

# Lecture 11

1. All these aspects together constitute a *system* (an interrelated network) within which each of the components or aspects simultaneously gives meaning to all the others and gets meaning from them. That is, we have another form of reflexivity here, as well. For a shorthand, let us call this system the “situation network.” Situations are never completely novel (indeed, if they were, we wouldn’t understand them).

2. Rather, they are repeated, with more or less variation, over time (that is, distinctive configurations or patterns of semiotic resources, activities, things, and political and sociocultural elements are repeated). Such repetition tends to “ritualize,” “habitualize,” or “freeze” situations to varying degrees, that is, to cause them to be repeated with less variation (Douglas 1986).

3- Such repetition (e.g. imagine the old style spelling bee or the traditional doctor– nurse–patient relationship around a hospital bed) is the life blood out of which *institutions*, such as distinctive types of schools, hospitals, businesses, industries, government agencies, political parties, street gangs, academic disciplines, colleges or college classrooms, and so on and so forth through a nearly endless list, are created. Institutions, in turn, create forces (e.g. laws, disciplinary procedures, apprenticeships, etc.) that ensure the repetition and ritualization of the situations that sustain them.

4- Studying the way in which situations produce and reproduce institutions, and are, in turn, sustained by them, is an important part of discourse analysis (Bernstein 1996;

Bourdieu 1985; Foucault 1973, 1977; Gee, Hull, and Lankshear 1996; Lynch and Bogen 1996). All of the elements in the situation network are like connected threads; if you pull on one you get all the others. Though discourse analysis usually focuses on the language (semiotic) aspect, it can start from any of these aspects of a situation and will, in the end, get right back to all the others.

5- Let me give some brief examples of how all the aspects in the situation network are integrally intertwined.

Consider a small seminar room with a circular table in it, and blackboard on all sides. The room has a “front” and “back” when a teacher is standing at the “front” addressing students. What gives the room (a material thing) a “front” and a “back” (meanings/values) is a socioculturally distinctive activity, teaching of a certain sort, which some cultures engage in and others do not, an activity realized through socioculturally distinctive forms of language and certain sorts of sociocultural knowledge, attitudes, and identities. Furthermore, the “front”–“back” dimension of the room reflects the traditional political alignments of teachers as “authorities” and students as subservient. Thus, the room, the activity, the talk, sociocultural identities, and political relations all mean together, giving and taking meaning from each other.

## Lecture 12

1. Words like “work” and “coffee” seem to have more general meanings than are apparent in the sorts of situated meanings we have discussed so far. This is because words are also associated with what, in Chapters 3 and 4, I called “cultural models.” Cultural models are “storylines,” families of connected images (like a mental movie), or (informal) “theories” shared by people belonging to specific social or cultural groups (D’Andrade 1995; D’Andrade and Strauss 1992; Holland and Quinn 1987; Strauss and Quinn 1997).

2-Cultural models “explain,” relative to the standards of the group, why words have the various situated meanings they do and fuel their ability to grow more. Cultural models are usually not completely stored in any one person’s head. Rather, they are distributed across the different sorts of “expertise” and viewpoints found in the group (Hutchins 1995; Shore 1996), much like a plot to a story or pieces of a puzzle that different people have different bits of and which they can potentially share in order to mutually develop the “big picture.”

3- The cultural model connected to “coffee,” for example, is, for some of us, something like: berries are picked (somewhere? from some sort of plant?) and then prepared (how?) as beans or grain to be made later into a drink, as well as into flavorings (how?) for other foods. Different types of coffee, drunk in different ways, have different social and cultural implications, for example, in terms of status. This is about all of the model I know, the rest of it (I trust) is distributed elsewhere in the society should I need it.

4-Cultural models link to each other in complex ways to create bigger and bigger storylines. Such linked networks of cultural models help organize the thinking and social practices of sociocultural groups. For example, taking a more consequential example than “coffee,” as we saw in Chapter 4, some people use a cultural model for raising young children that runs something like this (Harkness, Super, and Keefer 1992): Children are born dependent on their parents and then they go through various stages during which they often engage in disruptive behaviors in pursuit of their growing desire for independence.

5-This cultural model, which integrates models for children, child-rearing, stages, development, and independence, as well as others, helps parents explain their children’s behavior in terms of a value the group holds (e.g. independence). It is continually revised and developed (consciously and unconsciously) in interaction with others in the group, as well as through exposure to various books and other media.

6.children differently (Philipsen 1975): for example, as beings who start out as too unsocialized and whose disruptive behaviors are not so much signs of their growing desire for independence as they are signals of their need for greater socialization within the family, i.e. for less independence (less “selfishness”).