



Language, Meaning, and Strategy

Strategy 898: Doctoral Seminar in Strategy (Winter A 2021)

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Zoom link: <https://umich.zoom.us/j/9418104103>

DESCRIPTION

Meaning structures—collectively held and often taken-for-granted mental representations (e.g., knowledge structures, categories, institutions, culture, etc.)—define the very boundaries of what is possible or even thought of and, thus, are foundational to explaining individual and collective decision-making and behavior. This course takes a multidisciplinary perspective to explore 1) how meaning structures emerge, are negotiated and contested, and change over time, and 2) how this influences individual and collective outcomes. To gain both theoretical and empirical traction on these topics, we will engage a variety of linguistic theories and methods, revealing the links between language, meaning, and strategy.

OBJECTIVES

1. Develop and demonstrate an understanding of the relationships between language, meaning, and certain aspects of strategy making.
2. Develop and demonstrate a critical understanding for the appropriate use and application of linguistic theories and methods, paying special attention to construct validity.
3. Continue developing and demonstrating your research process skills, paying special attention to creative idea generation, paper framing, theory-methods match, and expectations during the review process.

MEETING SCHEDULE

1. **Meaning reproduction:** Institutionalization & persistence (Jan 25, 5–8 PM)
2. **Meaning disruption:** Sensemaking & change (Feb 1, 5–8 PM)
3. **The wizard behind the curtain:** Framing & responding to reviewers (Feb 8, 5–8 PM)
4. **Meaning structures:** Internalized (Feb 15, 5–8 PM)
5. **Meaning structures:** Externalized (Feb 22, 5–8 PM)
6. **Meaning-making:** From clarity to bullshit (Mar 1, 5–8 PM)

REQUIREMENTS

1. *Reading & participation (50% of grade)*. You are to read all required papers prior to the session and come prepared to discuss them. Keep in mind that I intentionally selected different theoretical and methodological approaches to studying these phenomena. As a result, although some of these papers will feel “outside of your wheelhouse,” please avoid using this as an excuse for not having an opinion on a piece. Push yourself to be able to discuss these types of questions:

- What is the fundamental question(s) of the paper? Is it an important question?
- What assumptions does the author make? How valid are these assumptions?
- What was impressive about this paper? What did the author(s) do right?
- What was particularly creative about this paper?
- What did the author(s) do wrong? Could they have done anything differently?
- What is the central contribution of this paper? To whom might it be valuable?
- What conclusions were really convincing, which ones were not, and why?
- What would the perfect or ideal study look like? Is this the ideal data for this test?
- What are the ways you could significantly extend or refine this paper/area?
- What similarities or tensions do you see across papers? Do they contradict?
- What themes do you detect across the readings? Across other sessions?

I’ve chosen this year to decrease the number of required readings per week. While before I required 6, now I require usually 3 primary papers plus a related methods piece or two. Of course, all other readings are still located in the supplemental reading list. However, I’ve found that we end up only covering 3 papers in depth anyhow. Moreover, this isn’t a survey course, where you’d need to be exposed to as many ideas as possible. As a result, I think it is best use of your time to engage the most thought provoking and important papers in this space. Given the limited number of papers, I expect students will read them deeply, and be prepared to engage them when I ask for your thoughts on a topic.

2. *Term paper (40% of grade)*. Each student is responsible for writing a term paper. This paper should be at the intersection of a topic covered in class and the student’s own research interests. Papers that span strategy and other disciplines (e.g., communications, sociology, psychology, accounting, finance, political science, etc.) are acceptable. Your aim should be creative, original research. While the paper can be the substantial improvement of an existing project, you need to disclose this with me and provide me with a copy of the draft that existed prior to this course. Note that the bar for this type of paper is higher. It is the responsibility of each student to discuss their paper topic with me prior to the last week of class. Below are the relevant details:

- *Paper proposal*. You will submit a brief proposal of your paper idea for review. The aim of the proposal is to identify your target audience, to state clearly your intended contribution, and to isolate at least one testable hypothesis. You need not discuss the methodological considerations yet, as the point of this proposal is to establish an important research question and hypothesis that, if tested well, could plausibly contribute to existing literature. The proposal may be in paragraph form,

or in outline format, but the core logic and ideas must be clear. The proposal should be no more than 7 pages double-spaced (excluding references or figures), and should be written in the format of a journal article (like ASQ, SMJ, or AMJ).

- *Term paper & response to reviewer.* Your grade on this assignment will reflect your final paper (not the proposal) and your written response to the reviewer. Term papers should be between 12-17 pages double-spaced (excluding references or figures). Papers should include the following:

- A title and abstract (which distills the paper’s central claim)
- An introduction that is framed clearly to the audience with which you are talking, motivates your research question, and isolates your intended contribution. We will discuss what a good introduction looks like in class.
- A theory section that includes the relevant literatures given your idea, excludes irrelevant or tangential topics, and develops a strong basis for at least one testable hypothesis. I want you to focus on identifying and motivating one interesting and important hypothesis instead of developing a full model with many hypotheses that fit together but are not well motivated or particularly interesting.
- A methods section that briefly describes what the ideal experiment might look like, a plausible data source and research design for testing your primary hypothesis, the main deficiencies of your proposed empirical design, and how you might rule out these issues via conceptual or empirical considerations. Keep in mind that the vast majority (at least 75%) of the paper should be the introduction and theory.

3. *Review (10% of grade).* Each student is responsible providing a quality review of a paper proposal. Your review should be no longer than two pages single-spaced, and should aim to provide between 4-6 major points.

Deliverable	Due (via email)
Paper proposal	Mar 8
Review of paper proposal	Mar 15
Term paper & response to reviewer	Mar 29

READINGS

You can find all course readings (required and not) here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nx9T4jqSAAS8BCK2z3dpaR-kReT1mP-p?usp=sharing>

Note: Required readings are listed in the order I’d suggest reading them. Supplemental readings are listed chronologically. Methods papers, which are denoted with an asterisk (*), correspond to what at least one paper that week is using to examine meaning structures.

WEEK 1—MEANING REPRODUCTION: Institutionalization & persistence

Zucker, L. G. (1977). The role of institutionalization in cultural persistence. *American Sociological Review*, 726–743.

Green Jr, S. E., Li, Y., & Nohria, N. (2009). Suspended in self-spun webs of significance: A rhetorical model of institutionalization and institutionally embedded agency. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(1), 11–36.

Lyons, A., & Kashima, Y. (2003). How are stereotypes maintained through communication? The influence of stereotype sharedness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(6), 989.

*Schwarz, N. (2014). *Cognition and communication: Judgmental biases, research methods, and the logic of conversation*. Psychology Press. (Chapter 2) [Experiments]

Supplemental readings:

- Carruthers, B. G., & Espeland, W. N. (1991). Accounting for rationality: Double-entry bookkeeping and the rhetoric of economic rationality. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97(1), 31–69.
- Zilber, T. B. (2002). Institutionalization as an interplay between actions, meanings, and actors: The case of a rape crisis center in Israel. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(1), 234–254.
- Phillips, N., Lawrence, T. B., & Hardy, C. (2004). Discourse and institutions. *Academy of Management Review*, 29(4), 635–652.
- Green Jr, S. E. (2004). A rhetorical theory of diffusion. *Academy of Management Review*, 29(4), 653–669.

WEEK 2—MEANING DISRUPTION: Sensemaking & change

Garfinkel, H. (1964). Studies of the routine grounds of everyday activities. *Social Problems*, 11(3), 225–250.

Weick, K. E. (1993). The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 628–652.

Harmon, D. J. (2019). When the Fed speaks: Arguments, emotions, and the microfoundations of institutions. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 64(3), 542–575.

*Krippendorff, K. H. (2003). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, Inc. (Sections: 2.1 / 2.2 / 2.4.4 / 2.4.5 / 9.1 / 11.1 / Tables 11.1 and 11.2) [Content analysis]

*Pennebaker, J. W., Mehl, M. R., & Niederhoffer, K. G. (2003). Psychological aspects of natural language use: Our words, our selves. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 54(1), 547–577. [Word dictionaries]

Supplemental readings:

- Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs NJ.
- Holm, P. (1995). The dynamics of institutionalization: Transformation processes in Norwegian fisheries. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 398–422.
- Steinberg, M. W. (1999). The talk and back talk of collective action: A dialogic analysis of repertoires of discourse among nineteenth-century English cotton spinners. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105(3), 736–780.
- Fiss, P. C., & Hirsch, P. M. (2005). The discourse of globalization: Framing and sensemaking of an emerging concept. *American Sociological Review*, 70(1), 29–52.
- Suddaby, R., & Greenwood, R. (2005). Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 50(1), 35–67.
- Harmon, D. J., Green Jr, S. E., & Goodnight, G. T. (2015). A model of rhetorical legitimation: The structure of communication and cognition underlying institutional maintenance and change. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1), 76–95.

WEEK 3—THE WIZARD BEHIND THE CURTAIN: Framing & responding to reviewers

Harmon – original submission & letter to editor.

Harmon – first revision, response document, & letter to editor.

Zuckerman (2008) Tips for Writers.

Zuckerman (2015) On Genre.

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/the-awesomest-7-year-postdoc-or-how-i-learned-to-stop-worrying-and-love-the-tenure-track-faculty-life/>

*Grimmer, J., & Stewart, B. M. (2013). Text as data: The promise and pitfalls of automatic content analysis methods for political texts. *Political Analysis*, 21(3), 267–297. [NLP caveat]

WEEK 4—MEANING STRUCTURES: Internalized

Corritore, M., Goldberg, A., & Srivastava, S. B. (2020). Duality in diversity: How intrapersonal and interpersonal cultural heterogeneity relate to firm performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 65(2), 359-394.

Fligstein, N., Stuart Brundage, J., & Schultz, M. (2017). Seeing like the Fed: Culture, cognition, and framing in the failure to anticipate the financial crisis of 2008. *American Sociological Review*, 82(5), 879–909.

Chen, M. K. (2013). The effect of language on economic behavior: Evidence from savings rates, health behaviors, and retirement assets. *American Economic Review*, 103(2), 690–731.

Roberts, S. G., Winters, J., & Chen, K. (2015). Future tense and economic decisions: controlling for cultural evolution. *PloS one*, 10(7).

*Blei, D. M., Ng, A. Y., & Jordan, M. I. (2003). Latent dirichlet allocation. *Journal of Machine Learning Research*, 3(Jan), 993–1022. [Topic modeling]

Supplemental readings:

- Mills, C. W. (1940). Situated actions and vocabularies of motive. *American Sociological Review*, 5(6), 904–913.
- Porac, J. F., & Thomas, H. (1990). Taxonomic mental models in competitor definition. *Academy of Management Review*, 15(2), 224-240.
- v. Werder, A. (1999). Argumentation rationality of management decisions. *Organization Science*, 10(5), 672–690.
- Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: a social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review*, 108(4), 814.
- Vaisey, S. (2009). Motivation and justification: A dual-process model of culture in action. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114(6), 1675–1715.
- Linneman, T. J. (2013). Gender in Jeopardy! Intonation variation on a television game show. *Gender & Society*, 27(1), 82–105.
- McWhorter, J. H. (2014). *The language hoax: Why the world looks the same in any language*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Glaser, V. L., Fast, N. J., Harmon, D. J., & Green Jr, S. E. (2016). Institutional frame switching: How institutional logics shape individual action. In *How Institutions Matter!* (pp. 35–69). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Goldberg, A., Srivastava, S. B., Manian, V. G., Monroe, W., & Potts, C. (2016). Fitting in or standing out? The tradeoffs of structural and cultural embeddedness. *American Sociological Review*, 81(6), 1190–1222.

WEEK 5—MEANING STRUCTURES: Externalized

Kennedy, M. T. (2008). Getting counted: Markets, media, and reality. *American Sociological Review*, 73(2), 270–295.

Hoberg, G., & Phillips, G. (2016). Text-based network industries and endogenous product differentiation. *Journal of Political Economy*, 124(5), 1423–1465.

Tetlock, P. C. (2007). Giving content to investor sentiment: The role of media in the stock market. *The Journal of Finance*, 62(3), 1139–1168.

*Le, Q., & Mikolov, T. (2014). Distributed representations of sentences and documents. In *International Conference on Machine Learning* (pp. 1188–1196). [Vector analysis]

Supplemental readings:

- Porac, J. F., Thomas, H., Wilson, F., Paton, D., & Kanfer, A. (1995). Rivalry and the industry model of Scottish knitwear producers. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 203–227.
- Tetlock, P. C., Saar-Tsechansky, M., & Macskassy, S. (2008). More than words: Quantifying language to measure firms' fundamentals. *The Journal of Finance*, 63(3), 1437–1467.
- Navis, C., & Glynn, M. A. (2010). How new market categories emerge: Temporal dynamics of legitimacy, identity, and entrepreneurship in satellite radio, 1990–2005. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(3), 439–471.
- Loughran, T., & McDonald, B. (2014). Measuring readability in financial disclosures. *The Journal of Finance*, 69(4), 1643–1671.
- Kaplan, S., & Vakili, K. (2015). The double-edged sword of recombination in breakthrough innovation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 36(10), 1435–1457.

WEEK 6—MEANING-MAKING: From clarity to bullshit

Scott, M. B., & Lyman, S. M. (1968). Accounts. *American Sociological Review*, 46–62.

Frankfurt, H. G. (2009). *On bullshit*. Princeton University Press.

Eisenberg, E. M. (1984). Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. *Communication Monographs*, 51(3), 227–242.

Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146–1151. (Please also read the supplemental material for this paper.)

Supplemental readings:

- Hewitt, J. P., & Stokes, R. (1975). Disclaimers. *American Sociological Review*, 1–11.
- Elsbach, K. D. (1994). Managing organizational legitimacy in the California cattle industry: The construction and effectiveness of verbal accounts. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 57–88.
- Lounsbury, M., & Glynn, M. A. (2001). Cultural entrepreneurship: Stories, legitimacy, and the acquisition of resources. *Strategic Management Journal*, 22(6–7), 545–564.
- Lee, J. J., & Pinker, S. (2010). Rationales for indirect speech: The theory of the strategic speaker. *Psychological Review*, 117(3), 785.
- Frankfurt, H. G. (2010). *On truth*. Random House.
- Graffin, S. D., Carpenter, M. A., & Boivie, S. (2011). What's all that (strategic) noise? Anticipatory impression management in CEO succession. *Strategic Management Journal*, 32(7), 748–770.

FURTHER SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

Useful reviews on linguistic perspectives:

- Cornelissen, J. P., & Werner, M. D. (2014). Putting framing in perspective: A review of framing and frame analysis across the management and organizational literature. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 8(1), 181–235.
- Loewenstein, J., Ocasio, W., & Jones, C. (2012). Vocabularies and vocabulary structure: A new approach linking categories, practices, and institutions. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 6(1), 41–86.
- Phillips, N., & Oswick, C. (2012). Organizational discourse: Domains, debates, and directions. *Academy of Management Annals*, 6(1), 435–481.
- Vaara, E., Sonenshein, S., & Boje, D. (2016). Narratives as sources of stability and change in organizations: Approaches and directions for future research. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 10(1), 495–560.

Additional theory papers not listed above:

- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Taking the linguistic turn in organizational research: Challenges, responses, consequences. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 36(2), 136–158.
- Alvesson, M. (1993). Organizations as rhetoric: Knowledge-intensive firms and the struggle with ambiguity. *Journal of Management Studies*, 30(6), 997–1015.
- Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1), 611–639.
- Billig, M. (1989). Psychology, rhetoric, and cognition. *History of the Human Sciences*, 2(3), 289–307.
- Gray, B., Purdy, J. M., & Ansari, S. (2015). From interactions to institutions: Microprocesses of framing and mechanisms for the structuring of institutional fields. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1), 115–143.
- Lounsbury, M., & Glynn, M. A. (2019). *Cultural Entrepreneurship: A New Agenda for the Study of Entrepreneurial Processes and Possibilities (Elements in Organization Theory)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ocasio, W., Laamanen, T., & Vaara, E. (2018). Communication and attention dynamics: An attention-based view of strategic change. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(1), 155–167.
- Tausczik, Y. R., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2010). The psychological meaning of words: LIWC and computerized text analysis methods. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 29(1), 24–54.
- Weber, K., & Dacin, M. T. (2011). The cultural construction of organizational life: Introduction to the special issue. *Organization Science*, 22(2), 287–298.
- Weber, K., & Glynn, M. A. (2006). Making sense with institutions: Context, thought and action in Karl Weick's theory. *Organization Studies*, 27(11), 1639–1660.

Additional empirical papers not listed above:

- Abolafia, M. Y. (2010). Narrative construction as sensemaking: How a central bank thinks. *Organization Studies*, 31(3), 349–367.
- Benner, M. J., & Ranganathan, R. (2017). Measuring up? Persistence and change in analysts' evaluative schemas following technological change. *Organization Science*, 28(4), 760–780.
- Clark, A. E., & Kashima, Y. (2007). Stereotypes help people connect with others in the community: A situated functional analysis of the stereotype consistency bias in communication. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93(6), 1028.
- Cornelissen, J. P., Mantere, S., & Vaara, E. (2014). The contraction of meaning: The combined effect of communication, emotions, and materiality on sensemaking in the Stockwell shooting. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(5), 699–736.
- Espeland, W. N., & Sauder, M. (2007). Rankings and reactivity: How public measures recreate social worlds. *American Journal of Sociology*, 113(1), 1–40.
- Espeland, W. N., & Stevens, M. L. (1998). Commensuration as a social process. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24(1), 313–343.
- Fiss, P. C., & Zajac, E. J. (2006). The symbolic management of strategic change: Sensegiving via framing and decoupling. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(6), 1173–1193.
- Giorgi, S., & Weber, K. (2015). Marks of distinction: Framing and audience appreciation in the context of investment advice. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 60(2), 333–367.
- Guttieri, K., Wallace, M. D., & Suedfeld, P. (1995). The integrative complexity of American decision makers in the Cuban Missile Crisis. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 39(4), 595–621.
- Heracleous, L., & Barrett, M. (2001). Organizational change as discourse: Communicative actions and deep structures in the context of information technology implementation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4), 755–778.
- Hoberg, G., & Phillips, G. (2010). Product market synergies and competition in mergers and acquisitions: A text-based analysis. *The Review of Financial Studies*, 23(10), 3773–3811.
- Lyons, A., & Kashima, Y. (2001). The reproduction of culture: Communication processes tend to maintain cultural stereotypes. *Social Cognition*, 19(3), 372–394.
- Loughran, T., & McDonald, B. (2011). When is a liability not a liability? Textual analysis, dictionaries, and 10-Ks. *The Journal of Finance*, 66(1), 35–65.
- Loughran, T., & McDonald, B. (2013). IPO first-day returns, offer price revisions, volatility, and form S-1 language. *Journal of Financial Economics*, 109(2), 307–326.
- Newman, M. L., Pennebaker, J. W., Berry, D. S., & Richards, J. M. (2003). Lying words: Predicting deception from linguistic styles. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29(5), 665–675.
- Ocasio, W., & Joseph, J. (2005). Cultural adaptation and institutional change: The evolution of vocabularies of corporate governance, 1972–2003. *Poetics*, 33(3–4), 163–178.
- Srivastava, S. B., Goldberg, A., Manian, V. G., & Potts, C. (2017). Enculturation trajectories: Language, cultural adaptation, and individual outcomes in organizations. *Management Science*, 64(3), 1348–1364.

- Staw, B. M., McKechnie, P. I., & Puffer, S. M. (1983). The justification of organizational performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 582–600.
- Steinberg, M. W. (1998). Tilting the frame: Considerations on collective action framing from a discursive turn. *Theory and Society*, 27(6), 845–872.
- Stokes, R., & Hewitt, J. P. (1976). Aligning actions. *American Sociological Review*, 838–849.
- Suedfeld, P., & Tetlock, P. (1977). Integrative complexity of communications in international crises. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 21(1), 169–184.
- Suedfeld, P., Tetlock, P. E., & Ramirez, C. (1977). War, peace, and integrative complexity: UN speeches on the Middle East problem, 1947–1976. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 21(3), 427–442.
- Tetlock, P. E. (1985). Integrative complexity of American and Soviet foreign policy rhetoric: A time-series analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 49(6), 1565.
- Weber, K., Heinze, K. L., & DeSoucey, M. (2008). Forage for thought: Mobilizing codes in the movement for grass-fed meat and dairy products. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 53(3), 529–567.
- Zuckerman, E. W., & Rao, H. (2004). Shrewd, crude or simply deluded? Comovement and the internet stock phenomenon. *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 13(1), 171–212.