



Committing Commitment:

theorizing meaning in process of change

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A history of commitment

Martin, J.R. (2006) 'Genre, ideology and intertextuality: a systemic functional perspective', in *Linguistics & the Human Sciences* 2(2), 275-298.

Martin, J.R. (2008) 'Tenderness: realization and instantiation in a Botswanan town', in N. Norgaard (ed.) *Odense Working Papers in Language and Communication* vol.29, 30-58.

Hood, S. (2008) 'Summary writing in academic contexts: implicating meaning in process of change', in *Linguistics and Education* 19, 351-365.

Pedagogy

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Media & Multimodality

Caple, H. (2008) 'Reconciling the co-articulation of meaning between words and pictures: exploring instantiation and commitment in image nuclear news stories', in A. Mahboob and N.K. Knight (eds.) *Questioning Linguistics*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 77-94.

Knox, J. (2009) 'Punctuating the homepage: image as language in an online newspaper', in *Discourse & Communication* 3(2): 145-72.

Translation & Identity studies

De Souza, L. (2010) *Interlingual re-instantiation: a model for a new and more comprehensive systemic functional perspective on translation*. PhD Thesis. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina and University of Sydney.

Tann, K. (2010) *Semogenesis of a Nation: an iconography of Japanese identity*. PhD Thesis. Linguistics Department, The University of Sydney, Australia.



What is “commitment”?

She turned on her heels and ran through the bush in the direction of the road, which she knew was not too far away. A truck came past a short time later, a Government truck from the Roads Department. The driver slowed, and then stopped. He must have been astonished to see a young Mosarwa child standing there with a baby in her arms. Of course he could hardly leave her, even though he could not make out what she was trying to tell him. He was going back to Francistown and he dropped her off at the Nyangabwe Hospital, handing her over to an orderly at the gate.

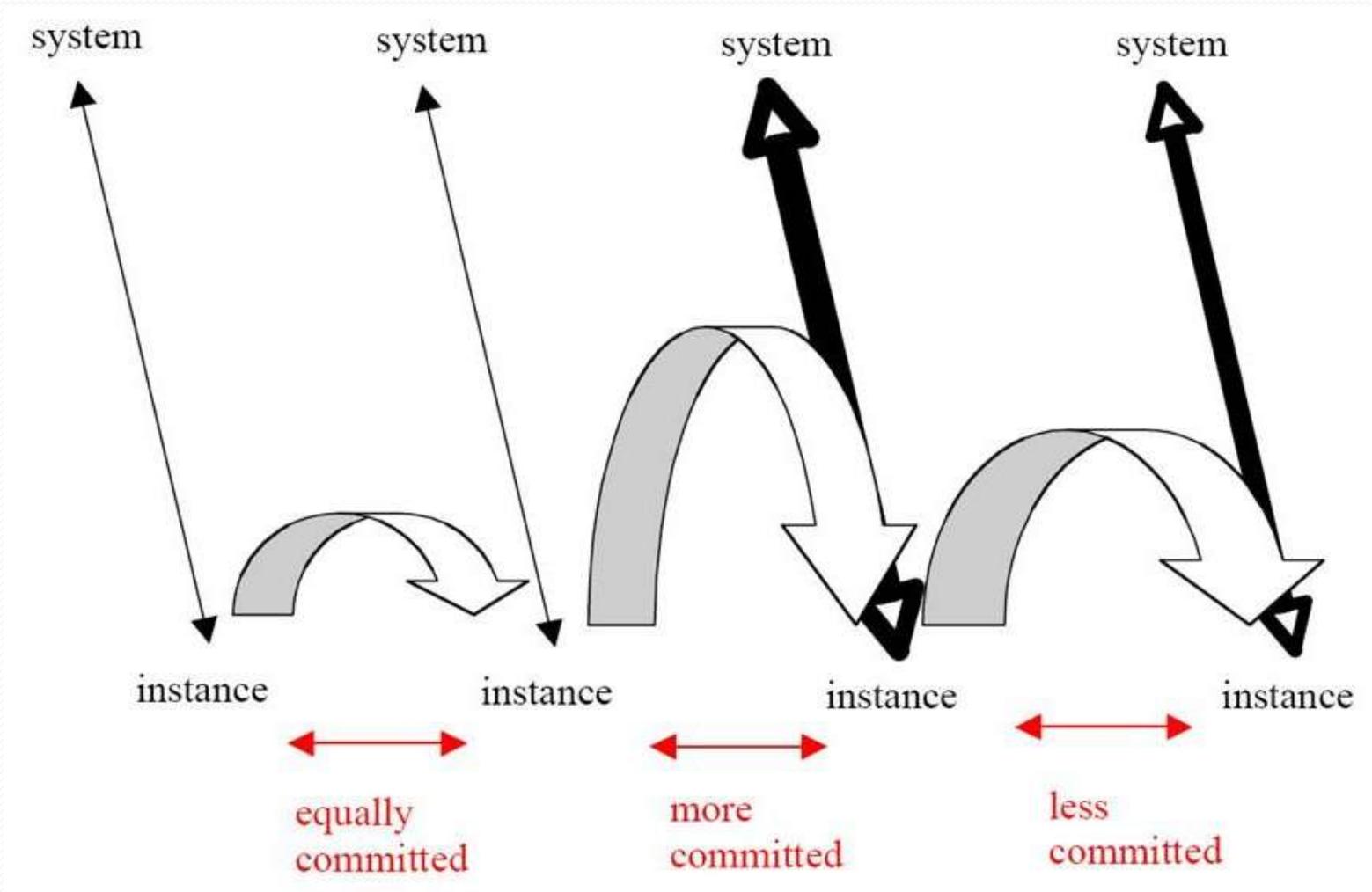
(50 pages later...) 

And then she remembered going away and finding herself in the strange place.

(1 book later...) 

...and running through the bush until I found a road. A man came down the road in a truck and when he saw me he stopped and took me to Francistown.

Relation	Less committed	More committed
hyponymy	class	member
	<i>e.g. man</i>	<i>e.g. driver</i>
meronymy	whole	part
	<i>e.g. Francistown</i>	<i>e.g. Nyangabwe Hospital</i>
incumbency	role	incumbent
	<i>e.g. Head Librarian</i>	<i>e.g. Ms Andrews</i>
exemplification	concept	instance
	<i>e.g. a strange place</i>	<i>e.g. Francistown</i>
composition	label	activity sequences
	<i>e.g. sales scene</i>	<i>e.g. foot-in-the-door technique, patter...</i>
explicitness	invocation	inscription
	<i>e.g. fenced in like sheep</i>	<i>e.g. prejudice</i>
lexical metaphor	congruent	metaphorical
	<i>e.g. change</i>	<i>e.g. make a break</i>
grammatical metaphor	metaphorical	congruent
	<i>e.g. that effect</i>	<i>e.g. This story...had affected her profoundly...</i>
infusion	basic	compound
	<i>e.g. consider</i>	<i>e.g. reassess (consider+ again + evaluatively)</i>
characterization	elaborated element	elaboration
	<i>e.g. Government truck</i>	<i>Government truck from the Roads Department</i>
abstraction	abstract	concrete
	<i>e.g. a fortunate life</i>	<i>e.g. [recount]</i>
metadiscursivity	metadiscourse	concrete
	<i>e.g. a story</i>	<i>e.g. [recount]</i>
heteroglossic expansion	entertain	attribution
	<i>e.g. perhaps</i>	<i>e.g. says</i>



Commitment theory

Martin, J.R. (2008) 'Tenderness: realization and instantiation in a Botswanan town', in N. Norgaard (ed.) *Odense Working Papers in Language and Communication* vol.29, 30-58.

“Commitment refers to the amount of meaning potential activated in a particular process of instantiation - the relative semantic weight of a text in other words. Essentially this has to do with the degree to which meanings in optional systems are taken up and, within systems, the degree of delicacy selected.” (p.45)

“Strictly speaking this is the same point, since we cannot in principle exit from a system network until all available subclassification has been committed; what I have in mind here are less formal taxonomies of discourse semantic entities in which more and less delicate features can be lexicalised without an exhaustive traversal of the system.” (footnote)

Commitment theory

“Commitment refers to the amount of meaning potential activated in a particular process of instantiation - the relative semantic weight of a text in other words. Essentially this has to do with the degree to which meanings in optional systems are taken up and, within systems, the degree of delicacy selected.”

Question 1: amount of meaning potential activated
 = amount of meaning potential in a text?

Question 2: amount of meaning potential = amount of meaning?

Question 3: meanings in optional systems taken up = degree of delicacy?

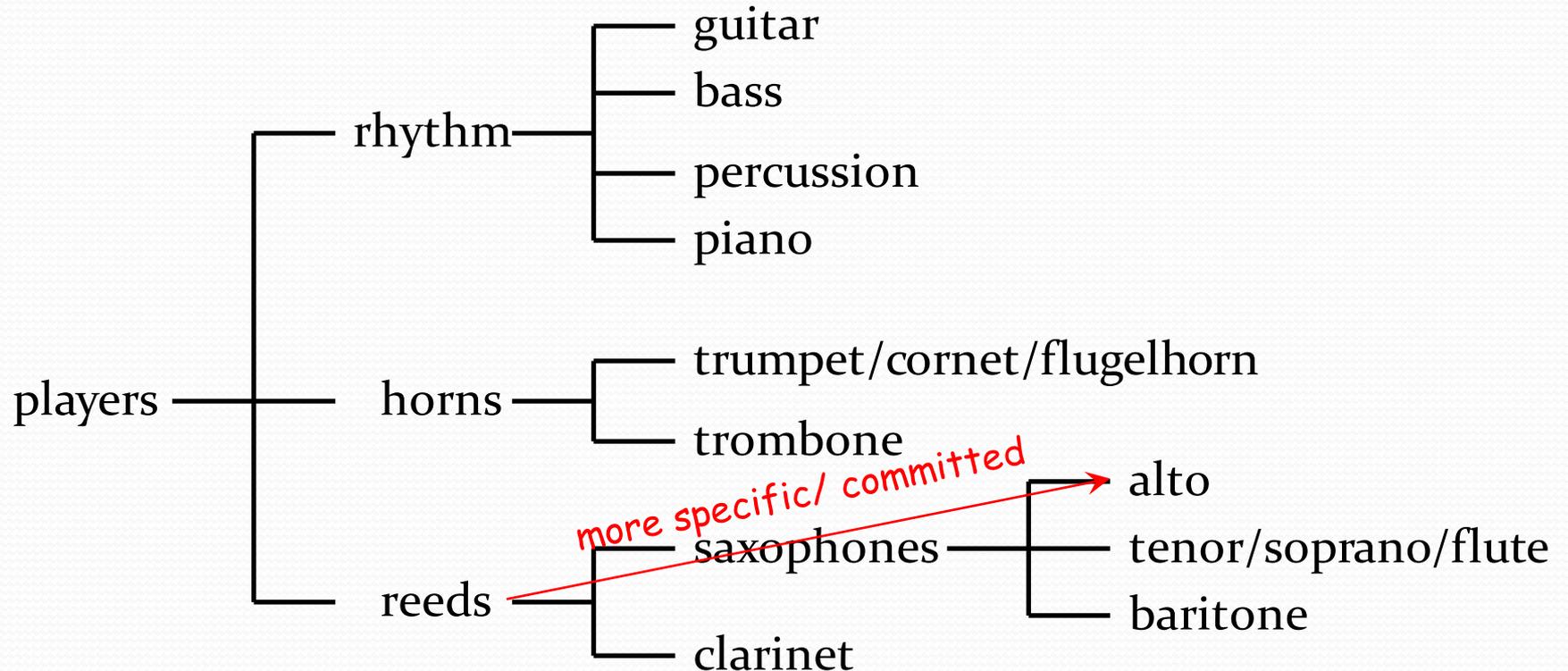
Question 1: amount of meaning potential activated
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“Commitment refers to the amount of meaning potential activated in a particular process of instantiation - the relative semantic weight of a text in other words.” (Martin 2008:45)

Instances which increase commitment have to reach back higher along the instantiation cline, to open up meaning potential which has in the previous instance been foreclosed... Where less meaning is committed, instances in a sense don't have to reach so high up the cline; there's more than enough meaning in the previous instance for them to move along.” (Martin 2008:49-50)

“From this point, I will use the general term commitment... to refer to the degree of meaning potential instantiated in one instance or another. Related instances of language can be said therefore to commit more or less meaning potential.” (Hood 2008:356)

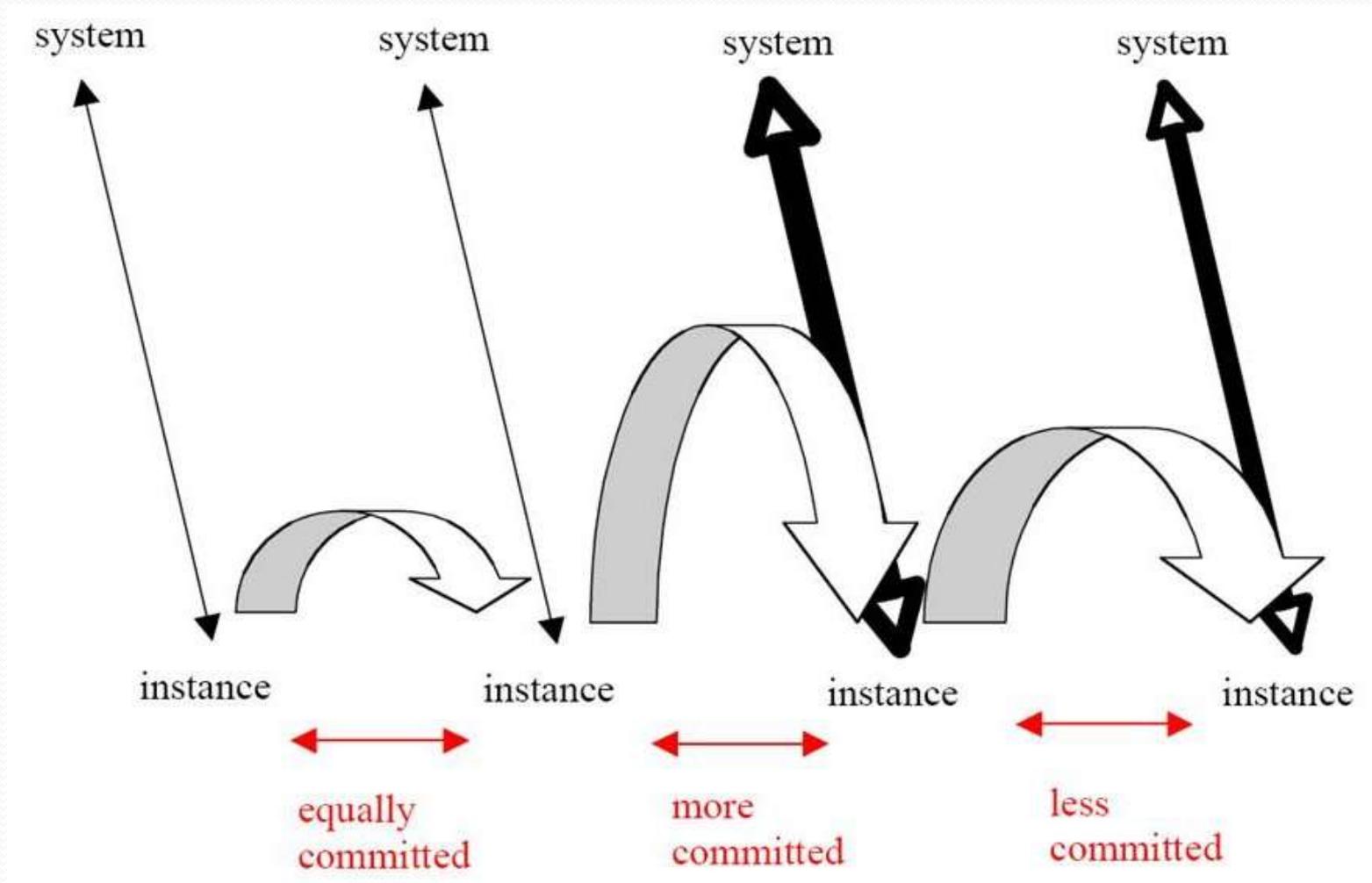
Question 1: amount of meaning potential activated
= amount of meaning potential in a text?



But...

e.g. Peter plays reeds in the band. \searrow
Peter plays the alto in the band. \swarrow (more/less instantiated?)

Question 1: amount of meaning potential activated
≠ amount of meaning potential in a text?



(Martin 2008:50)

Question 2: amount of meaning potential = amount of meaning?

...commitment has to do with the amount of meaning manifested in instances of language use. (Martin 2008:52)

In this sense, they can be said to commit less ideational meaning. (Hood 2008:357)

In this case, *has-beens* classifies people in attitudinal terms, so additionally commits interpersonal meaning in the classification. (Hood 2008:357)

Inscribed Attitude commits more interpersonal meaning than does an instance of Graduation invoking Attitude. (Hood 2008:362)

Question 2: amount of meaning potential = amount of meaning?

Essentially this has to do with the degree to which meanings in optional systems are taken up and, within systems, the degree of delicacy selected.

(Martin 2008:45)

In these data, some of the ways in which meanings are committed differently from the source text to the summary are accounted for in such terms, but not all. (Hood 2008:358)

Change instantiates meaning in a less committed way with the potential to mean many kinds of changes. (Hood 2008:360)

...arguably a single inscription commits evaluative meanings in a less committed way than an accumulating prosody of co-articulating instances.

(Hood 2008:362)

Question 3: ~~meanings in optional systems taken up = degree of delicacy?~~

*Half the skill in getting ahead on the **career front** is knowing when to move on.*

*In **everyone's** life there comes a **moment** when they **should** make the break.*

This is re-instantiated in the summary as

*In this article on successful careers it says that it's **important** to know when to change jobs.*

An inherent paradox...

There would seem to be a cline of commitment of attitudinal meanings from inscribed Attitude to provoked Attitude to invoked Attitude that applies from instance to instance. However, if we consider the evaluative meaning as a prosodic accumulation and spread of Attitude across a phase of text, then arguably a single inscription commits evaluative meanings in a less committed way than an accumulating prosody of co-articulating instances. (p.362)

Question 3: ~~meanings in optional systems taken up = degree of delicacy?~~

She lost the opportunity to apply for the job. The **loss of opportunity** cost her dearly.

An inherent paradox...

There is less commitment in that the participants in the process can be omitted, which “leaves the relations within a figure almost totally inexplicit”... So grammatical metaphor offers a resource by which we commit less ideational meaning as we re-instantiate meanings from one text into another. However, ... grammatical metaphor offers a resource by which two layers of meaning are construed in the one representation. In that sense it commits more meaning potential, as both a process and a Thing, or as an attribute and a Thing. (p.360)

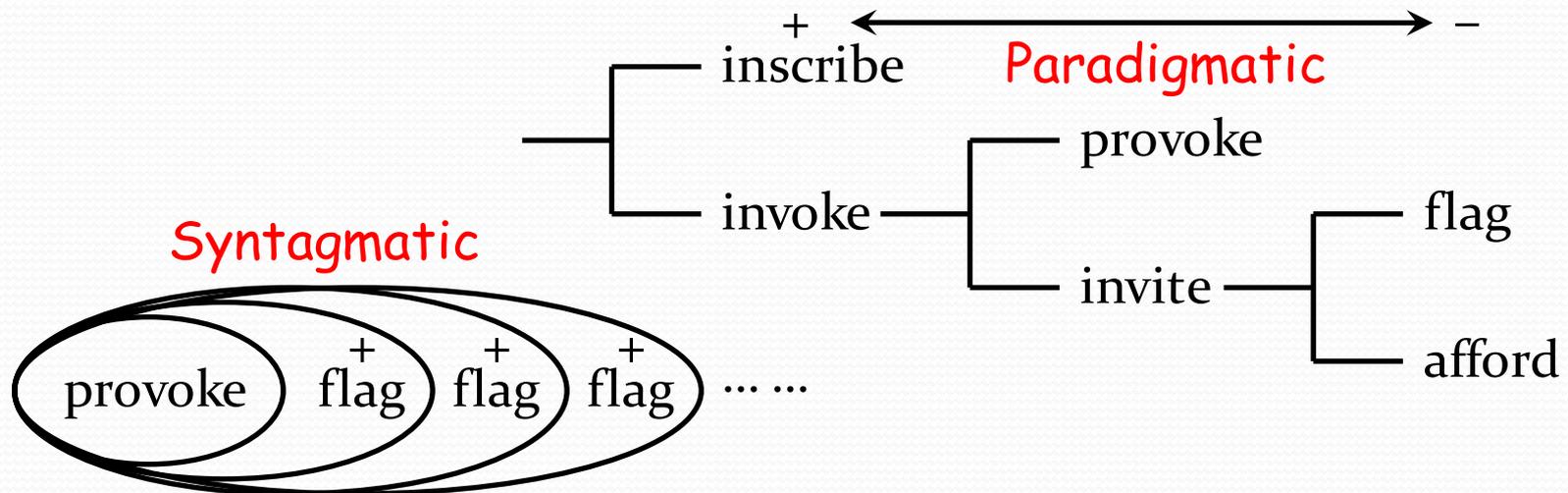
Possible solution: amount of meaning potential activated \neq amount of meaning meanings in optional systems taken up \neq degree of delicacy

*Half the skill in getting ahead on the **career front** is knowing when to move on.*

*In **everyone's** life there comes a **moment** when they **should** make the break.*

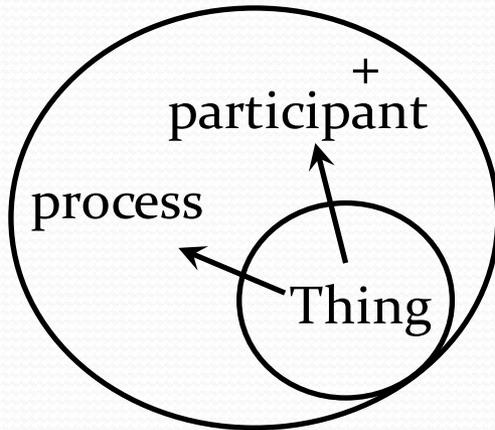
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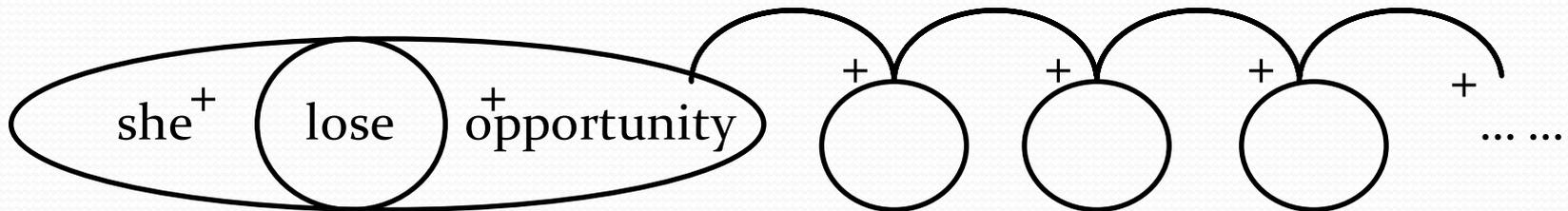


Possible solution: amount of meaning potential activated \neq amount of meaning
meanings in optional systems taken up \neq degree of delicacy

She lost the opportunity to apply for the job. The **loss of opportunity** cost her
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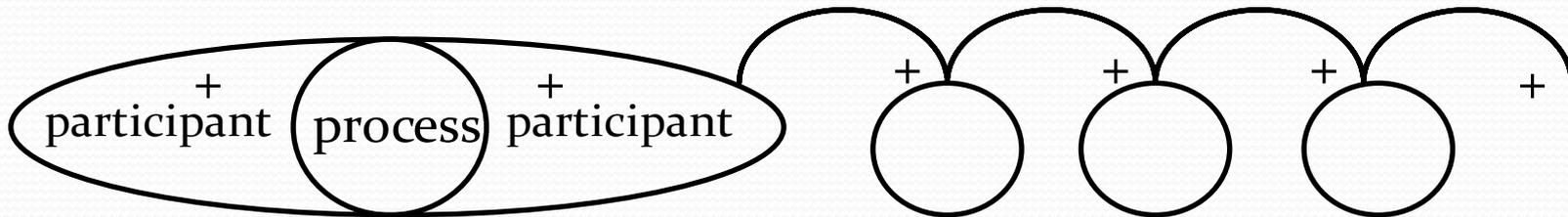
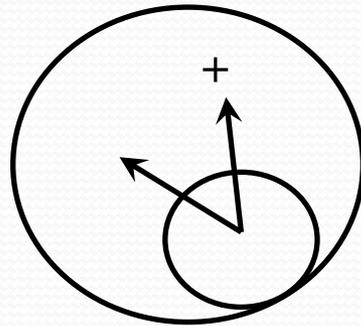
Paradigmatic



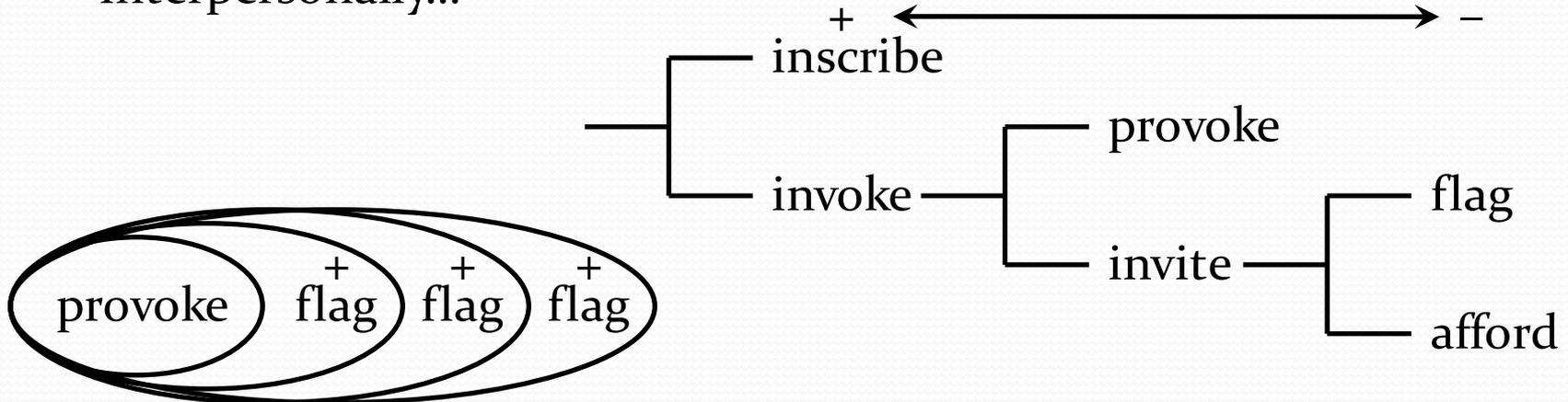
Syntagmatic

Possible solution: Syntagmatic AND Paradigmatic perspectives

Ideationally...



Interpersonally...



In conclusion...

Some possible questions:

(1) Is it a syntagmatic or paradigmatic comparison?

(2) If paradigmatic,
what are comparable units of comparison?

(3) If syntagmatic,
how do we determine extent of text compared?

Some references drawing on commitment theory

Identity

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Multimodality

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