and successful organizational settings where diversity and collaboration are embraced and leveraged.

The awareness of detrimental language habits can help business leaders identify and challenge any biases or stereotyped choices and behaviors that may even inadvertently be perpetuated through such a language. By actively questioning and reshaping their language choices, business leaders can create a more inclusive and respectful environment where everyone feels valued and heard. This not only benefits the individuals within the team but also enhances overall team performance and productivity. When diverse voices and ideas are given equal weight and consideration, the team is more likely to come up with innovative solutions and make better decisions. Embracing a diverse range of perspectives and actively engaging with language can truly transform the dynamics of a team and lead to long-term success.

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Chapter 1: What it is in language that engages listeners

By Giorgio Marchetti

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition.

William Shakespeare
The Life of King Henry the V, Act IV, Scene III

Abstract

Below the surface of specific language content, subtle yet powerful attention-based mechanisms are embedded in grammatical classes and conveyed by them. These mechanisms play a crucial role in influencing and guiding our exploration, elaboration, and explanation of reality. They exert their influence on our behavior not only by directing our attention to specific aspects of reality but also by diverting it from other aspects. In this chapter, we explore how these mechanisms work when nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions are used. Business leaders are encouraged to comprehend and harness these mechanisms to optimize their effectiveness and drive success.

1. Introduction

The epigraph is from one of Shakespeare's most famous plays, *The Life of King Henry the V*, and precisely from the motivational speech that King Henry the V delivered to his troops as they prepared for the Battle of Agincourt with the French enemy. The troops were anxious and demoralized because they were significantly outnumbered by the French forces. King Henry used his words to inspire his men with heroism and patriotism and to create a sense of comradeship that bound them together.

King Henry's speech, albeit fictional, vividly exemplifies how words can be used to drive action. That words have the power to drive action, is a very

well-known truth. We learn it since childhood when our parents tell us what "we can do" and what "we cannot". Rhetoricians of all times, from ancient Greece to our days, have been using the power of language to persuade the listener. Politicians use words to convince us that what they intend to do is the right thing. Marketing experts use language to attract consumers. Poets use words to create images and emotions in the reader's mind.

Many of the mechanisms that allow language to be effective in guiding behavior have been known for long: for example, the power of the so-called rhetorical figures or figures of speech – metaphors, oxymorons, ellipsis, etc. – to produce specific effects on the listener; the importance of choosing the right words to pilot the listener's attention towards the desired outcome; the emotional appeal of certain expressions; and so on.

In this chapter, I will deal with some important attention-based mechanisms that are not frequently given the consideration they truly deserve. These mechanisms pertain not so much to the contents of words, that is, what words mean, but rather to the grammatical class or part of speech to which words belong, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and relators (e.g., prepositions, conjunctions), among others.

The mechanisms that regulate grammatical classes are all the more worth considering as their effects – compared to the explicit content of words – *may largely go unnoticed and escape awareness*. A direct comparison of the different effects that grammatical classes and the explicit content of words have on message effectiveness was carried out by Formanowicz et al. (2021). It is known that the content of words is easy to see and react to, as the phenomenon of *psychological reactance* testifies (Roubroeks et al., 2022; Reynolds-Tylus, 2019). Psychological reactance occurs when one perceives that an external stimulus, such as a persuasive message in health or political campaigns, threatens, limits, or eliminates one's autonomy. When one becomes psychologically reactant, one feels the urge to defend one's autonomy and does the opposite of whatever the persuasive stimulus or message directed one to do. Therefore, the content of a stimulus or message – *what* one says – does not always turn out to be effective. On the contrary, the subtle mechanisms of the grammatical classes – *how* one says something – are likely to trigger less reactance and therefore substantially contribute to the effectiveness of persuasive messages. Formanowicz et al.'s (2021) experiments (studies 2, 3, and 4) investigated the different effects that content cues (agency vs. communion) and grammatical cues (verbs vs. adjectives) have on message effectiveness. In their experiments, participants were shown slogans that expressed either agentic or communal content by using either a verb (e.g., *We act*; *We help*) or an adjective (e.g., *We are*

active; *We are helpful*). Participants were then asked to assess, among other things, how effective the slogan was, by rating questions such as: *Based on this slogan, how successful would you estimate this campaign to be?* or *Based on this slogan, how persuasive do you perceive this campaign could be?* The experiments revealed that grammatical agency consistently increased slogan effectiveness across conditions, while content agency varied across conditions by increasing (Study 2), not affecting (Study 3), and even decreasing (Study 4) the effectiveness of the slogan. In sum, these experiments offered evidence that the subtle mechanisms of grammatical classes, due to their unobtrusiveness, are more likely to impact communication than the explicit content of a message. As Formanowicz et al. (2021, p. 87) summarize: "Message recipients extract information that goes beyond the content of what is said, by subtly exploiting grammatical information".

Let's now proceed with one of the most fundamental and used grammatical classes: nouns.

2. Nouns

Nouns can refer to such a very wide variety of entities that it is hardly possible for anyone to classify them in a comprehensive list: physical objects (e.g., *car*), human beings (e.g., *man*, *brother*), animals (e.g., *cat*), events (e.g., *revolution*), abstract properties (e.g., *loyalty*), emotions (e.g., *fear*), and so on. They can represent entities that can be counted (countable nouns: e.g., *table*), entities that cannot be counted or are difficult to count (mass nouns: e.g., *water*, *rice*), and multiple entities at once (collective nouns: e.g., *family*, *government*).

For our purposes, what is important to observe is that all nouns share a fundamental function: *they identify an entity by specifying the set of affordances that are intersubjectively attributed to that entity*.[3] "Affordance" is a technical term that is used here to indicate *the possibilities (which can manifest as either opportunities or obstacles) for action* that the features of tangible (e.g., trees, cars, animals, humans) and intangible (e.g., ideas, concepts, theories, intentions, memories) entities in the environment

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[3] It may happen that a noun is used to identify one or more affordances that are not attributed intersubjectively, but only by an individual: obviously, in that case, the use of the noun made by that individual will differ from the use of the same noun made by the other people.

provide to an agent to satisfy (or hinder) its (physical, biological, social, psychological, economic, etc.) needs. The term "affordance" serves to emphasize the close relationships that exist between the agent and the entity with which the agent interacts: indeed, the latter is defined based on the needs of the former, and the former is defined in terms of its ability to attune to and use or exploit the latter.

For example, the noun *bottle* specifies a set of affordances that range from very specific possibilities (e.g., of being filled with liquid, corked), to more generic possibilities (e.g., of being grabbed, rolled, broken, put in the freezer), to very generic possibilities (e.g., of being perceived, remembered, thought about). All these affordances are made possible by the various features of the bottle (such as its form and the material it is made of) that are relevant to and can be used or exploited by the agent.

Likewise, the noun *freedom* specifies a set of affordances that includes, among others, the practical possibility of acting without the control of other people, the rational possibility of being preferred to other conditions, and the psychological possibility of being enjoyed. These affordances are made possible by the various elements composing the idea of freedom (e.g., autonomy and will) that the agent can make use of.

The set of affordances specified by any noun can generally vary from *concrete* (when they enable an agent to perform concrete actions, such as touching or moving) to *abstract* (when they allow an agent to perform abstract actions, such as thinking or imagining).

It is important to highlight that most possibilities for action are defined by and learned on sociocultural bases, practices, and needs. As such, they are constrained and ruled by social norms (Rietveld and Kiverstein, 2014). This means that sociocultural practices and norms determine and constrain the possibility of using the affordances of most entities, whether physical (e.g., hammer, spoon, bicycle), linguistic (e.g., words, grammar), social (e.g., social media), economic (e.g., money, stocks), mathematical (e.g., numbers, mathematical operators) or others. As Rietveld and Kiverstein (2014, p. 344) exemplify: "A red pen does not afford completing a customs form to be filled out in blue ink". This implies that sociocultural practices allow us to attribute affordances to entities that we rarely or even never come into contact with (e.g., subatomic particles, black holes) and to (mostly conceptually) deal with these affordances. In this view, all relations between entities that are independent of us (e.g., gravitational force, electronic forces, chemical reactions) are also conceived and defined with reference to us and our needs.

The affordances specified by each noun limit and condition the possibility of combining the noun with other words. Let's remain with the noun *bottle*. As long as we combine it with verbs – such as *take*, *break*, and *buy* in *I take/break/buy a bottle* – that are compatible with the affordances specified by *bottle*, we face no problems. However, when we combine *bottle* with verbs – such as *eat* in *I eat a bottle* – that are not compatible with the affordances specified by *bottle*, we will produce sentences that are judged as either meaningless, odd or require an unusual interpretative effort (as is the case of new metaphors).

The function of nouns implies an interesting consequence. As a general rule, when a noun is combined with other words (into a phrase, clause, or sentence), a *selection process* occurs by means of which only some of the affordances specified by the noun are selected and focused on.[4] For example, the verb *bought* in the sentence *I bought some bottles* draws and confines the listener's attention to the "purchasability" of bottles, that is their quality of being purchasable: consequently, the other affordances that the noun *bottle* specifies are not selected and focused on (even though they remain available in the background for possible successive linguistic processing).

Nouns, by virtue of their main function – they identify an entity by specifying the set of affordances that are intersubjectively attributed to that entity –, possess a fundamental property that sharply distinguishes them from the other grammatical classes: *stability*. The set of affordances that they specify is stable: it is like a picture representing a scene in a timeless here and now.

Compared to the other grammatical classes, nouns, with their inherent stability, serve as the ideal means for individuals to create and maintain their sense of self and identity. They offer a certain degree of permanence that facilitates the process by means of which individuals can identify themselves with, and recognize themselves in, the set of affordances specified by nouns. If I describe myself as *an artist*, I will appear as a *type* of person possessing the abilities, attitudes, and interests that artists have (and which can be used to satisfy my own as well as the other's aesthetic needs) in a dispositional and permanent way, rather than in an occasional and temporary way. Therefore, my abilities, attitudes, and interests will appear as stronger, more reliable, and more stable: part of my own identity. On the contrary, if I describe myself as *practicing the arts* or *engaged in an*

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[4] This selection process occurs not only when nouns are combined with other words, but also when pronouns are used.

artistic activity, my abilities, attitudes, and interests will appear as provisional, something I just happen to hold now, but that I could lose tomorrow. That is, nouns hint at someone's essence, who someone is, the type of person one is.

The effects of nouns on self-perception have been clearly demonstrated by Walton and Banaji's (2004) experiments, which show that when people describe their preferences using abstract noun labels (e.g., *I am a chocolate-eater*), they judge those preferences as stronger and more stable than when they describe them using descriptive action verbs (e.g., *I eat chocolate a lot*).

The inherent stability of nouns also explains why addressing people with nouns is more effective in achieving desired outcomes than using verbs or adjectives. Indeed, nouns that refer to a socially preferred or longed-for category of persons give people the possibility of identifying with it and encourage them to behave accordingly. As Bryan, Master et al.'s (2014) experiments show, three- to six-year-old children are more willing to assist adults with chores (e.g., picking things up) when they are referred to as *helpers* rather than when they are asked *to help*: requesting them to take on the role of a *helper* results in nearly a 30% increase in their willingness to assist, as opposed to simply asking them *to help*. As Berger (2023, p. 21) observes, turning a verb (*help*) into a noun (*helper*) turns "what was previously just an action (i.e., helping) into something more profound. Now picking up blocks isn't just helping, it's an opportunity. An opportunity to claim a desired identity (…) a chance for me to show myself, and maybe even someone else, that I'm a good person. That I'm a member of this desirable group".

When nouns refer to socially undesirable, negative behaviors, they tend to inhibit the identification with such behaviors more strongly than other grammatical classes. In the experiments designed by Bryan, Adams et al. (2013), participants were given the opportunity to behave dishonestly: they could claim money they were not entitled to at the experimenters' expense, without their cheating being possibly discovered. Participants were asked to think of a number from 1 to 10 without revealing the number to the experimenter. Once they had thought of the number, they were told they would receive $5 if their number was even but nothing if it was odd. Participants were then asked to reveal their number and paid (or not) as promised. The instructions referred to the implications of cheating by focusing either on the participant's identity (e.g., *Please don't be a cheater*) or on the action (e.g., *Please don't cheat*). Participants in the "cheating" condition claimed significantly more money than did participants in the "cheater" condition, who showed no evidence of having cheated at all. This

clearly shows that nouns are more effective than verbs in defining an individual's identity: the "cheater" condition made it more difficult for participants to ignore the implications of unethical behavior and accept such an undesirable identity.

The inherent stability of nouns also explains why they are preferred to other grammatical classes when the satisfaction of psychological and social needs for order and predictability is involved. According to Cichocka et al.'s (2016) analysis of inaugural and State of the Union addresses delivered by U.S. presidents (from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Barack Obama), Republican presidents use a higher proportion of nouns than Democratic presidents. Moreover, the preference for nouns is negatively associated with *integrative complexity*, which, broadly speaking, measures the capacity of individuals to conceive of a situation from multiple perspectives and integrate those perspectives. This finding clearly reflects differences in preferences and cognitive styles between liberals and conservatives: while conservatism is associated with a preference for order, predictability, and certainty and with lower integrative complexity, liberalism is associated with a preference for novelty and diversity, and with higher integrative complexity.

3. Adjectives

Grammars distinguish various categories of adjectives, for example, attributive adjectives (e.g., *white* in *a white fence*), predicative adjectives (e.g., *long* in *this sentence is long*), noun acting as modifiers or attributive nouns (e.g., *car* in *car park*, or *work* in *work clothes*), postpositive adjectives (e.g., *important* in *something important*), demonstrative adjectives (e.g., *this* in *this cup*), interrogative adjectives (e.g., *what* in *What book are you reading?*). In this section, I will deal specifically with attributive and predicative adjectives, and use the term "adjective" as a shorthand for "attributive and predicative adjectives".

While nouns have the function of identifying an entity by specifying the set of affordances that are intersubjectively attributed to the entity, *adjectives have the function of identifying (or selecting) only one or a limited set of the affordances of an entity* by specifying the entity's features that make those affordances possible. For example, the feature *empty* in *empty bottle* identifies just some affordances of the bottle, that is, the possibilities it affords of being filled, carried easily, and used to make a certain sound: all the other affordances (e.g., graspability) are left in the background, unmentioned.

Adjectives often allow one to attribute new affordances to an entity, typically based on one's evaluation. If I say *I found it useful*, I am attributing the affordance "usefulness" to the object based on my subjective judgment.

Compared to nouns, which specify the entire set of affordances of an entity, each adjective typically specifies only one or a very limited set of features for an entity. This difference between adjectives and nouns becomes evident when an adjective is used to form a noun (nominalized adjectives). For example, the adjective *blond* refers to just a single property (the color of the hair), while the noun *blonde* refers to some other properties as well (e.g., sexy, glamorous).

Because of this, adjectives can be used to describe different entities, while nouns, specifying more than one affordance, can only be applied to specific categories of entities. This adheres to what can be considered a very general rule: the extent to which a word can be applied increases as the number of affordances it specifies decreases, and conversely, the extent of application decreases as the number of affordances it specifies increases. For example, while color adjectives can be applied to all visible objects, the expression *the Reds* can only be applied to a specific category of people (Wierzbicka, 1988, p. 472).

For the same reason, adjectives are less likely than nouns to inhibit alternative classifications of the same entity. In Carnaghi et al.'s (2008) study 4, participants were presented with a target person, who was labelled either by a noun (e.g., *Paul, 22 years old, is an athlete*) or by an adjective (e.g., *Paul, 22 years old, is athletic*). Then participants had to estimate the likelihood that the target person could also possess another, unrelated characteristic, which was, again, provided either in noun form (e.g., *artist*) or in adjective form (e.g., *artistic*). The study showed that when the target person was initially described by an adjective, participants were equally likely to assign a new characteristic to the target person, regardless of whether the new information was conveyed in adjective or noun form. On the contrary, when the target person was initially described by a noun, an alternative classification of the same target conveyed in noun form was unlikely to occur. Summarizing their finding, Carnaghi et al.'s (2008, p. 855) observe that: "Whereas nouns inhibit alternative (noun) classifications, adjectives do not. Nouns are exclusive in the sense that they do not easily *allow* that the same person also be assigned to a different category. Adjectives, in contrast, do not preclude that the target person also has other qualities defined by other adjectives or by nouns. At the risk of oversimplifying, the target person can belong to only one noun category, but she or he may possess any number of different properties".

This difference between adjectives and nouns makes the latter more apt than the former at inducing, conveying, and perpetuating stereotypical beliefs. Indeed, as Carnaghi et al.'s (2008) 2B study shows, nouns (e.g., *X is a homosexual*) induce stereotypical inferences (e.g., *to have one-night stands*) more than the corresponding adjectives (e.g., *X is homosexual*). Moreover, they tend to inhibit counter-stereotypical inferences (e.g., *to attend church*): that is, nouns do not simply induce stereotypical inferences, but they channel the inferential activity so that expected behaviors appear more likely and unexpected behaviors appear less likely. This may also be attributed to the fact that nouns elicit a greater sense of *essentialism* than adjectives, in the sense that they make us perceive and conceive of the set of affordances that they specify as stronger, more stable, and more resilient than the individual affordances specified by adjectives (see Carnaghi et al.'s, 2008, studies 5A, 5B and 5C).

Likewise, nouns, because of their capacity to elicit a more essentialist perception and make category membership more salient than adjectives, have a higher impact on the *intergroup bias* when compared with adjectives. The intergroup bias is the tendency to evaluate in-group members more favorably than out-group members and serves as a basis for prejudice. This was tested by Graf, Bilewicz et al. (2012) in three studies. In study 2, for example, participants (all Czech) were presented with a bogus newspaper that reported unsportsmanlike conduct during an international football match between Germany and the Czech Republic. A player from Germany committed a harsh foul against a player from the Czech Republic. Linguistic forms denoting players' nationalities were manipulated by using either nouns (e.g., *a defending German*; *the Czech*) or adjectives (e.g., *a German defender*; *the Czech footballer*). After reading the newspaper report, participants' attitudes toward their in-group (the Czech Republic) and out-group (Germany) were measured, by asking them to describe their general feelings toward inhabitants of the Czech Republic/Germany on a feeling-thermometer scale ranging from 0 (cold) to 30 (warm). The study showed that the preference for the in-group to the out-group was more pronounced in the noun condition than in the adjective condition.

Consequently, as one can understand, using nouns to describe people, events, etc., as opposed to using adjectives, makes changing stereotypes rather difficult.

Let me add a final consideration concerning the property of adjectives to select one or a limited set of affordances of an entity. This property makes them an ideal means to convey highly abstract and decontextualized information. When compared, for example, to the more concrete linguistic

category of descriptive action verbs (e.g., *to touch*, *to kiss*, *to drive*), adjectives (e.g., *altruistic*, *brutal*, *foolish*, *anxious*, *intelligent*, *reliable*) prove to be the category with the highest subject informativeness (i.e., how revealing a statement is about an entity), the most enduring quality (i.e., the stability over time of a quality expressed in a statement about an entity), the least verifiability (i.e., the extent to which a statement can be objectively verified), the highest amount of disputability (i.e., the extent to which a statement can lead to disagreement), and the least informativeness about specific situations (i.e., how revealing a statement is about the specific situation in which an entity is). Descriptive action verbs follow the exact opposite pattern (Semin and Fiedler, 1988).

As such, adjectives can be used to direct the interlocutors' attention only to the desired aspect of an entity, while diverting it from, or disregarding, the other aspects of the entity. This property of adjectives becomes particularly evident with jokes. Try to answer the question: "Why does a fireman wear red suspenders?". Have you tried? The correct answer is: "To hold his pants up". Distracted by the color of the suspenders, you realize too late that a fireman, like anyone else, needs suspenders just to hold up his pants!

The use of adjectives to convey highly abstract and decontextualized information can be specifically exploited when a speaker and his interlocutors share a common knowledge or opinion and do not need to provide detailed, concrete information, such as when a politician speaks to an audience composed of people with a similar political orientation (Menegatti and Rubini, 2013).

However, because of their lack of verifiability and potential for disputes, adjectives may lead to disagreements and disputes with the interlocutors, because different people may have different standards or criteria for what constitutes the quality denoted by the adjective. Therefore, a more concrete language style is recommended when a speaker and his interlocutors do not share the same knowledge or opinion, such as when a politician speaks to an audience composed of people with heterogeneous or opposite political positions. All the more so if one considers that concrete language is regarded as "truer" (Hansen and Wänke, 2010) and more convincing (Menegatti and Rubini, 2013) than abstract language, enhances the perceived proximity between communicators, and increases a speaker's accountability (Semin, 2007).

The fact that adjectives can be used to attribute new affordances to entities (typically based on a subjective evaluation) makes them suitable for relating entities to *domains* to which they were never related before. A

domain is a representational field or structure organized around one or more quality dimensions, which allows one to order entities along the dimension(s) of the field, distinguish the entities of the domain based on their reciprocal, ordered position in the domain, and distinguish and separate a representational field from all other representational fields. Examples of domains are space, time, and what I name "typological" domains, that is, domains that contain objects, events, qualities, features, and so on, that can be ordered, classified, ranked, etc., such as animals, cars, materials, colors, temperatures, geometrical forms, numbers, specific objects, artistic genres, and scientific theories.

By relating an entity to a domain to which the entity was never related before, it is possible to have it experienced, perceived, thought, imagined, evaluated, remembered, etc. in new ways, that is, along the dimensions implied by the domain. This allows us to innovatively expand the range of the possible usages that we can make of the entity to satisfy our needs. For example, adjectives can be used to mark the unexpected by creating subtypes, thus rendering it acceptable and allowing the general rule to remain inviolate. As Beukeboom (2012, p. 315) highlights: "A label like *a nice Moroccan* creates a narrow subtype that allows for the maintenance of a more general belief that most Moroccans are not nice". Obviously, such use of adjectives may reveal the speaker's Learnable (Magni et al., 2023), such as their stereotypical views and preconceptions. This also allows for artfully or cunningly modifying the interlocutor's perception and conception of an entity to achieve a specific goal or effect. An example is given by the Italian oxymoronic expression *morte dolce* (*sweet death*), which is sometimes used to indicate euthanasia, that is, the practice of intentionally ending life to eliminate pain and suffering.[5] In this case, the adjective *dolce* (*sweet*) is artfully associated with the noun *morte* (*death*) to render the latter socially and ethically more acceptable.

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[5] See for example: https://www.ildubbio.news/interviste/la-morte-dolce-di-marina-ripa-di-meana-fatelo-sapere-si-puo-anche-in-italia-rzxo0v1a and https://www.ilpopolopordenone.it/Rubriche/La-Nota/Un-aberrazione-la-morte-dolce.

4. Verbs

4.1 General considerations

Compared to the static description of affordances provided by nouns and adjectives, verbs introduce a *dynamic aspect*. While the information provided by nouns and adjectives concerns *possibilities for actions* (which is what affordances are), the information provided by verbs concerns the *actualization* of such possibilities. Very generally speaking, *verbs direct our attention to the processes that are occasioned or favored by entities' affordances*. The term *process* is used here in a very general sense. It serves to: indicate how something behaves or develops over time; denote not only physical, concrete processes but also abstract ones (e.g., thinking, imagining, planning); refer to various cases: for example, how an entity changes, transforms, moves, remains stable, decades, emerges, combines with other entities, and so on; indicate that the process can be performed by agents with the ability to carry it out (e.g., human beings) or that it can occur due to the presence of the necessary conditions (e.g., gravitational force).

The entity whose affordances occasion the process is usually represented by the direct object or by a prepositional phrase, but it can also be represented by the grammatical subject.

For example, the verb *broke* in the sentence *Sue broke the glass* directs our attention to an action that is made possible by an inherent affordance of the direct object – that is, the *brittleness* of the glass – and, concurrently, Sue's ability to use it. The verb also indicates that the glass underwent a transformation, that is, it does not afford the possibility of being handled and used any longer.

The same holds for *The glass was broken by Sue*. There is an important difference, however: while *Sue broke the glass* attentionally foregrounds the abilities of the agent and backgrounds the affordances of the object, the passive structure attentionally backgrounds the abilities of the agent and foregrounds the affordances of the object. Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that the possibility that verbs offer for directing the interlocutor's attention toward the subject or the object, can be used to guide the interlocutor's interpretation, judgment, decisions, and so on. For example, as Fausey and Boroditsky (2010) showed, agentive descriptions invite more blame and more severe punishment than non-agentive descriptions. In their experiments (studies 1, 2, and 3), participants had to judge how much people involved in particular accidents should be blamed and how much they should have to pay for the resulting damage. The

accidents were described using either agentive verb forms (e.g., *She toppled the candle and ignited the whole tablecloth*) or non-agentive verb forms (e.g., *The candle toppled and the whole tablecloth ignited*). The results of the experiments showed that agentive descriptions led participants to attribute more blame and request higher financial penalties than did non-agentive descriptions. This occurred even when participants witnessed the accident and had prior knowledge about it (study 3).

In *The glass broke*, the affordance that facilitates the process (brittleness) belongs to the subject (the glass). The intransitive use of the verb *to break* allows one to focus just on the grammatical subject's affordance, without mentioning the external agent or cause.

The verb *walks* in *John walks down the street* describes the activity that John can perform thanks to his ability to walk and the walkability afforded by the street. The verb also indicates that (at least) one of John's affordances, that is, its spatial position, has been modified.

The same modification occurs when *John runs down the street* but the manner of motion in which the modification is brought about is different (running vs. walking). Incidentally, it is worth noting that languages may differ in the way in which they lexicalize the various aspects of a process. For example, Talmy (1985), discussing motion verbs, provides an example of the different ways in which English (1a) and Spanish (1b) describe a bottle moving on the surface of a stream in the direction of a cave:

1a. The bottle *floated into* the cave.
1b. La botella *entró* a la cueve, *flotando*.

Talmy observes that while English incorporates the manner of motion (*floating*) into the verb and leaves the direction of motion to a separate preposition (*into*), Spanish does exactly the opposite: it incorporates the direction of motion into the verb (*entering*) and leaves the manner of motion to an adverb (*flotando*).

As we have seen in the section devoted to nouns, entities' affordances enable agents to perform actions that span from concrete to abstract. Just to exemplify, an entity's affordances can prompt cognitive processes such as those denoted by the verbs *imagine*, *judge*, *recognize*, *remember*, *think*, and *understand*, emotional states such as those denoted by the verbs *accept*, *admire*, *desire*, *envy*, *fear*, *love*, *hate*, and *like*, and behavioral actions such as those denoted by the verbs *cheat*, *command*, *encourage*, *help*, *hurt*, *inhibit*, and *warn*.

The examples that we have considered so far concern the finite form of verbs. However, verbs can also be used in a non-finite form, that is the infinitive, gerund, and participle. In this case, while retaining their fundamental dynamic content, they can assume the form of another grammatical class (noun, adjective, adverb). As such, they can be used as subjects, objects, etc.

Some verbs (e.g., *to be*, *to appear*, *to seem*) can also be used as copulas (e.g., *The sky is blue*). In this case, they behave as adjectives, in the sense that they allow for identifying one or a limited set of the subject's affordances, or for attributing new affordances to the subject. However, copulas differ from adjectives because the former introduce a temporal dimension that the latter do not afford.

The verb *to be* has three further uses: as an auxiliary verb (*The man was killed*; *It is raining*), as a verb that indicates the presence of an entity (*There is a pen on the desk*), and as an "existential" verb,[6] that is, a verb that indicates the existence of an entity (*I think, therefore I am*; *There is no God*). The existential usage allows for referring to *all* the abilities or affordances of the subject.

This is not the case with other verbs. Indeed, as a general rule, the combination of a subject with a verb requires that only one or very few of the subject's abilities or affordances are selected. For example, the verb *walks* in *John walks down the street* refers only to John's ability to walk: it does not refer to any other abilities that John could possess. Similarly, *The glass broke* refers only to one of the affordances of the glass (that is, its brittleness) and does not mention the others.

Moreover, the subject's selected ability or affordance must be compatible with the processes denoted by the verb: if the former is not compatible with the latter, such as in *The newspaper walked down the street*, we will have meaningless sentences or sentences that require a specific (e.g., metaphorical) interpretation.

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[6] It must be noted that the expressions "existential verb" and "existence" are slightly misleading when used to refer to the verb *to be* because they do not allow for distinguishing the verb *to be* and *to exist*. Actually, *to be* has wider applicability than *to exist*, and the two verbs cannot always be used interchangeably. A preliminary and tentative analysis based on the ontological classification put forward by Magni (2023) shows that *to exist* applies and refers to the Real, the Actual, and the Empirical, while *to be*, in its existential sense, applies and refers to the Learnable. In this view, *to be* denotes the cognitive process that leads (or led) a subject to ascertain, recognize, verify, etc. the existence of something. On the contrary, *to exist* denotes the (existential) condition of something, regardless of the cognitive processes that are (or were) performed to ascertain, recognize, etc. its existence.

An exception to the compatibility requirement is represented by the verb *to be* when used as a copula: indeed, *to be* allows for selecting *any one* of the affordances of an entity without any restriction or for attributing *any new* affordance to the subject.

4.2 The dynamic and the agentic aspects of verbs: implications for language users

The dynamic aspect of verbs has various implications for language users. The first implication is that they favor various possible ways of imagining and simulating[7] how the processes they describe can be realized. For example, the event described by the verb *drink* in the sentence *I drink a glass of water* can occur over varying durations and with different modalities (e.g., using the right hand, the left hand, or both). This characteristic of verbs may be exploited to find alternative and innovative ways to solve problems, achieve goals, overcome difficulties, resolve conflicts, etc., and to imagine possible scenarios and developments. This was clearly seen by Milton Glaser – the famous American graphic designer who designed the I ♥ NY (I love New York) logo –, who observed: "I think people need to be reminded that *creativity is a verb*, a very time-consuming verb. It's about taking an idea in your head, and transforming that idea into something real" (quoted by Lehrer, 2012, p. 69, italics are mine).

However, this characteristic can also have some downsides. On the one hand, it makes the processes they describe less easy to imagine and simulate than the stable entities denoted by nouns (Gentner and Boroditsky, 2001; McDonough et al., 2011). On the other, it may induce undesired reasons for concern, worries, doubts, etc. This is how the findings of Idan et al.'s (2018) about intractable intergroup conflicts can be interpreted. In their experiments (studies 1, 2, and 3 part 1), they asked Israeli students of various political orientations to rate their level of support for different concessions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Various concession items were presented using either noun labels (e.g., "I am for *the division* of Jerusalem within a permanent status agreement"; "I am for *negotiations* with Palestinians without preconditions") or verb labels (e.g., "I am for *dividing*

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[7] Various studies have shown that verbal descriptions of actions activate compatible motor responses (Glenberg and Kaschak, 2002; Zwaan and Taylor, 2006; Taylor and Zwaan, 2008), as well as the brain regions that are active when similar actions (i.e., those involving the same effectors) are performed (Tettamanti et al., 2005; Moseley and Pulvermüller, 2014).

Jerusalem within a permanent status agreement"; "I am for *negotiating* with Palestinians without preconditions"). Additionally, following each concession item, students were asked to indicate the extent to which they experienced anger toward the state (studies 1, 2, and 3 part 1) and Palestinians (studies 2 and 3 part 1) concerning the implementation of the given concession. Experiment 3 part 2 also tested the support for various retaliatory policies (which were also presented using either noun labels or verb labels: e.g., "*Demolishing/The demolition of* homes belonging to family members of those involved in terrorist activities") and the impact that concession and retaliatory policies have on other kinds of emotions: hope, fear, and guilt. The results showed that presenting concessions in noun form (vs. verb form) reduces levels of anger toward the state (studies 1 and 3 part 1; study 2 only marginally significant) and toward Palestinians (study 2) and consequently increases support for concessions. Study 3 part 2 showed that the use of noun form (vs. verb form) reduces levels of anger toward Palestinians, which in turn decreases support for retaliatory policies. In sum, the use of verb form (e.g., *negotiating with Palestinians*), by allowing for imagining various possible ways to implement the process that it denotes (e.g., with or without the involvement of third parties, by accepting or not certain compromises, by considering or not minor issues, etc.), may induce additional reasons for concern and worries, which in turn may lead to negative emotions such as anger.

A second implication of the dynamic aspect of verbs – the temporally limited nature of the processes that they describe – makes them preferable to nouns. As we have seen, nouns imply an essentialist, dispositional, and atemporal interpretation, which may render them unsuitable when one wants to highlight the temporary aspect of certain behaviors and activities. As Berger (2023, p. 19) exemplifies: "When arguing for leniency for a client, for example, a lawyer may say, *He's not a criminal; he just made a bad decision*. Similarly, a sports fan may say, *I watch some games, but I'm not a fanatic*".

Conversely, nouns are preferable to verbs when one wants to highlight the enduring, stable, and reliable nature of an entity (see the case mentioned above in the section "Nouns" of *helper* vs. the verb *help* reported by Bryan, Master et al., 2014).

The dynamic aspect of verbs also makes them suitable in contexts where concrete language is required to deliver precise operating instructions. As such, verbs denoting practical actions (*cut*, *paste*, *copy*, *fasten*, *rotate*, etc.) are preferable to the abstract language made up of evaluative adjectives (*beautiful*, etc.) or abstract nouns.

Finally, considering the agentic aspect of verbs, it can be generally said that verbs are preferable to other grammatical classes when one wants to increase message effectiveness by implying that the message sender is agentic and can act upon his goals. Formanowicz et al.'s (2021) study, for example, shows that slogans using verbs (e.g., *We act*; *Think out of the box*; *Persist in achieving goals*) are perceived as more effective than slogans using adjectives (e.g., *We are active*; *Out of the box ideas*; *Persistent in goal achievement*). This is primarily due to the sense of agency that verbs convey (Formanowicz et al., 2017), which is a basic dimension of human perception signalling dynamism and goal achievement.

4.3 Modal verbs

Modal verbs – *can/could*, *may/might*, *must*, *ought to*, *shall/should*, *will/would*, *need*, *dare/durst*, *had better* – can be considered as forming a specific grammatical category. Firstly, they are characterized by more or fewer of the following morphological and syntactical properties: lack of infinitive, past participle and present participle form, lack of *-s* for the third-person singular, postponed *not*, and inversion with the subject as in questions and formal conditional. Talmy (2000, p. 441) accords the honorary modal status to *have to*, *be supposed to*, *be to*, *get to*, and *be able to* because, even if they are morphologically and syntactically regular, their meanings and usage are so close to the real modals that they can be considered in the same terms.

Secondly, and most importantly, they have a specific attentional function: they foreground *the conditions* on which the performance of the process designated by the main verb depends (the main verb is the verb governed by the modal verb: e.g., in *I must go*, the main verb is *go*) while backgrounding the designated process. *I must go*, compared to *I go*, emphasizes the subject's obligation or sense of duty to go somewhere. Likewise, *I can go*, compared to *I go*, emphasizes the subject's ability or permission to go somewhere.

The conditions on which the designated process depends are of various types. They can indicate that the process depends on the subject, somebody else, a material circumstance, a moral rule, and so on. They can refer to abilities rather than obligations, necessities, intentions, or choices.

Modals can have either a sentient subject (*He should go*) or a non-sentient subject (*The cake must stay in the box*). Moreover, they can have either a basic, root (or deontic) usage (*John must not leave the house*; *The cake must stay in the box*) or an epistemic one (*There may be some snow by tomorrow evening*).

With a sentient subject, modals usually indicate that the subject is (self)aware of its own or someone or something else's involvement in the performance of the designated process. If I say *I must read that book*, I am not simply aware of what reading a book means and implies, but I am (self)aware that reading depends on a certain necessity or obligation that *I* have. In this perspective, verbs such as *to want*, *to imagine*, and *to intend* can also be considered similar to modals (Marchetti, 2023c).

Generally speaking, self-awareness arises when one sees oneself from the outside, as an entity among other entities. This implies, among other things, that one can see oneself as an agent equipped with the necessary affordances that can be used to achieve goals, satisfy needs, and so on – essentially, as a means to achieve an end (Marchetti, 2010, p. 23). Let's briefly explore how modal verbs map the various ways in which a self-aware agent can use its affordances to satisfy its own or someone else's needs.

When the modal verbs *can* is used to refer to a subject's ability (e.g., *I/He can run the marathon in under three hours*), the subject is seen (by itself or by the speaker) as an agent equipped with the affordances necessary *to perform* a certain task. The associated *could* form is used in past or conditional sentences, or to express generic possibility (*You could cause an accident driving like that*).

The use of *can* to give permission (e.g., *She can stay as long as she likes*) indicates that the subject's use of its affordances to perform a certain process depends on the speaker or another agent's decision.

The use of the modal verb *will* with a volitional meaning (e.g., *I've told her how urgent it is but she won't sign the form*; *I WILL solve this problem*),[8] as well as of the verbs *to want/intend/decide (to do something)*, indicates that the subject is seen (by itself or by the speaker) as an agent equipped with the affordances necessary *to set a goal for itself* (or, sometimes, for others: e.g., *I want you to go*).

The use of *must*, *should*, *have to*, *ought to* (e.g., *I/You have to/must/should/ought to obey Mr. Pitt*) implies that the subject is seen (by itself or by the speaker) as an agent equipped with the affordances necessary to act according to, or satisfy or fulfil, *someone's needs, orders, and desires or something's else requirements and necessities*. In this view: *have to* usually indicates that the subject is requested to use its affordances to fulfil an external authority's order (*You have to obey Mr. Pitt*: it is Mr. Pitt who insists on it); *must* usually indicates that the subject is requested to use its

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[8] The examples are from Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p. 193).

affordances to fulfil the speaker's advice (*You must obey Mr. Pitt*: it is the speaker who insists on or approves of Mr. Pitt's authority); *should* and *ought to* usually indicate that the subject is requested to use its affordances to fulfil moral duties, legal or economic obligations, and so on (*You should/ought to obey Mr. Pitt*: it is morally or legally advisable for the subject to obey Mr. Pitt).[9]

The varying emphasis that modal verbs place on the subject's affordances and their possible usages has various implications for language users. Let's consider for example the difference between *should* and *could*.

As we have seen, the use of *should* implies that the subject's activity depends on some moral, legal, or economic obligation. This verb is certainly helpful in certain situations, such as when one is looking for what is morally, legally, or socially right or wrong to do in a given situation: it is for this reason that organizations usually frame the principles to guide managerial conduct mainly in terms of *should* (Zhang et al., 2018). Framing a question by using *should* (*What should I do? What do you think I should do?*), assuming a *should* mindset, can help one choose the morally or socially right path. However, in many other situations, *should* is less helpful. Indeed, its use forces individuals to narrowly focus on weighing and choosing from among a few (usually two) possible courses of action. For example, when one faces the Heinz dilemma – choosing between stealing a drug that one's spouse needs for survival and obeying laws that protect property (Kohlberg, 1971) –, one weighs the moral costs of stealing against the moral costs of letting one's spouse die. This usually leads one to settle for the least undesirable option that meets one's ethical priority while providing justifications for failing to honor the other value. That is, using *should* severely reduces one's possibilities for action, as well as one's power to imagine alternative scenarios (obviously, this is also a means to relieve oneself from all one's responsibilities).

On the contrary, the use of *could* implies the awareness that multiple solutions might exist: the subject's activity does not depend on what someone or something else imposes but on the various possibilities afforded by the subject's abilities. Asking oneself *What could I do?*, and adopting a *could* mindset, may help one realize that the trade-off between saving a spouse's life and not stealing is not necessarily irreconcilable and that other solutions are possible that honor both competing imperatives (e.g., solicit donations through social media). This was empirically proved by Zhang et

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[9] The examples are from Thomson and Martinet (1980).

al. (2018). Across four studies, they found that adopting a *could* mindset, in comparison to a *should* mindset, enhances divergent thinking. Facing a moral dilemma, participants who framed the question in terms of *could* (*What could I do?*) reported having considered more solutions than participants who framed the question in terms of *should* (*What should I do?*). Moreover, independent assessors rated the solutions proposed by the former as more "outside of the box" and capable of meeting more moral imperatives than the solutions proposed by the latter. In sum, when facing ethical dilemmas, assuming a *could* mindset encourages greater exploration of possibilities than assuming a *should* mindset, and helps people shift from analyzing and weighing what they assume to be fixed and mutually exclusive alternatives to generating options that might reconcile underlying imperatives (i.e., to generate what Zhang et al., 2018, label *moral insight*).

Another example of the creative power of *could* was offered by Langer and Piper (1987). In their experiments, they showed that considering what objects *could* be, as opposed to what objects *were*, helped participants overcome the rigidity of considering only conventional uses of objects. When confronted with the need to erase a pencil mark without having access to an eraser, participants who considered what objects *could* be were more likely to recognize that a rubber band could serve the same function as an eraser, compared to those who only considered what these objects *were*.

5. Adverbs

The class of adverbs has sometimes been considered a "trash-can" class because of its heterogeneity (Cervoni, 1990). As Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p. 563) observe: "In the practice of traditional grammar (…) the adverb is a miscellaneous or residual category – the category to which words are assigned if they do not satisfy the more specific criteria for nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, and conjunctions".

Further complicating the situation is the fact that the functions of what was traditionally considered as the prototypical class of adverbs – that is, the class of single words characterized by a specific morphological form such as the English suffix *-ly* (e.g., *probably*) or the Italian suffix *-mente* (e.g., *velocemente*) – can also be performed by more complex linguistic constructions and by elements lacking a specific morphological form. For example, the idea conveyed by the adverb *quickly* can also be expressed through the prepositional phrase *in a hurry*. To account for this possibility, scholars have introduced the term *adverbial*. In this view, while the term

adverb identifies a specific class of words (typically, but not always, characterized by a certain morphological form), the term *adverbial* denotes any word, phrase, or clause that serves the function of an adverb within a sentence (De Cesare, 2016; La Foggia, 2018). Therefore, the term *adverbial* includes *adverbs* and larger groups of words that act as adverbs.[10]

Additionally, it must be considered that adverbials, although they typically modify verbs (e.g., *They [almost suffocated]*), can also modify (or supplement) other categories other than nouns, especially adjectives (e.g., *The article was [almost incomprehensible]*) and adverbs (e.g., *She [almost always] gets it right*), but also determinatives (*[Almost all] the candidates failed*), prepositional phrases (*They are [almost without equal]*), noun phrases (*She read [almost the whole book] in one day*), or a whole clause (*Annoyingly, they hadn't left us any milk*) (all the examples are from Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 562).

Adverbials have been variously classified according to their semantic content. For example, Huddleston and Pullum (2002) identify the following classes: manner (*She walked <u>unsteadily</u> to the door*), means or instrument (*Planets can be detected <u>radio-telescopically</u>*), act-related (*They <u>deliberately</u> kept us waiting*), degree (*The share price has increased <u>enormously</u>*), temporal location (*She <u>subsequently</u> left town*), duration (*We were staying in a motel <u>temporarily</u>*), aspectuality (*Some of the guests are <u>already</u> here*), frequency (*Do you come here <u>often</u>?*), serial order (*The play was <u>next</u> performed in 1901*), domain (*<u>Politically</u>, the country is always turbulent*), modality (*This is <u>necessarily</u> rather rare*), evaluation (*<u>Fortunately</u> this did not happen*), speech act-related (*<u>Frankly</u>, I'm just not interested*), connective (*<u>Moreover</u>, he didn't even apologize*) (all the examples are from Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 576). Biber et al. (1999, pp. 763-765 and 776-782) categorize adverbials into three main classes: *stance adverbials*, *circumstance adverbials*, and *linking adverbials*. Stance adverbials can be subdivided into *epistemic* (*It is very sad, <u>really</u>*), *attitude* (*<u>Fortunately</u>, this is far from the truth*), and *style* (*At twenty-tree minutes to*

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[10] However, this is not a universally agreed-upon definition. For example, Halling (2018, p. 7) uses the term *adverbial* to refer only to forms having more complex constructions than single-word adverbs. Biber et al. (1999, p. 538) distinguish between adverbs that serve as *modifiers* (when they are "integrated into an element of the clause") and adverbs that serve as *adverbials* (when they "function as an element of the clause"). According to their distinction, the same adverb can function as either a modifier or an adverbial. For example, the adverb *strangely* serves as a modifier in: *To put on a grey shirt once more was strangely pleasing*, and as an adverbial in: *Strangely, it is in this area that the greatest fears concerning CAD exist*.

one, to be precise). Circumstance adverbials can be subdivided into seven categories: place (e.g., *southwards, a long way*), time (e.g., *nowadays*, *tomorrow night*, *in January*), process (e.g., *slowly*, *with somebody else*), contingency (e.g., *And if you were in the mood, we could at least go*), extent/degree (e.g., *completely*, *hardly*, *a little bit*), addition/restriction (e.g., *also*, *especially*), and recipient (e.g., *to me*, *for you*). Examples of *linking adverbials* are *however*, *furthermore*, and *nonetheless*.

In this section, given the complexity of the subject, I will specifically address *adverbs* – as traditionally defined, that is, single words – that modify verbs (e.g., *She's totally absorbed in her work*; *They happily watched TV until dinner*). Consequently, I will not address more complex constructions serving the function of an adverb, such as adverbial phrases and adverbial locutions (*three hours late*, *five feet high*, *every day*, *twice a week*), nor will I address cases where adverbs modify or supplement categories other than verbs.

The function performed by adverbs that modify verbs can be better illustrated by comparing it with that of verbs. As we have seen, verbs direct our attention to the processes that are occasioned or favored by entities' affordances. In contrast, *adverbs make us focus on or select a specific aspect of the process referred to by verbs*. For example, in *He drank it slowly*, the adverb *slowly* makes us focus on the unhurried and gradual manner in which the action of drinking occurred. In so doing, the adverb *slowly* diverts our attention from other (equally important) aspects of the action of drinking – for example, the fact that, while drinking, the subject closed his eyes or was seated.

In their selective role, adverbs closely resemble adjectives. Just like adjectives, adverbs can select various types of aspects of a process. These aspects can be prompted either by an intrinsic property of the process or by a subjective evaluation performed by the speaker. Consequently, adverbs can be used to convey not only objective, context-related, and concrete information but also subjective, decontextualized, and highly abstract information.

For the specific aim of our study – that is, the investigation of how language, by piloting individuals' attention, shapes and influences their behavior, thinking, and cognitive processes, thereby constraining their exploration, elaboration, and explanation of reality – we propose provisionally categorizing adverbs according to the following main domains: *modality*, *spatial/temporal conditions*, *degree of accomplishment*, *genesis*, *source of knowledge*, *justifiability*, and *level of certainty*. These domains may, in turn, be organized into various dimensions.

Modal adverbs make us focus on how a process occurs or is performed (*He drank it slowly*), or what means or tools are used to perform it (*It was established mathematically today*). Modal adverbs usually direct our attention to an intrinsic property of the process, that is, on a property that is intersubjectively recognized as characterizing the process.

Spatial adverbs make us focus on dimensions such as where a process occurs, how far it extends, or the direction it takes. Temporal adverbs direct our attention to dimensions such as duration, frequency, position in time of a process, or its temporal relationship with another event. Spatial and temporal adverbs also typically direct our attention to dimensions of the process that are intersubjectively verifiable.

Adverbs indicating the degree of accomplishment make us focus on the extent to which a process has been completed (e.g., *completely*, *partially*, *slightly*, *almost*, *thoroughly*). This is also a dimension that, usually, can be intersubjectively ascertained.

Adverbs indicating the genesis of a process make us focus on dimensions such as the cause, reason, purpose, or conditions that prompted the process (e.g., *There was fortunately plenty of time*; *Chris had luckily forgotten it*; *The document may have unintentionally got into Soviet hands*). These dimensions leave enough room for subjective evaluation.

Adverbs indicating the source of knowledge about a process (e.g., *obviously*, *evidently*, *apparently*, *visibly*, *manifestly*, *naturally*, *objectively*, *clearly*) direct our attention to the conditions under which the speaker acquired knowledge of the process.

Adverbs indicating the justifiability of a process (e.g., *rationally*, *prudently*, *coherently*, *validly*, *actually*, *really*, *correctly*, *justly*) make us focus on how reasonable the process is for the speaker. We also include here adverbs such as *frankly* and *honestly* (*Frankly/honestly speaking*) that other linguists (Biber et al., 1999; La Foggia, 2018) consider as speech act-related.

Adverbs indicating the level of certainty (e.g., *certainly*, *definitely*, *probably*, *likely*, *indeed*, *undoubtedly*, *surely*, *necessarily*) direct our attention to the speaker's confidence in the occurrence of the process.

Each category of adverbs can be preferably used for a specific purpose. Modal, spatial, and temporal adverbs and adverbs indicating the degree of accomplishment are particularly useful in pragmatic contexts to direct the interlocutor's attention to practical, spatial, and temporal aspects of a process. Adverbs indicating the genesis of a process may be used to justify the occurrence of a process, both when the conditions that prompted it are known or when they are unknown. Adverbs indicating the source of knowledge about a process may be particularly useful in argumentative

contexts to persuade interlocutors about the "objective" validity of what the speaker is saying. Adverbs indicating the level of certainty are also used in argumentative contexts but mainly to highlight the speaker's authority or power (Szczyrbak, 2017). Adverbs indicating the justifiability of a process may be useful in persuading the interlocutor about the apparent (but not necessarily true) objective reasons behind a process.

We acknowledge that these categories might not exhaustively cover all possible cases of adverbs that modify verbs. Theoretically, we could also add to this list (i) adverbs of comparison (e.g., *equally*, *more*, *less*, *better*, *worse*), which allow us to compare the degree of one process to another, (ii) interrogative adverbs (e.g., *why*, *when*, *where* and *how*), which allow us to ask information regarding the manner, place, time, reason etc. of a process, and (iii) adverbs of negation (e.g., *not*, *never*), which make us focus on the absence or non-occurrence of a process. However, in these three last types of adverbs – compared to the adverbs listed above – the syntactic role seems to prevail over a purely semantic one.

6. Prepositions

In this section, I will exemplify how relators work by addressing one of their most important categories: prepositions. Relators play a relational role: they combine two or more linguistic elements, thereby producing a new entity that differs from both the individual elements we have combined and the relator we used to combine them. Think about arithmetic operators: by adding 1 and 2 (*1+2*) we obtain 3, which is something different from both *1*, *2*, and *+*. Likewise, *black hole* identifies an entity that differs from both *black*, and *hole*, and the implicit element that keeps *black* and *hole* together. Traditionally, scholars have identified – in addition to prepositions and arithmetic operators – conjunctions (e.g., *and*, *or*), subordinating conjunctions (e.g., *because*, *if*, *while*), copulas, relative pronouns, some adverbs, and some determiners as relators (Pottier, 1962). However, it is reasonable to also include in the class of relators all those linguistic constructions that allow for variously relating linguistic elements, such as the subject-predicate construction, the verb-direct object construction, and the noun-adjective construction (Ceccato and Zonta, 1980; Benedetti, 2011; Marchetti, 2023a).

What distinguishes prepositions from other relators is the specific way in which they combine or assemble elements. If we symbolize with X*prep*Z the new entity that a preposition (*prep*) forms by assembling two elements

(X, Z), and call it prepositional assembling (PA), we can say that *prepositions make Z determine X, according to the specific instructions each preposition provides*.[11]

Here, the term *determine* expresses the very general idea that "X is operated on or further elaborated based on *prep*Z, so as to make it more specific". As such, the term *determine* encompasses various notions, including delimit, define, specify, identify, modify, characterize, constrain, and of course determine. For example, in *Wine of Italy*, *Italy* determines *wine* – as instructed by the preposition *of* – by assigning an Italian origin to the wine as opposed to another origin (which allows one to identify the wine as a specific instance or kind of wine). Likewise, in *To hit with a hammer*, *a hammer* determines *to hit* – as instructed by the preposition *with* – by characterizing the act of hitting according to the property of the tool used to perform it. In other words, Z (*Italy*; *hammer*) determines X (*wine*; *to hit*) according to the operations expressed by the preposition (*of*; *with*).

As one can see, each preposition delivers its own specific instructions on how Z should determine X. It must be noted, however, that there is no general agreement among scholars in this regard. Some scholars hold that (some, if not all) prepositions, on their own, do not deliver any instruction – that is, do not carry any independent *meaning*, but acquire a full meaning only when used in the context of a sentence or phrase. This view seems to overlook the fact that by simply changing the preposition while holding the two elements it combines constant, as exemplified by (2), the overall meaning of the phrase changes accordingly.

2a. A glass with water.
2b. A glass for water.
2c. A glass of water.
2d. A glass under water.

This demonstrates that each preposition *does* have its own meaning, distinct from the meanings of the other prepositions. If prepositions truly did not carry independent meanings and only acquired full meaning from the other words with which they occur, the phrases in (2) would be indistinguishable in their meanings because the co-occurring words remain unchanged.

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[11] For those who want to delve into the differences between prepositions and other relators, see Marchetti (2023a).

Some other scholars hold that prepositions have multiple meanings. This idea typically stems from the observation that a preposition can be used in sentences that differ from each other in the meaning they express – whether it is spatial, temporal, instrumental, causal, or otherwise. This suggests that the preposition may have as many meanings as the diverse meanings expressed by the various sentences. However, this inference is incorrect because it confuses the products of the usage of a preposition with the preposition's inherent meaning. As relational tools, prepositions are akin to any other tools used to relate things, be it a dovetail, an electrical connector, an arithmetical operator, or something else. Their nature remains unchanged despite their various usages. As argued by Crisari (1971), maintaining that the meaning of a preposition changes when the elements it connects change is akin to asserting that the function of the symbol + differs in (3a) compared to (3b) merely because the addends change.[12]

3a. 3+2=5
3b. 2+2=4

Moreover, as noted by Benedetti (2011, pp. 57-58), the idea that prepositions have multiple meanings is highly implausible, considering that prepositions are among the most frequently used words.

Therefore, it seems more reasonable to hypothesize that most prepositions have only one meaning. This is also what my analyses of the most frequently used English prepositions revealed (Marchetti, 2023b). Table 1.1 offers a brief overview of these analyses.

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[12] The idea that prepositions have multiple meanings also poses some other problems, which I have listed in Marchetti (2023b).

Table 1.1. The instructions provided by the English prepositions against, at, by, for, in, of, on, over, to, with *and* without

Preposition	Instructions provided by the preposition about how Z determines X
Against	Make X exert its action on Z.
At	Assign the position that Z occupies in a certain domain to X.
By	Determine the characteristics of X on the basis of the reference provided by Z.
For	Construct something (A) as a result that is obtained by means of something else (B). There are two possibilities: either (i) (A)=X and (B)=Z or (ii) (A)=Z and (B)=X.
In	Assign some part of the space delimited and occupied by Z to X.
Of	Identify X on the basis of the domain provided by Z. Z can either be a domain of its own or a member of a domain.
On	Apply X to Z.
Over	Assign X with the capacity to mentally encompass part of the bounded domain represented by Z, including its bounds.
To	Develop the construction of X by using Z as the end point of the construction developmental process of X.
With	Associate the construction of X with the concurrent construction of Z, so that the construction of the former cannot occur if the construction of the latter does not occur.
Without	Attentionally discard Z in order to replace the positive representation implied by the PA with its negative counterpart (This is the primary meaning. The secondary meaning is akin to *outside*).

If we consider for example the preposition *over*, we can see that, regardless of the linguistic context where it is used, it consistently instructs one *to assign X with the capacity to mentally encompass part of the bounded domain represented by Z, including its bounds*.

The bounded domain can be spatial, as well as of other kinds. An example of the spatial domain is *Go over the bridge and turn right immediately onto a track leading into the trees*, where the bounded domain is the space under the bridge delimited by both ends of the bridge itself. In *The day Ruth walked*

out of this family – when she went over to the Roman Church – she cut herself off from us, the bounded domain is a conversion journey delimited by two entities, *family* on the one hand and *Roman Church* on the other. In *The process has evolved over the decade with the linking up of what used to be short runs into long, cross-country routes*, the bounded domain is the period during which a certain process occurs. In *Taking out of his pockets whatever might be in them – keys, pencil, purse, or pen-knife – and laying himself parallel with the edge of the hill, he actually descended turning himself over and over till he came to the bottom*, the bounded domain is the process of repeating a certain action.

In these examples (all taken from Col and Poibeau, 2014), the encompassing process entailed by *over* implies going from one side of the bounded domain to the other, be it the banks of a river, different religions, a period of time and a repeated process, respectively.

The mental operation of encompassing something has one of its most prototypical examples in the capacity to diffusely deploy attention on a global scale (rather than on a local element) (Alvarez, 2011; Chong and Evans, 2011). The encompassment can occur dynamically, as when one moves from one side of a place to the other (*Run over the glass*), or statically, as when an object covers a person or another object (*They held a large umbrella over her*); it can refer to the function performed by an object rather than to the object itself, as in *There was a lamp over the table*, where the encompassment refers to the area above and around the table on which the lamp sheds its light; it can lead to or imply either a continuous covering of the domain, as in *Spread a cloth over the table*, or a discontinuous one, as in *"Zeppelins of World War One" by Wilbur Cross tells of the little-known aerial battles that took place over England during the Great War*, which implies that the battle took place over different parts of England in different times.

6.1 The attentional effects of prepositions

As we have seen in the previous sections, when words are combined into a phrase, clause, sentence, text, or discourse, a process of selection occurs, by means of which only one or very few of the elements – affordances, abilities, features, and aspects – referred to by words are selected and focused on. When prepositions are used, the selection process prompts a double-attentional effect.

As we have seen, prepositions make Z determine X, in accordance with the specific instructions provided by each preposition. This implies that prepositions cause one or very few elements of Z to act on one or very few corresponding and compatible elements of X, thereby combining the selected elements of Z and X in the specific manner instructed by each preposition.

The outcome of this process of selection and combination of the elements of Z and X is a double-attentional effect. On the one hand, we are made to focus our attention on – and consequently become conscious of – the final product of the prepositional assembling X*prep*Z (and, possibly, its implications). On the other hand, *we are specifically inhibited from focusing on and becoming conscious of, a different outcome of the assembling process, rather than being inhibited generally from everything else*.

Let us illustrate this crucial point using the preposition *over*.

As we have seen, the preposition *over* directs our attention to the zone of the domain of Z encompassed by X. For example, in *There was a lamp over the table*, the preposition *over* directs our attention to the area on which the lamp sheds its light. Likewise, in *Go over the bridge and turn right immediately onto a track leading into the trees*, the preposition *over* directs our attention to the path that is delimited by the bridge.

Concurrently, the preposition *over* diverts (or defocuses) our attention *specifically from what lies beyond, below, or above the (spatial, temporal, or typological) zone delimited by the encompassment*. For example, *There was a lamp over the table* diverts our attention specifically from what stays beyond, below, or above the area on which the lamp sheds its light, rather than from anything else. Likewise, a sentence like *Go over the bridge and turn right immediately onto a track leading into the trees* diverts our attention specifically from what lies beyond, below, or above the path delimited by the bridge, rather than from anything else.

The focusing and defocusing attention effects can be observed with all prepositions. Table 1.2 summarizes the focusing and defocusing effects prompted by the most frequently used English prepositions (Marchetti, 2023b).

Table 1.2. The focusing and defocusing operations prompted by the English prepositions against, at, by, for, in, of, on, over, to, with *and* without

Prepositions	Attentional Focusing is:	Attentional Defocusing from:
Against	on the nature/typology of action, which is qualified by X and exerted on Z, to maintain or gain status	either the same kind of action on something/someone other than Z, or different kinds of actions than the one exerted on Z
At	on what it implies for X to occupy the same position as the one occupied by Z	events and matters occurring in absence of one or both the elements referred to by X and Z
By	on how Z qualifies/contextualizes/constrains the verb, which may be either stated or implied by X	what happens far from Z and/or its alternatives
For	on the final result that is obtained by means of either X or Z	what stands opposite to what is implied by the qualifying element (either X or Z), or what overrides what it states
In	on what is within the borders/boundaries delimited by Z and what being inside it implies	areas at the borders/boundaries and outside Z, and of what it implies not being inside it
Of	on the transformative/characterizing effect that Z imposes on X	elements of a different nature of what is qualified (in which case, Z is a domain of its own) or with the same nature but a different qualification (in which case, Z is a member of a larger domain).
On	on status/actions/functions/effects of X, which is in contact with, or applied to Z and whose function/role may be influenced, although it does not merge with it	what is beneath the surface or beyond the area or surface where X is applied to Z
Over	on the zone of the domain of Z encompassed by X, and the effects/implications of such an encompassment	what lies beyond, below or above the (spatial, temporal, or typological) zone delimited by the encompassment
To	on the process that leads to close the gap between X and Z	what is before or after the gap
With	driven along the two elements, where Z qualifies as a constituent of X, or the compound it forms with X, while maintaining its separate identity	what constitutes, belongs to, or is implied by X but is not affected by the link between X and Z
Without	on Z, whose presence represents/sets the norm, while the preposition declares its absence	the possibility of considering/accounting for the situation that the phrase describes as a precedent, which sets a new normality

These attentional effects may have important cognitive and behavioral consequences when prepositions are used. Let us see why by considering the use of *over* in the following text:[13]

"For me depression is hurt and pain it's fear and anxiety it's aloneness and terror. I have chest pain and nausea and feel all wound up. It is like a dark cloud hanging over me and it overwhelms me sometimes it envelops me and it's such a dark lonely frightening place I can't get out I can't escape and nothing makes it better. It is always there and it hurts and I hate it. It takes away my pleasure and replaces it with pain it has control of my life and I feel like I can't get it back. (…) It is a constant struggle and sometimes I feel I have no strength or courage left".

The simile *(Depression) is like a dark cloud hanging over me* describes an unpleasant state that negatively impacts a person's life and engenders feelings of oppression, impending danger, inescapability, and similar. As we have seen, the preposition *over* instructs one to assign X with the capacity to mentally encompass part of the bounded domain represented by Z, its bounds included. In the simile *(Depression) is like a dark cloud hanging over me*, the bounded domain is the person represented by the pronoun *me*, while the entity that performs the encompassment is the *dark cloud*. The term *cloud* qualifies the nature of the encompassment as something intangible, pervasive, and inescapable. The encompassment is further qualified by the adjective *dark*, which casts a foreboding shadow of intimidating dread, and by the verb *hanging*, which highlights the atmosphere of suspension and threat.

The use of the preposition *over* implies a double-attentional effect. On the one hand, *over* directs the interlocutor's attention to the upper part of *me*. Generally speaking, the encompassment of a person by a *cloud* can have various consequences, such as the interruption of direct sunlight to the person, the person's reduced capacity to see what is happening in the area of the sky hidden by the cloud, and the person's worries about the worsening of the weather conditions. In the specific context of a depressive state, these overarching shadow and lack of clarity and visibility convey the sense of something that constantly threatens the person, cannot be avoided and, because of its impalpable nature, cannot be defeated.

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[13]   Retrieved   from   www.depressionforums.org/forums/topic/470-pain-of-depression/page/25/?tab=comments#comment-208561.

On the other hand, *over* diverts the interlocutor's attention specifically from what stays beyond, below, or above the upper part of *me*. Generally speaking, this can lead one to ignore, for example, what is happening above the cloud in the sky, or to people other than the person referred to by the pronoun *me*. In the specific context of a depressive state, defocusing from what happens elsewhere or to others translates into the reduced capacity or even incapacity of the depressed person to see, think about, and imagine what is happening elsewhere and to other people. In turn, this can lead the depressed person to feel alone, to feel to be the only one fighting against his disorder (as it can be seen from the quotation above, the subject speaks of *aloneness* and a <u>*lonely*</u> *frightening place*), or to inhibit his capacity from perceiving or imagining what is happening outside of the focused zone (delimited by the *cloud* and *me*). In other words, defocusing hinders the depressed person from exploring possible solutions to his disorder – such as asking help from other people or institutions –, alternative behaviors and attitudes – such as trusting in other people's help, skill, and support –, and the causes of his disorder.

Further examples of the attentional focusing and defocusing effects prompted by the use of prepositions can be found in Chapter VI of Magni et al. (2023).

It can therefore be concluded that the use of prepositions, while on one hand allowing for the articulation, specification, and deepening of one's thought in a certain direction, on the other hand, may compromise and inhibit its possible development in other specific directions, along with all the related behavioral consequences that this inhibition implies.

7. Conclusion

Below the surface of specific language content, subtle yet powerful attention-based mechanisms are embedded in grammatical classes and conveyed by them. These mechanisms play a crucial role in influencing and guiding individuals as they perceive and assess reality. They exert their influence on individuals' decision-making and actions not only by directing their attention to specific aspects of reality but also by diverting it from other (equally or even more relevant) aspects. In this chapter, we have explored how these mechanisms work when nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions are used.

We have seen that nouns identify an entity by specifying the set of affordances that are intersubjectively attributed to that entity. As the set of

affordances that they specify is stable, nouns take on the property of *stability*. This property can be used to create and maintain, in the interlocutor, a sense of self and identity or to facilitate the interlocutor's identification with a preferred or longed-for category of persons (remind of Bryan, Master et al.'s [2014] experiment, which shows that children are more willing to assist adults with chores when they are referred to as *helpers* rather than when they are asked *to help*). It can also be used to guide the interlocutor in refraining from unwanted or undesired behaviors, as illustrated by the example *Please don't be a cheater* in Bryan, Adams et al.'s (2013) study.

However, the sense of stability conveyed by nouns can have the (undesired and unforeseen) side effect of perpetuating stereotypical beliefs, which then become difficult to overcome. Labelling a person with the noun *homosexual* induces stereotypical inferences (e.g., *to have one-night stands*) more than the corresponding adjectives (e.g., *X is homosexual*) and inhibits counter-stereotypical inferences (e.g., *to attend church*) (Carnaghi et al., 2008, study 2B).

Adjectives have the function of identifying (or selecting) only one or a limited set of the affordances of an entity by specifying the entity's features that make those affordances possible. Because of this, adjectives are ideal means to convey highly abstract and decontextualized information (Semin and Fiedler, 1988). As such, they can be used to address the interlocutor's attention only to the desired aspect of an entity, while diverting it from, or disregarding, the other aspects of the entity. However, their abstractness and lack of verifiability can lead to disagreements and disputes with the interlocutors because different people may have different standards for what constitutes the quality denoted by the adjective. Therefore, a more concrete language style is recommended in contexts where people have different opinions or views.

Adjectives can also be used to attribute new affordances to entities by relating them to domains to which they were never related before. In this view, they can innovatively expand the range of the possible usages of an entity or divert the interlocutor's attention from undesired aspects or features of an entity (e.g., *sweet death*, *assisted suicide*). As a collateral effect, they can inhibit the interlocutor's attention from considering equally or even more important aspects of the entity.

Verbs direct our attention to the processes that are occasioned or favored by entities' affordances. Consequently, verbs are useful for describing what an entity can do, what can be done with it, the capability it has to fulfil a specific purpose or to undergo a certain transformation or enhancement, and

so on. The potential offered by verbs is best represented in Kelley and Littman's (2001, p. 46) invitation: "*See products as verbs* – as animated devices that people integrate into their lives – and you'll become more attuned to how people use products, spaces, services – whatever you're trying to improve" (italics are mine). This metaphorical suggestion to see products as dynamic and action-oriented elements integrated into people's lives (rather than static or passive objects) is made possible precisely by the opportunity that verbs offer to describe the processes occasioned or favored by entities' affordances.

The temporally limited nature of the processes that verbs describe renders them useful also for highlighting the temporary aspect of certain behaviors and activities, as exemplified when a lawyer, arguing for leniency for a client, says: "*He's not a criminal; he just made a bad decision*" (Berger, 2023, p. 19).

The dynamic nature of verbs allows for various ways of imagining and simulating how the processes they describe can be realized, thereby fostering creativity and innovation. For instance, the event described by the verb *eat* in the sentence *I eat at home* can occur over varying durations, with different modalities, in the dining room or the kitchen, and so on. However, this property of verbs has the downside that the processes they describe may not always be easy to imagine. Consequently, verbs may induce undesired feelings such as concern, worries, doubts, fear, etc. (Idan et al., 2018).

The sense of agency conveyed by verbs makes them useful when one wants to stress the subject's ability or lack of ability to perform a certain action, accomplish a certain task, act upon certain goals, and so on.

Adverbs make us focus on or select a specific aspect of the process referred to by the verb. Considering the role that language has in the exploration, elaboration, and explanation of reality, adverbs can be categorized into some main domains: *modality*, *spatial/temporal conditions*, *degree of accomplishment*, *genesis*, *source of knowledge*, *justifiability*, and *level of certainty*. Each category of adverbs can be preferably used for a specific purpose. For example, modal, spatial, and temporal adverbs, and adverbs indicating the degree of accomplishment are particularly useful in pragmatic contexts to direct the interlocutor's attention to practical, spatial, and temporal aspects of a process. On the contrary, adverbs indicating the level of certainty are useful in argumentative contexts to highlight the speaker's authority or power (Szczyrbak, 2017).

In their selective role, adverbs closely resemble adjectives: by selecting a specific aspect of the process referred to by verbs, they divert the interlocutor's attention from other (equally important) aspects of the

process. Moreover, they can be used to innovatively expand the possible ways of perceiving and conceiving processes.

Generally speaking, relators combine two or more linguistic elements, thereby producing a new entity that differs from the individual elements that it combines. The combination implies a process of selecting one or very few of the affordances, abilities, features, and aspects referred to by the combined linguistic elements. This selection process triggers specific attentional effects that vary according to the relators used.

In this chapter, we have dealt with a specific class of relators: prepositions. After defining the new entity that a preposition (*prep*) forms by assembling two elements (X, Z) as X*prep*Z, we observed that prepositions cause one or very few elements of Z to act on one or very few corresponding and compatible elements of X, thereby combining the selected elements of Z and X in the specific manner instructed by each preposition. This assembling process has a double-attentional effect. On the one hand, it directs users' attention to final product of the prepositional assembling X*prep*Z (and, possibly, its implications). On the other hand, it specifically prevents users from focusing on and becoming conscious of a different outcome of the assembling process, as opposed to a general inhibition from everything else.

By unveiling the attention-based mechanisms inherent in language generally and specifically in grammatical classes, Learnable Analysis makes us aware of how language guides and constrains our exploration, elaboration, and explanation of reality and behavior. Moreover, it enables us to understand how language, by diverting and hindering our attentional activity, can sometimes represent an obstacle to societal progress and innovative solutions. Business leaders are encouraged to comprehend and harness these mechanisms to optimize their effectiveness and drive success.

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Chapter 2: How language enchains speakers
By Luca Magni

Abstract

The present chapter introduces a conic helicoid framework to describe the intricate dynamics that can be assumed to be at the basis of human symbols generation and the role played by semiosis, lexicon, grammar, and syntax in the shaping of learnables. This offers insights into the evolving nature of language and its profound impact on our perceptions, cognitions, and social interactions. Signs are here highlighted with their dependence on what individuals perceive and elaborate from reality, while meanings are described in their relationship with affordances and human needs. The conic helicoid framework is here proposed to guide the analysis of learnables in their interdependence with the development of languages, and their inhibiting effects in cognition – i.e. due to the *umbra cone* learnables project onto people's perceptions and the elaborations of the reality in which they are immersed. Examples of the enlightening and inhibiting powers relatable to the learnables are then provided to simplify how *Learnable-Based Linguistics* can guide towards further academic studies and/or field applications, either in business and/or in the management of healthcare.

1. Learnable Linguistics in practice

Building on the foundation laid in previous sections, this chapter delves deeper into the possibilities and tools that speakers and listeners have at their disposal to identify and analyze the learnables in language. Learnables refer to the cognitive horizons that limit individuals' access to reality and hinder their ability to achieve business success. By understanding these limitations, individuals can decide to emancipate themselves and their audiences from them. In the preceding chapters, we explored the different areas of language that can be analyzed: lexical, grammatical, and syntactic. Each of these areas is hereafter defined in learnable terms, i.e., highlighting the role that each of them plays in the construction and use of language-mediated human representational systems; systems that impact assimilation

and elaboration of reality and thereafter seem to prompt human decisions and behaviors. In this chapter, we offer a new pair of learnable enhancing lens through which readers can deepen their understanding of the use of words in the representation of reality (lexicon), in relation to the different functional roles each linguistic component may play (grammar), and/or with respect to the attentional dynamics words trigger (either directly and/or metaphorically) when they are used together (syntax).

The learnable-based perspective here proposed builds on recent neurolinguistics studies and less recent but nevertheless still relevant views that have developed in different contiguous fields, i.e., anthropology, psychology, philosophy, etc. One of these grounding standpoints of such multidisciplinary approach is the notion, originally proposed by Cassirer and subsequently reinforced by Deacon (1997), that humans distinguish themselves from other species because their interactions with external reality are mediated by an extremely sophisticated and complex symbolic system. A system that generates symbols connecting signs to meanings: where signs are characterized by perceptually distinguishable units and meanings emerge from affordances, relatable to the represented objects and converging into their defining concepts. In this respect, the meaningfulness of signs reflects their positioning into the map of human needs: a map that Maslow (1944) well described as being hierarchically ordered along the categories of physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs.

Maslow's theory of human needs is the result of his extensive research and observations. He developed his theory, conducting multiple studies and interviews with individuals he considered to be psychologically healthy and self-actualized. He examined their behaviors, motivations, and patterns of thinking, and he identified common themes and patterns that led him to propose his theory of the human needs' hierarchy. According to Maslow, human needs can be categorized into five distinct levels, which are arranged in a hierarchical order. These levels include physiological needs, at the base of the pyramid, followed by safety needs, needs of belonging and love, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Let us explore each category in detail:

1. Physiological Needs: The earliest, at the bottom of the hierarchy, are physiological needs, which include basic survival requirements such as food, water and sleep. These needs must be met before an individual can progress to higher levels of the hierarchy.

2. Safety Needs: Once physiological needs are fulfilled, individuals seek safety and security. This includes physical safety, financial stability, and protection from harm or danger. Examples of safety needs include a stable job, a secure home, and access to healthcare.
3. Belongingness and Love Needs: The third level of the hierarchy involves the need for social interaction, love, and a sense of belonging. Humans are social beings and crave connection with others. This includes forming relationships, friendships, and being part of a community or family.
4. Esteem Needs: Esteem needs refer to the desire for self-esteem and the recognition and respect of others. This level encompasses both self-esteem (feeling confident and capable) and the esteem of others (being recognized and valued by others). Achievements, status, and recognition play a significant role in fulfilling self-esteem needs.
5. Self-Actualization Needs: The pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy is self-actualization, which represents the fulfilment of an individual's highest potential. Self-actualization involves personal growth, self-discovery, and the realization of one's unique talents and abilities. It is a state of self-fulfillment and the ultimate goal of human existence.

It is important to note that Maslow's theory suggests that individuals progress through these levels in a sequential manner. Once the lower-level needs are satisfied, individuals can focus on fulfilling the higher-level needs. However, it is also recognized that individuals may experience fluctuations and regressions in their pursuit of needs, depending on various circumstances and life events. Maslow's theory is generally leveraged by managerial scientists as a framework for understanding human motivation and the factors that drive individuals to fulfil their needs. It continues to be influential in various fields, including psychology, education, and business, as it offers valuable insights into human behavior and motivation. Within the *Theory of Learnables*,[14] it complements the ***Generative System of***

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[14] Please note that while the ***Learnable*** concerns the philosophical dimension described in LEBO (Learnable Enhanced Bhaskarian Ontology), ***learnables*** can be viewed as its historical actualizations: a difference that roughly corresponds to the one between ***Language*** and ***languages***. Consequently, there is a distinction, to be highlighted, between ***Learnable Theory*** – which boils down to LEBO – and the ***Theory of Learnables*** – which deals more broadly with learnables and languages, their interwoven development and interplay, which can be leveraged for deconstruction/analytic purposes. These two theories are linked, but they are not the same thing.

Human Symbols, offering a sensible and interesting way to deconstruct *learnables* based on the lexicons and repertoires that languages enact.

The Generative System of Human Symbols accounts for the attributions of meaning, starting from pre-birth as well as in subsequent phases of life, when languages appear to play a relevant mediatory role, in all symbolic activities, performed by humans. The Generative System of Human Symbols is represented here below by a conic helicoid (Fig. 2.1), a geometric solid that seems to well express some of the key characteristics that the system has inherited from the plasticity of our brain and its neural components. Such central characteristics are: 1) the recursive repetitiveness, which is captured by the circularity of the spiral; 2) the synchronic antero-projection, which accompanies the sequential deployment of elements, along a diachronic verticality representing time. Each element participates in synchronous horizontal patterns (i.e., the learnables), as well as in sequential linguistic ones: acting as a point of radiation for explorative, elaborative, and explanatory activities. 3) The growth of the system, by Associative Sequence Learning,[15] may occur via contiguous and continuous aggregations of signs with meanings, which reflect into the concurrent growth of languages and learnables.
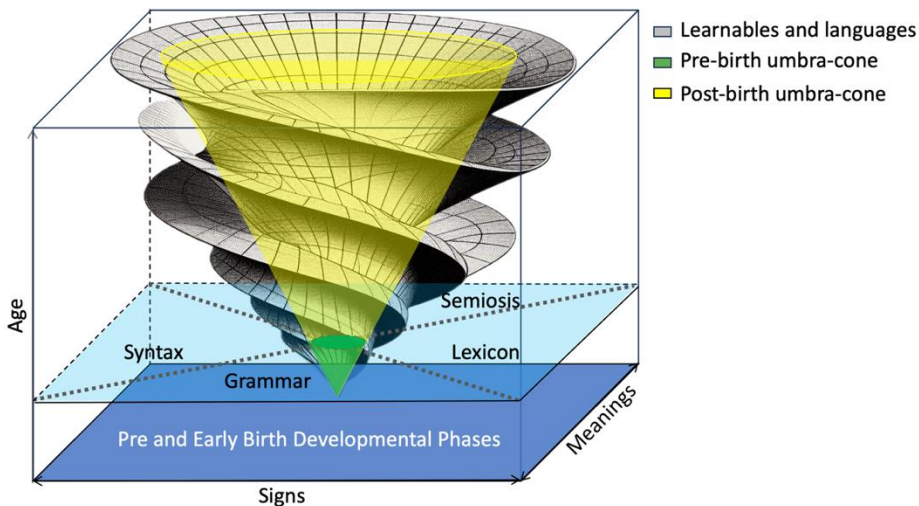

Figure 2.1. The Generative System of Human Symbols

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[15] **Associative Sequence Learning** (**ASL**) was formulated by Cecilia Heyes in 2000 and echoed by Christian Keysers and David Perrett (2004) who stressed the neural properties and spike-timing-dependent plasticity within learning.

To present how the conic helicoid can be leveraged in the identification of beliefs limiting and/or influencing key decision-making and behaviors, I propose to use Covid-19 as an example. A case that involved governments and healthcare systems worldwide, for a period of nearly two years. During the pandemic, a few crucial lexical, grammatical, and syntactic phenomena occurred and characterized the narratives employed at different stages of the pandemic event. Phenomena that can be leveraged to trace a clear symbolic path. In fact, there are many instances from the Covid-19 years that demonstrate how language choices can shape healthcare narratives, which in turn influence important choices and actions made by physicians, patients, and other important stakeholders in the healthcare system. The deconstruction along the helicoid of such complex interactions can be approached in the following way:

- *At the lexical level*, some discrepancies and discontinuities in the semantic field emerged, characterizing one of the most frequently used words in that context: the noun *vaccine* registered a significant change of meaning, as the affordance most relevant in determining its meaning shifted from injectable substance preventing contagion to injectable substance minimizing the effects of contagion. No neologism was created to illustrate this peculiarity and substitute the term *vaccine*. On the contrary, the same noun was constantly used, potentially expanding, beyond any reasonable limit, the advantages that some vaccines, despite their reduced efficacy, could continue to enjoy benefits ranging from preferential processes in registration and public financing/advertising of vaccination campaigns.
- *At the grammatical level*, the call to action first emerged with the frequent leveraging of nouns-to-verbs transformations (i.e., distance => to distance; quarantine => to quarantine), then the priority of such actions was reinforced with the nominalization of verbs (i.e., distance => distancing, quarantine => quarantining) in the numerous discourses and narratives pertaining to the pandemic. Finally, to protect the community from the expected phantoms/fears (i.e., the disruptive social effects of distancing), the linguistic exorcism of "social distancing" (i.e., with the adjective social semantically contrasting the nominalized verb distancing) was preached.
- *At the syntactical level*, "Covid-19 is like the plague in the 15th century" is the prepositional metaphor where the learnable linguistic discrepancies converged. This metaphor effectively classified Covid-19 as one of the deadly diseases and may have contributed to the postponement of efforts

to find a cure by focusing resources and attention on anti-contagion measures such as masks, quarantines, social distancing, and vaccinations.

Overall, one might assume that illnesses and healing experiences can be themselves examined as existential discontinuities that the human symbolic function interprets and elaborates as signals requiring an interpretation. When healthcare professionals do not provide explicit guidance, these discontinuities prompt a search within the semantic repertoires of the communities to which each affected person belongs or identifies. Unfortunately, these semantic repertoires may or may not have a healing effect; in certain cases, they may even taint medical professionals' assessments and decisions. Language is important in these processes because it allows people to make sense of their experiences, express their emotions, and communicate their needs. Language also reflects some of the most significant discontinuities that people face and, on occasion, serves as their source/reinforcement. This is why I strongly advocate for the use of narrative medicine and the humanistic perspective in healthcare and in the training of healthcare professionals. These approaches provide the opportunity to bridge material and immaterial elements which are involved in disease management, and they may assist healthcare professionals in spotting and managing linguistic and existential discontinuities that interfere with prompt diagnoses and cures.

Learnables are the result of human learnings; they summarize previous challenges and help preparing for subsequent ones, leading to an increasingly ample understanding of the outside world. They emerge and evolve along the helicoid symbolic path, which accounts for individuals' both intracranial and intercranial activities. The emergence of learnables and their evolution, akin to a conic helicoid, encompass the intricate and recurring interplay of semiosis, lexicon, grammar, and syntax. In exploring the different phases along the conic helicoid, one may delve into the profound dynamics of human language, as originally elucidated by Frank Dance (1967), whose work emphasizes the importance of language in the communication process and its role in shaping our understanding of the world. Dance posits that language is not merely a tool for communication, but a complex system that influences our perception, cognition, and behavior. The conic helicoid here presented can be considered as an extension of Dance's ideas. It provides a framework for comprehending the intricate nature of languages and learnables, the developments of which impacts both physical and social human realities.

At the origin of the conic helicoid, there is the overall recognition of the importance of semiosis, in the definitions of what reality is for our species and how human beings interact with it. Another pivotal assumption concerns the nature of signs and meanings. Signs are in fact related to perceived discrepancies (i.e., elements which can be detected by an agent as different from any concurring sensory and perceptual background or alternative signs). Semiotic analysis then realizes itself with the deconstruction/exploration of how individuals recognize and interpret signs, as such, and include them in their attentional screen. Let us remember signs can range from gestures and cries to more complex forms of perceivable semantic triggers such as metaphors, anthems, slogans.

Signs serve as the building blocks of any communication; they convey information and evoke specific responses. It seems therefore critical to stress that the helicoid accounts for the above mentioned perceptual semiotic prompt as the originator of any human comprehension of the world. Semiosis appears crucial to the development of language and to any subsequent language-mediated interactions of individuals with their external reality. Moving along the path of the helicoid, immediately after the semiotic phase, the lexical one follows. Lexicon encompasses the vocabulary of a language, consisting of its signs – words – and their associated meanings. In its simplest form, a lexicon includes words that represent and describe tangible and frequently used objects. As we progress along the helicoid, human lexicons may become larger and more complex, incorporating abstract nouns that cover intangible concepts and ideas.

The helicoid recognizes the dynamic nature of lexicon, reflecting the evolving needs and priorities of individuals and communities. Grammar and syntax, the next stages of the helicoid, govern the structural and organizational aspects of language. Grammar focuses on the rules and principles that govern the usage of words, including their inflections and relationships within sentences. Syntax, on the other hand, deals with the arrangement of words and phrases to form coherent and meaningful expressions. Expressions that can be descriptive/narrative, inquisitive/injunctive, metaphoric. Together, grammar and syntax provide the framework for effective communication, ensuring that messages are conveyed accurately and comprehensibly.

In this respect I encourage to leverage the Generative System of Human Symbols and investigate the benefits of extending some of the key

linguistic concepts it conveys, beyond the field of linguistics where they originally developed. I also suggest researchers focus on the studies on Semantic Primes and Natural Semantic Metalanguage (Wierzbicka, 1972 and Goddard, 2013) as these almost naturally combine with what the Generative System of Human Symbols proposes and define an area for multiple interesting cross fertilizations, particularly once the links between words' meaning and human needs are not only assumed, but adequately traced along their deployment and their development in different contexts. During her long career, Wierzbicka conducted many fascinating explorations into the very fabric of language, shedding light on the universality of human understanding. Semantic Primes and Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) are indeed two of the most interesting research areas that she introduced and very successfully developed with a group of international scholars, in the past few decades.

Semantic primes refer to a set of basic, irreducible concepts that are universally present in all languages. Wierzbicka and other NSM scholars assume semantic primes as being the building blocks for the construction and deconstruction of meaning within and across natural languages. They are thought to be innate, and they are common to all humans. Indeed, NSM may be considered, from this perspective, as a powerful reference to study meaning correspondences and gaps among words and expressions in different languages. With the identification and analysis of semantic primes, Wierzbicka provided valuable insights into the nature of language and the universality of certain concepts across cultures. It is by studying how such linguistic primitives relate to human needs, and whether their combinations can be linguistically related to their subsequent evolution that we intend to resolve a few challenges that business leaders may encounter when addressing audiences and employees whose needs might differ over time or be drastically impacted by different intervening events. The reflection about the primitives may explain how/why learnables and languages might develop differently in subgroups and their components, affecting their perspectives and perceptions of reality, and their receptiveness to whatever communication or request their leaders address to them.

Both Semantic Primes and Natural Semantic Metalanguage are very consistent with the dynamics illustrated by the helicoid model, and they also seem to benefit from the bridging that the helicoid operates between meanings and human needs. In fact, there seems to exist a viable opportunity to connect the very few nouns that are part of the list of 65 semantic primitives, as they were originally listed by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2002; 2014), and the motivational needs elaborated by Maslow. The helicoid

indeed stimulates some questions around the motivational grounding that back human symbolizations processes, not only for the formation of key semantic primitives, but also and more importantly for any subsequent elaborations leading to their composition in higher order derivates. Should the link between human needs and human symbolic activities be confirmed with further studies, the helicoid could assume, over time, an increasing relevance for the deconstruction of languages and learnables, along the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical pathways they describe.

I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY	Substantives
KIND, PART	Relational substantives
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE	Determiners
ONE, TWO, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW, SOME, ALL	Quantifiers
GOOD, BAD	Evaluators
BIG, SMALL	Descriptors
THINK, KNOW, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	Mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	Speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH	Actions, events, movement, contact
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING), BE (SOMEONE'S)	Location, existence, specification, possession
LIVE, DIE	Life and death
WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	Time
WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE	Space
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	Logical concepts
VERY, MORE	Augmentor, intensifier
LIKE	Similarity

Table 2.1. Semantic Primes (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2002; 2014)

Among the list of substantives that Goddard and Wierzbicka provided, four words adhere directly and more strictly to the orthodox grammatical definition of nouns. Hereafter I will call such words *primitive nouns*. Indeed, if we exclude from the list in Table 2.1 any pronouns (i.e., I, you, someone, something), or second order elements (i.e., kind => thing/person like other-else, body => place where people are/live/die), not only the remaining nouns are four, but they also appear to relate quite well to the human needs as these have been categorized by Maslow:
- *thing* relates with physiological needs, as it refers to material objects that can satisfy survival needs.
- *place* relates with safety needs, as it refers to protection from danger and environmental stability.

- *part* relates with belongingness to understanding the constituent parts of a whole, it refers to esteem needs.
- *people* relates with self-actualization needs, as it refers to personal identity.

Quite interestingly, once it is assumed that the Generative System of Human Symbols exists and it operates with some influence on the formation of the above-mentioned four primitive nouns and their derivates, the needs relatable to Maslow's hierarchy emerge as the source of possible meaning attributions for any symbolic representations including semantic primitives and their derivates. Needs compositional patterns then turn into viable references to study the formation of new words and the evolution of old ones characterizing each specific group and cultures. To exemplify what such needs-based semantics might look like, let us consider three unrelated English nouns, and proceed to their analysis via the primitives and the needs that can be leveraged in their definitions:

1. *Food*: This noun refers to a *thing* that people eat to satisfy their physiological need for nourishment.
2. *Friend*: This noun refers to a *person* with whom people develop friendships and a sense of belonging.
3. *City*: This noun refers to a *place* where people live and work together.

To conduct an analysis of such derivates, the Theory of Learnables invites to focus on nouns only, as these are the words that most directly connect with affordances and the human needs that such affordances satisfy. Once this concentration is achieved, nouns' links with Maslow's theory can be easily identified and this is what emerges:

1. *Food*: This noun appears to be correlated with *physiological needs*, as it represents something that people eat to satisfy their need for nourishment.
2. *Friend*: This noun appears to be correlated with *belongingness needs*, as it represents a person with whom people develop friendships and a sense of belonging.
3. *City*: This noun appears to be correlated with *safety*, belongingness, and esteem needs, as it represents a place where people live and work together to meet their needs for safety, belongingness, and esteem.

The above deconstruction/analysis discloses some semantic dynamics, which would otherwise go unnoticed. It points out different paths for different nouns. Some regularities and exceptions emerge which seem to offer new opportunities to support the discovery and possibly the tracking of human needs motivations and their evolution behind the words people use, in different circumstances. This opens the way to future studies on

individual/organizational lexicons and the opportunities for their development, when aiming at the change of cultural scripts (Wierzbicka, 1994), in view of specific challenges/opportunities for either individuals and/or the organizations they support. Retrospective studies may be initially considered and/or more safely conducted to investigate the rate of success that some lexical/grammatical/syntactical alternatives can reach when offered to individuals and/or organizations with the intent to reshape/synchronize their perspectives onto the realities they address and/or intend to address.

A thorough analysis of the above-mentioned approach would clearly require a fully dedicated study. For the purposes of this book, though, we can simply concentrate on the most pervasive phenomena that this perspective highlights and the numerous opportunities this kind of linguistic inquire offers in multiple contexts. Let us consider how motivational needs pass on from primitive nouns to derivates. Given my cultural background one of the things I noticed is that, when learning English, many Italians find it difficult to use properly some English words, particularly the ones that in Italian translate with the same term:
1) ***House*** and ***Home***, in Italian ***Casa***
2) ***Travel*** and ***Journey***, in Italian ***Viaggio***
3) ***Job*** and ***Work***, in Italian ***Lavoro***
It must be noted that both a *house* and a *home* can be defined as "*places* where *people* live" and this in both languages, *place* being evocative of safety needs and *people* being evocative of self-realization ones. That said, while the first class of physiological needs appears to be prominent in the construction of the meaning for the word *house*, the categories here mentioned second play a leading role in the framing of the meaning of *home*. Something very similar also characterizes *travel* and *journey*. Both terms indicate a situation when *people* go from one *place* to another place. In *travel*, though, security needs supersede self-actualization ones. On the other hand, the opposite appears to be true for *journey*. The words *work* and *job* also concern what people do to make things, or have things done. This time in *job* the physiological needs and the goal (aim/outcome) supersede any self-realization within the job, while the word *work* stresses the activity required to accomplish the role duties.

Although the investigation of how semantic primitives compose in such derivates does not seem to provide all elements to explain the ultimate distinctions in meaning, many things materialize once the analysis is

expanded to include the classes of needs originally proposed by Maslow. Then a repetitive and very peculiar modality of composition emerges highlighting a discontinuity, in meaning generation, which I like to label *Semantic Discontinuity*. This refers to the categories of needs that the Theory of Learnables proposes as the bases of meaning. While, by default, meanings appear to compose around the class of needs that conceptually reflects the lowest hierarchical class that is evoked by the primitive nouns leveraged by the derivates, the highest hierarchical class may sometimes be alternatively enacted and produce a Semantic Discontinuity whose perception pushes the symbolism at a higher level, enabling the conceptual metaphoric use of that very word.

Being conceptual metaphors a key constituent of learnables,[16] we might therefore consider the difficulty that Italians encounter in the correct use of English words such as *house/home*, *travel/journey*, *job/work* as a reflection of a deeper cultural dimension where such linguistic differences in meaning can be conveyed only via the compositions of different words (i.e. periphrases), where any metaphoric use might no longer be covered, or via other terms (e.g. *famiglia*-family, *esperienza*-experience, *arte*-art), which inevitably enact a set of very different metaphorical opportunities from the ones that the translated word evoked in the original language. This is just a very preliminary exploration into the interplay between semantic primitives and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It is merely the tip of the iceberg, revealing the vast and largely uncharted waters of semantic composition and its undercurrents of cultural significance. The preliminary findings, though, underscore the imperative for more rigorous and in-depth research in this domain. Consequently, there is a clarion call to experts in Semantic Primes and Natural Semantic Metalanguage to delve deeper into this relationship. Their expertise is invaluable in navigating the complexities of meaning as influenced by fundamental human needs, and in doing so, they can illuminate the subtleties of language that escape the untrained eye. Such scholarly endeavors could significantly advance our understanding of linguistic nuances and the cognitive frameworks that underpin them, offering a richer and more comprehensive map of the semantic territories shaped by our most basic needs.

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[16] The intersubjective constructs defining and constraining groups' views onto reality.

In the preceding section, we explored the different perspectives from which language can be analyzed: lexical, grammatical, and syntactic. Each of these perspectives were defined in learnable terms – i.e., highlighting the role they play in the construction and use of language mediated by human representational systems that impact assimilation and elaboration of reality and thereafter prompt human decisions and behaviors. This intends to provide a learnable enhanced lens through which anyone can deepen the understanding of the different linguistic elements that seem to have the largest and long-lasting impact on human representations of reality and the attentional dynamics such representations trigger in individuals and cultures. Building on the foundations laid in previous sections, here below the chapter delves deeper into other possibilities and tools that speakers and listeners have at their disposal to identify and analyze the learnables in languages.

While reminding that learnables refer to the cognitive horizons that limit individuals' access to reality and hinder their ability to achieve business success, we investigated lexicons, to highlight the relevance of affordances in the definition of the concepts represented by nouns. By identifying these affordances, we affirmed and demonstrated that individuals can gain a deeper understanding of the implications and possibilities associated with the use of nouns and other linguistic elements. This process allowed us to uncover the underlying connections and associations that shape the meaning of words and the concepts they represent. Moving on to grammar, we speculated on less static language elements, like verbs that engage users and their attention in the selection and transformation of affordances. This aspect of language analysis helps us associate causes and effects with the different elements that constitute the social and personal reference world of language users. By understanding how grammar operates, individuals can gain insight into how linguistic choices influence communication and decision-making processes. Finally, we explored the role of syntax in shaping meaning and understanding. Syntax focuses on the order and arrangement of linguistic elements and provides opportunities for higher-order metaphoric reasoning. By examining the order of words and the resulting implications, individuals can go beyond simple affordances and trigger actions, decisions, and behaviors with the support of similes and metaphors.

In conclusion, the conic helicoid seems to provide a valuable framework to visualize some of the intricate dynamics of the human

cognitive system. It acknowledges the role of semiotics, lexicon, grammar, and syntax in shaping our cognitive system. Leveraging the concepts represented by the helicoid, we gain insights into the evolving nature of language and its profound impact on our perception, cognition, and social interactions. Through further studies and research, the mysteries of the Learnable and its use can deepen our understanding of human language and communication as well as set a direction to deconstruct these into some of their key components. The helicoid aims to offer a comprehensive perspective on the development and evolution of human language. It recognizes that language is not static but constantly evolving, shaped by cultural, social, and individual factors. The interplay between languages and learnables within the conic helicoid seems to well portray how these two elements of the human cognitive system relate. It shows how their future, present and past intersect and are influenced by one another. A dynamic interplay, the one with past, present, and future, which also highlights the complex nature and effects of human communication. It seems reasonable to think that it is by understanding these dynamics and the limitations they cast on language users, that steps can be taken to emancipate language users from the Learnable constraints, which are linguistically enforced upon them.

2. When languages reveal speakers' learnables

The above-mentioned repartition of linguistic areas of intervention among lexical, grammatical and syntactic appears particularly relevant for the analysis of another interesting phenomenon: linguistic idiosyncrasies. These may be broadly intended as the features characteristics of different languages, or more specifically as the different uses of the same language by different groups within the same linguistic community. Idiosyncrasies may indeed manifest in various aspects of language, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and different language expressions in everyday life. One prominent example of a language idiosyncrasy is the use of gender in many languages. For instance, in Spanish, nouns are categorized as either masculine or feminine, without any clear rule for determining the gender of a noun. This can pose challenges for learners, as the gender assignment may seem arbitrary. For instance, the Spanish word for "house" is feminine, while the one for "car" is masculine. Another common language idiosyncrasy is verb conjugation. In French, for instance, verbs must be conjugated according to the subject of the sentence. This can be daunting for learners

due to the multitude of verb forms to be mastered. For example, the French verb *être*, "to be", is conjugated as "*je suis*, *tu es*, *il est*, *nous sommes*, *vous êtes*, *ils sont*".

Pronunciation can also present idiosyncrasies. In English, for instance, the pronunciation of the letter "r" varies depending on its position within a word. In the word *car*, the "r" is pronounced as a trill, while in the word *butter*, the "r" is silent. Furthermore, language usage in everyday life can exhibit idiosyncrasies. For instance, certain cultures consider direct eye contact impolite, while others view avoiding eye contact as rude. While language idiosyncrasies can pose challenges for language learners, they also offer intriguing and rewarding aspects of language acquisition. By comprehending the unique features of a language, learners can develop a deeper appreciation for the associated culture and its speakers. Below are some additional examples of language idiosyncrasies:

- In English, the word *to* serves various purposes, each with distinct meanings. It can indicate purpose or goal (*I went to the store <u>to</u> buy some milk*), express a relationship between two entities (*The cat is <u>to</u> the left of the dog*), or indicate a range (*From 10 to 50*).
- In Spanish, the verb *ser* "to be" undergoes conjugation variations based on tense, mood, and person. For instance, in the present tense, the verb is conjugated as "*soy*, *eres*, *es*, *somos*, *sois*, *son*".
- In French, the word *tu* can be used to address both friends and family members, but it is considered more informal than the word *vous*.
- In Japanese, the word *desu* serves as a polite sentence-ending expression, suitable for both formal and informal contexts.
- In Chinese, the phrase *ni hao* is a common greeting meaning "hello", applicable to both acquaintances and strangers.

These examples merely scratch the surface of the numerous language idiosyncrasies that can be found worldwide. By familiarizing themselves with these idiosyncrasies, learners can deepen their understanding of the languages they are studying. Semantic idiosyncrasies involve words or phrases whose meanings differ from their literal interpretations. For instance, the phrase *to kick the bucket* signifies death, even though the act of kicking a bucket does not cause mortality. Semantic idiosyncrasies exist in all languages. Common examples in English include:

- To kick the bucket: to die
- To have a frog in your throat: to be unable to speak clearly

- To be on cloud nine: to be very happy
- To be green with envy: to be very jealous

Non-native speakers may find semantic idiosyncrasies challenging to learn, as they often defy literal translation. However, they can also add humor and creativity to language usage.

Grammar idiosyncrasies encompass grammar rules specific to a particular language. For instance, in English, the verb *to be* must be conjugated according to the subject of the sentence. In Spanish, the verb *ser* must be conjugated based on tense, mood, and person. Non-native speakers may encounter difficulties in learning grammar idiosyncrasies, as they may deviate from the grammar rules they are accustomed to. Nevertheless, these idiosyncrasies play a crucial role in effective communication in a new language. Syntax idiosyncrasies pertain to syntax rules unique to a particular language. For example, in English, the subject of a sentence must precede the verb. In Spanish, however, the verb can appear before or after the subject, depending on the sentence type. Non-native speakers may find syntax idiosyncrasies challenging to grasp, as they may diverge from the syntax rules they are familiar with. Nonetheless, these idiosyncrasies are essential for effective communication in a new language.

Linguistic idiosyncrasies may hold significant importance in the business world, and being aware of these elements can greatly benefit business leaders. Understanding and utilizing language idiosyncrasies can enhance communication, foster cultural understanding, and facilitate successful business interactions. Here are some examples of when business leaders may benefit from knowing or using language idiosyncrasies:

1. Negotiations: In international business negotiations, knowing the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the target language can help business leaders navigate delicate situations and build rapport. For instance, in some cultures, indirect communication is preferred, and understanding this preference can prevent misunderstandings and promote effective negotiation strategies.

2. Marketing and Advertising: Language idiosyncrasies play a crucial role in crafting effective marketing and advertising campaigns. Tailoring messages to align with the linguistic nuances of the target audience can enhance engagement and resonate with potential customers. For example,

using idiomatic expressions or wordplays that are specific to the local language can create a sense of familiarity and connection.

3. Customer Service: Language idiosyncrasies are particularly relevant in customer service interactions. Being aware of cultural norms and linguistic preferences can help business leaders provide personalized and effective customer support. For instance, using appropriate honorifics or formal language in certain cultures can demonstrate respect and professionalism.

4. International Expansion: When expanding into new markets, understanding language idiosyncrasies is essential for successful market entry. Adapting product names, slogans, or branding to align with local linguistic preferences can help businesses establish a strong presence and avoid unintended negative connotations. For example, the Chevrolet Nova faced challenges in Spanish-speaking markets as "*no va*" translates to "it does't go".

5. Cross-Cultural Collaboration: In multinational teams, language idiosyncrasies can impact effective collaboration and teamwork. Business leaders who are aware of these idiosyncrasies can foster a more inclusive and harmonious work environment. For instance, understanding the importance of indirect communication in certain cultures can encourage open dialogue and prevent misunderstandings. By recognizing and utilizing language idiosyncrasies, business leaders can navigate cultural differences, build stronger relationships, and ultimately achieve success in the global marketplace.

It must be noted that language changes often accompany the development of new social formations (i.e., groups and communities of practice) and such discontinuities can be categorized, with reference to the specific tripartition that was mentioned earlier. **Lexical discrepancies** manifest in various forms, such as the massive introduction of neologisms, where new affordances converge into new concepts represented by new words. Another form of discontinuity is semantic extension, where new affordances converge into new concepts represented by existing words. Lexical changes occur when there are discrepancies or variations in the meaning of words or concepts. These discrepancies can reveal new learnables and expand our understanding of reality. An example of a semantic discrepancy is offered by neologisms, which are new words that are forged to represent new affordances or new aggregations of affordances into concepts. Neologisms extend the capabilities of a language to convey new concepts and provide users a more direct access to the concepts they

need. For instance, the term *noob* originated in the gaming community and signifies a novice or inexperienced player. This neologism reveals the concept of a beginner, or someone lacking expertise, in that cultural domain. Semantic extensions are another form of lexical discrepancy that reveals the emerging of new learnables. In this case, new affordances converge into existing signs, resulting in the creation of alternative meanings of certain words. For example, the word *mouse* originally referred to a small rodent but has been semantically extended to represent a computer input device. This semantic extension reveals that languages adapt to satisfy the representational needs that new learnables require and evolve to incorporate new affordances and concepts.

Nominalizations are yet another form of discontinuity. They occur when a verb is transformed into a noun, allowing for the representation of actions through their discursive use as transformable entities. These **grammatical discontinuities** reveal learnables that sustain deeper exchanges on abstract concepts and the transformation of specific instances or occurrences. For instance, the verb *to run* can be nominalized into the noun *running*, representing the action or activity of running. This nominalization reveals a learnable intersubjective context where the action of running itself is relevant and deserves opportunities to be discussed together with its possible transformations. The concept that the nominalized verb conveys is that it expresses actions or processes so important to be dealt as concrete entities. Moving on to other forms of grammatical discontinuities, we can consider the adjectives that normally operate their selection of affordances among the ones most frequently associated with the nouns they describe. These adjectives may, on the other hand, evoke contexts very different from the ones that reposition the element represented by the noun into a different context, introducing a shift in meaning. Similarly, adverbs can evoke transformations beyond the expected ones related to the verbs they support, further contributing to grammatical discrepancies. When it comes to adjectives and adverbs it is important to distinguish between their principal qualifying and filtering role, which they play in phrases with other words, and the least common but attentionally relevant one that they tend to perform in isolation. There are instances when adjectives and adverbs relinquish from their core selective function and

accomplish a very different task. In the brevity of company slogans,[17] for example, adjectives are often used, in isolation and/or with an adverbial function, in a role that I would define of *false qualificatives*. There they extend rather than restrict the overall semantic grip of the utterance they compose. In the same contexts, modal verbs often do the same: rather than playing a subaltern role and forge a specific effect onto the verbs they serve, modal verbs act there independently, diverting users' attention into the elaboration of general powers, desires, or necessities. By analyzing the grammatical discontinuities that impact nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and other attentional operators, we count to better explain the role of the languages we speak in the shaping and understanding of our world.

Linguistic Exorcisms – the case of adjectively enacted cognitive inhibitions – are another interesting example of grammatical discontinuity. There nouns are contrasted by adjectives that do not select among the affordances normally related to the semantic dominium of the nouns they qualify. Instead, they operate by repositioning the element represented by the noun into a completely different semantic context. Example of this kind of discrepancy can be found in expressions like: "recreational drugs", "ethical products", "vertical forest", etc. Here, the adjectives *recreational*, *ethical*, *vertical* do not describe any typical affordances semantically associated with pharmaceutical products, drugs, or forests, but rather they refer to moral, amenable, and physical dimensions very distant form the ones normally pertaining to the nouns they should qualify. These grammatical discrepancies provide a shelter from unspeakable fears and/or threats, which other linguistic choices do not offer. In *linguistic exorcisms*, speakers' attention is diverted from specific evil/negative aspects, which are never explicitly expressed, but are revealed and addressed in the C*omplementary Semantics* that is enacted by discrepant qualifiers. All this is consistent with the *helicoid model* and the *umbra cone* effects, which accompany the generation of any human symbolic representations.

Competence Crystallizations – the case of adverbially captured competences – offer another example of grammatical discrepancies, where adverbs evoke transformations which would not be typically associated with

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[17] Slogans emphasize what Companies do and the transformations they can bring. It is by highlighting the various possibilities and benefits that their products offer, that slogans remain inclusive and appeal to a wide range of people. Nouns, particularly concrete ones, would very poorly serve such an inclusive purpose.

the verbs they support. For instance, the phrase *cooking pasta al-dente* includes the adverbial phrase *al-dente*, which refers to the desired texture of the pasta. This adverbial discrepancy reveals the learnable, where the adverb provides specific instructions or preferences that go beyond the typical transformations associated with the verb *to cook*. It implies high personal engagement in the practice/process of cooking requiring the tasting of what you are cooking, while you are cooking; it also stresses ample sensory intersubjective connections of a community that converge within the act of cooking and eating: when deciding the cooking time for a pasta al-dente, an Italian would in fact take into account when the dish will be served (immediately or a few minutes later), and the tasting preferences, habits, chewing abilities of the people (e.g., children and elderly) sitting at the table.

Syntactic discrepancies, on the other hand, revolve around the atypical order and arrangement of different linguistic elements. An example of syntactic discrepancy is the positioning of verbs before subjects, as in the formulation of questions or in hyperbaton, as seen in the sentence *On the table sat a vase of flowers*, which also represents a form of syntactic discrepancy that, similarly to questions, stimulates a response (i.e., an action) from the audience. The "sitting" of the vase on the table, in this case, seems to evoke a personification of the vase, paving the way for more vivid interactions of the subject and/or other objects with it. There the verb does not transform any of the affordances of the object – as it would be normally expected using the intransitive verb "to sit" – but it personifies the object. Another example of a syntactic discrepancy is when an adjective follows a noun, contrary to the usual order. For instance, we typically say *a responsible person*, but in certain contexts we can say *the person responsible*. This syntactic discrepancy semantically operates on the attentional restrictive effect of the adjective: it shifts our attention from any individual personal autonomy or power to his/her guilt or accountability. The adjective following the noun primes here judgmental/evaluative settings, where actions or behaviors are not the same as the ones contemplated in the first and more standard use.

Another syntactic discrepancy occurs when verbs anticipate the subjects. This turns affirmative phrase into questions and thereafter call for a reply. Distinguishing strings of words between descriptive/declarative phrases and injunctions, one may affirm that the anticipation of verbs to subject in a way operates a transformation of any descriptive strings into injunctions (i.e., calls to provide an answer). That is for instance what

happens when the order of the phrase *You are John* is changed into *Are you John?*. Hyperbatons offer in this sense another form of syntactic discrepancy. They involve the deliberate rearrangement of words in a sentence, for rhetorical or poetic reasons, they also often leverage analogies or metaphors. As per, the sentence *On the table sat a vase of flowers* deviates from the typical subject-verb-object order and characterizes the vase of flowers as a human presence. Metaphors and similes also represent a form of discrepancy: they concern strings of words which are syntactically correct, but semantically detached from the original descriptive messages and/or injunctions they were framed to deliver. These syntactic discrepancies reveal that language can be creatively manipulated for stylistic or expressive purposes. But while this is something generally accepted and understood, what is less known – at least in the world of business – is that such manipulations often survive their original appearance and they may end up expressing a detrimental effect for years, generally operating at subconscious level and at the expenses of both users and their audiences.

From a learnable perspective, when any linguistic element is used or ordered in ways that contravene expectations and/or established norms, it is crucial to examine the implications of such discontinuities and investigate the attentional dynamics they trigger and the meaning they might assume within the community of their users. Among the various discrepancies discussed earlier, the category of syntactic discrepancies appears, in this respect, to be particularly relevant. These discrepancies have indeed the power to act onto existing similes and metaphors, therefore they have the power to prompt and/or inhibit actions, decisions, and behaviors, almost immediately (as we amply treated in Magni, Marchetti, Alharbi, 2023, where we presented the attentional focusing and defocusing effect of prepositions when they are used in similes and metaphors). Something very similar also happens with the awkward use of double negation in injunctions:[18] there the attentional operators *no*/*not*/*anti-*/*un-* which would singularly focus the attention of speakers and listeners on the negated elements, once they are oddly coupled, shelter the injunction they express from any rational assessment by recipients, obtaining their unquestioned obedience.

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[18] Please note that injunctions such as *Don't be no-vax*, *Don't be unrealistic*, etc. are injunctions that, contrary to what one might assume, go well beyond the invitations of being pro-vax or realistic, as they inhibit any rational evaluation of what being pro-vax and realistic means.

We can therefore state that languages reveal learnables, not only through lexicon, grammar, and syntax but also, and even more explicitly, through various discrepancies which may occur within each of such linguistic areas. These discrepancies are worth noting, as they seem to provide further insights into how language functions and how learnables are therein conveyed. That is why we encourage delving into these three specific types of discrepancies: lexical discrepancies, grammatical discrepancies, and syntactic discrepancies. To fully comprehend the impact of such linguistic idiosyncrasies on human cognitive horizons and discuss their possible use to pursue business success, it is important to explore specific examples and delve deeper into their impact on human decision-making and behaviors. Therefore, here below we examine several cases that highlight the ways in which language reveals speakers' learnables and the steps necessary to emancipate oneself from them.

Lexical discrepancies	
Neologisms: new affordances converge into new concepts/signifiers of new words (e.g., *noob*).	Semantic extensions: new affordances converge into new concepts/signifiers of old words (e.g., *mouse*).
Nominalizations: when a verb is turned into a noun (e.g. *to run => running*).	Verbalization: when a noun is turned into a verb (e.g. *quarantine => to quarantine*).
Grammatical discrepancies	
Adjectives that do not select among the affordances normally related to the nouns they qualify, but reposition the element represented by the noun into a completely different context (e.g., *recreational drugs, ethical drugs, vertical forest*).	Adverbs that do not select among the transformations normally related to the verbs they support, but evoke other transformations (e.g., cooking pasta *al-dente*).
Syntactic discrepancies	
Subjects that follow the verbs (e.g., *You are John* vs *Are you John?*).	Adjectives that follow nouns (e.g., *A responsible person* vs *The person responsible*).
Hyperbatons (e.g., *On the table sat a vase of flowers*).	Injunctions or descriptive strings of words that turn into similes and metaphors (e.g., *Life is like a journey*).

Table 2.2. Language discrepancies and learnable development

3. Learnable attrition

Besides the acquisition of language capabilities and the expansion of learnables and abilities these may trigger, it seems equally interesting to consider how language and learnables shrinking may occur and according to which dynamics and with what effect. Studies on language attrition and how it may be related to the acquisition of distinctive capabilities appear particularly intriguing. Language attrition is indeed a complex phenomenon that involves the gradual loss of language skills and proficiency in individuals who are no longer exposed to or actively using a particular language. This section aims to explore the impact of language attrition on lexicon, grammar, and syntax, providing examples of attrition phenomena within these language components.

Impact on lexicon: Language attrition can significantly impact an individual's lexicon, leading to a reduction in vocabulary and difficulties in retrieving words. For example, individuals who have migrated to a different country and are no longer immersed in their native language may experience attrition in their lexicon. Studies have shown that attrition can result in decreased lexical access and retrieval speed (e.g., Köpke and Schmid, 2004). Additionally, attrition may lead to the loss of specialized vocabulary and idiomatic expressions that are not commonly used in the individual's new linguistic environment (e.g., Schmid, 2002).

Impact on grammar: Language attrition can also affect an individual's grammatical knowledge and proficiency. Attrition phenomena may manifest in the loss of grammatical structures, resulting in simplified or incomplete sentence constructions. For instance, individuals who have not used their native language for an extended period may struggle with maintaining grammatical accuracy and complexity. Studies have shown that attrition can lead to the omission of grammatical markers, errors in verb tense and agreement, and difficulties in sentence structure (e.g., Schmid, 2002; Montrul, 2008).

Impact on syntax: Syntax, the study of sentence structure and word order, is another area affected by language attrition. Attrition can lead to changes in syntactic patterns and the loss of syntactic flexibility. For example, individuals who have shifted to a different language may experience attrition in their native language's syntactic rules and patterns. Studies have shown that attrition can result in the simplification of sentence

structures, the loss of syntactic complexity, and the adoption of syntactic patterns from the dominant language (e.g., Schmid, 2002; Montrul, 2008).

Relevant studies: Several studies have investigated language attrition and its impact on lexicon, grammar, and syntax. For example, Schmid (2002) examined attrition phenomena in German-English bilinguals and found evidence of lexical attrition, including reduced vocabulary and difficulties in word retrieval. Montrul (2008) explored attrition effects on grammar and syntax in Spanish-English bilinguals and observed changes in tense and agreement marking, as well as simplification of sentence structures. Köpke and Schmid (2004) conducted a study on attrition in German-Italian bilinguals and found evidence of slower lexical access and difficulties in grammatical processing.

Given the significant impact of language attrition on lexicon, grammar, and syntax and the relevance these seem to have on people's ability to access, elaborate and interact with reality, we believe that such phenomenon is pivotal to investigate the development of learnables over time. The loss of vocabulary, changes in grammatical structures, and alterations in syntactic patterns are common attrition phenomena. Understanding the specific effects that such attritions may have on the umbra cone limiting the learnable of individuals who are part of a community might indeed have important practical applications in business. Interesting examples of competence attrition which seem to perfectly match the hypothesis we introduced have been presented by Guercini and Lechner (2023). Additional research is nevertheless needed to explore the underlying mechanisms further, providing insights into effective strategies for mitigating any attrition effects and supporting relevant language maintenance and revitalization efforts when these are required.

4. Diving into linguistics exorcisms

A closer look at *linguistic exorcisms* is here provided to offer a clear example of what is implied by Learnable-Based Linguistics and by the helicoid model. The analysis of the three examples quoted in Table 2.2 – *vertical wood/forest*, *ethical products*, *recreational drugs* – are here pursued to illustrate the steps required to enter the umbra cone that symbolic human representations cast on reality, via languages and the pieces of learnables they convey. In this respect it appears relevant to remind that learnables are

the cognitive horizons that <u>limit</u> people access to reality. By objecting to the idea of unconstrained learnability of reality even when empirically accessible, Learnable Theory affirms the existence of an umbra cone, and it emphasizes the need to study how such inhibited area is originated and the effects it has on people's views, choices, and behaviors. We refer to these studies as *Complementary Semantics* as the semantic domains they consider are generally complementary to the ones pertaining the words that form the utterance under scrutiny.

Our investigations of the umbra cone*s* projected by linguistic exorcisms onto reality revealed the possibility to uncover their inhibitory reach, within the complementary semantic area that each semantically inconsistent adjective-noun coupling defined. The complementary meanings, of both the adjectives and the nouns that compose each exorcism forge the umbra cone that limits the learnables of their users. *Vertical Forests* (the skyscrapers covered with plants) find/enact their umbra cones onto the *horizontal cementification* they require for their construction. *Ethical products* divert the attention of speakers and audiences from the relatable *unethical activities* or *behaviors* they may induce. *Recreational drugs* defocus the attention from any of the *alienating addictions* they may cause.

It seems worth noting that not all semantically inconsistent adjective-noun couplings are to be considered linguistic exorcisms. As it happens to metaphor in the early phases of their development, it seems reasonable to assume that also linguistic exorcisms do not possess any symbolic power beyond the descriptive ones commonly performed by the words they include. It is only after higher-order recursive symbolic iterations that potentially exorcistic and metaphoric strings assume either a broader inhibiting or metaphorical power. That moment of symbolic evolution can be seen as the time when such linguistic expressions turn into learnables. While, in metaphors, common linguistic strings cease to be descriptive and become metaphoric when a separation occurs between the source domain and a target domain for the attributions of meaning, in linguistic exorcisms, the transformation seems to happen when the adjective-noun pair becomes an identifier of specific entities and is no longer a defining phrase to detect qualities/characteristics of similar entities. The vertical forest is not a building adorned with plants, but a construction that embodies a set of very specific and distorted eco-systemic ambitions.

In this sense, I would affirm that the conical helicoid effectively portrays the symbolic dynamics through which our species represents, shares, and processes reality. In its three-dimensional spiral path, it expresses what, through repeated and recursive semiotic, lexical, grammatical, and syntactic passages, seems to lead to the construction of languages and learnables, as well as the emergence of shadow areas where access and processing are inhibited by languages and learnables. The joint development of Language/languages and Learnable/learnables can be reasonably assumed to adhere to the following a 4-phases recursive symbolic path: firstly, general signs are attentionally prioritized and associated to meanings (semiosis); secondly, strings of signs are composed into words and grouped into increasingly larger sets (lexicon); thirdly, large sets of words are elaborated, bridged and ruled, based on their functions and the reciprocal relations (grammar); lastly, rules broaden and account for word orders (syntax).

5. Conclusions

In summary, language reveals learnables not only through the relatively more frequent uses in lexicon, grammar, and syntax, but also through the occurrence of discrepancies within such areas. Semantic discrepancies, such as neologisms, semantic extensions, and nominalizations, expand the power of language and introduce new conceptual perspectives. Grammatical discrepancies, such as the awkward apposition of adjectives and nouns, may reveal additional operational dimensions. Syntactic discrepancies, such as variations in word order or the use of hyperbaton, similarly highlight the flexibility and creativity of language. It is by exploring these discrepancies, that one might gain a deeper understanding of how language reveals learnables and how it can be harnessed to convey complex ideas and evoke emotions. Language is a dynamic and ever-evolving system that constantly challenges our assumptions and guide our knowledge.

By examining semantic discrepancies, we can uncover the dynamic nature of language and its ability to adapt to a new and/or ever-changing reality, via the framing of new concepts with wider or different affordances. Language evolves to accommodate emerging ideas and trends. New words represent the lexical response that a community provides to resolve either some semantic or existential challenges. There semantic extensions may expand the meaning of existing words – i.e., coping via new affordances to

the pressure deriving from growing needs. For instance, the word *mouse* now refers not only to a small rodent but also to a computer input device. This semantic extension reveals that language can incorporate new affordances and adapt to technological advancements. Nominalizations, such as turning the verb *to run* into the noun *running*, allow us to express actions or processes as concrete entities. A positive transformation that nevertheless also reveals a constraint affecting our brains: we seem to be able to reflect on dynamic actions only by transforming them into static concepts.

Grammatical and syntactic discrepancies further demonstrate the flexibility and creativity of language. The placement of an adjective before or after a substantive may indeed change the meaning and the opportunities that listener and speaker may subsequently have to elaborate on the subject and/or object represented by the nouns to which the adjectives referred.

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Chapter 3: Why more is less and why less is more

By Ahlam Alharbi

Abstract

This chapter argues that language plays a significant role in shaping the context of consumer decision-making and product representation. To achieve the inclusivity, memorability, and timelessness of marketing messages, it is crucial to adopt a concise approach. This notion is supported by the principle of "Less is More". By developing "The Funnel Theory", this chapter seeks to explain this principle and demonstrate how it accomplishes these goals. To illustrate this, this chapter further delves into the linguistic and discursive aspects of enduring and successful slogans, providing guidelines and recommendations for the creation of effective slogans. These recommendations include considering some key components of brand strategy, such as adopting a long-term perspective and avoiding slogans that restrict the brand too narrowly. This chapter emphasizes the importance of designing slogans that are adaptable to future changes to ensure the brand's flexibility and ability to respond to evolving circumstances.

1. Introduction

The marketplace presents a vast array of choices for both consumers and companies. It is imperative for businesses to tailor their offerings to meet the diverse needs of their clientele. Consumers, in turn, are tasked with discerning which products, ranging from insurance policies to vacation resorts, align best with their requirements. These pivotal decisions are influenced by more than just the products themselves; the narratives that accompany them, such as corporate visions, missions, and advertising slogans, also play a significant role. Language is a key factor in shaping the decision-making context for consumers, as noted by Schwartz (2004).

Corporate communication tools like vision and mission statements, and particularly slogans, are succinct yet potent. Slogans serve as a dynamic means of promoting a company's offerings, encapsulating core beliefs and

unique qualities as described by Silveira and Bogas (2019), and Whittier (1958). These brief statements are designed to be memorable and to foster a connection with the audience, often acting as a call to action and reinforcing brand identity, as discussed by Leech (1972) and Keller (2003). According to Silveira and Bogas (2019), a slogan is "a motto or short sentence designed to encapsulate the beliefs, appeals, and distinctive traits of an entity". Whittier (1958) defines it as "a statement of such merit about a product or service that is worthy of continuous repetitive advertising; is worthwhile for the public to remember; and is phrased in such a way that the public is likely to remember it". As a form of communication, slogans are promotional discourses that offer promise to target audiences and attempt to construct social relationships, practices, meanings, and representations of companies, products, and customers. It is also an inviting form of communication that addresses and attracts customers. Leech (1972) and Ke and Wang (2013) view it as an identity reinforcer, whereas Keller (2003) sees it as a phrase structured to communicate either descriptive or persuasive information about products or services.

Slogans are an essential aspect of marketing, as they communicate information about products or services in a concise and memorable manner. They not only justify their existence but also reinforce brand identity and persuade customers to make purchases. According to Leech (1972), Rein (1982), and Clow and Baack (2012), slogans can identify a company and its image. These statements are supported by Huang and Lin (2017), who suggested that slogans help build brand awareness. Given the importance of slogans, they are typically brief, easily remembered and recalled, and intended to evoke positive associations with the products they advertise.

The strength of a well-crafted slogan derives its power from language (Iswati and Widodo, 2020) and is instrumental in shaping a brand's identity (Miller and Toman, 2016). To achieve brevity and timeliness in slogans, it is crucial to meticulously consider linguistic features, such as phonetics, orthography, morphology, syntax, and semantics, as well as the functional use of rhetorical devices, such as alliteration, hyperbole, rhyme, repetition, personification, and idioms (Michalik and Michalska-Suchanek, 2016). Many studies have investigated the effectiveness and success of slogans, particularly their ability to enhance brand awareness. In addition, the memorability of slogans has been extensively examined in terms of their simplicity, complexity, and use of figurative language and linguistic structures (Yalch, 1991; Wells et al., 1989; Corder, 1986; Bradley and Meeds, 2002; McQuarrie and Mick, 1999; Lagerwerf, 2002). Kohli et al. (2007) provided guidelines for creating effective slogans, including the

importance of considering a key component of brand strategy, such as a long-term perspective and avoiding slogan restrictions that define the brand too narrowly. It is important to note that, while slogans can be updated, this should be done with care and consideration, as overly restrictive slogans can limit a brand's flexibility and ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Therefore, slogans developed today should be designed to adapt to future changes.

Research on the linguistic and discursive aspects of long-lasting timeless slogans has not yet provided definitive guidelines. Therefore, this chapter aimed to address some guidelines that highlight the interconnections between inclusivity, imageability, call to action, and parts of speech. A more comprehensive examination of slogans as linguistic and discursive units was conducted to examine how the use of inclusive language and imageability can significantly impact their effectiveness. A call to action is also a crucial component of a slogan as it encourages the audience to take specific actions. By carefully considering the parts of speech used in a slogan, marketers can create powerful and impactful messages that resonate with their target audiences. This study aimed to provide a basis for further research on the essential characteristics that render slogans timeless, memorable, and successful.

2. In/exclusivity and the law of funnel

As noted earlier, slogans, as a discourse, necessitate inclusivity and longevity to endure changes. One approach to achieving this is by employing minimalism, which entails saying less to resonate with a wider audience and promote acceptance. The paradoxical expression *Less is More* encapsulates this minimalist approach, which is the antithesis of maximalism, or *More is Less*. Studies on *Less is More* suggest that three primary factors contribute to the perception that saying less conveys more: ambiguity (Norton et al., 2007), simplicity (Wu et al., 2022), and the occasional negative relationship (correlation) between concepts such as knowledge and liking (Norton et al., 2007) or design and understanding (Wu et al., 2022). I argue that there is a relationship between lexical choices, including their parts of speech, and both inclusivity and enduring change.

The law of funnel, which has been applied in various fields such as business, marketing, programming, education, politics, and communication, can effectively address the paradox of *Less is More*, demonstrating the principle of inclusivity. This funnel analogy represents a discourse that

controls the flow of language, and, consequently, meaning. In more detail, the funnel has two ends: wide and narrow. Any piece of communication can be funneled in one of two ways. As depicted in Figure 3.1, the flow of ideas can be visualized using these two funnels. The first funnel, with a wide opening pointing upward, allows for a broader range of lexical choices, resulting in a more focused and narrower segment of customers, as the discourse flows through the narrow end of the funnel. This exclusive mechanism targets a specific group, single meaning, or referent, because the addition of words may lead to a loss of affordance or customer segment. The example depicted in Figure 3.1 refers to a particular type of bird. On the other hand, the second funnel, with a wide opening pointing downward, allows for fewer lexical choices, resulting in a wider segment of customers as the discourse flows and is filtered through the wider end of the funnel. This inclusive mechanism expands and broadens the scope of a specific group, single meaning, or referent. In this case, the wide end of the funnel leads to an increase in affordances and customer segments. Unlike Example 1, Example 2 demonstrates the potential of the phrase to refer to multiple bird species.
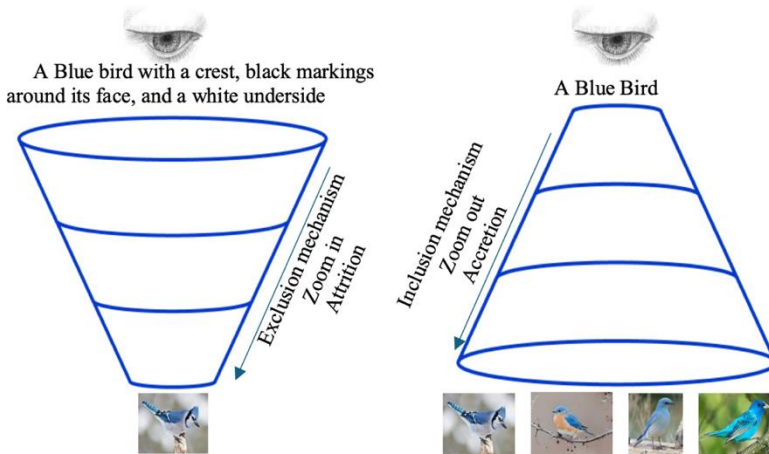

Figure 3.1. The funnel of Less is More/More is Less

The funnel analogy is an apt representation of the breadth of meanings and the function of details expressed in a sentence. The more details expressed through different parts of speech, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs, the more limited meanings we have, and vice versa.

For instance, the field of criminal profiling exemplifies the functionality of the expressions *Less is More* and *More is Less*. In the event of a crime, law enforcement officials endeavor to obtain comprehensive descriptions of potential suspects. Thus, criminal profiling delineates precise details such as sex, race, age, height, weight, body composition, skin complexion, hair and eye color, tattoo styles, and facial hair. The more distinct the traits that can be identified, the narrower the range of potential suspects or offenses, and the greater the likelihood of accurately identifying the perpetrator. In essence, by funneling information through the wide opening, numerous details, options, and possibilities can be eliminated. On the other hand, slogans necessitate the use of concise yet all-encompassing language to allow for the progressive expansion of the target audience and connotations through the accretion of additional layers throughout the funnel. Hence, the expressions *Less is More* and *More is Less* represent inclusivity and exclusivity, respectively.

Penned by Donald Gilles in May 1957,[19] The Kit Kat slogan, "Have a break, have a Kit Kat", is an exemplary manifestation of the phrase *Less is More*. By using a minimal number of words, including their parts of speech, this slogan conveys a range of connotations related to the term "break". This tagline has endured for over six decades, remaining relevant through various marketing campaigns. The noun "break" in the slogan can signify both the act of breaking the chocolate bar and the opportunity to take rest from work or other activities. In response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, Kit Kat's advertisement adapted its well-known slogan to target individuals working remotely.[20] An example of how enduring and relevant this slogan can be is the advertisement created by Sam Hennig as part of a Twitter challenge, which depicts a daily schedule dominated by Zoom meetings, with a Kit Kat duo blocking out two slots at 3 p.m. (see Figure 3.2). This design is simple, relevant, and effective at conveying the brand's message. In fact, it is so clever that many hailed Kit Kat as a genius before realizing that the advertisement had no official connection to the brand. This advertisement was garnered unprecedented attention, amassing tens of thousands of likes and praises from top-level design leaders and marketers. It has even attracted the attention of Zoom and Kit Kat.

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[19] The history of "Have a Break Have a Kit Kat". – Creative Review, https://www.creativereview.co.uk/have-a-break-have-a-kit-kat/.

[20] Ardijan, Sam. 2021. "Kit Kat Ad Analysis – Capitalizing on the Times". *The Ad Digest*, 10 August, https://theaddigest.com/kit-kat-ad/.
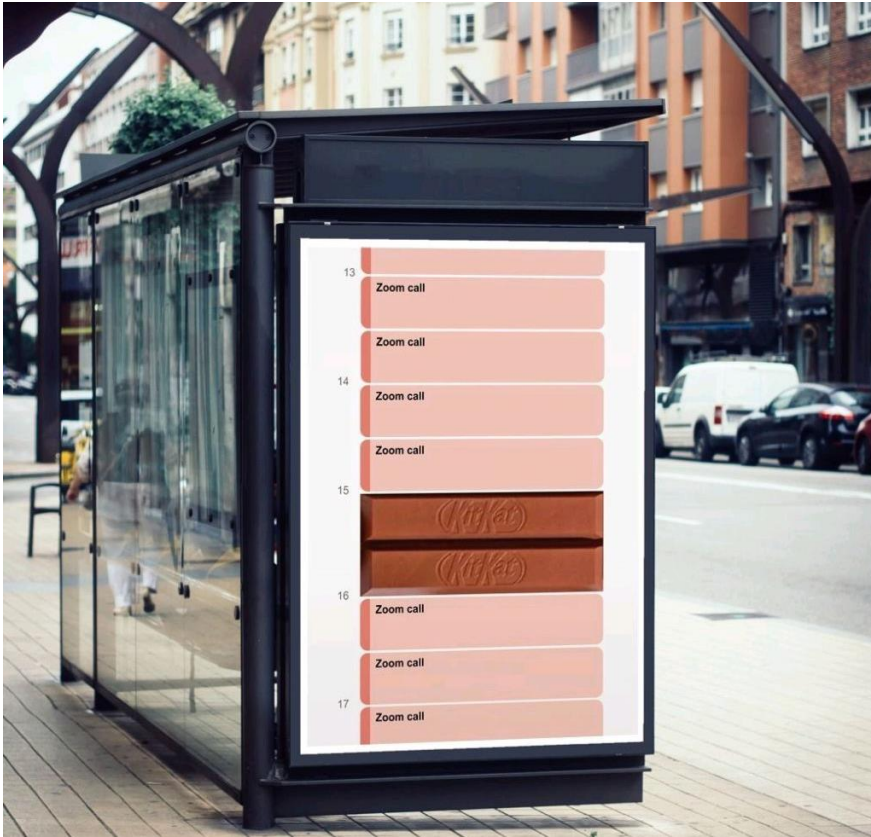
Figure 3.2. 3:00 p.m. is Kit Kat time (Image credit: Sam Hennig)[21]

The vagueness of the word "break" allowed the company to reuse it in different taglines, such as "Make the most of your break" in 2004.[22] Another good example is when Kit Kat launched an international campaign in 2020 to commemorate its 85th anniversary, as announced in a press release sent to the Marketing Dive. This campaign invited fans to create a new slogan for the brand using the hashtag #ABreakForHaveABreak across its social media channels. To assist in the search for the best alternative slogan, Wunderman Thompson, the firm behind the campaign, developed an online slogan generator powered by artificial intelligence (AI). To provide consumers with a "break" during the challenges of the pandemic, the creator

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[21] Coggan, Georgia. 2021. "Genius new Kit Kat ad sums up lockdown perfectly". *Creative Bloq*, 18 February, https://www.creativebloq.com/news/kit-kat-lockdown-ad.

[22] "Kit Kat launches new slogan". *Marketing Week*, 5 August 2004, https://www.marketingweek.com/kit-kat-launches-new-slogan/.

of the most impressive temporary slogan would receive an 85-hour stay for two at a luxury hotel. The winner would be selected by Jeremy Bullmore, a renowned creative who has been with Wunderman Thompson's predecessor, J. Walter Thompson, since 1954, three years before the Kit Kat slogan was introduced.[23]

Moreover, Figure 3.3 depicts an advertising campaign that highlights the potential for artificial intelligence to reduce the demand for creative professions. By adopting its slogan "Have a break", the brand is offering its creative employees an opportunity to take a break to recuperate and rejuvenate. However, the campaign's outcome was disappointing, underscoring the potential hazards of misjudging AI capacity.[24]

Figure 3.3. Kit Kat AI new ad campaign

Another enduring slogan is the slogan of Nike, "Just do it", which was created in 1988, encompassing all actions and initiatives because of its broad yet concise language. This proactive statement appeals to the desire for freedom and independence, empowering customers to overcome all obstacles, including social and physical limitations. Through this slogan, Nike created a platform for their customers who desire freedom, independence, and self-expression, empowering them to overcome social and physical barriers and limitations by encouraging them to do what they desire and break free from any constraints, unleash their inner potential, achieve their goals, and lead a more fulfilling life by personalizing their

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[23] Walk-Morris, Tatiana. 2020. "Kit Kat gives its slogan a break for its 85th anniversary". *Marketing Dive*, 20 October, https://www.marketingdive.com/news/kitkat-gives-its-slogan-a-break-for-its-85th-anniversary/587363/.

[24] Foley, Joseph. 2023. "Kit Kat ribs AI in hilarious new ad campaign". *Creative Bloq*, 17 April, https://www.creativebloq.com/news/kit-kat-ai-ad.

message using the broad verb "do" and the pronoun "it". Therefore, it is both relevant and adaptable, making it a powerful tool for Nike's customers.

Ghasemirad[25] argued that this slogan has been utilized in numerous marketing initiatives, thereby contributing to Nike's ascension to a preeminent global athletic apparel company. He also pointed out several elements that contributed to its longevity, such as simplicity, universal appeal, timelessness, and versatility. These elements were partially achieved through linguistic tools.

A comprehensive analysis of long-standing and successful slogans revealed that the choice of language and vocabulary is invariably guided by the principle of *Less is More*. Consequently, they flowed through the narrow opening of the funnel, using a limited number of words. Notably, when nouns and verbs are used in slogans, they are not described or identified by adjectives or nouns, respectively. This makes slogans more inclusive and adaptable, allowing customers to identify with the company and hence with their products. Therefore, it is necessary to scrutinize the role of parts of speech and inclusivity and endurance of slogans.

3. In/exclusivity and parts of speech

As a linguistic unit, and as noted earlier, companies often avoid or limit the use of nouns in slogans to describe products, services, purposes, or customers to ensure the success and durability of their slogans. Instead, they employ verbal phrases. It is worth to note that when nouns are used, they are carefully crafted in slogans. Accordingly, slogans are mostly verbal phrases. An example of avoiding the use of nouns can be observed in slogans such as Nike's "Just do it" and "Dream crazy", which do not specifically identify the doers or subjects of verbs, who are usually nouns. In the case of "Just do it", the doer or subject of the verb is avoided using an imperative sentence, while the noun or object of the verb is replaced by the pronoun "it", which is typically used when the object has already been introduced and identified. Similarly, the Kit Kat slogan shows how the noun "break" is used skillfully and vaguely.

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[25] Ghasemirad, Ali. "The longevity of Nike's 'Just Do It' slogan: A marketing masterstroke". *Marketing by Ali*, https://marketingbyali.com/the-longevity-of-nikes-just-do-it-slogan-a-marketing-masterstroke/.

Because of specificity of nouns, in 2014, a class action lawsuit was brought against Red Bull over their slogan, "Red Bull gives you wings". The Austrian beverage company agreed to pay a maximum of $13 million to settle the lawsuit, with $10 going to each US consumer who had purchased the beverage since 2002. Among the plaintiffs were Benjamin Careathers, who alleged that he had consumed Red Bull on a regular basis for ten years without experiencing any improvements in his physical or mental abilities or gaining any "wings".[26]

Another interesting lawsuit related to nominal slogans that do not abide by the funnel approach is that of Barilla Pasta. They are being sued for marketing their pasta in America as "Italy's No. 1 brand of pasta". A legal action initiated in 2021 by Mr. Matthew Sinatro and Ms. Jessica Prost asserts that the slogan "creates the impression in the minds of reasonable consumers that the products in question are manufactured in Italy using ingredients sourced from Italy". Barilla asserted that the slogan is a registered trademark, and its purpose is solely to identify Barilla, not Italy, as the source of the product. In addition, Barilla brand pastas are prominently labelled "Made in the USA" and feature the location of Barilla's corporate headquarters in Illinois.[27]

The dearth of nouns in slogans contributes to their inclusivity and longevity and can be attributed to the resulting ambiguity, which often stems from a lack of specificity. This lack of specificity allows slogans to be utilized in various contexts, as nouns have affordances that limit the meanings of slogans. On the other hand, the use of verbs is necessary, yet their ambiguity enables slogans to be used in multiple contexts, as verbs do not have affordances; they can describe processes of transformations and changes that can be performed based on the affordances of the entities denoted by nouns. Marchetti in Chapter 1 defines affordances as follows:

> They identify an entity by specifying the set of affordances that are intersubjectively attributed to that entity. "Affordance" is a technical term that is used here to indicate *the possibilities (which can manifest as either opportunities or obstacles) for action* that the features of tangible (e.g., trees, cars, animals, humans) and intangible (e.g., ideas, concepts, theories, intentions, memories) entities in the environment provide to an agent to satisfy (or hinder) its (physical,

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[26] Business Insider, 27 February 2017, https://www.businessinsider.in/strategy/18-false-advertising-scandals-that-cost-some-brands-millions/slidelist/57380282.cms.
[27] McCarthy, Kelly. 2022. "Lawsuit against Barilla over slogan 'Italy's No.1 brand of pasta' may proceed". *Good Morning America*, 20 October.

biological, social, psychological, economic, etc.) needs. The term "affordance" serves to emphasize the close relationships that exist between the agent and the entity with which the agent interacts: indeed, the latter is defined based on the needs of the former, and the former is defined in terms of its ability to attune to and use or exploit the latter.

Accordingly, nouns due to their affordances are more limiting than verbs, that do not have such a property. With reference to adjectives, Pajunen (1998, p. 346) posits that they are "property-type words", and conventionally do not introduce new objects but rather distinguish and modify existing objects by adding features. As Marchetti in Chapter 1 explains, "[w]hile nouns have the function of identifying an entity by specifying the set of affordances that are intersubjectively attributed to the entity, *adjectives have the function of identifying (or selecting) only one or a limited set of the affordances of an entity* by specifying the entity's features that make those affordances possible". Similarly, as Magni argues in Chapter 2, in Learnable Linguistics, adjectives are used to direct the attention of both listeners and speakers toward a specific aspect (affordance) or a limited range of aspects (affordances) that contribute to the overall meaning of a noun. However, in slogans, the use of adjectives often deviates from this purpose, as they do not identify definite nouns such as products, services, purposes, or customers. Instead, they are independently used, sometimes even with a sort of adverbial function, to convey a general message. This strategic use of adjectives enables companies to remain inclusive and avoid specificity while still standing out, as seen in slogans such as "The simpler, the better" by McDonald's, "Do the right thing" by Google, and "Start something priceless" by Mastercard. In these slogans, the adjectives, e.g., simpler, better, right, and priceless, do not modify existing items because there are no identified nouns. Therefore, firms and companies can use adjectives skillfully in slogans to convey a general message that is inclusive of the doer/subject and allows customers to use these adjectives to describe any product or service provided by the company, including its process, strategies, values, mission, or vision. For instance, McDonald's slogan "The simpler, the better" could be interpreted as referring to food, preparation processes, ingredients, and so on. Similarly, Subway – with its slogan "Eat fresh" – uses a verb and an adjective and avoids using a noun. The adjective fresh is understood to describe any of their products and its ambiguity, inclusivity and broadness allow customers to assume as intended the meaning they prefer. Certainly, it is imperative to use appropriate adjectives in slogans, as they allow companies to differentiate themselves

from competitors and maintain inclusivity. The use of nouns or words such as "something" or "things" instead of nouns can also contribute to this goal. Marchetti in Chapter 1 explains that nouns offer stability whereas verbs and adjectives do not. This lack of stability allows for more endurance and inclusivity.

Political campaign slogans, such as "Yes, we can", "Fired up! Ready to go", and "Forward", have also employed the same technique to achieve similar inclusivity and broadness effects by using verbs without nouns. Magni (Chapter 2) argues that these adjectives are falsely selective or qualitative. That is, they are used with the intention of fulfilling speakers' and listeners' needs by performing a selective function without actually doing so. In this way, they deceive speakers and listeners based on their linguistic expectations driven by grammar.

An intriguing instance of the absence of verbs is "You can with a Nissan", which exemplifies the ambiguity that can arise from the lack of specific linguistic units necessary to form clear and meaningful sentences. Nissan, a multinational automaker, must address its customers globally by using the same tagline. To achieve universality, Nissan, like any other company, must employ fewer words to allow more customers to identify with them and their products. In "You can with a Nissan", the modal verb "can" is not followed by another verb and leveraged to express an ability to generate a specific transformation or change; in this slogan, "can" is utilized by itself to encompass all activities, actions, and verbs, thereby rendering it versatile, timeless, and universal.

The use of adjectives to modify nouns can frequently lead to costly legal proceedings, as exemplified by the lawsuit against Papa John's pizza for false advertising due to its slogan "Better ingredients. Better pizza", Papa John's argued that the slogan was an opinion and not a verifiable fact and was therefore not subject to being true or false. The court ruled that the term "better" was unquantifiable and immeasurable, and the slogan was primarily used for marketing purposes.[28] It is worth noting that the distinction between Papa John's "Better ingredients. Better pizza" and McDonald's "The simpler, the better" lies in the specificity of the adjective's description. While McDonald's did not specify what the adjective describes, Papa John's asserted that their ingredients are superior to those of other pizza establishments; thus, their pizza is superior as well.

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[28] Pizza Hut, Inc. v. Papa John's International, Inc., 227 F.3d 489 (5th Cir. 2000).

According to Magni (Chapter 2), certain grammatical elements are utilized in slogans to cater to the communicative needs and expectations of both the speaker and the audience. These elements, which are typically utilized for their "default grammatical function", seem to serve slightly different purposes. For example, modal verbs are used without accompanying verbs to express a general interest in the subjects' power or will without a specific transformative goal. Similarly, adjectives are used without nouns, avoiding the specification of particular sets of affordances that should be subject to attentional restrictions. Additionally, verbs are used without nouns, preventing the comprehension of the specific affordances upon which the verbs would perform a transformation. The traditional function and reputation of these linguistic elements appear to meet, at least at a formal level, the desired requirements of specificity and action for both speakers and their audiences.

4. Inclusivity, verbs, and call to action (CTA)

Li (2019, p. 520) explains: "One of the most efficient ways of understanding the meaning of an advertising message is to determine how this meaning was conveyed through language means". In this case, the use of verbs in slogans is a crucial linguistic aspect, as Magni (Chapter 2) emphasizes. He posits that slogans, as verbal constructions, aim to create identities for companies and their services in response to stakeholders' needs. As a result, they attain a meaningful existence through what they do rather than what they are. Therefore, Magni (Chapter 2) implies that these verbal phrases draw stakeholders' attention to the various transformations of affordances that their products can sustain without restricting their possibilities; in turn, they remain inclusive.

As previously noted, verbs in slogans need to be framed with savviness to enable companies to convey their message without catering to the diverse cultural and individualistic needs of all potential customers. For example, verbs such as "do", "can", and "have" are broad, culture-neutral, and all-encompassing in their meaning. These verbs allow customers with varying cultural backgrounds to relate to the message and to consider the slogan relevant, regardless of their areas of activity or location. This linguistic inclusiveness is both linguistically and financially effective. The longevity of many successful slogans serves as a testament to the fact that

companies do not need to incur into recurrent financial costs to update or replace them as needed.

Colin Kaepernick, the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback and a former endorser of Nike since 2011, sparked controversy by kneeling during the national anthem to protest racial injustice after the police killed an African American. This action drew national attention and caused a division among people across the US. Nike Executive Gino Fisanotti expressed their support for Kaepernick, stating that he is "one of the most inspirational athletes of this generation who has leveraged the power of sport to help move the world forward". As part of their efforts to reinforce their slogan "Just do it", Nike chose Kaepernick to be the face of their advertising campaign for the 30th anniversary of the "Just do it" slogan. The advertisement featured a black-and-white photo of Kaepernick with the Nike logo and "Just do it" slogan, along with the following quote: "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything".[29]

Needless to say, companies should be mindful of political conflicts, as they can be perceived as taking a political stance that can alienate some customers and employees. Therefore, companies are advised to remain neutral and avoid polarizing issues that can divide their customer base. Nike advertisements led to many negative reactions. Nike's share price decreased by 2% because of various reactions, such as burning trainers, removing the Nike logo from clothing, and threatening to boycott the brand entirely. Choosing Kaepernick as the face of Nike was described as the most divisive move by *The Guardian*.[30] Nevertheless, this chapter discussed how slogans can be timeless, inclusive, and adaptable. This political conflict shows how such a slogan can be relevant, even during such times.

Linguistically speaking, Gentner and Boroditsky (2001, pp. 215-216) posited that nouns possess denotational functions; that is, they identify and label objects. In contrast, verbs serve both denotational and relational functions by establishing "linguistic connections among [nouns]", yet the way they convey the composition of events and relations is subject to

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[29] Kotecha, Tejas. 2020. "Colin Kaepernick: How taking a knee started after NFL quarterback met Nate Boyer". *Sky Sport*, https://www.skysports.com/nfl/news/12118/12170048/colin-kaepernick-how-taking-a-knee-started-after-nfl-quarterback-met-nate-boyer.

[30] Kelner, Martha. 2018. "Nike's controversial Colin Kaepernick ad campaign its most divisive yet". *The Guardian*, 4 September, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/sep/04/nike-controversial-colin-kaepernick-campaign-divisive.

linguistic interpretation. Accordingly, it is important to note that while using nominal phrases in slogans can effectively introduce products and services, utilizing verbal phrases is crucial for conveying to customers how to use these products or services, creating relations between the product and the customer's reality, rendering the message more effective and impactful and products' purposes more apparent. Skorupa and Dubovičienė (2015, p. 109) argue, "[S]logans are the most effective means of drawing the attention of the general public or consumer base to one or more aspects of a product". In addition, nouns, especially concrete nouns, demonstrate a consistent referent to a significant degree, whereas the referents of verbs, especially concrete verbs, may be temporary in nature (Gentner and Boroditsky, 2001, p. 220). With respect to inclusivity, slogans must revitalize messages, stimulate interest, and encourage customer engagement by establishing memorable and impactful statements. Because of their meaningful linguistic structure, such slogans have a timeless quality: they build, sustain and reinforce the identification of customers with brands.

Regardless of their semantic content, Formanowicz et al. (2017) argued that words, as social tools and integral parts of social perception and meanings, provide further evidence of the role of language in shaping social cognition. They also acknowledge that verbs, unlike nouns, serve as linguistic markers of agency and grammatical vehicles of action. In the available literature on slogans and advertisements, five imperative functions are identified: (1) attention focusers, as in the verb "check", (2) contact group, as in the verb "visit", (3) acquisition of product, as in the verb "join", (4) experiencer, as in the verb "enjoy", and (5) miscellaneous functions, as in the verb "keep". Therefore, another pivotal aspect to highlight here is that using verbs in slogans allows the creation of imperative sentences that command the audience to act rather than simply naming a product or service. These imperatives can be in the form of advice, requests, commands, or directions and are essential for effective marketing, as they prompt an immediate response. Pennock-Speck and Fuster-Márquez (2014) demonstrated that imperatives in advertisements primarily serve as suggestions and advice rather than direct commands. Known as call to action (CTA), verbs are crucial tools in marketing that enable companies to be inclusive and open to new target audiences by implying the subject/doer of the action, without the need for specific mention of the second-person pronoun "you". As previously mentioned, when a verbal phrase is used to promote a product, it enables customers to understand the necessity of purchasing the item, what it does, and its features, as everyone is familiar with the product, making it unnecessary to reiterate it with a nominal phrase.

In other words, displaying power over consumers and guiding and engaging them ideologically demonstrate a company's comprehensive understanding of the services or products they offer. This approach goes beyond mere justification of consumer needs. Let's take the use of imperative verbs in slogans, for example. With their resolute advising tone, imperatives, being verbs, well serve the purpose to reach a wide range of individuals; then they also succeed in leading targeted customers away from any consideration about the advantages of products and services, which might distract them from identifying with the models, the values and the mood that are defined by multiple and concurring brand non-verbal messages – such as images and jingles leveraged in specific products ads. In a way, one might affirm that slogans express their linguistic power when they inhibit the analytic assessment of targeted customers about the products and/or services they are about to buy.

5. Imageability and parts of speech

Imageability refers to the ability of a word to conjure a sensory mental image in one's mind (Paivio, Yuille and Madigan, 1968). Bird, Franklin and Howard (2001) discovered that verbs had lower imageability ratings than nouns in English even when they shared the same word form. Nouns tend to be more easily picturable than verbs (Lind et al., 2012). To elaborate, nouns typically refer to entities, whereas verbs describe the relationships between entities. Entities are more easily imageable than relations are, which may explain the general and cross-linguistic differences in imageability between different word classes (Lind et al., 2012). Accordingly, through cross-linguistic analysis, it was determined that nouns have higher imageability scores than verbs do.

In more detail, Gentner proposed the "natural partition" hypothesis to address the difference among parts of speech, especially between nouns and verbs (Gentner, 1982; Gentner and Boroditsky, 2001). His hypothesis states that the distinction between nouns and verbs is based on a "pre-existing perceptual-conceptual distinction between concrete concepts such as persons or things and predicative concepts of activity, change-of-state, or causal relations" (Gentner, 1982, p. 301). That is, nouns are more fundamental in terms of conceptualization than other parts of speech. McDonough et al. (2011) explain that the dominance of nouns is because nouns typically label lasting entities, whereas verbs typically label relational

notions. In other words, objects that nouns describe can typically be used independently, whereas verbs describe activities that need to be performed by an agent. Additionally, verb referents are frequently less clear than noun referents are. While nouns often designate all objects, verbs can denote a variety of verbal concepts such as the direction of an action (e.g., *pull* vs. *push*) or the style of the action (e.g., *run* vs. *walk*). Therefore, it is often the case that the meanings of verbs are more prone to changes when considered in relation to the context in which they are utilized, while those of nouns tend to remain relatively unchanged.

Among the oldest American fast-food chains in the industry, McDonald's "I'm lovin' it" and Arby's "We have the meats", are excellent examples. Of particular interest is the use of pronouns in these slogans. In McDonald's slogan, customers are represented as endorsing their products and expressing their fondness toward them. Regarding the establishment of relationships through verbs, it is essential to have the entities verbs connect. In the case of the slogan "I'm lovin' it", the relationship between the speaker, who is a consumer, and the unspecified object, represented by the pronoun "it", is established through the use of the verb "love". It is noteworthy that the relationship between the speaker or subject and the object can be re-established regardless of the product as a result of the use of "it", as an unidentified pronoun. In this sense, this slogan represents consumers' experience. On the other hand, in Arby's slogan, "We have the meats", the speaker, the exclusive "we", is the company, asserting that they possess a variety of meats. The verb "have" is general in nature, but the specific concrete noun "meats" is not. The message does not invite customers to participate in this statement, and the use of the noun "meats" solely associates Arby's with meat products, excluding other possibilities or items available on their menu. Therefore, they excluded consumers' experiences with their slogans and focused on what they offered to them by naming them.

In terms of imageability, the broadness of the meanings of the verb "love" underscored by the unidentified pronoun "it" renders it challenging to envision the slogan and what it stands for, allowing it to be timeless. In contrast, the vague meaning of the verb "have" counterbalanced by the specific concrete noun "meats" accentuates the emphasis on meat products and excludes any other items, thus making this slogan or part of the slogan more imaginable than McDonald's. Hence, it might not endure time, as the company has changed its slogans eight times since 2000 in an attempt to remain relevant and appeal to changing consumer preferences. Arby's choice may be justified by suggesting that the company is confident in its

offerings and wants to assert its dominance in the market. Even though this argument is true, it could be limiting, leading the company to adjust its marketing message within a few years to remain competitive. Another reason for changing the slogan was to reflect changes in the company menu. It is worth noting that in 2014, Arby's 50-year-old brand experienced a significant decline. As fast food and fast casual industries expanded rapidly, Arby's struggled to remain relevant, with a decrease in locations and sales. Arby's slogan was "Slicing up freshness", which was primarily associated with roast beef; however, this type of meat comprised only a small proportion of fast-food visits. Through this repositioning effort, Arby's refocused on its meat offerings and highlighted the variety and quality of its products. The successful campaign "We have the meats" helped transform the struggling fast-food chain into one of the fastest growing in the industry.[31] The former Chief Marketing Officer, Rob Lynch, stated that Arby's did not want the brand to grow older with its customer base. Along with the change in slogans, the company's website was revamped to emphasize "at least eight different meats", and new Mega Meat Stack sandwiches were introduced, boasting a significant amount of meat. Following the "We have the meats" campaign, 54% of Arby's customers were between the ages of 18 and 34, an increase from 38% prior to the slogan change.[32] Therefore, by updating their slogans, Arby's group attempted to communicate a new brand identity to their target audience.

Apparently, Arby's focuses on their menu, whereas McDonald's highlights consumers' experiences. The latter need to be broad, inclusive, and less tangible. However, the former needs to be specific, exclusive, and tangible. It is worth reminding readers that Gentner's (1982) natural partition hypothesis postulates that, unlike the meanings of nouns, the meanings of verbs are more prone to undergoing changes based on the textual context in which they appear. Accordingly, McDonald's slogan may be more timeless than Arby's.

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[31] https://www.effie.org/legacycases/case/NA_2018_E-3138-937.

[32] David, Lauren. 2022. "The real reason Arby's changed its slogan". *Mashed*, 27 January, https://www.mashed.com/749737/the-real-reason-arbys-changed-its-slogan/.

6. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the concept of "The Funnel Theory", which illustrates how "More is Less and Less is More" in the context of business language, and the role this may play in the management of consumer choices through cognitive load reduction. This underscores the importance of being mindful of language use and avoiding overwhelming consumers with an excess of information. The efficacy and success of slogans have been studied, and guidelines have been established for creating effective slogans. These guidelines include considering a key element of brand strategy and avoiding overly restrictive slogans. The aim is to provide comprehensive guidelines that are definitive in nature. Thus, this chapter discussed the concept of "Less is More" and its relationship with inclusivity and enduring change in discourse. In addition, it explored the interconnections between inclusivity, imageability, calls-to-action, and parts of speech in relation to long-lasting slogans. Future research needs to delve into the impact of adjectives on public perspectives and how this may affect decision-making communication, especially in the realm of business. Additionally, it is crucial to explore the potential benefits of concise messaging, following the "Less is More" principle, to determine whether it leads to improved brand recall, favorable associations, and heightened purchase intent.

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Chapter 4: Where the talking paves the way to new walking

By Ahlam Alharbi

Abstract

This chapter delves into the function of language in shaping public opinion and creating novel realities, with a focus on the use of adjectives in grammatical discrepancies and the semantic paradoxes they produce. This chapter highlights the use of adjectives as linguistic operators that can extend the semantic reach of the nouns they qualify. It considers a few linguistic paradoxes where adjectives enact paradoxes, and the challenge these create bring about new learnables. In essence, the chapter illustrates how adjectives have the capacity to generate novel meanings by inserting nouns into contexts where their affordances of origin no longer hold. The emergence of novel learnables introduced with such paradoxes allow not only new perspectives on reality, but seem to weaken existing beliefs, and eventually allow and sustain social transformations.

1. Learnable development through paradox

According to Hargrave and Van de Ven (2017, p. 33), research on paradoxes demonstrates that the ability to embrace opposing ideas is crucial in transforming the tension between them into an opportunity for creativity. By compelling individuals to delve deeper, explore beyond the surface, and reconsider their fundamental beliefs, innovative thinking is encouraged. According to Smith and Tushman (2005), human mental templates are cognitive structures that enable individuals to recognize and accept persistent inconsistencies arising from contradictory forces. This paradox mindset entails embracing an alternative viewpoint that acknowledges and seeks to reconcile conflicting demands that often arise in various aspects of life. In line with the available literature on paradoxes, Magni (2024) notes that the act of pairing two paradoxical terms or grammatical discrepancies can generate new learnables and realities by resolving the inherent contradictions in phrases that combine an adjective and a noun that belongs

to two different semantic domains. This mismatching is an operational mechanism for generating new learnables that are achieved through resolving conflict, resulting in a transformation rather than a state of persistent coexistence characterized by tension. This process of transforming meaning or integrating opposing concepts cultivates novel learnables that transcend the original meanings while maintaining the meanings of both semantic domains, with the adjective assigning the noun a new semantic domain. In this context, the adjective role is to mask and exorcize unfavorable connotations of nouns, simultaneously generating new learnables and exorcizing negative or undesirable meanings. These novel learnables or ways of thinking may lead to social changes that challenge existing learnables, beliefs, and understandings of reality.

Employing the *exploratory* approach to learnables, at the macro level, a society possesses a particular set of learnables, which shape and are shaped by the linguistic options available at the micro level. These micro-level options are consistent with our understanding at the macro level. That is, the relationship between our learnables and language is cyclical and serves to both reinforce and reshape our understanding of the world. Some of these intersubjectively established learnables are universal, whereas others are culturally specific. To create novel learnables by reusing lexical choices in new ways, discrepancies may arise from combining words with different semantic domains, such as the expression "old news" which is a combination of two contradictory terms from two different semantic domains, "old" and "news". The word "news" is associated with a semantic domain (1) that can be characterized by various adjectives, none of which is the adjective "old", as it is the antithesis of news in terms of meaning. Conversely, the word "old" is an adjective that is used to describe nouns that belong to a semantic domain (2) that does not include "news", as "old" negates the meaning of "news", which conveys a sense of modernity. With reference to adjectives, they are frequently used to describe nouns, but they can sometimes provide different and new affordances, leading to different contexts and a shift in meaning. Therefore, the phrase "old news" suggests something that is outdated or irrelevant, and "news" denotes information that is recent or current. However, when combined, "old news" refers to knowledge that is received belatedly or after others have already been informed of it.
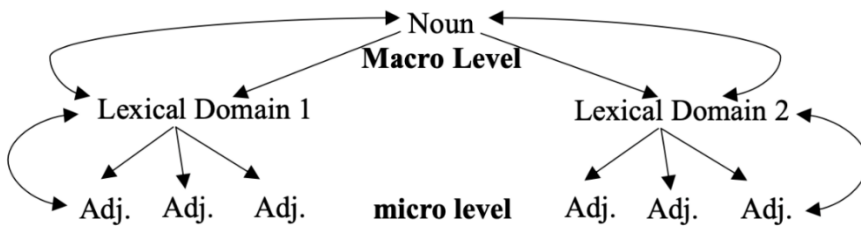
Figure 4.1. Learnables of nouns at the macro/micro levels

Another example is the phrase "friendly takeover", which combines two contradictory terms. The words "friendly" and "takeover" are opposites. "Friendly" implies a cooperative and amicable relationship, while "takeover" suggests hostile and aggressive acquisition. However, when used together, the phrase "friendly takeover" refers to a situation where a company willingly accepts an acquisition by another company, despite the hostile and aggressive connotations typically associated with the term "takeover". This occurs with the approval of the target company's management and board of directors, suggesting a cooperative and amicable relationship, as implied by the term "friendly". Moreover, in the phrase "real potentials", the word "real" refers to that which is authentic or genuine, whereas "potential" signifies the possibility of an event or situation occurring or becoming a reality, although it may not become so. In this sense, "real potential" can be understood to denote the genuine likelihood of an occurrence or the transformation of a possibility into a tangible reality.

Another interesting example is the phrase "mandatory volunteering", which is an inherently contradictory concept that combines the ideas of obligation or mandatory and uncompensated freely offered community services. While volunteering typically connotes a willingness to help and an absence of compensation, the addition of the word "mandatory" suggests an obligation or requirement. This results in a scenario in which individuals are required to provide uncompensated services as part of their school or work obligations. However, the use of the term "mandatory" in this context undermines the traditional concept of volunteering, which relies on an individual's choice and autonomy. By removing an individual's agency, mandatory volunteering can lead to a sense of obligation and pressure rather than enthusiasm and willingness. This can result in a lack of personal connections and investment in the cause, ultimately leading to a lack of motivation and commitment. The introduction of mandatory volunteering as a new learnable has enabled organizations and educational

institutions to require uncompensated community services from their employees and students.

In brief, the nouns and adjectives in the previous examples are fundamentally incompatible combinations, and the differences between their respective semantic domains are irreconcilable. These grammatical discrepancies, as Magni mentions, are referred to as linguistic exorcisms. In these constructions, adjectives that do not typically relate to the semantic domain of the nouns they qualify are used to change the semantic domain of the noun and assign meanings that belong to an entirely new semantic domain. Therefore, by adopting this mindset, individuals can learn to reconcile the inherent tensions that come with these opposing words by creating a new understanding, perspective, or learnables. This kind of mindset is prevalent in many fields, including business, health, politics, and technology; has a significant influence on public perception; and can create new realities to promote products, services, and ideologies. The impact of inventions, evolution, and significant events, including the interests of authority, can lead to significant changes in people's perspectives and views and, in some cases, reverse them. This mindset is commonly encountered in various sectors, such as business, healthcare, politics, and technology, which wield considerable power over public opinion and can shape people's beliefs and perceptions about marketing their services, products, and ideology.

2. The emergence of new learnables of drugs through adjective

In Chapter 2, Magni presented an example of "recreational drugs" to illustrate grammatical discrepancies. To examine how this phrase introduced new learnables for the noun "drugs", it is necessary to conduct an analysis to elucidate the mechanism by which this was achieved. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines *drug* as "a substance used as a medication or in the preparation of medication", which elucidates our understanding and learnable of the abstract idea of "drugs" at the macro level. This consequently influences our linguistic choices, leading us to select verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that are commonly associated with the noun "drug". These linguistic choices are consistent with the semantic/lexical fields or domains of drugs, such as but not limited to sickness, health, substance, medication, and addiction, in worse-case

scenarios (see Figure 4.2). These fields exhibit distinctive linguistic selections and occasionally display some similarities. Accordingly, there are possible adjectives that can be paired with the noun *drug*, such as prescription, over-the-counter, useful, dangerous, addictive, or (il)legal. The use of prescription or over-the-counter drugs activates particular learnables, such as the fact that medication should be administered under the guidance of a medical professional or that it can be used to address minor health concerns. In these learnables, the user is portrayed as experiencing health issues. However, it has been noted that the creation of a new lexical domain, and hence new learnables, for the noun "drug" necessitates the employment of new adjectives originating from a distinct domain. As such, "recreational drug" in which the adjective "recreational" implies lexical domains of fun, entertainment, and pleasure that are not aligned with our learnables associated with the noun "drug". Recreation is defined as all the activities that individuals engage in to refresh their physical and mental states and enhance the enjoyment of their leisure time. Examples of such activities include walking, swimming, meditation, reading, playing games, and dancing (Khasnabis et al., 2010). That is, it is a necessity that requires suitable pursuits, including hobbies, physical activity, socialization, and music, but not drugs.
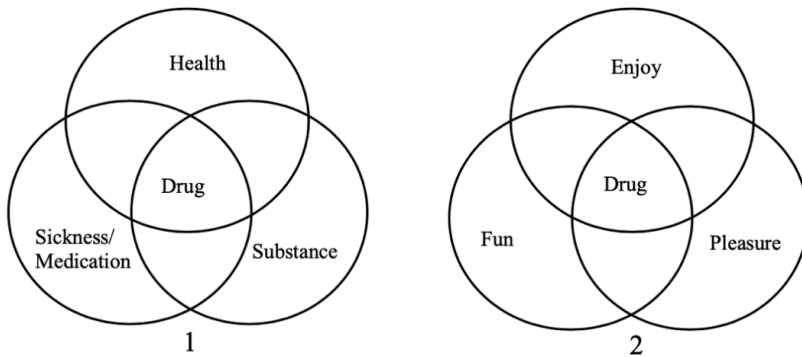

Figure 4.2. The learnables of the noun drug *in two different domains*

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines *drug* also as follows: "A drug (such as cocaine, marijuana, or methamphetamine) used without medical justification for its psychoactive effects often in the belief that occasional use of such a substance is not habit-forming or addictive". Therefore, *recreational drugs*, despite being initially shocking, can facilitate the development of new learnables that convey a more favorable meaning

of the drugs as fun, safe, non-addictive, and non-problematic and downplay their illegality, enabling individuals to openly discuss and acknowledge their occasional use for recreational purposes.

Currently, recreational drugs are primarily intended for leisure and amusement rather than as therapeutic interventions for medical conditions. In these learnables, the user is assumed to be healthy rather than a person with a preexisting health condition. The introduction of this new learnable has paved the way for countries to consider legalizing drugs. Most importantly, this new learnable created new learnables that manifest in lexical choices, such as decriminalization and personal use. According to the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the decriminalization of drug use and possession for personal use is beneficial because it eliminates the stigma and discrimination that impede access to healthcare, harm reduction, and legal services. Furthermore, the adjective "recreational" can be employed to cast a shadow on the negative aspects associated with drug use while simultaneously creating and distinguishing between individuals who use drugs occasionally and those who are addicted, thereby presenting the recreational user positively.

3. COVID-19 pandemic alternative realities

Major events or inventions often compel individuals to revisit and modify their preexisting learnables and, in some instances, develop and create entirely new ones. A recent and significant event that has had a profound impact on our lives is the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has brought about a transformative shift in the way people think and perceive the world, resulting in the emergence of novel realities and unprecedented situations. For example, prior to the pandemic, the notion of *being together* or *togetherness* was characterized by a shared physical space and a lack of isolation and loneliness. However, the pandemic has necessitated the adoption of social distancing measures, which have led to the emergence of the concept of *alone together*. This contradictory concept emphasizes that individuals can maintain a sense of togetherness without sharing physical space. While this approach may mitigate the spread of the virus, it has also given rise to a new understanding of what it means to be together, which may involve feelings of isolation and loneliness. As a result, the pandemic has highlighted the need for alternative methods of fostering

a sense of togetherness and connection that are not solely reliant on physical proximity. This transformation in our understanding of *togetherness* has far-reaching implications for the future. Therefore, the power of language to shape one's understanding of the world is substantial and is recognized. It has the potential to generate, sustain, conserve, and revive knowledge, comprehension, and, most importantly, learnables that in turn create our realities.

Similarly, the phrase *new normal* is contradictory, as it combines two words with opposing connotations. In more detail, "new" implies novelty, unfamiliarity, and recentness, while "normal" signifies typicality or customary practice. During the pandemic, the phrase "new normal" was frequently used to describe the unprecedented changes in people's daily routines that emerged as a result of the pandemic and were projected to persist even after the pandemic subsided. These changes, including remote work, virtual gatherings, and increased reliance on technology, may be unprecedented, but they are becoming increasingly common and thus representative of the novel normal. Currently, it is increasingly common to hear about work from home (WFH) or hybrid jobs, and there are numerous remote job opportunities available in the market. The market is currently inundated with software programs designed to facilitate the organization and management of virtual tasks on a global scale. An increasing number of companies are adopting this approach, as it permits them to operate without a physical location because their employees work remotely from various locations around the world. This emerging situation underscores the notion of "alone together", as all employees, although working remotely, are nevertheless united in a virtual space, effectively synchronizing their tasks and meeting deadlines through collaborative efforts.

4. Reframing sustainable urban living through architectural terminology

Promoting sustainable urban living and encouraging environmentally friendly lifestyles are key objectives of environmental advocates. The impact of this ideology on both our perception and language is substantial. This has given rise to new phrases and expressions that adhere to this ideology and further its goals. For example, the elements in the phrase "vertical forest" seem to contradict one another, as they refer to two

structures that differ in their dimensions. A forest is typically composed of a horizontal layer that encompasses the composition and arrangement of trees. On the other hand, the vertical direction refers to an upright structure that rises straight from a horizontal line. The term "vertical forest" is used to describe luxurious apartment buildings, giving the impression that residents live in a forest-like environment. It is a type of architectural structure or skyscraper that incorporates vegetation, such as trees and plants, into its vertical structure. The purpose of these buildings was to address the issue of urban pollution while promoting sustainable practices. Achieving these goals is neither feasible nor unattainable through this proposed inadequate solution. In addition, forests have a range of functions that extend beyond these specific aspects. This term gives the impression that residents live in a forest-like environment. However, this characterization is misleading, as it describes an artificial environment as a natural habitat. A living green façade fosters a connection with the surrounding environment while simultaneously providing protection from it. Nevertheless, the use of a "vertical forest" might be seen as an attempt to conceal an unfavorable truth by emphasizing a different one. In this situation, the phrase effectively conceals the truth of deforestation that occurred before the construction of these vertical forests. By employing the term "forest" instead of "deforestation", the phrase directs the audience's focus toward a limited perspective, obscuring the broader context of the situation.

Accordingly, this phrase creates a new learnable regarding both buildings and forests, a concept that did not exist before 2007. In April 2007, while serving as the director of Domus, architect Stefano Boeri conceived of the idea of constructing a skyscraper covered in trees. During a visit to the city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, Boeri was struck by the prevalence of glass, ceramics, and metal cladding on numerous new skyscrapers, which he believed generated excessive heat and reflected sunlight. This impression was compounded by research conducted by Spanish architect Alejandro Zaera, who revealed that a significant majority of tall buildings, constructed during the 21st century, were covered in glass. Boeri's response to these observations was to design two towers that would be covered in vegetation, including plants, shrubs, and trees, to reduce energy consumption and create a more sustainable and life-filled urban environment.[33] Foliage enhances "air quality by filtering out dust and

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[33] Bosco Verticale (n.d.), Wikipedia,
 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosco_Verticale#cite_ref-8.

sequestering carbon" while also mitigating the negative impacts of "the urban heat island effect and reducing noise pollution". The integration of vegetation into a building's façade not only adds aesthetic value but also incorporates sustainable design principles. Consequently, the living green façade fosters a connection with the surrounding environment while simultaneously providing protection from it. It is "one of the most intensive living green façades ever realized".[34] This architectural design substitutes conventional cladding materials with verdant screens, culminating in "a distinct microclimate that works to improve the sustainability of the structure".

This new learnable is echoed in another contradictory statement by Beori, in which he described these towers as "a house for trees inhabited by humans". Typically, a house is regarded as a constructed structure that is built using wood to serve as a shelter or refuge for people or animals, whereas trees grow on the ground, do not need a house, and serve as a shelter for both people and animals. In this context, "a house for trees inhabited by humans" is a structure designed to provide shelter or protection for trees while also being inhabited by human beings. It is worth noting that previous learnables have established that people construct houses to provide shelter for themselves and have the ability to grow plants and trees within and outside of these houses. However, these towers are larger structures designed to house and accommodate multiple trees unnecessarily, based on our previous learnables.

Finally, these new learnables are designed to promote sustainable living, connect with nature, or offer unique and innovative living spaces that incorporate natural elements. Therefore, these concepts aim at addressing urban pollution while promoting sustainable practices linguistically without considering the vertical dimension of environmental degradation, which encompasses the depletion and overexploitation of natural resources, as manifested in the construction of structures and buildings. Nonetheless, it detracts from the horizontal aspect of environmental degradation, such as deforestation and tree cutting, as this may divert our attention from other crucial aspects.

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[34] Bosco Verticale Torre E - The Skyscraper Center

5. Humanization and dehumanization: a social shift in language and responsibility

The processes of humanization and dehumanization are linguistic phenomena that occur sequentially to generate new learnables. The introduction of innovations, products, and devices constantly pushes boundaries, opens up new frontiers, and necessitates the identification and establishment of new linguistic constructs to facilitate the creation of these new learnables. For example, the term "smartphone" is an interesting juxtaposition of two words, as it combines the concept of intelligence with that of a device primarily used for making calls. The adjective "smart" refers to the mental capacity of a living capable of thinking and reasoning. However, smartphones have evolved to perform a multitude of functions beyond the original purpose of making phone calls. They are essentially pocket-sized computers that can execute a variety of tasks, such as web browsing, photography, and gaming. Therefore, the term "smartphone" refers to the full range of capabilities that these devices offer. However, it is important to note that these capabilities do not indicate the ability to think or reason. They are simply what the device is designed to do, without requiring any thought or reasoning. Describing a phone as "smart" draws attention to its advanced features and functions rather than the user's abilities and communication. In addition, the term "smartphone" has been used to redefine the term "smart", limiting its application to non-cognitive functions and excluding cognitive capabilities.

This revised focus may be indicative of modern times, which emphasize technological advancements and the increasing role of machines in daily life. The shift in emphasis can be seen in the way that devices have become the primary focus of attention rather than individuals. The growing prominence of machines and technology has brought to light the transfer and shift in power and authority from humans to machines. Currently, it has become common to witness the integration of machines into our daily lives, where devices and machines manage diverse aspects of our lives, at times even making decisions on our behalf. Therefore, increasing reliance on machines has led to the reassignment of adjectives typically used by humans to describe machines. This transition from human-centric to machine-centric language is indicative of a broader social shift. This trend is evident in many phrases that are currently used to refer to such technology, including but not limited to smart homes, cars, and plugs.

Another example is the phrase "artificial intelligence", which may seem contradictory because it brings together the words "artificial", which

signifies something that is man-made and non-natural and non-biological, and "intelligence", which refers to the natural ability to think, an ability that machines typically do not possess. Therefore, the word "artificial" cannot be used to describe "intelligence". In line with smartphone implications, the increased reliance on machines has led to the reassignment of adjectives that were traditionally used to describe humans and their traits to machines. This change in language from a human-focused to a machine-focused viewpoint reflects a broader societal transformation. Therefore, artificial intelligence, in its most basic form, refers to the ability of machines to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. The term "artificial" in this context signifies that this form of intelligence is created by humans rather than arising naturally. The intention of using this term is to emphasize that the form of intelligence is not biological or natural.

The learnables concerning the development of artificial intelligence and the creation of smartphones are two distinct processes. Whereas the former involves the transformation of human abilities into machine capabilities, the latter refers to the description of man-made objects with human-like features. There are two processes at play: a humanizing process involving the infusion of human qualities into machines, while the other is a dehumanizing process involving the erosion of human traits. The increasing tendency to employ terminology that pertains to and characterizes human capabilities and natural biological abilities to describe machines and devices is a matter of concern. The emergence of these patterns is concerning because they blur the line between humans and machines and could lead to the humanization of machines, which could have significant implications and far-reaching consequences. This not only signifies the transformation in society but also indicates that individuals will relinquish their responsibilities and delegate them to machines that surpass them because of their abandonment of these tasks. To combat this trend, it is necessary to discourage the use of such language and encourage clearer language to maintain a distinct boundary between humans and machines.

The language of humanization and dehumanization is particularly evident in the context of new learnables generated by the introduction of innovations, products, and devices. The shift in emphasis from humans to machines is reflected in the transfer of adjectives typically used to describe humans to machines and vice versa. This linguistic phenomenon indicates the increasing reliance on machines, which can lead to the marginalization of humans and the diminishing of their role. On the other hand, it can centralize machines and contribute to the perception that machines are becoming more human-like while simultaneously diminishing the human

element of humans. This shift toward machine-centricity raises concerns about the devaluation of human roles.

Figure 4.3. Humanization and dehumanization patterns

Figure 4.3 depicts this social transformation illustrated in the phrase "smartphone", which imbues machines with human-like traits, which can be humanizing on one end of the spectrum. Similarly, referring to something as "artificial intelligence" attributes the quality of intelligence, which is inherently human, to a non-human entity, potentially leading to dehumanization on the other end of the spectrum. In contrast, the term "artificial intelligence" attributes the quality of intelligence, a characteristic that is inherently human, to a non-human entity, which may consequently evoke a sense of dehumanization on the other end of the spectrum. The figure illustrates the shifting dynamics between humanization and dehumanization, highlighting the trend toward the increasing prominence of machines and the corresponding diminution of human capabilities. This development may serve to acclimate society to the notion that machines will eventually assume the roles and responsibilities traditionally held by humans, given their capacity for more efficient task execution.

6. Maintaining yet adapting to the changing world

In this ever-changing and transforming world, flexibility and adaptability are indispensable. Equally important is the need to consider the moral and ethical implications. Nonetheless, the paradox arises when flexibility is needed for ethics and morality. For example, "ethical flexibility" is a contradictory phrase that refers to the capacity to make decisions and engage in behaviors guided by a set of principles and values that are not flexible but also adaptable to changing circumstances or requirements. In other words, it is the ability to maintain ethical standards while being flexible and adaptable to changing situations. In the phrase "ethical flexibility", "ethical" refers to a set of values and principles that guide decision-making and behavior that are not flexible, while "flexibility" refers to the ability to adapt to changing circumstances or requirements.

The paradox of ethical flexibility is a phenomenon in which individuals or organizations use ethical standards to justify unethical behavior. This occurs when an individual or organization believes that the end justifies the means and, consequently, is willing to compromise or even violate their ethical standards to achieve a desired outcome. For instance, a politician may profess strong ethical values but then engage in unethical behavior, such as accepting bribes or exploiting their position for personal gain. In this scenario, politicians employ ethical standards as a cover for their unethical actions. Another example is a company that claims to prioritize environmental sustainability but then engages in practices that harm the environment to reduce costs. In this instance, the company utilizes its proclaimed values to cover its unethical actions. Addressing the paradox of ethical flexibility can be challenging because it involves a deliberate attempt to deceive others and oneself. This requires an honest examination of one's own biases and motivations, acknowledging the disparity between one's actions and stated values. Additionally, it necessitates a commitment to transparency and accountability as well as taking responsibility for one's actions.

Another example is the concept of "moral flexibility", which is inherently paradoxical, as it implies the capacity to accommodate one's moral beliefs and values, which are typically considered absolute and immutable. It is essential to clarify that moral flexibility does not denote a lack of commitment to moral principles or willingness to make concessions to one's values. Instead, it refers to the ability to adjust one's moral beliefs and values to suit different situations and contexts. This involves considering multiple viewpoints and making decisions rooted in ethical principles while considering the specific circumstances of a given situation. It should be noted that moral flexibility does not compromise one's values or principles but rather applies them in a thoughtful and nuanced manner that considers the intricacies of real-world situations.

In conclusion, the paradox of ethical and moral flexibility in the context of an ever-changing world refers to the ability to maintain ethical and moral standards while being flexible and adaptable to changing situations. However, it can also be used to justify unethical and immoral behavior. In conclusion, maintaining principles and adapting to changing circumstances require a thoughtful and nuanced approach that considers the intricacies of real-world situations.

7. Commonly used paradoxical phrases in business

In the business world, there are several expressions that combine two seemingly contradictory terms, such as "human resources", "long briefing", "larger half", "negative growth", "stagnant growth", "industrial park", "mobile station", "plastic silverware", and "liquid paper". These expressions are examined below to elucidate how the combination of these terms creates a new meaning that differs from the individual meanings of the words, thereby creating new learnables that can alter our perception of reality.

The phrase "human resources" contains a paradox, which results from the nature of both words. On the one hand, the adjective "human" emphasizes the individuality and uniqueness of people within an organization. On the other hand, the word "resource" refers to the non-human aspects of an organization. The phrase "human resources" is a department in companies or organizations that manages employees. However, the word "resource" suggests that these employees are managed as assets or commodities. The paradox between valuing people as individuals and managing them as resources can persist unless companies can successfully reconcile these opposing views. To achieve this, a better workplace culture needs to be created, effective human management of employees must be endorsed, and a balance between the satisfaction of employees and the organization needs to be maintained. Hence, companies must honor individuality while successfully managing employees without compromising their human aspects or the organization's effectiveness.

The term "long or extensive briefing" appears to be inherently contradictory. While the word "long" suggests a duration of time, the word "extensive" indicates something that is comprehensive, and "briefing" implies a concise summary. Consequently, a "long briefing" could be interpreted as a detailed or thorough explanation of a topic, whereas an "extensive briefing" would refer to a comprehensive and detailed briefing on a topic or situation. Equally paradoxical is the phrase "larger half", which too combines two opposing concepts. While "larger" implies a greater size or quantity, "half" suggests a division into two equal parts. However, in this context, it refers to a situation in which one part of a whole is larger than the other.

In addition, there are a variety of financial terms that are utilized to describe and express financial growth. The following expressions involve the combination of two contradictory concepts: "negative growth", "negative income", and "negative profit". Additionally, "stagnant growth"

is another expression that is used to describe progress or development. Certainly, it is worth noting that each of the first three expressions contains the adjective "negative", which suggests a loss or decline in value, while the words "growth", "income", and "profit" indicate an increase in financial gain. Despite this contradiction, these phrases are used in economic and financial contexts to describe scenarios where there is a decline in growth or profits, a loss of income, or losses that surpass earnings or income, respectively. Similarly, the term "stagnant growth" combines two conflicting ideas, as the words "stagnant" and "growth" are inherently incompatible. "Stagnant" typically signifies a state of inactivity or lack of progress, while "growth" refers to an expansion or increase in size or quantity. However, when used in conjunction, the phrase "stagnant growth" refers to a situation in which an economy or business does not experience a marked increase in size or quantity, despite the presence of indicators suggesting growth.

With regard to the location of a business, two paradoxical phrases are commonly used. The first phrase, "industrial park", combines the term "industrial", which typically refers to a place of work or manufacturing, and "park", which suggests a recreational or natural environment. Despite this, an "industrial park" is a specific area of land that has been designated for industrial use and is often home or a park for factories, warehouses, and other industrial facilities. The second phrase, "mobile station", is also contradictory. The words "mobile" and "station" typically refer to opposing concepts, where "mobile" signifies the ability to move or change position and "station" implies a fixed location or place of work; when these terms are combined, it refers to a vehicle that is capable of performing a specific function, such as broadcasting or communication, while simultaneously possessing the capability to move from one location to another.

Finally, in terms of products, businesses need to be innovative to create new learnables. For example, two contemporary items that have gained widespread use are "plastic silverware" and "liquid paper". The term "plastic silverware" combines two opposing concepts: "plastic" refers to a lightweight, disposable, and affordable synthetic material, while "silverware" refers to a cutlery made of silver or silver-plated metal. Despite this contradiction, the rise of food delivery services has led to the use of disposable cutlery made of plastic, commonly offered alongside meals. This has resulted in the emergence of the term "plastic silverware". The adjective "plastic" modifies the word "silverware", indicating that the traditional connotation of "silverware" as being made of silver is no longer accurate. The use of plastic, a breakable material, has come to symbolize the

temporary and disposable nature of modern culture. On the other hand, silverware, with its association with luxury and elegance, represents a more enduring and valuable cultural tradition. The contrast between these two materials highlights the paradox of our current culture, where inexpensive and convenient plastic items have replaced more durable and valuable materials such as silver and a formal dining setting. This shift in cultural values may also suggest a wider change in attitudes toward consumption and waste, which has important environmental implications. The second product is "liquid paper", which combines two opposing words, namely, "liquid" and "paper". While "liquid" refers to a fluid or flowing substance, "paper" signifies a dry and solid material. Accordingly, "liquid paper" refers to a substance that is simultaneously liquid and solid; the former flows, while the latter does not. It is a type of correction fluid that is used to correct mistakes on paper. It is a liquid that is applied to paper with a brush or pen but subsequently dries and solidifies, enabling the paper to be written on again without the correction being visible. Therefore, a new learnable was formed by introducing the adjective "liquid" to change our previous learnable concerning the noun "paper".

8. Conclusion

This chapter explored the role of language in shaping public perception and our understanding of the world as well as in creating new realities, focusing specifically on the use of adjectives to create grammatical discrepancies. It has been argued that humans' ability to embrace opposing and conflicting ideas is crucial in transforming the tension between them into an opportunity for creativity. It showed that employing adjectives to describe nouns in a contradictory manner is one of the operational mechanisms used to create new learnables. That is, adjectives create new meanings and assign new affordances to nouns, leading to different contexts and shifts in meaning.

Future research needs to focus on investigating the influence of paradoxical adjectives on public opinion and perception, particularly in the context of business. Additionally, it is essential to examine the impact of this phenomenon on semantics and the potential shifts in language over time. Finally, the study of linguistic paradox can yield valuable insights into social change and belief systems, making it a worthwhile area of exploration.

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Chapter 5: When the walking paves the way to new talking

By Giorgio Marchetti

So what happens when we acquire knowledge or cognition of a fact is this: we reduce it mentally to some other thing or things with which we are already acquainted, and this "reduction" is simply a description of the new object by means of the same signs that described the old objects. In this way the "unknown" is made "known".

Moritz Schlick
Gesammelte Aufsätze, 1926-1936 (1938, p. 186)

Abstract

When thinking about how knowledge expands and develops, what immediately comes to mind are rather complex and niche things, such as scientific theories and disciplines, experiments, philosophy, and the educational system. However, there is a much simpler means, accessible to everyone, which we use daily, that enables us to expand our knowledge: language. In this chapter, we will analyze some passages from Alberto Moravia's *Lettere dal Sahara* (Letters from Sahara), to understand how language helps us explain the unknown. It will be shown that language, by encoding our experiential, cognitive, and cultural horizon, that is our learnable (Magni, 2023, and this book), serves as a reference system to explore, elaborate on, and explain the unknown.

1. Introduction

How do we get to know what we do not yet know? What are the cognitive processes that allow us to comprehend the unknown?

With these questions, I intend to address not so much the *unknown unknowns*, that is things that we are not even aware that we are not aware of, as the *known unknowns*, that is things that we are aware that we don't know. As the *Learnable Theory* shows (Magni et al., 2023, and this book), dealing with the unknown unknowns means considering the brain and cognitive *limits* that hinder us from noticing our own cognitive gaps – limits that resemble the blind spot in our visual field: the unaware obscuration of

the visual field due to the absence of light-detecting photoreceptor cells on the location where the optic nerve passes through the optic disk of the retina (usually, one remains unaware of one's blind spot until one undergoes specific tests). In this chapter, I will rather focus on the *possibilities* that our brain and cognitive mechanisms afford us for exploring, elaborating on, and explaining the known unknowns, and that allow us to expand our understanding beyond current knowledge. For the sake of simplicity, I will use the term "unknown" as a shorthand for "known unknown".

Neither do I intend to address the issue of *how* we become aware that there are things that we do not know. Usually, we become aware that there are things that we do not know because we face new situations that challenge us or because someone or something informs us about them. In this regard, a very important role in making us aware of the unknown is played by the media, which, through broadcasting news, reportages, opinions, criticisms, and more, contribute to stimulating our curiosity, thereby leading us to expand our knowledge. In the following discussion, I will simply assume that sometimes, for whatever reason, we know that there is something that we do not know.

Moreover, I will not address the issue of the exploration, elaboration, and explanation of the unknown from the perspectives which are usually adopted for this purpose. Usually, the unknown is investigated by scientists, who develop theories, models, formulas, methodologies, techniques, and experiments to unveil the mysteries of nature. Philosophers also deal with the unknown, even though they are more interested in the general principles that guide and constrain human knowledge. An active role in addressing the unknown is also played by the educational system and schools in general, in that they transmit not only acquired knowledge, but also the conceptual, theoretical, and practical tools that are necessary to acquire and develop new knowledge. Instead, in this chapter, I will address the issue of how we explore, elaborate on, and explain the unknown from a perspective that is rarely considered for this purpose: the perspective of language use.

My assertion that language use "is rarely considered" as a perspective from which to address the unknown needs qualification. Actually, language is frequently used to comprehend the unknown, such as when we ask someone to explain something that we do not understand, present a new idea or teach us a foreign language. In this sense, language is usually considered as a useful tool to comprehend the unknown. With my assertion, however, I refer to a less intuitive and noticed property of language, that is its ability to explain the unknown by simply being used, even though the language user does not have any intention to do so.

This less intuitive property of language is rarely recognized and investigated, most probably because language has historically been considered primarily as a general-purpose tool because of its communicative function rather than for any specific ability. Moreover, the existence of scientific disciplines specifically devoted to knowledge development has also contributed to hiding the role played by language in this process.

To exemplify this property of language, I will refer to Alberto Moravia's *Lettere dal Sahara*.[35]

2. Alberto Moravia's *Lettere dal Sahara*

Alberto Moravia, born Alberto Pincherle (1907-1990), was an Italian novelist and journalist, widely regarded as one of the most important literary figures of 20th-century Italy. As a journalist of the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, he wrote various reportages from Africa in the period 1975-1981. These reportages were later complied in the book *Lettere dal Sahara* (Letters from Sahara), published by Bompiani, Milano, in 1982.[36] Here, I will specifically consider some reportages from the Sahara Desert.

For the specific purpose of this chapter, it is important to highlight that Moravia himself states in the Introduction that when he wrote these reportages, he had no sociological, psychological, anthropological, religious, cultural, or political intent, but rather only wanted to convey his pure and simple impressions:

"I will write (…) a diary of pure and simple impressions (…). The impressions I will record in this diary will be primarily *visual*. That is to say, I will describe what I see, as well as the *sense* of what I see, but no more than the sense – meaning what I think about the thing at the very moment I see it. It will be, in short, the diary of a tourist. I am well aware that the words "tourist" and "tourism" are discredited and will immediately bring to

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[35] The opportunity to read *Lettere dal Sahara* was accidentally provided to me by my colleague Ahlam Alharbi. Ahlam was conducting research on the different ways Westerners and Middle Easterners perceive the desert and asked if I could provide her with texts from Western writers specifically addressing the desert. Among the various texts I consulted, I came across this book by Moravia.

[36] In this chapter, I will refer to the 2007 edition; all the quoted passages are translated by me and reviewed by Wendy Piemonte.

mind travel agencies, cruise advertisements, and *Rome by night* buses. However, after all, tourism has not always been merely consumerism; originally, it was a form of sentimental education (…). Tourism (…) was a way of seeing reality, not explaining it, narrating it, not unmasking it. This way of traveling required above all sensitivity and curiosity. In the end, it proved more fruitful than the investigations of so-called experts because it informed the reader not only about things that are shareable and further explorable, known to all, but about those that the traveller alone had experienced – namely, as I have said, his impressions".[37]

As we can see, Moravia's intention in writing his reportages was not a scientific one of *explaining* and *discovering*, but rather that of *describing* and *recounting* his travel impressions. I have highlighted this aspect because it further supports the idea that I am presenting in this chapter, namely that *language, even when used simply to describe, recount, or narrate something – as Moravia indeed does – can prove to be a useful tool for the development of knowledge*.

2.1. The track is the Sahara's road

The first thing that Moravia notices about the Sahara is the peculiarity of the desert *tracks* (Italian: *piste*) that cross it, a peculiarity that sets them apart from the *roads* (Italian: *strade*) as we in the West are accustomed to conceiving them: "The track is the Sahara's road (…) but the track can never completely become a road".[38] There is indeed a fundamental difference between the road and the track: the road "is fixed and simple,

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[37] "Scriverò (…) un diario di pure e semplici impressioni (…) Le impressioni che consegnerò in questo diario saranno soprattutto visive; quanto a dire che descriverò quello che vedo nonché il senso di quello che vedo ma non più che il senso, cioè quello che penso della cosa nel momento stesso che la vedo. Sarà, insomma, il diario di un turista. So bene che le parole turista e turismo sono screditate; e che faranno pensare subito alle agenzie di viaggi, alla pubblicità delle crociere, agli autobus di *Rome by night*. Ma, dopo tutto, il turismo non è sempre stato soltanto consumismo; originariamente era una forma di educazione sentimentale (…) Il turismo (…) era un modo di vedere la realtà non di spiegarla, di raccontarla non di smascherarla. Questa maniera di viaggiare richiedeva soprattutto sensibilità e curiosità; ma alla fine si rivelava più proficua delle inchieste dei cosiddetti esperti, perché informava il lettore non già delle cose divulgabili e approfondibili che tutti possono sapere ma di quelle che il viaggiatore era stato il solo a provare, cioè appunto, come ho detto, delle sue impressioni" (pp. 7-8).
[38] "La pista è la strada del Sahara (…) ma la pista non potrà mai diventare del tutto una strada" (p. 69).

while the (track) is mobile and multiple. That is, it often changes course, and it is a bundle of seemingly parallel tracks, actually often divergent"[39].

Moravia puts forward some hypotheses about this peculiarity of the desert track: the continuous transit of caravans, the hooves of camels, the wheels of carts, and the striped tires of cars and very heavy trucks make the track practically unusable, despite some sporadic attempts at maintenance.

"Dug deep by the wheels, full of holes and bumps, the track is now irreversibly what is called a *tôle ondulée*; that is, with a road surface resembling a saw blade, entirely impassable, both because one can only travel on it at very low speeds and because the furious, almost systematic jolts end up wrecking any vehicle, even those specifically designed for the desert. Therefore, it happens that many travellers, taking advantage of the fact that the desert, for a very long stretch, is of hard and perfectly smooth sand, abandon the official track (...) and create two other parallel tracks, one to the right and the other to the left [of the official track]. One proceeds in this way at a discreet speed, now returning to and now departing from the official track, a bit like someone who occasionally indulges in some adventure and then prudently re-enters the routine of daily life. But it can happen, indeed it almost always happens, that the two parallel tracks turn out to be just as unmanageable as the official track; and then the drivers create other copies of subsidiary tracks (...) less and less parallel, more and more divergent"[40].

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[39] "è fissa e semplice; mentre la (pista) è mobile e molteplice. Cioè cambia spesso percorso; ed è un fascio di piste apparentemente parallele, in realtà spesso divergenti". (p. 69)

[40] "Scavata a fondo dalle ruote, piena di buche e di gobbe, la pista è oramai, irrimediabilmente, di quelle chiamate a *tôle ondulée*; ossia con un fondo stradale a denti di sega del tutto impercorribile, sia perché non vi si può viaggiare che a velocità ridottissima, sia perché i rabbiosi, quasi si direbbe sistematici, sobbalzi, finiscono per sfasciare qualsiasi macchina, persino quelle fatte apposta per il deserto. Allora avviene che molti viaggiatori, approfittando del fatto che il deserto, per un lunghissimo tratto, è di sabbia dura e perfettamente liscia, abbandonano la pista (…) ufficiale e creano altre due piste parallele, l'una a destra e l'altra a sinistra. Si procede così con discreta velocità, ora rientrando e ora uscendo dalla pista ufficiale, un po' come qualcuno che ogni tanto si concede qualche avventura e poi rientra prudentemente nel tran tran della vita quotidiana. Ma può accadere, anzi accade quasi sempre che le due piste parallele si rivelano altrettanto intrattabili della pista ufficiale; e allora gli automobilisti creano altre copie di piste sussidiarie (…) sempre meno parallele, sempre più divergenti" (pp. 69-70).

Here, Moravia provides us with an initial indication of how language – even when used simply to describe or narrate impressions – can help us understand what we do not know, and thus make it known to us.[41] The use of the word *road* to define the desert *track* – "The track is the Sahara's road" (p. 69) – allows him to describe the latter in terms of the former, identify commonalities and differences, and explore the peculiarities of the track in relation to the road. This process is possible because Moravia possesses the word *road* and the (entirely Western) concept it represents. Thanks to this word, he can compare what he sees for the first time (the desert track) with what he already knows (the road). It is Moravia's experiential, cognitive, and cultural background, or horizon – that is, his learnable (Magni, 2023) – that allows him to make this comparison: a background primarily encoded in the linguistic repertoire (to which the word *road* belongs) in which each individual culturally recognizes himself and to which the individual assimilates the unknown to understand it.

This fact well explains the astonishment that Moravia feels when he first sees the Sahara tracks. The idea of a *road* implies, for Westerners, the presence of road signs, clear boundaries that separate it from the rest of the landscape, asphalt covering it, temporal stability, intersections, rules, priorities, stops, traffic lights, and perhaps even a sidewalk. All these things are lacking in the desert tracks: a lack which Moravia is forced to reckon with and for which he must find some explanation when he describes them as *roads*.

In short, we come to know something we did not know by starting from what we already know. And since much of what we know is encoded in words, their use can lead us, even despite our most immaculate intentions, *to develop our knowledge in one direction rather than another, to know things in a certain way rather than another* (in this regard, it would be interesting to know how a native of the Sahara Desert would describe Western roads the first time they saw one in their life. We can imagine, paraphrasing Moravia, that they might say something like: "The roads are the tracks of Western countries, only much more boring and much less practical than ours. You can never leave them to take shortcuts, and, above all, you can never get distracted, even for a short while!").

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[41] A clarification is in order here. Obviously, Moravia, as an Italian speaker, knows the word "track" (Italian, *pista*), as well as its lexical meaning. What he does not know is its epistemic sense (Meunier, 2006), which is primarily acquired through the subjective, direct and lived experience of the entity referred to by the word "track". The epistemic sense allows a speaker to use the entity's affordances to satisfy his needs.

2.2. Life as a mirage of death, death as a mirage of life

The same linguistic-cognitive process that leads Moravia to account for the *unknown tracks* of the Sahara (and the amazement he feels) in terms of the more *familiar roads* of the West, can be seen at work on another occasion when a much more remarkable, inexplicable, and astonishing phenomenon presents itself to him: that of the *mirage*.

But be aware: for Moravia, it is not so much a matter of providing a scientific explanation or justification for the mirage, as its physical causes are well-known and established. It is rather a matter of explaining the extraordinary psychological and symbolic effect that the mirage has on him: "Can scientific explanation perhaps also explain why the mirage, unlike many other natural phenomena, inescapably tends, despite all rational resistance, to take on a symbolic character?"[42]

To provide himself with a rationale for this effect, Moravia turns to the rhetorical figure of antimetabole. Antimetabole is a figure of speech in which the same words are repeated in successive clauses or sentences but in reverse order, arranged in a chiasmus. Typical examples of antimetaboles are: "We do not live to eat, but eat to live" and "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" (the latter is by John F. Kennedy).

Moravia, addressing his interlocutor, first describes the impression the Western city makes on him:

"You live in the city, in a large modern city full of inhabitants and vehicles, shops, traffic, business – in a single word, life. Yet, I am sure it has happened to you (...) to have the sudden sensation that urban vitality, especially in the moments of its greatest excitement, for example, in the early hours of the night in winter, takes on the shape of a fleeting, illusory image of death (...) Those mobile lights that flicker ambiguously in the dark; those faces that continuously emerge and disappear (...); that boiling chaos of glimmers, movements, noises, encounters, and escapes; all contribute to composing, before our astonished and unbelieving eyes, the ominous *mirage*

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[42] "La spiegazione scientifica può forse anche spiegare perché il miraggio, a differenza di tanti altri fenomeni naturali, tende invincibilmente, malgrado ogni resistenza razionale, ad assumere un carattere simbolico?" (p. 75)

of a daily apocalypse in which death presents itself as what it truly is: disorder, decay, putrefaction".[43] (italics are mine).

Life, therefore, as a mirage of death.

And here is the chiastic reversal that Moravia performs to account for the psychological effect of the mirage in the desert:

"In the desert, the opposite of what happens in the city happened to me. That is, while the city, so vital with its crowd, its movement, its lights, gives me an impression of death, the desert, which is synonymous with death, somehow inspires an impression of life in me. So, while in the city, life continuously seems to take on the semblance of death; similarly, in the desert, death at every moment seems to simulate life".[44]

In the desert, death takes on the semblance of life. Therefore, we have death as a mirage of life.

According to Moravia, the mirage "is the true key to understanding why death disguises itself as life in the desert, takes on its aspects, seeks and succeeds in deceiving us".[45] The mirage in the desert comes to our aid with its illusion, comes to our rescue at the moment when the utmost despair, the emptiness of the desert, the sense of void it inspires, and the idea of the inevitability of death assail and take hold of us:

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[43] "Tu vivi in città, in una grande città moderna piena di abitanti e di veicoli, di negozi, di traffico, di affari, insomma, in una parola sola di vita. Eppure, sono sicuro che ti sarà avvenuto (…) di avere l'improvvisa sensazione che la vitalità urbana, soprattutto nei momenti della sua massima esaltazione, per esempio nelle prime ore della notte, d'inverno, si configuri come una fuggevole, illusoria immagine di morte (…) Quelle luci mobili che occhieggiano ambigue nel buio; quei volti che affiorano e scompaiono senza tregua (…); quel caos ribollente di luccichii, di movimenti, di rumori, di incontri e di fughe; tutto contribuisce a comporre, davanti ai nostri occhi attoniti e increduli, il miraggio funesto di una apocalisse quotidiana nella quale la morte si presenta come ciò che è realmente: disordine, disfacimento, putrefazione" (p. 74).
[44] "Nel deserto mi è successo il contrario che nella città. E cioè, mentre la città, così vitale, con la sua folla, il suo movimento, le sue luci, mi dà un'impressione di morte; il deserto che è sinonimo di morte, riesce in qualche modo a ispirarmi un'impressione di vita. Così mentre nella città la vita sembra continuamente assumere sembianze di morte; allo stesso modo, nel deserto, la morte ad ogni momento, pare simulare la vita" (pp. 74-75)
[45] "è la vera chiave per comprendere perché nel deserto la morte si traveste da vita, ne assume gli aspetti, cerca e riesce ad illuderci" (p. 75).

"Although I know with absolute certainty that I am traveling in the desert, that the desert is synonymous with death, and that no matter how much I explore the desert, I will never encounter anything other than emptiness, nothingness, and death; nevertheless, at the sight of the mirage, I cannot help but feel relief, satisfaction, attraction, and hope. Of course, it is an illusion; but this illusion, curiously, gives me the impression of being more real than the steering wheel of the Land Rover".[46]

The extraordinary and unknown psychological effect of the mirage and its intrinsic symbolism are thus understood by Moravia not so much through an explanation formulated in terms of physical optics, but through a linguistic device – the antimetabole figure – which allows him to rework, by inverting it chiastically, knowledge previously possessed and encoded in the linguistic expression *In the city, life takes on the semblance of death*.

Just as with the *desert track*, in this case as well, Moravia manages to understand a phenomenon previously unknown to him by linguistically reworking his experiential, cognitive, and cultural baggage – his learnable. Obviously, this is a wholly personal understanding, and it is by no means certain that it should also apply to other people: but it is still a way of making sense of something that was previously unknown.

2.3. The life in the oasis

If, with the *desert track*, Moravia had to deal with unknown aspects of reality of an objective-physical-material nature, and, with the *mirage in the desert*, he had to deal with unknown aspects of reality of a subjective-psychological-symbolic nature, with the last example we will discuss – namely, *living in the oasis of the desert* – Moravia had to come to terms with unknown aspects of reality of an intersubjective-social nature. For Moravia, the unknown aspect of the life in the oases of the desert can be phrased as follows: How is it possible for human beings to live in an oasis of the desert and lead an organized life there?

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[46] "Benché sappia con assoluta certezza che sto viaggiando nel deserto, che il deserto è sinonimo di morte, che per quanto perlustri il deserto non vi incontrerò mai altro che vuoto, nulla e morte; purtuttavia alla vista del miraggio non posso fare a meno di provare sollievo, compiacimento, attrazione e speranza. S'intende, è un'illusione; ma questa illusione, curiosamente, mi fa l'effetto di essere più reale del volante della *Land Rover*" (pp. 76-77).

A Western observer, to grasp how unfamiliar and unknown the possibility of living in the oases of the desert is, needs only observe "the dark, incredulous amazement that the desert nomads inspire in us (...) – the Tuareg, who, in the Sahara, can sometimes be found in the most improbable and desolate places, with their brown tents, their crouched camels, and their fires made of twigs and dried dung".[47]

Moravia explains the incomprehensibility of the life in the oasis of the desert with the extreme *solitude* that characterizes such a way of life: "These oases tell us that organized human life ultimately manages to overcome even the most challenging test of forced and almost total solitude".[48] The solitude of life in the oases is, for the cognitive horizon of a Westerner, *unknowable*: "Why do I say unknowable? Because (...) on the sands of the desert (...) it is not possible to reside, put down roots, inhabit, live permanently. In the desert (...) one must continually move, and thus let the wind, the true master of this vastness, erase every trace of our passage, make the expanses (...) of sand once again virgin and inviolate".[49]

The unknowability and incomprehensibility of life in the oasis are even more pronounced (for a Western citizen) when considering that oases are places of extreme poverty and mere subsistence: "To get an idea, just go to the market of Ain Salah. On the stalls or on the ground, displayed neatly on carpets, you will find only industrial products of the lowest quality or small piles of fruits, spices, and dried legumes. In abundance, you will only find dates, either pressed and amalgamated into brown blocks or loose".[50]

Concluding this paragraph on the poverty of the oases, Moravia cannot help but emphasize the *relativeness* that permeates his observations: "Yet the veiled and turbaned nomads linger in front of these miserable goods with

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[47] "l'oscuro, incredulo stupore che ci ispirano i nomadi (…) desertici, (…) i Tuareg che, nel Sahara, accade di trovare talvolta nei luoghi più improbabili e desolati, con le loro tende brune, i loro cammelli accovacciati, e i loro fuochi di sterpi e di escrementi secchi" (p. 90).
[48] "Queste oasi ci dicono che la vita umana organizzata riesce alla fine a superare anche la prova, tra tutte durissima, della solitudine forzata e pressoché totale" (p. 90).
[49] "Perché dico inconoscibil(e)? Perché (…) sulle sabbie del deserto (…) non è possibile soggiornare, mettere radici, abitare, vivere stabilmente. Nel deserto (…) bisogna continuamente muoversi, e così lasciare che il vento, il vero padrone di quest(a) immensità, cancelli ogni traccia del nostro passaggio, renda di nuovo le distese (…) di sabbia, vergini e inviolate" (p. 90).
[50] "Per averne un'idea, basta andare al mercato di Ain Salah. Sulle bancarelle o in terra, esposti in ordine su tappeti, non ci sono che prodotti industriali di infima qualità oppure minimi mucchietti di frutta, di spezie, di legumi secchi. In abbondanza ci troverai soltanto i datteri sia pressati e amalgamati in blocchi bruni, sia sfusi" (p. 94).

all the signs of a fascinated and deluded attention. In reality, they look at them through the lenses of Saharan scarcity; we, on the other hand, through those of European abundance".[51]

And it is precisely in the light of this evident relativeness that Moravia, utilizing and narratively reworking his experiential, cognitive, and cultural horizon, his learnable, ultimately manages to come to terms with the life in the oases and the unknowable solitude that characterizes it:

"Thus, little by little, I am approaching a definition of the worldview that is typical of those who live in the oases. I had an intuition of this worldview one morning in the oasis of El Golea. I had climbed up to the old citadel (…) Looking down (…) at the oasis below, which I could see in its entirety, with its palm grove surrounded on all sides by sand dunes, its village with houses made of dry mud (…) and the track that, like a striped yellow serpent, wound its way through the houses and stretched into the desert (…); then, embracing this extraordinary panorama in a single glance, it suddenly seemed to me to understand what might go through the mind of those who live in the oases, never leaving the oasis except to go to another oasis and knowing no other life than that of the oasis. This is why: the oasis is poor, isolated, small, far from the world, but precisely for this reason, it is the place that induces daydreaming, whether one lives there and thinks about the surrounding desert, or whether one crosses the desert and thinks about the oasis at which, at the end of the journey, one will arrive. Now, to those who cross the terrible solitudes of the Sahara, the oasis cannot but appear as a place where (…) enchanted palaces rise with golden halls filled with women, music, and delicious foods. And to those who, instead, live in the oasis, the desert cannot but appear as the place where, almost to compensate for the difficulties of existence, the immaterial treasures of contemplation and revelation are concealed. Thus, the world of the Sahara, so dead, so inhuman, so bare in daily reality, reveals itself, instead, through history, as the privileged place of imagination and spirit".[52]

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[51] "Eppure i nomadi ammantellati e inturbantati si soffermano davanti a queste merci miserabili con tutti i segni di un'attenzione affascinata e illusa. In realtà, essi le guardano attraverso gli occhiali della penuria sahariana; noi, invece, attraverso quelli dell'abbondanza europea" (p. 94).

[52] "Così pian piano mi sto avvicinando ad una definizione della visione del mondo che è propria di coloro che vivono nelle oasi. Di questa visione del mondo ho avuto l'intuizione una mattina, nell'oasi di El Golea. Mi ero inerpicato sulla vecchia cittadella (…) Guardando

The reversal of perspective, facilitated by the ascent to the old citadel, allows Moravia to glimpse spirituality – a quality that Western places have long since lost – in the unknown (the life in the oasis) and the unknowable (the solitude upon which this life is based). It is a quality that makes the oasis the privileged place of imagination and contemplation. Once again, Moravia succeeds in making the unknown known through the linguistic and narrative reworking of his learnable.

3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed how knowledge develops and expands through the use of language. This development is determined by two main factors: (i) what we already know, our learnable, and (ii) our linguistic and narrative ability.

Analyzing some passages from Moravia's *Lettere dal Sahara*, we have observed some possible ways in which language can help explain the unknown.

The first possibility involves the fundamental and straightforward linguistic operation of defining the unknown based on the known. Through the predication "The track is the Sahara's road", Moravia can describe the unknown (the track) in terms of the known (the road) and, consequently, identify their similarities and differences. Remember, as we have seen in the chapter 1 that when used as a copula, the verb "to be" allows for attributing *any new* affordance to the subject of the predication (as well as for selecting

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(…) all'oasi sottostante che potevo scorgere tutt'intera, con la sua selva di palme circondate d'ogni parte dalle dune, il suo villaggio dalle case di fango secco (…) e la pista che, come un serpente giallo e striato, si snodava tra le case e si allontanava verso il deserto (…); allora dico, abbracciando in un solo sguardo questo panorama straordinario, mi è sembrato ad un tratto di capire che cosa possa passare per la testa di chi vive nelle oasi, non esce dall'oasi che per andare in un'altra oasi e non conosce altra vita che quella dell'oasi. Ecco qui. L'oasi è povera, è isolata, è piccola, è lontana dal mondo. Ma, appunto per questo, è il luogo che induce a sognare ad occhi aperti, sia che ci si viva e si pensi al deserto che la circonda, sia che si attraversi il deserto e si pensi all'oasi a cui, alla fine del viaggio, si arriverà. Ora, a chi attraversa le terribili solitudini del Sahara, l'oasi non potrà non apparire come un luogo in cui (…) si levano palazzi incantati dalle sale dorate piene di donne, di musiche, di cibi squisiti. E a chi, invece, vive nell'oasi, il deserto non potrà non apparire come il luogo in cui, quasi a compensare le difficoltà dell'esistenza, stanno nascosti i tesori immateriali della contemplazione e della rivelazione. Così il mondo del Sahara, così morto, così inumano, così nudo nella realtà quotidiana, si rivela, invece, attraverso la storia, come il luogo privilegiato dell'immaginazione e dello spirito" (pp. 94-95).

any one of the affordances of the subject of the predication without any restriction). In other words, through the predication, Moravia can attribute those affordances to the track that he detects by comparing what he knows of the road with what he perceives of the track.

A second possibility afforded by language to explain the unknown is represented by rhetorical figures. In this chapter, we have seen Moravia's usage of the antimetabole: *In the city, life takes on the semblance of death; in the desert, death takes on the semblance of life* (or *Life as a mirage of death, death as a mirage of life*). The antimetabole allows him to define desert life by reworking chiastically his knowledge of city life.

Last, we have seen that, facilitated by a reversal of perspective, Moravia manages to explain life in the oases and the unknowable solitude that characterizes it by narratively reworking his experiential, cognitive, and cultural horizon.

In sum, Moravia's learnable, encoded in his linguistic repertoire, provides the reference system against which the unknown can be compared and evaluated.

The learnable is a predominantly cultural and social factor, transmitted to us by the society in which we live and encoded in the language we speak. It is essential because it provides us with the building blocks with which we can realize new (mental, physical, cultural, social) constructions. Our learnable helps us explore, elaborate on, and explain the unknown. In a word it expands our knowledge.

However – as the Learnable Theory (Magni, 2023; Magni and this book) warns us – it is important to consider that our learnable is also limiting. By directing and constraining our attention and intention regarding why, how, where, when, and what to build, it channels the development of our knowledge in one direction rather than another, hiding and hindering potential alternative paths of knowledge development. But to properly address this issue, one would need a separate discussion, which is beyond the scope of the current chapter.

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Closing remarks: Learnable Linguistics in a nutshell
by Luca Magni

Abstract

Language plays a crucial role in shaping reality and business success. It influences perceptions, actions, and creativity. Business leaders can communicate their vision, communicators can craft compelling narratives, and individuals can cultivate language skills to navigate social dynamics and build meaningful connections. While wrapping up the content of previous chapters, this closing section stresses their focus and relevance in highlighting how some linguistic mechanisms may be leveraged by business leaders to forge inclusive and adaptable messages to employees, customers, investors, and other stakeholders. This section ends the book with the recommendation to navigate the challenging seas of business communications and negotiations with linguistic precision, embracing paradoxes for creative problem-solving, expanding knowledge and understanding through narrative, developing awareness of language schemes, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation.

1.The power of language in shaping reality and business success

Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is a powerful force that shapes our reality, influences our perceptions, and guides our actions. Throughout the chapters of this book, we have explored the multifaceted roles that language plays in business and beyond. From the enchanting power of words to the paradoxes that foster creativity, language is at the heart of human interaction and cognitive development. This concluding chapter synthesizes the insights from the previous chapters and discusses the implications for business leaders, communicators, and individuals alike. By understanding the profound impact of language, business leaders can effectively communicate their vision and inspire their teams. Communicators can harness the power of language to craft compelling narratives that resonate with their audiences. And individuals can cultivate their language skills to navigate complex social dynamics and foster meaningful connections. Ultimately, recognizing the significance of

language allows us to harness its potential and shape a more successful and harmonious future. For example, a business leader who understands the impact of language may use persuasive and motivational language to inspire their team during a challenging project, resulting in increased productivity and employee satisfaction. Similarly, a skilled communicator who crafts a narrative using language that resonates with their audience can effectively influence public opinion and drive positive change. Ultimately, individuals who cultivate strong language skills can navigate social dynamics more effectively, building stronger relationships and fostering a sense of connection and understanding within their communities.

Furthermore, the impact of language extends beyond individual interactions and can shape the collective consciousness of a society. Powerful orators throughout history have used their linguistic prowess to rally masses, ignite revolutions, and challenge oppressive systems. The ability to articulate ideas clearly and passionately can create a ripple effect, sparking a wave of inspiration and mobilization among those who hear the words. Language has the power to break down barriers, bridge gaps, and foster empathy, creating a more inclusive and harmonious world. For example, Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I have a dream" speech not only inspired thousands of individuals to join the civil rights movement, but it also shifted public opinion and paved the way for significant legislative changes. His use of powerful language and vivid imagery resonated with people from all walks of life, sparking empathy and a collective desire for social justice. Through his speech, King broke down barriers of prejudice and united individuals in the pursuit of a more inclusive and harmonious society. However, it is important to recognize that not all speeches or actions have the same impact. For instance, while some may argue that certain political leaders' speeches promote empathy and inclusivity, their actions may contradict these ideals. This can create a dissonance between rhetoric and reality, leading to a less inclusive and harmonious world. While speeches like Martin Luther King Jr.'s may inspire empathy and unity, it is crucial to acknowledge that the impact of a speech is dependent on the speaker's actions aligning with their words, as some political leaders' speeches may not reflect their true intentions or promote inclusivity in practice. In order for speeches to truly promote empathy and inclusivity, they must be backed up by tangible actions that demonstrate a commitment to these values. Without this alignment, speeches can become empty rhetoric that fails to create real change. It is important for individuals to critically analyze the actions of political leaders and hold them accountable for their

words, ensuring that they are actively working towards creating a more inclusive and harmonious world.

1.1. The enchantment of listeners through language

In the realm of business, the ability to captivate an audience is invaluable. As Giorgio Marchetti elucidates in Chapter 1, the grammatical classes of nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions each carry unique attention-based mechanisms that can enchant listeners. These linguistic elements, when skillfully employed, can direct attention towards desired outcomes and divert it from less pertinent aspects. The strategic use of language can thus enchant listeners, fostering a sense of unity and purpose, as exemplified by King Henry the V's rousing speech to his troops before the Battle of Agincourt. In his speech, King Henry the V masterfully utilizes a combination of nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions to rally and captivate his troops. Through his choice of powerful and evocative words, he is able to direct their attention towards their common goal of victory and instill a sense of unity among them. His skillful use of language not only engages his listeners but also inspires them to action, showcasing his invaluable ability to captivate an audience with carefully crafted speeches. This example relates to the speech where Henry the V addresses his weary and outnumbered troops, urging them to fight courageously against the French. Through carefully chosen words and a commanding tone, he creates a strong sense of purpose and camaraderie among his soldiers, motivating them to defy the odds and emerge victorious in the face of adversity. His speech exemplifies the power of effective communication in galvanizing a group of individuals towards a common goal. However, a counterexample to King Henry the V's ability to captivate an audience can be seen in his speech at the Siege of Harfleur. Despite his attempts to rally his troops and inspire them to fight with valor, the soldiers were demoralized and lacked the motivation to continue the battle. The speech failed to resonate with them and instead led to further disillusionment, ultimately resulting in a defeat for Henry the V's army. This counterexample highlights the limitations of even the most carefully crafted speeches and emphasizes the importance of factors beyond communication in achieving success on the battlefield. While King Henry the V was known for his charismatic leadership and ability to inspire his troops, the speech at the Siege of Harfleur showcased his inability to connect with his soldiers on that particular occasion. It is evident that factors such as fatigue, fear, and previous losses had taken a toll on the soldiers' morale, rendering the speech

ineffective in rejuvenating their spirits. This counterexample serves as a reminder that even the most skillfully delivered speeches may not always yield the desired outcome in the face of complex realities on the battlefield.

1.2. The constraints and liberation of speakers

Language can both constrain and liberate speakers. In Chapter 2, the concept of linguistic exorcisms is introduced, highlighting how a basic understanding of linguistics can free speakers from communicative constraints. This liberation is crucial for business leaders, who must convey complex ideas succinctly and persuasively. By breaking free from linguistic constraints, speakers can communicate more effectively, fostering clarity and understanding. Moreover, the ability to navigate through the complexities of language allows speakers to adapt their message to different audiences. Whether addressing staff members or potential investors, business leaders can modify their language to ensure that their ideas are comprehensible. The liberation provided by linguistic knowledge also extends to the realm of diplomacy, where leaders must navigate various cultural nuances and language barriers to achieve diplomatic success. In this context, linguistic exorcisms become a powerful tool for bridging gaps and fostering fruitful dialogue. In high-stakes negotiations on a business deal, a leader who understands the power of linguistic exorcisms can strategically choose words and phrases that create a sense of urgency and persuade the other party to agree to their terms. By mastering the art of concise and persuasive communication, the leader can overcome complexities, mitigate misunderstandings, and ultimately achieve favorable outcomes for their organization. Overall, understanding the constraints and liberation of language empowers speakers to overcome obstacles and achieve positive outcomes in any challenging scenario.

In addition to the tactical use of language, a skilled leader must also possess a deep understanding of the psychological impact that words can have on individuals and groups. By carefully selecting their words, a leader can inspire and motivate their team, instilling a sense of purpose and unity. Moreover, they can foster a positive and inclusive work environment where everyone feels valued and heard. This ability to effectively communicate can be particularly crucial in times of change or crisis, as it can help alleviate fears and uncertainties and rally people towards a common goal. Therefore, a leader who recognizes the power of linguistic exorcisms not only possesses a valuable tool for negotiation but also a means to cultivate a thriving and cohesive organization. For example, during a company merger,

a leader who effectively communicates can address concerns and anxieties among employees by sharing a clear vision for the future and emphasizing the benefits of the merger. They can also encourage open dialogue and actively listen to employees' perspectives, fostering a sense of trust and collaboration. By utilizing linguistic exorcisms, the leader can navigate through challenging circumstances and create a united workforce that is motivated to embrace change and work towards shared success. This not only helps employees feel valued and understood but also ensures that their ideas and feedback are considered in decision-making processes. Additionally, effective communication skills enable leaders to successfully resolve conflicts and mediate disputes within the organization, promoting a harmonious and productive work environment. Ultimately, by prioritizing effective communication, leaders can create a positive corporate culture where collaboration and innovation thrive, leading to improved employee engagement and overall organizational success.

1.3. Simplicity and inclusivity in business communication

Ahlam Alharbi's exploration of the principle "Less is More", in Chapter 3, underscores the importance of simplicity and inclusivity in business communication. The funnel theory suggests that a concise approach to language can enhance the memorability and effectiveness of marketing messages. This minimalist approach to language ensures that slogans and branding messages remain adaptable and relevant over time, thus contributing to the longevity of a brand's appeal.

Furthermore, Alharbi provides examples of precise linguistic choices that may be leveraged to enhance simplicity in business communication and foster inclusivity by making messages accessible and relevant to a wider audience. When language is clear and straightforward, it eliminates potential barriers that may arise from complex jargon or industry-specific terminology. This inclusivity not only allows for effective communication within an organization but also extends to external stakeholders such as customers and clients. By adopting a minimalist approach to language, businesses can ensure that their messages are easily understood and resonate with a diverse range of individuals. This can lead to increased customer engagement, loyalty, and ultimately greater success in the market.

1.4. The role of paradox in innovation

The use of paradoxical adjectives and grammatical discrepancies, as examined in Chapter 4 can lead to the development of novel learnables and alternative realities. Embracing opposing ideas and resolving the tension between them can spur creativity and innovation. This approach can challenge existing beliefs and provoke social transformations, leading to the creation of new meanings and contexts. By embracing paradoxes, individuals and organizations can break free from conventional thinking and explore new possibilities. The ability to hold contradictory ideas simultaneously allows for a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues and encourages a more inclusive approach to problem-solving. Ultimately, the role of paradox in innovation lies in its power to push boundaries, stimulate critical thinking, and pave the way for ground-breaking discoveries and breakthroughs. In the field of technology, embracing the paradox that sees the measurable and predictable world of physics and the variability of biological phenomena has led to the development of ground-breaking innovations such as biometric authentication, for example, where the dilemma between privacy and convenience seems to have found a solution. This technology allows individuals to securely access their devices or accounts using unique biological markers like fingerprints or facial recognition. It simultaneously addresses concerns about privacy by offering a convenient and secure method of authentication, transforming the way people interact with technology. By embracing this paradox, companies and individuals can navigate the complex landscape of privacy and convenience to create innovative solutions. As biometric authentication becomes more prevalent, it is likely that we will see its integration into various aspects of our daily lives. From unlocking our smartphones to accessing secure buildings, the convenience and security offered by biometrics are revolutionizing the way we interact with technology. Furthermore, this technology has the potential to eliminate the need for passwords, which are often forgotten or easily hacked. By embracing biometric authentication, we can strike a balance between privacy and convenience, ultimately enhancing our digital experiences. All this is well expressed and possibly cognitively induced by the intersection of the two semantic domains reflected in the term biometrics.

1.5. The expansion of knowledge through language

Finally, Chapter 5 illustrates how the metacognitions that accompany new experiences are sustained and sustain language expansions. By encoding our experiential, cognitive, and cultural horizons, language serves as a reference system to explore, elaborate on, and explain the unknown. As Moravia's *Lettere dal Sahara* illustrates, language allows us to make sense of unfamiliar experiences by relating them to what we already know. In this way, language acts as a bridge between the known and the unknown, enabling us to navigate and comprehend the complexities of the world. By providing a framework for understanding, language not only expands our knowledge but also shapes our perception of reality. Through the power of language, we are able to make connections, draw conclusions, and expand our intellectual horizons, ultimately leading to the pursuit of further knowledge and understanding. For example, in *Lettere dal Sahara*, the author uses language to describe the vast and arid landscapes of the Sahara Desert in a way that not only visualizes the physical aspects of the desert but also allows the reader to empathize with its emptiness. By drawing comparisons and using familiar imagery, the author bridges the gap between the unfamiliar environment of the desert and the reader's existing knowledge, allowing them to comprehend and appreciate the complexities of this unique setting. Through language, readers are able to form a mental picture of the desert. The author's vivid descriptions of the piercing heat and seemingly endless dunes transport readers to the Sahara, evoking a sense of desolation and isolation. The use of sensory language, such as the feel of the scorching sand beneath one's feet and the sight of mirages shimmering in the distance, deepens the reader's understanding of the barrenness and harshness of this environment. This mental picture not only helps readers visualize the physical aspects of the desert, but it also allows them to empathize with the emotional challenges faced by those who inhabit such a vast and unforgiving landscape, widening and deepening the semantic reach of their desert-related lexicons and repertoires.

1.6. Implications for business leaders

For business leaders, the insights from this book offer a roadmap for harnessing the power of language to achieve success. Leaders must be aware of the attentional effects of different grammatical classes and use them strategically to engage audiences and drive action. They must also recognize

the constraints of language and seek to liberate their communication from these bounds to foster innovation and adaptability.

In the next section, we will delve deeper into the practical applications of these linguistic insights for business leaders, focusing on how they can leverage language to create a more informed, tolerant, and successful organization. In this respect, a business leader can strategically use persuasive language techniques such as active verbs and positive adjectives to captivate their audience during a sales pitch or presentation. By carefully choosing their words and sentence structures, they can create a sense of urgency and excitement, ultimately driving action and increasing sales.

Additionally, by recognizing and leveraging the limitations of language, leaders can encourage innovation and adaptability within their organization. They can use and focus on metaphors and assumptions that permeate their own communications to employees, and vice versa, investigate the cognitive horizons that may restrict both their ideation and elaboration capabilities and possibly their performance. By embracing the power of language, leaders can inspire their teams to think outside the box and explore new ideas. They can encourage a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration where employees feel empowered to challenge existing norms and push boundaries. Ultimately, leveraging the limitations of language can lead to breakthrough innovations and improved performance that drive the success of the organization.

2. Linguistic strategies for business leadership and organizational success

2.1. Harnessing linguistic mechanisms for effective leadership

Effective leadership is often marked by the ability to communicate vision and values compellingly. The linguistic mechanisms discussed in this book provide leaders with a toolkit for enhancing their rhetoric and engaging their teams. By understanding the selective role of adverbs, the stabilizing function of nouns, and the dynamic nature of verbs, leaders can craft messages that resonate with their audience and inspire action. For instance, using verbs that denote action and change, such as "transform", "innovate", and "achieve", can instill a sense of agency and momentum within the team. By choosing nouns that convey stability and reliability, such as

"foundation", "trust", and "commitment", leaders can create a sense of security and unity among their team members. Adverbs, when used selectively, can add emphasis and conviction to a leader's message. Words like "boldly", "passionately", and "unwaveringly" can reinforce the leader's vision and values, making it more persuasive and inspiring. Overall, mastering these linguistic techniques can greatly enhance a leader's ability to communicate effectively and motivate their team towards success. In addition to using nouns and adverbs, leaders can also make use of strong verbs in their communication to further enhance motivation and cohesion within their team. Action words like "empower", "collaborate", and "innovate" can inspire team members to take decisive action and work together towards achieving shared goals. By incorporating these powerful language techniques, leaders can effectively build trust, foster a positive team dynamic, and propel their team towards success. By using strong verbs in their communication, leaders can empower their team members to take ownership of their tasks and feel motivated to go above and beyond. By encouraging collaboration, leaders can foster a sense of unity and encourage team members to pool their talents and ideas towards achieving common objectives. Additionally, by promoting innovation, leaders can inspire their team to think creatively and outside the box, resulting in breakthrough solutions and a culture of continuous improvement. In this way, utilizing powerful language techniques can significantly contribute to a leader's ability to communicate effectively and drive their team towards success.

2.2. Creating inclusive and adaptable brand messages

In the fast-paced world of business, adaptability is key. The principle of "Less is More" is particularly relevant in creating brand messages that are both inclusive and adaptable. By using a language that is broad and open-ended, businesses can ensure that their messages remain relevant across different contexts and cultures. This approach also allows for a wider audience to connect with the brand, fostering inclusivity. For example, Nike's "Just do it" slogan is a masterclass in minimalism and adaptability, resonating with diverse audiences over decades. Nike's simple yet powerful slogan encapsulates the brand's ethos and encourages individuals to push their limits, regardless of their background or circumstances. This adaptability has allowed Nike to transcend borders and become a global phenomenon. By keeping its brand message concise and universal, Nike has successfully connected with athletes and non-athletes alike, reinforcing the notion that anyone can achieve greatness. This approach not only fosters

inclusivity but also ensures that Nike remains a timeless brand that continues to inspire generations to come. Nike's commitment to inclusivity is further demonstrated through its diverse range of brand ambassadors. From world-renowned athletes to everyday individuals, Nike celebrates the power of perseverance and determination in all their forms. By showcasing individuals from various backgrounds and abilities, Nike sends a powerful message that greatness knows no boundaries. This dedication to representation not only resonates with consumers but also reinforces Nike's status as a trailblazer in the industry. As a result, Nike's impact goes far beyond athletic performance, making it an enduring symbol of empowerment and inspiration.

2.3. Navigating business negotiations with linguistic precision

Negotiations are a critical aspect of business, and the language used during these interactions can make or break a deal. Employing clear, precise, and respectful language can facilitate understanding and lead to successful outcomes. Leaders should be mindful of their word choice, avoiding ambiguous terms that could lead to confusion. Instead, they should use language that conveys their intentions clearly and leaves little room for misinterpretation. By choosing their words carefully and avoiding jargon, negotiators can ensure that both parties have a clear understanding of the terms and expectations. Additionally, using respectful language helps to maintain a positive and professional atmosphere, fostering trust and cooperation. It is important to remember that effective communication goes beyond verbal language; non-verbal cues and body language also play a significant role in negotiations. Therefore, it is essential for leaders to be mindful of their tone and mannerisms, as they can convey their intentions just as effectively as their words. Overall, linguistic precision is a fundamental skill that can greatly contribute to successful business negotiations. In order to achieve linguistic precision, it is crucial for negotiators to plan and prepare their messages in advance. This involves carefully choosing the right words and phrases that accurately convey their thoughts and intentions. Moreover, active listening is imperative during negotiations to ensure that both parties fully understand each other's perspectives and avoid any misinterpretations. By practicing linguistic precision and actively listening, negotiators can effectively build rapport and reach mutually beneficial agreements.

2.4. Embracing paradox for creative problem-solving

The use of paradox in business language can be a powerful tool for creative problem-solving. By presenting opposing ideas and challenging conventional thinking, leaders can encourage their teams to think outside the box and develop innovative solutions. For example, the concept of "liquid paper" combines two seemingly incompatible ideas to create a product that is both a liquid and a solid, solving the problem of correcting written errors. By embracing paradox, leaders can foster a culture of open-mindedness and collaboration, enabling their teams to approach challenges with fresh perspectives. This approach also encourages employees to challenge assumptions and question the status quo, leading to breakthrough solutions. Moreover, by accepting contradictions and embracing complexity, organizations can navigate the ever-changing business landscape with agility and adaptability, ultimately gaining a competitive edge in the market. Similarly, embracing paradox in negotiations can lead to breakthroughs and win-win outcomes. By acknowledging and exploring conflicting interests and perspectives, negotiators can uncover hidden opportunities and find creative solutions that address the needs of all parties involved. This approach encourages a collaborative and open-minded mindset, fostering a more constructive and productive negotiation process. Ultimately, embracing paradox allows negotiators to transcend traditional boundaries and find innovative ways to meet everyone's objectives.

2.5. Expanding knowledge and understanding through narrative

Language and narrative are potent tools for expanding knowledge and understanding within an organization. By sharing stories and experiences, leaders can help their teams make sense of complex situations and learn from different perspectives. Moravia's *Lettere dal Sahara* demonstrates how language can be used to describe and make sense of the unknown, a skill that is invaluable in the business context, where leaders often need to guide their teams through uncharted territories. By using narrative language, leaders can provide a framework for their teams to navigate through unfamiliar territory and make informed decisions. Moravia's work showcases how language can create a sense of familiarity and understanding, allowing leaders to effectively communicate their vision and goals. Additionally, storytelling can foster empathy and connection among team members, leading to increased collaboration and innovative problem-solving. For example, imagine a company undergoing a major

restructuring due to changing market conditions. The leader can use storytelling to share the company's history, highlighting past challenges and successes and how they have overcome adversity. This narrative language helps employees understand the context of the changes and feel a sense of familiarity and purpose in navigating through the uncertainties. Through storytelling, the leader can also share personal anecdotes that evoke empathy among team members, fostering a stronger bond and encouraging them to work together towards innovative problem-solving solutions for the future. By sharing personal anecdotes, the leader humanizes themselves and creates a relatable connection with employees. This creates a more collaborative and supportive environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their own ideas and contributing to the company's success. Additionally, storytelling can inspire and motivate employees by highlighting the company's past successes and showcasing the potential for future achievements even in the face of uncertainty. Ultimately, storytelling helps to build resilience and a shared sense of purpose among employees, creating a strong foundation for navigating through changing market conditions. Incorporating narrative techniques in business can lead to a more cohesive and successful organization.

2.6. Developing awareness of language schemes

A critical takeaway from this book is the importance of developing awareness of language schemes that can influence thinking and decision-making. Leaders should strive to identify and challenge biases or stereotypes that may be perpetuated through language. By fostering a culture of critical thinking and open dialogue, organizations can avoid the pitfalls of counterproductive language schemes and promote a more inclusive and dynamic work environment. This can be achieved by encouraging employees to question and examine their own language choices as well as the language used by others within the organization. Leaders can also provide training and resources to help employees understand the power of language and its impact on organizational culture. By promoting a more mindful and intentional use of language, businesses can create an environment where diverse perspectives are valued and respected, ultimately leading to greater collaboration and innovation. In addition, by challenging and dismantling harmful language schemes, organizations can avoid potential legal and reputational risks associated with discriminatory or exclusionary practices. Overall, developing awareness of language

schemes is a crucial step towards fostering a cohesive and successful organization.

2.7. Fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation

The dynamic nature of language reflects the need for continuous learning and adaptation in business. Leaders should encourage their teams to engage with new linguistic concepts and explore the evolving landscape of business communication. By staying abreast of changes in language use and their impact on business practices, organizations can remain competitive and responsive to the needs of their stakeholders. In this regard, I would strongly recommend that marketing teams prioritize understanding the latest cultural buzzwords and slang in order to effectively connect with their target audience. By being aware of language schemes and incorporating relevant terminology into their marketing campaigns, they can build rapport with and resonate with a specific customer demographic. This proactive approach to language fosters adaptability and ensures that the organization stays relevant and flexible in a rapidly changing market. This can ultimately lead to improved collaboration, innovation, and overall success in the global marketplace. Additionally, staying up-to-date with cultural buzzwords and slang allows marketing teams to avoid potential miscommunications or misunderstandings that could harm their brand image. By using the right language and terminology, they can effectively communicate their brand message and values to their target audience, increasing brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. Moreover, by understanding and incorporating the latest cultural trends, marketing teams can stay ahead of their competitors and position their brand as innovative and trendsetting. In a global marketplace where consumer preferences and trends are constantly evolving, this linguistic adaptability can be a key factor in ensuring long-term success and growth for the organization.

3. Future directions in linguistic research and business applications

3.1. The imperative of complementary semantics in business communication

The exploration of language in business throughout this book has revealed the profound impact that linguistic choices have on shaping perceptions, driving behaviors, and constructing reality. One area that stands out for its potential to revolutionize business communication is the study of complementary semantics, i.e., the emergence of the umbra cone from the language we use (see Figure 2.1). This field examines how the inhibiting power of words can be expanded or altered by their association with other words, particularly in the context of adjectives modifying nouns in ways that create new conceptual spaces (e.g., linguistic exorcisms) or lead to awkward grammatical forms (e.g., double negations) with interesting cognitive effects for speakers and hearers. The importance of complementary semantics in business cannot be overstated, as it directly influences branding, marketing strategies, and the overall narrative that a company presents to the world. By understanding the functioning of complementary semantics, businesses can carefully choose adjectives that subtly shape consumer perceptions and drive desired behaviors. For example, a company may consider using words like "innovative" and "cutting-edge" to position its products as forward-thinking and technologically advanced; however, the desired effect is then reduced by coupling such words to the wrong nouns like "turn" or "deviation", which might evoke unsought derailing effects. On the contrary, well thought-out complementary semantics may allow business leaders to construct a reality where their offerings are seen as superior and indispensable, ultimately gaining a competitive edge in the market. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of complementary semantics is vital for businesses seeking to effectively communicate their brand identity and influence consumer decision-making.

3.2. Suggesting further studies in complementary semantics

Further empirical studies are needed to deepen our understanding of complementary semantics and its applications in business. Research could explore how consumers interpret and respond to paradoxical or innovative adjective-noun combinations in brand messaging. For instance, empirical studies could assess the effectiveness of slogans that use unexpected adjectives, such as "silent power" for an electric car brand, in conveying a unique selling proposition and resonating with target audiences. This research could provide valuable insights into the impact of creative language use on consumer behavior. Additionally, investigating the role of complementary semantics in different cultural contexts and age groups could shed light on how different targeted audiences perceive and respond

to unconventional language use in advertising. This could help businesses tailor their marketing strategies to specific cultural preferences and increase their chances of success in culturally and generationally diverse markets. Moreover, exploring the potential of complementary semantics in areas beyond branding, such as persuasive communication and persuasion techniques, could have significant implications for the field of marketing and communication. Ultimately, further research in this area has the potential to revolutionize the way businesses communicate with their target audiences and enhance their competitive advantage.

3.3. The role of complementary semantics in product innovation

Complementary semantics also play a crucial role in product innovation and development. By understanding how certain adjective-noun combinations can evoke specific associations or emotions, businesses can create product names and descriptions that capture the imagination of consumers and differentiate their offerings in the marketplace. Empirical research in this area could involve A/B testing of product names and descriptions to determine which linguistic constructions are most effective in driving interest and sales. This research could also explore the impact of cultural and linguistic differences on the effectiveness of these adjective-noun combinations, allowing businesses to tailor their product names and descriptions to specific target markets. Additionally, by analyzing the complementary semantics of competitor products, businesses can identify gaps in the market and develop innovative offerings that satisfy unmet consumer needs. Ultimately, understanding and leveraging complementary semantics can give businesses a competitive edge in the ever-evolving landscape of product innovation.

3.4. Expanding the scope of Learnable Theory

The concept of learnables, as introduced in this book, provides a framework for understanding the cognitive horizons that shape our access to reality. Future studies should expand the scope of Learnable Theory to include how language, particularly complementary semantics, influences these cognitive boundaries. Research could investigate how exposure to different linguistic constructions affects problem-solving abilities, creativity, and the capacity to assimilate new information. By examining the impact of language on cognitive boundaries, researchers can gain insight into how individuals perceive and interpret the world around them.

Understanding how exposure to different linguistic constructions affects problem-solving abilities and creativity can lead to the development of more effective educational strategies and interventions. Additionally, exploring the influence of language on the capacity to assimilate new information can help improve communication and knowledge transfer in various fields, ultimately contributing to the ever-evolving landscape of product innovation. Studying the impact of bilingualism on cognitive boundaries, for example, might reveal whether individuals who speak multiple languages have a greater ability to think flexibly and adapt to new situations. This can have implications in areas such as multicultural society integration and global business collaborations. Furthermore, researching how language choices influence the learning process can inform educational practices, such as designing curriculum materials that optimize language comprehension and retention for diverse student populations.

3.5. Investigating the impact of linguistic discrepancies

The exploration of linguistic discrepancies, such as those found in the use of metaphors and hyperbatons, has shown that language can both reveal and conceal aspects of reality. Further studies should investigate the impact of these discrepancies on cognitive processing and decision-making in business contexts. For example, how do metaphoric expressions influence stakeholders' perceptions of corporate social responsibility initiatives, or how do syntactic structures affect the persuasiveness of financial reports? Understanding the impact of linguistic discrepancies on cognitive processing and decision-making in business contexts is crucial for effective communication and decision-making. For instance, examining how metaphoric expressions influence stakeholders' perceptions of corporate social responsibility initiatives can help businesses tailor their messaging to better align with stakeholders' values and expectations. Similarly, studying how syntactic structures affect the persuasiveness of financial reports can aid in creating more compelling and influential communication strategies in the corporate world. By delving into these areas, businesses can gain valuable insights into the power of language and utilize it to their advantage.

3.6. Empirical studies on language attrition and business communication

Language attrition, the gradual loss of linguistic proficiency over time, has implications for global business communication, especially in multicultural and multilingual settings. Future research should empirically

study the effects of language attrition on business practices, such as international negotiations, cross-cultural team dynamics, and the maintenance of corporate language policies. Understanding how language attrition affects business communication is crucial for companies operating in multicultural and multilingual environments. By studying its effects on international negotiations, cross-cultural team dynamics, and corporate language policies, businesses can develop strategies to mitigate any negative impact. This empirical research will provide valuable insights into how language attrition can be managed effectively, enabling businesses to leverage language as a powerful tool for their advantage in global markets.

3.7. The importance of narrative medicine in healthcare management

The book has touched upon the use of narrative medicine in healthcare, highlighting the importance of language in patient care and medical practice. Further studies in this area could provide valuable insights into how narrative approaches can improve patient outcomes, enhance the communication skills of healthcare professionals, and contribute to more empathetic healthcare management. By incorporating narrative medicine into healthcare management, healthcare professionals can establish a deeper connection with their patients, ensuring better understanding and empathy. This approach can also enhance the communication skills of healthcare professionals, enabling them to effectively convey complicated medical information to patients. By emphasizing the role of language in patient care, narrative medicine has the potential to revolutionize the healthcare industry, ultimately improving patient outcomes and overall healthcare management. Much has been done in the past decade in this regard, but there is still much more to explore and implement. As technology continues to advance, incorporating narrative medicine into electronic health records and telemedicine platforms can further enhance patient-provider communication. Additionally, integrating narrative medicine into medical education and training programs can ensure that future healthcare professionals are equipped with the necessary skills to provide compassionate and patient-centered care. With continued research and investment in narrative medicine, the healthcare industry can continue to evolve and prioritize the importance of the patient's story in their overall healthcare journey.

4. Conclusion

The linguistic insights presented throughout this book offer a wealth of strategies for business leaders seeking to enhance their communication, foster inclusivity, and drive organizational success. By harnessing the power of language, embracing its paradoxes, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, leaders can navigate the complexities of the business world with greater confidence and effectiveness. They can create an environment where employees feel valued and empowered, leading to increased innovation and overall productivity. In addition, the linguistic insights also emphasize the importance of empathy and active listening in building strong relationships with employees and stakeholders. By truly understanding and acknowledging diverse perspectives, leaders can create a sense of belonging within the organization, which, in turn, leads to a more collaborative and motivated workforce. Furthermore, these strategies can also help leaders navigate cross-cultural communication challenges, enabling them to establish successful partnerships and expand into new markets. Ultimately, the knowledge and application of linguistic insights can be a game-changer for leaders looking to achieve sustainable success in today's rapidly evolving global business landscape.

In conclusion, the linguistic journey that this book has embarked upon underscores the transformative power of language in business and beyond. The importance of complementary semantics, the expansion of Learnable Theory, and the empirical investigation of linguistic discrepancies and attrition are just a few of the areas ripe for further study. By continuing to explore these linguistic frontiers, researchers and business practitioners can unlock new levels of understanding and innovation. The future of business communication lies in the nuanced interplay of words and meanings, and it is through this lens that organizations can craft narratives that resonate, inspire, and endure. By understanding the power of language, businesses can effectively communicate their values and goals to their target audience. Complementary semantics, which focuses on the relationship between words and their meanings, can help businesses create cohesive and impactful messaging. Additionally, the expansion of Learnable Theory can provide valuable insights into how language can be taught and learned in a business context. Lastly, empirical investigation of linguistic discrepancies and attrition can help businesses identify and address communication gaps, leading to more effective and efficient communication strategies. Overall, by continuously studying and exploring these linguistic frontiers, businesses

can stay ahead of the curve and leverage the power of language to drive success and innovation.

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