VCE English Language (2024-2028) Study Design implementation

Using linguistic theory in the VCE English Language classroom

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Acknowledgement of Country

The VCAA respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pays respect to the ongoing living cultures of First Peoples.

Linguistic theory in the English Language study design

Definitions of linguistic theory

- Descriptivist approach
- Metalanguage
- Linguistic theory specific to course

Key theories across the study

Unit 1 Outcome 1	Signifier and signified	Ferdinand de Saussure
	Jakobson's functions	Roman Jakobson
Unit 1 Outcome 2	Universal Grammar	Noam Chomsky
	Usage-based theory	Michael Tomesello
	Critical age hypothesis	
Unit 2 Outcome 2	Language reclamation	Barry Blake
Unit 3 Outcome 1	Politeness theory	Brown & Levison

Unit 1 Outcome 1

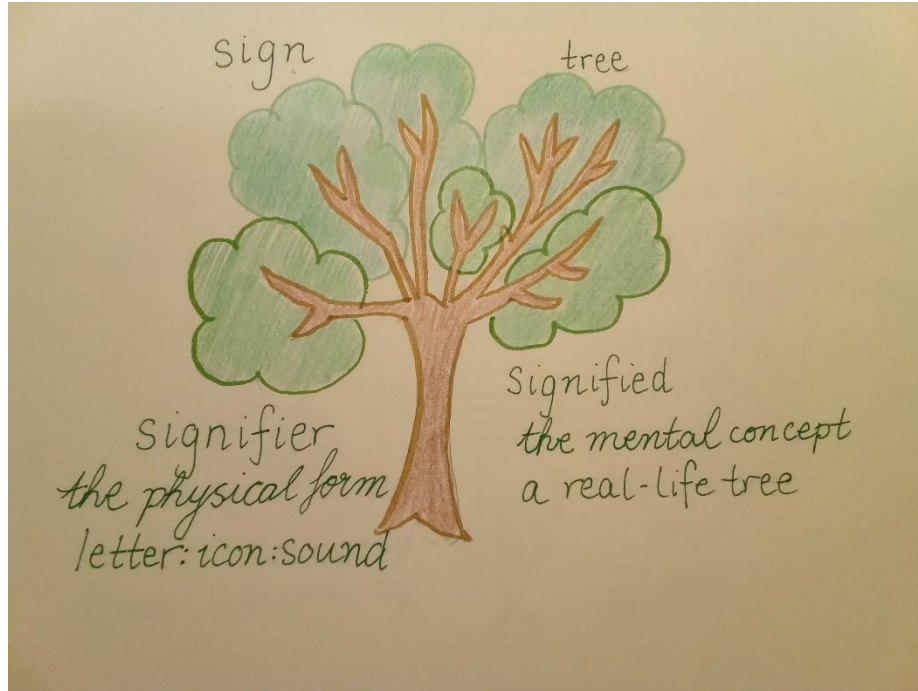Theories:

Signifier and Signified
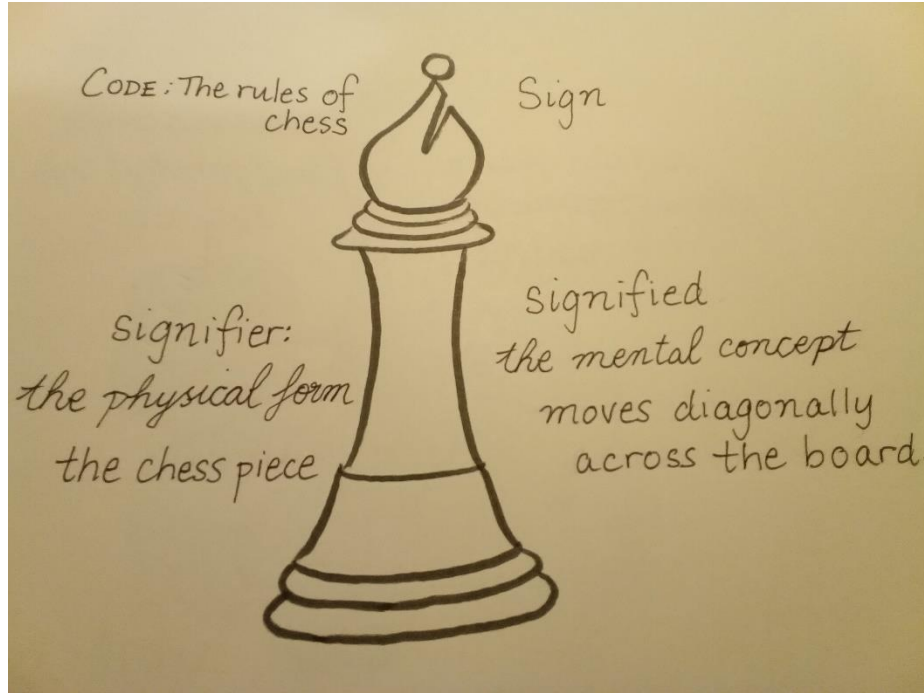(Ferdinand de Saussure)

Jakobson's functions
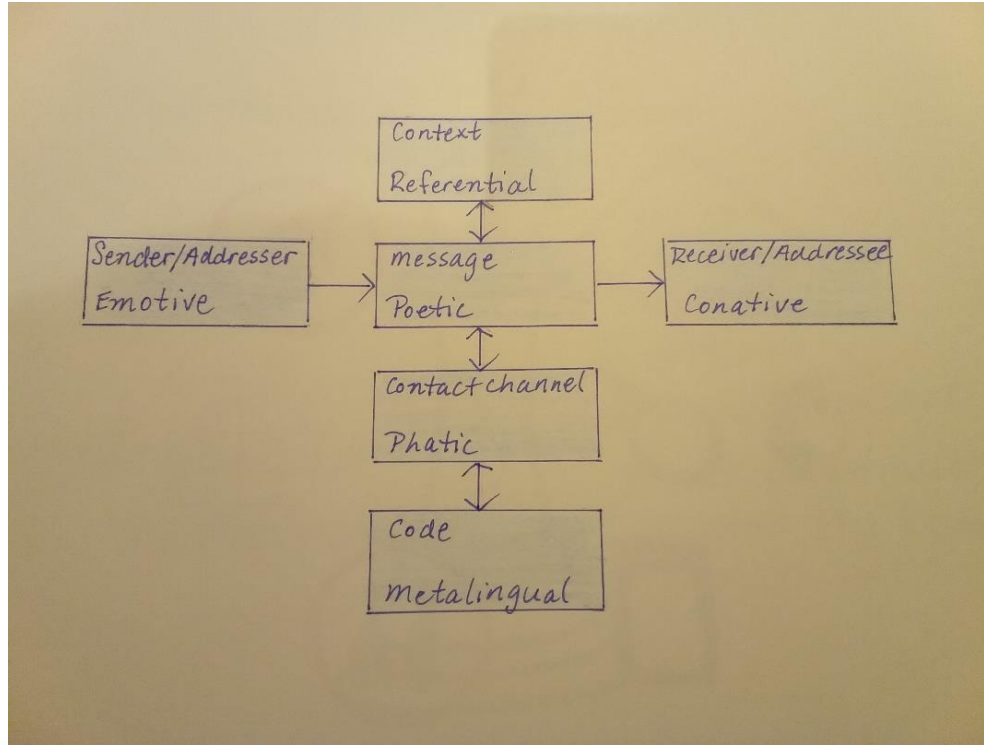
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Signifier and signified

Teaching signifier and signified

CODE: The rules of chess

Sign

signifier:
the physical form
the chess piece

Signified
the mental concept
moves diagonally
across the board.

Teaching signifier and signified

Jakobson's functions

Jakobson's functions – broken down

- Emotive – with attention to the addresser (expression of own thoughts and ideas)
- Conative – with attention to the addressee (vocative, imperative)
- Referential – with attention to context (giving information)
- Poetic – with attention to the message (language structure & play)
- Phatic – with attention to the communication channel (making connections)
- Metalingual – with attention to the code (ensuring understanding is shared)

Teaching Jakobson's functions

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Jakobson + de Saussure
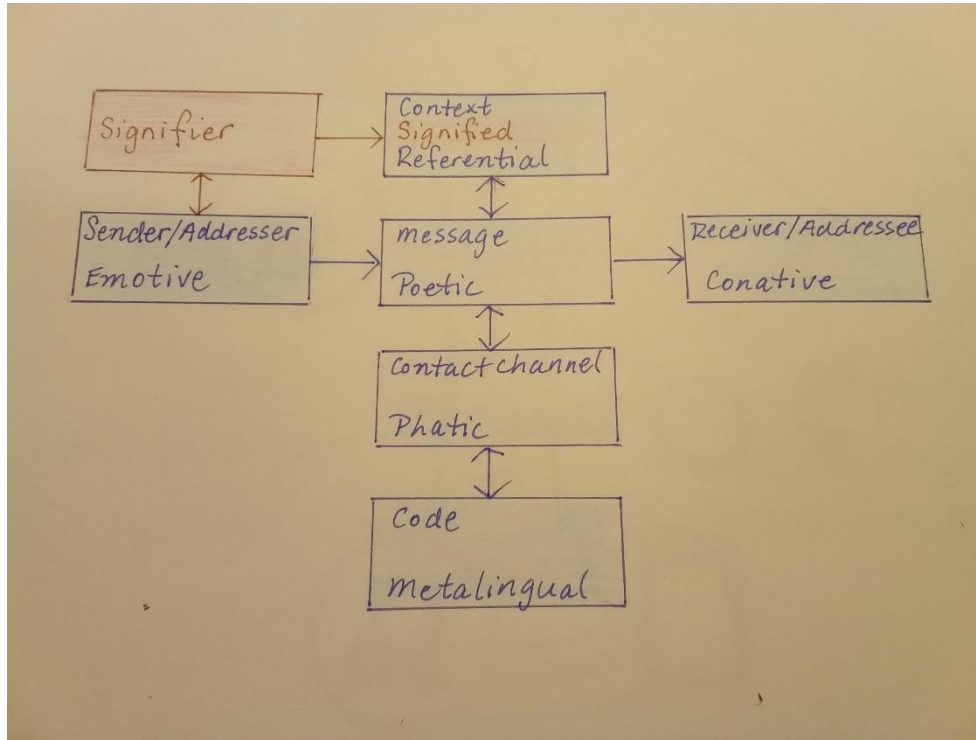
Unit 1 Outcome 2

Theories:

Universal Grammar

Usage-based theory

Critical age hypothesis

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Language acquisition theories

- Universal grammar – Noam Chomsky (1957)
- Usage-based theory – Michael Tomesello (2003)

Universal grammar

- Introduced the idea of innateness – the nature side of the debate.
- We are born with a Language Acquisition Device (LAD), which controls the development of language.
  - The baby knows all linguistic universals
  - The baby hears examples of language in its native tongue
  - The baby makes hypotheses about the incoming language
  - The baby narrows down its systems of grammars

Support for Universal Grammar

- All children go through very similar stages of language acquisition
- Children do more than simply imitate adult speech.
- Things like over and under-extension suggest that children are actively constructing language according to an unconscious model of how language works.
- Children resist or simply do not respond to correction from adults.
- Medical research suggests that there are specific areas in the brain to control language

Problems with Universal Grammar

- Universal grammar is only focussed on whether children are hard-wired for language. It does not explore how children use this LAD to then develop their language.
  - While universal grammar states that there needs to be interaction, it does not explore the impact of this interaction
- Chomsky never did any practical experiments, and mainly thought of his theory and hypothesised how it worked. Others have added to his work to make it stronger.

Usage-based theory

- Children acquire language through language use
- Children develop language cognitively by linking intentions of speakers (functions) to grammatical patterns (grammar).
- Children develop language using shared cognitive skills including:
  - Intention-reading (how people use language to achieve their intended purpose)
  - Pattern-spotting (how meaning-based constructions emerge within their language use)
- Usage-based theory is embedded in the notion that language is used for communication and begins well before the first words are being spoken

Support for Usage-based theory

- Observation of children under two building abstract argument structure around the initial verb. Children also only ever use the verb in the way that it has been exposed to them.

- Over-generalisation is rare in children under the age of 3, suggesting that they have not yet formed initial language generalisations.

- Input frequency impacts on child language productivity.

Problems with Usage-based theory

- Usage-based theory does not account for a child's formulation of complex constructions such as those involving two verbs or embedded clauses
    - Tomesello suggests that complex structures are really a patterning of simple structures
- Usage-based theory cannot specify how generalisation is contained
    - The response to this is multiple exposure helps children confine their language choices.
- It does not deal with the 'poverty of stimulus'
    - Tomesello argues there is no poverty of stimulus as long as there are people communicating with the child

Teaching language acquisition theories

- Class debate
- Field analysis
  - Application to real life
  - Natalie Gleeson presentation

Second language acquisition

- Whilst intended for first language acquisition, these theories have possible implications in the acquisition of a second language
  - It is worth considering what implications these theories have on second language acquisition.

Critical age hypothesis

- First language
  - There is a limited period in which a child can develop a first language.
  - There is no agreement amongst linguists to the specific critical age.

- Second language
  - There is evidence to suggest that as people age, they take on less language when taught in a naturalistic way. However, adults seem to be able to compensate when they have a higher verbal ability through other learning mechanisms
  - What are the implications of this in the second language classroom?
    - Exposure to language

Teaching the critical age hypothesis – first language acquisition

- Victor (The Wild Boy of Aveyron) (France, 1797)
- Genie Wiley (USA, 1970)
- Shamdeo (India, 1972)
- Oxana Malaya (Ukraine, 1991)
- John Ssebunya (The Monkey Boy) (Uganda, 1991)
- Prava (The Bird Boy) (Russia, 2008)
- Madina (Russia, 2013)

Unit 2 Outcome 2

Language reclamation
(Barry Blake)

Language reclamation

- A reclaimed language is a language that has been constructed in the absence of native speakers
    - Previous accounts (as documented by the British)
    - Previous accounts (as shared by people who identify with the language)

Challenges

- Interpretation of possibly inaccurate phonological transcription
- Modernising language (introducing borrowed words)
- Recognising distinctions within language boundaries

Resources

- The Warrnambool Language
  - Barry Blake

Teaching language reclamation

- Research an Indigenous language that has been reclaimed, or is in the process of being reclaimed

- Provide a glossary and simple sentences of an Indigenous language, and challenge the students to create simple grammatical generalisations about the language to understand the reclamation process

Politeness theory

Positive face	Negative face
Individuals have a desire to be liked and appreciated by others. (Related to a person's self-esteem)	Individuals have a desire to protect their personal rights and freedoms. (Related to a person's expression of self)
Positive politeness strategies	Negative politeness strategies

Positive politeness strategies

Claim common ground	(Notice them) Direct compliment
	Exaggerate
	Intensify interest
Stress common membership of a group	Convey in-group membership
Claim common perspective	Seek agreement
	Avoid disagreement
	Raise common ground
	Joke

Positive politeness strategies cont.

Convey cooperation	Assert or imply knowledge of them
Claim reflexivity of wants	Offer and promise future connection
	Be optimistic
	Be inclusive
	Give (and ask for) reasons
Belief in reciprocity	Assume or insert reciprocity

Negative politeness strategies cont.

Apologetic language, self criticism or asking for forgiveness
Using honorific terms
Use terms that are more inclusive or lack precision
Indicate awareness and concern for the hearer's self image
Suggest ideas without imposing on territory
Use hedges and hints
Use indirect requests and pessimism

Teaching politeness strategies

- Application to text

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