

# **Towards a methodology for tracking culturally recurrent type-of-person related ways of meaning**

**- the linguistic performance of identity/persona**

Peter R. R. White, University of New South Wales

**Turn off the noise**  
Forget the first koel; the shrill-

Forget the first koel; the shrill screaming scourge of spring and summer interrupts. Mechanical blowers are mindlessly bludgeoning leaves. Whining-wailing whippersnippers are razoring shrubs and grass borders to horticultural exactitudes. Lawns are being cut to dust by rigid schedules and trees brutally truncated.

For century-old interpretations of horticultural aesthetics we are doltishly and selfishly shattering the peaceful panacea of bird calls and day with an ever-increasing clamorous industrial aural assault. Vast public and private spaces are being wantonly screech-manicured and blasted. The insidious and growing destruction of peaceful public amenity by individuals and private and public institutions is out of control.

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I know this person

I recognise this type of person; I  
have encountered other people  
(other letter-to-the editor writers)  
who present themselves  
linguistically/come across in similar  
ways

A **recurrent** "way of meaning"  
(recurrent syndrome of co-  
articulated, intersecting meanings)  
which I relate to

a recurrent way of being human  
(or at least a recurrent way of  
being a letter-to-the-editor  
writer);

a recurrent way of "coming  
across" as a person;

a recurrent "personhood";

a type-of-person category

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Someone who lives in a “leafy suburb”

A lover of nature and tranquillity

Someone at odds with lovers of mowing and horticultural mechanicals

Someone happy to put their opinions out there and strongly criticise others, but in a “good natured”, or “light-hearted” manner

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“Educated”: someone very much in command of the genre and register – to the extent that they play with the language; draw attention to the expression plane

Someone who doesn't take themselves entirely seriously – parodical turn of phrase

Keep your randy cat in your Own place. Bloody cat pisses all over my cat. Get it desexed. Female cats everywhere in Marian St and lane. Your cat should be kept indoors at night. I intend to inform the council.

You cat is all black and with some white on it. I have a cat cage from the council. We intend trapping the cat.

On Monday (06.07.98) we received this anonymous note in our letterbox (see below).

It is true we do have a small black and white cat - his name is Nigel. As responsible cat owners we had him desexed (over a year ago) at the correct age to ensure he does not 'spray'. Nigel is a very shy and timid little cat and spends most of his time indoors. He certainly stays in the house at night. We believe he should not be the target of such threats.

....

Yours sincerely, Simon, Bec (and Nigel) 13 Marian Street.  
Enmore

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JUST hours after our Consul-General and two dozen other people were murdered in Istanbul on Thursday, an idiotic, self-indulgent rabble of wreckers went to demonstrate in London's Trafalgar Square. As part of their 'fun', they imitated the fall of the genocidal maniac Saddam Hussein by toppling a Saddam- style effigy of President Bush. Every American should be told that this insult to an honoured guest and strong ally of this country was not carried out in the names of most of the British people. It was committed by a group of morons who have no idea how dangerous this world is, and how essential it is that every step is taken to make it safer. (continues...)

[Simon Heffer, *The Daily Mail*, November 22, 2003]

My neighbour recently asked me, on behalf of her friend Julie Christie, to sign a petition against a war on Iraq. Many of those approached - the Great and the Good and assorted thespians (many of whom are friends of mine), all decent, caring and humanitarian people - did sign.

And their illustrious names were duly printed in full-page ads.

Indeed many of you decent, caring and humanitarian Mail readers will have signed similar petitions - and some of you may even be marching today with my neighbour's friends against 'Bush's and Blair's War'.

But I could not sign. And I cannot join this march... I reluctantly believe (whatever Hans Blix or the U.N. Security Council say) that war is probably the only answer

[Ann Lesley, *The Daily Mail*, Feb, 15, 2003]

## a notion of textual persona

Drawing on work by Hasan, Poynton, Martin, Don, Knight, Zappavigna, Cléirigh, Bakar, Caldwell, others

Speakers/writers come across as a certain “type of person” according to how they speak/mean (there are **recurrent** communicative styles/ways of meaning which we recognise when we encounter them in a text)

Persona (the “personhood” or type-of-person category being construed) an effect of certain ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings operating in a given communication – but particularly influenced by interpersonal positionings, especially the attitudinal and dialogistic stances adopted by the speaker/writer

Question:

Just which are the meanings/combinations of meaning which are persona-constitutive: recurrent in the culture and functional in a speaker/writer coming across as a certain “type of person”?  
How do they operate communicatively?

Is it possible/useful to come up with a global model which will be relevant/appropriate for all instances of persona-performance analysis or do we need a more localised approach (different analytical categories; different parameters of possible variation)?

dico ergo sum  
*I speak therefore I am*



**What are the bases for “type-of-person” taxonomies?**

## Candidates for type-of-person classifications

- What is it that might be influential/determinative in causing different people to favour similar “ways of meaning” and by this to come across as instances of the same “type-of-person” category, while at the same time causing other people to favour different “ways of meaning”
- One proposition
  - A person’s communicative behaviour (ways of meaning) may be conditioned by their membership in macro, demographically-determined social groupings such as those of “class”, “gender”, “sexual orientation”, “age”, “ethnicity”, etc
  - The social conditioning common to people who have membership in a given demographic grouping results in significant commonalities in the ways-of-meaning deployed by those people
  - Particular ways of meaning become associated with a particular macro social grouping and hence may “index” that grouping
    - a speaker/writer may self-consciously deploy a given way-of-meaning so as to “perform” membership in a given macro demographic grouping

## Evidence of culturally-recurrent, macro-category associated ways-of-meaning

- Work by Hasan, Cloran and Williams
- Whether mothers in what they termed “low autonomy families” (working class) consistently conversed with their young children in different way was from mothers from “high autonomy families” (middle class)  
[Hasan 2009, p.393]
- Discovered different recurrent “semantic orientations”
  - Middle class: “individual autonomy style”
  - Working class: “interpersonal trust style”
- Echoing Bernstein’s proposals re “elaborated” and “restricted” code.

**“interpersonal trust style”**: indicating a person (a persona) who “takes for granted a principle of togetherness” and who conveys the sense that verbal interaction is not needed “for access to a knowledge of others minds”

**“individual autonomy style”** : indicating a person (a persona) who “maximises the separation of minds” and who “relies criterially on certain qualities of verbal communication to bridge the gap”.

## Candidates for type-of-person classifications

- Relatively stable role/hierarchy related: teacher/student, parent/child, doctor/patient, real estate agent/vendor; judge/prosecutor/defendant
- Speakers learn, or may be constrained by others, to take on recurrent role-related ways-of-meaning in institutional settings
-

## Making meaning like a “good” teacher

“This chapter demonstrates how identity is constituted through the language resources called upon by two participants, the interviewer/ researcher and the interviewee/ teacher, in a research interview.

Specifically, aspects of ethnomethodological and conversational analysis are used to examine a lengthy interview transcript and reveal that initially the identity work is done by the interviewer as she positions the teacher to take up the identities of critically reflective teacher and excellent research participant.

Further analysis shows how the teacher accepts the interviewer’s positioning... She shifts from a dilemmatic discourse to a more positive construction of how her teaching practices help students to fulfill parental expectations, therefore positioning herself as a good practitioner.”

Johnson, D, 2005, **“The discursive construction of teacher identities in a research interview”** in De Fina, A., *Discourse and Identity* (Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics, 23) Cambridge University Press: p.213.

## Candidates for type-of-person classifications

- Contextually emergent, communicative-purpose driven, contingent cultural positions which give rise to recurrency in ways-of-meaning/semantic orientation
  - Research focusses on recurrent patterns of evaluative positioning – the attitudinal position put at stake and the ways in which the speaker/writer negotiates these positions :

...textual persona is a function of the acts of positioning that each contributor makes to a discussion, in the co-text of a whole text - or during a series of texts created in similar contexts - and generally with a specific audience in mind. As such, this conception of textual persona can be distinguished from other concepts of identity which often depend on the notion of a stable individual self-image, or on an individual's social role ascriptions (such as woman, teacher, mother, English, etc), or on wider ethnic, cultural, or other social groupings with whom individuals may identify, such as America, Church of England, Manchester Football Club, etc.

The construal of textual persona .. could be described as concerned with the performed, as opposed to an ascribed identity. (Don, in preparation)

Cléirigh (in preparation) distinction between the *instantiation of persona* and the *potential meaner* in a social context

## Candidates for type-of-person classifications

- Contextually emergent, communicative-purpose driven, contingent cultural positions which give rise to recurrency in ways-of-meaning/semantic orientation
  - journalist commentator/correspondent (Feez, Iedema, White, White, Martin and White)

## Journalistic personae: commentator/correspondent

### Commentator

Employs full range of Judgement sub-types, with an emphasis on **Social Sanction** – presents as authorised/able to judge people's behaviour in ethical terms

### Correspondent

Limit their assessments to **Social Esteem** – presents as authorised/able to pass judgements of Tenacity, Capacity, Normality but not the ethical assessments of Propriety and Veracity



## Candidates for type-of-person classifications

- Contextually emergent, contingent cultural positions which give rise to recurrency in ways-of-meaning/semantic orientation
  - journalist commentator/correspondent (Feez, Iedema, White, White, Martin and White)
  - **film buff personae: aesthete/sentimentalist (White 2008)**

# Cinema buff personae: aesthete v. sentimentalist

## **Aesthete**

Strong preference for Appreciation  
– aesthetic assessments of the  
film's style, appearance, form etc.

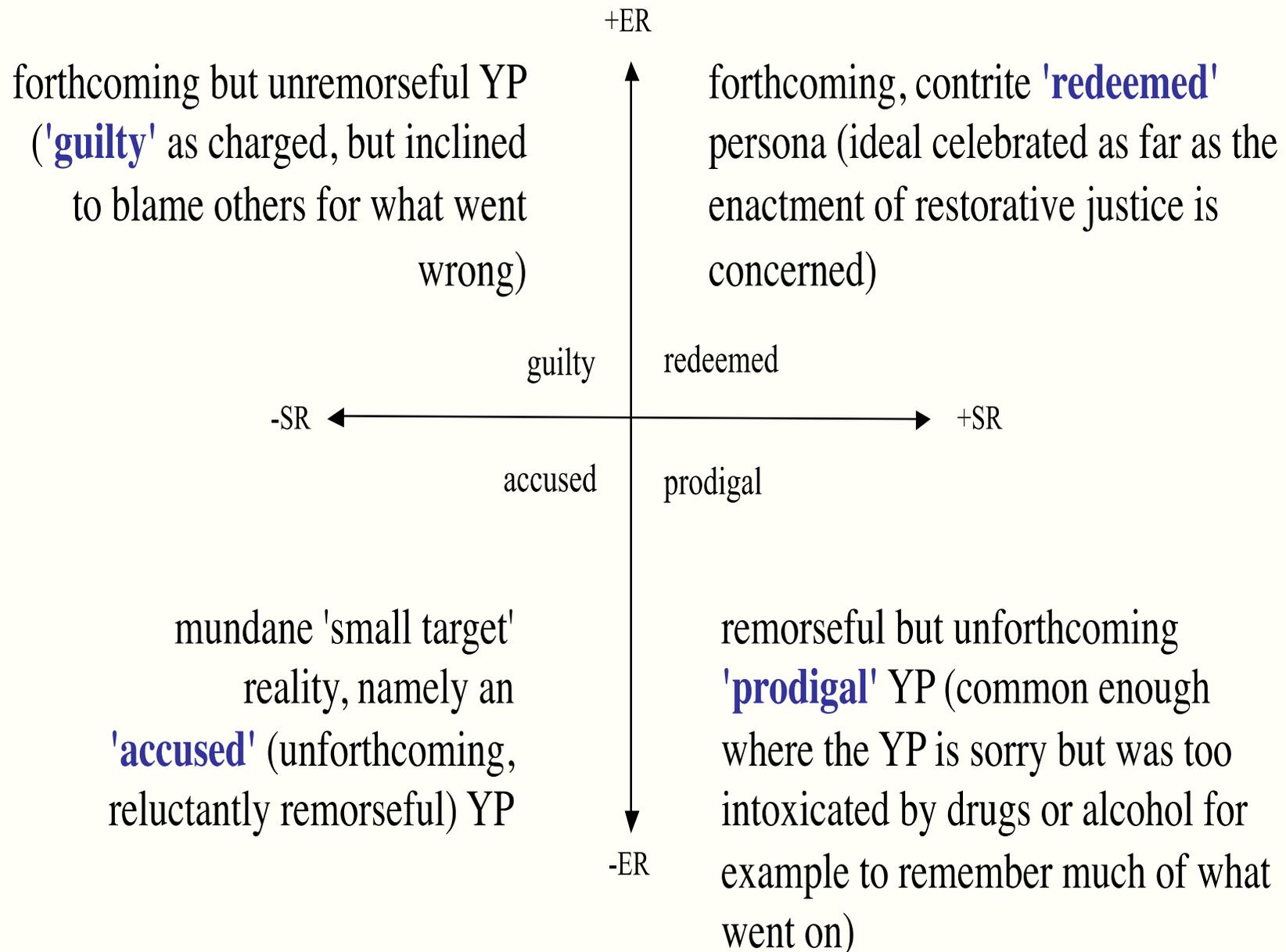
## **Sentimentalist**

Strong preference for Affect –  
personal emotional responses to  
various aspects of the movie and  
also to what it lacked

## Candidates for type-of-person classifications

- Contextually emergent, contingent cultural positions which give rise to recurrency in ways-of-meaning/semantic orientation :
  - journalist commentator/correspondent (Feez, Iedema, White, White, Martin and White)
  - film buff personae: aesthete/sentimentalist (White 2008)
  - **candidates for political office: incumbent/challenger (Benoit)**
  - **young offenders personae (“prodigal”, “redeemed”, etc) in NSW Youth Justice Conferences (Martin, Zappavigna, Chlérigh)**

# Youth Justice Conferencing: Young Persons



## Candidates for type-of-person classifications

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  - film buff personae: aesthete/sentimentalist (White 2008)
  - candidates for political office: incumbent/challenger (Benoit)
  - young offenders personae (“prodigal”, “redeemed”, etc) in NSW Youth Justice Conferences (Martin, Zappavigna, Chlérigh);
  - **microblogging personae – e.g the “deviant”, “addicted”, “frazzled” “#bad mother” (Zappavigna)**

# #badmother persona

Microblog post (tweet)



Need. Wine.

Just spilt wine on son's homework diary.  
#badmother



What a spectacularly horrendous night. Max awake for 3 hours, wanting "iPad! IPAD!!" I think NOT baby. Then twins snuck into bed @ 4am. Ugh



“deviant”

“addicted”

“frazzled”

- from Zappavigna, 2013

## Candidates for type-of-person classifications

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- young offenders personae (“prodigal”, “redeemed”, etc) in NSW Youth Justice Conferences (Martin, Zappavigna, Chlérigh)
- microblogging personae – e.g the “deviant”, “addicted”, “frazzled” “#bad mother” (Zappavigna)
- **email-list “poster” personae: e.g. the affectually self-absorbed poster identity** (Don 2008, “Analysis of textual identity through profiles of evaluative disposition”)
- “trickster/enforcer” personae of rap music (Caldwell 2010, 2014)
- the Malaysian “simple person” identity in Malaysian English personal advertisements (Bakar 2013)
- etc, etc (type-of-person categories not derived in advance but on the basis of observed recurrent “ways of meaning”)

aestimare ergo sum

*I evaluate therefore I am*

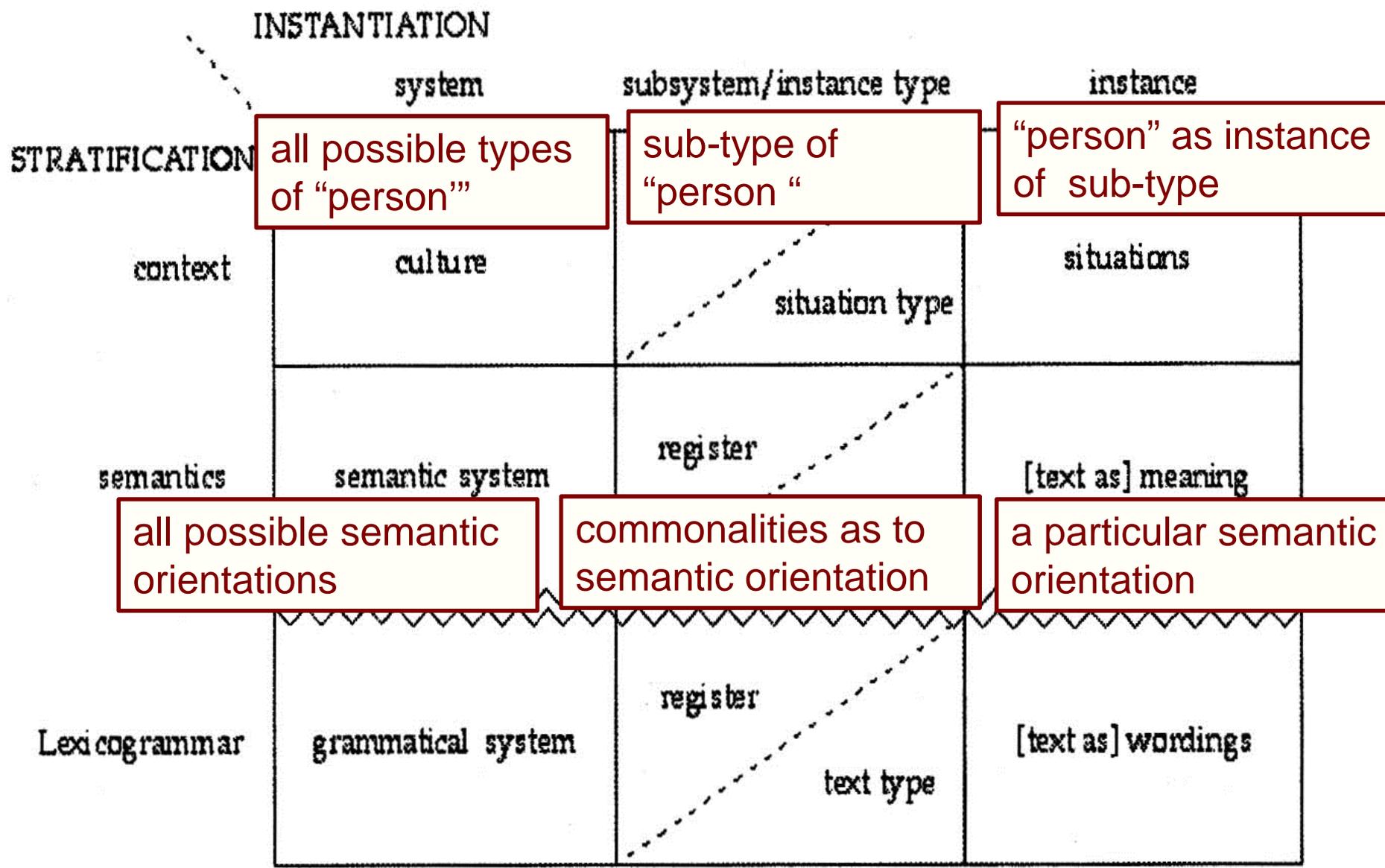


## Foci of identity/persona scholarship

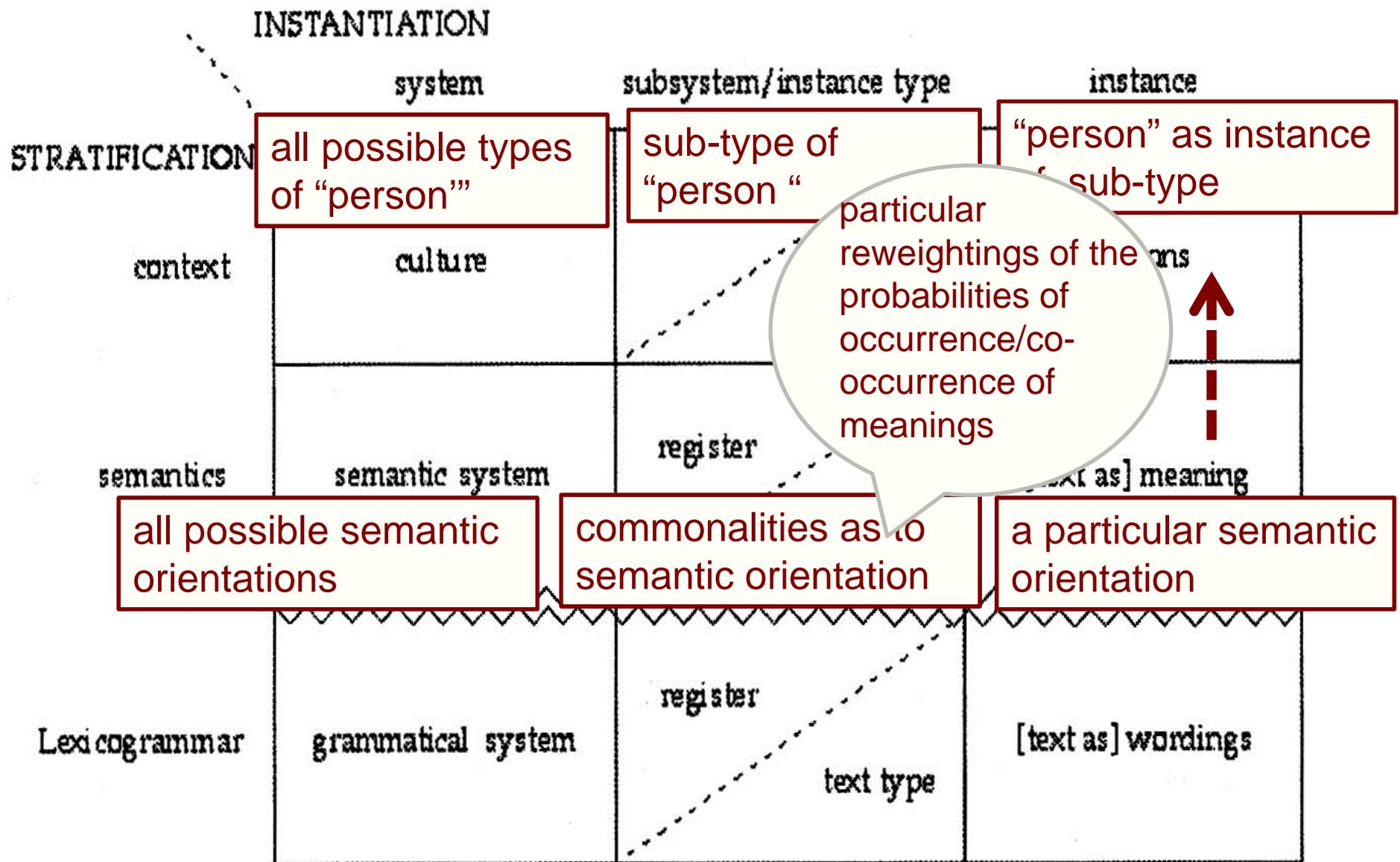
- Formulating identity/persona categories: **speaking about**
  - ascribed identity
- Performing identity/persona
  - **speaking as** (habitual)
    - typical context: spontaneous, synchronous, face-to-face/embodied, interactive
  - **speaking as if** (premeditated, conscious)
    - typical context: non-spontaneous, asynchronous, one-to-many/one-to-unknown, un-embodied, non-interactive

## Persona in staged, asynchronous, one-to-many/unknown (typically disembodied/written) communications

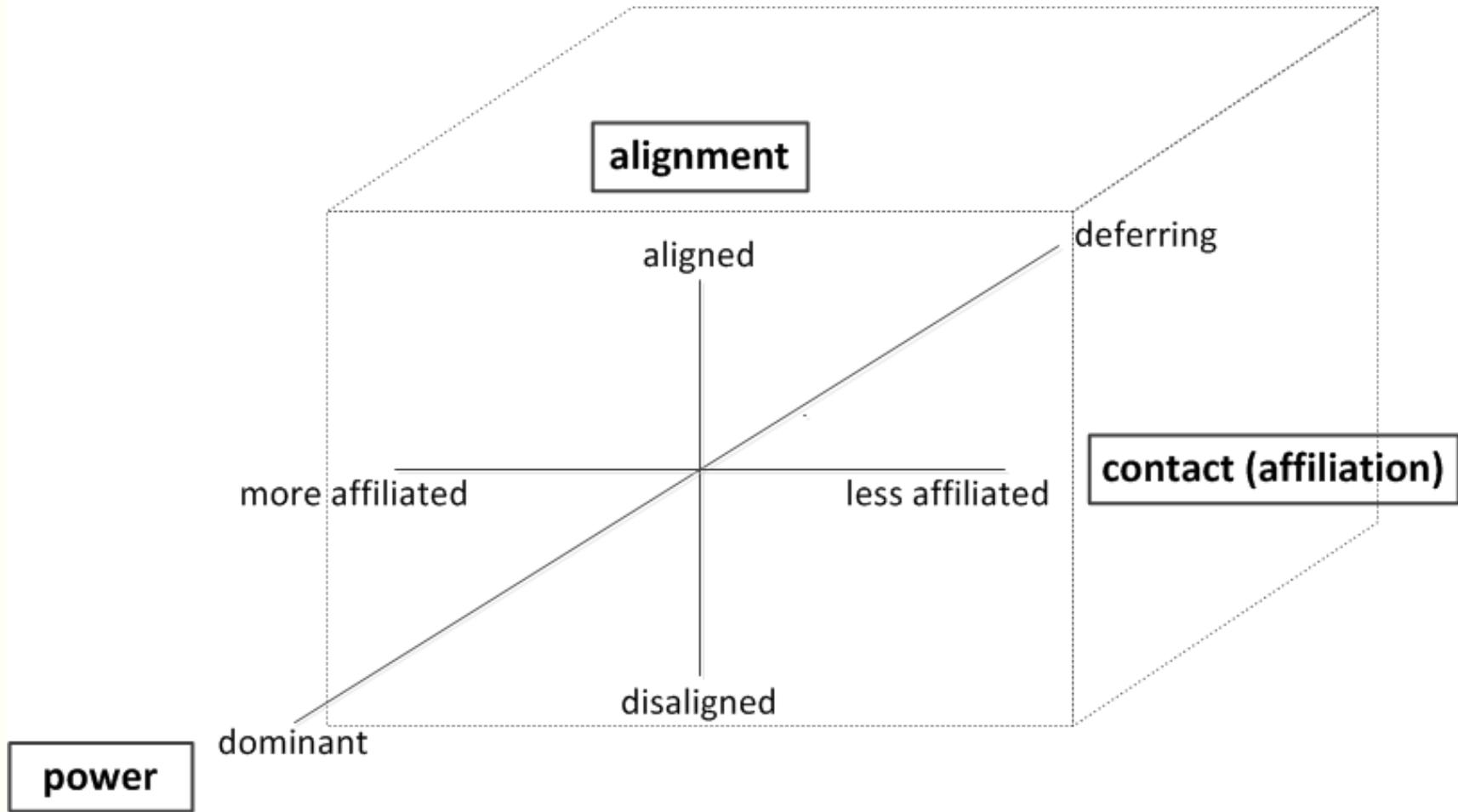
- A proposed methodology for discovering, describing and analysing “type-of-person” related recurrent semantic orientations/ways of meaning
- The particular culturally-recurrent language options (semantic orientations/ways of meaning) which are persona-constitutive/persona-sensitive
- Lines of possible type-of-person conditioned similarity according to
  - [**standing**] the writer’s social standing (empowerment) as construed in the text(s)
  - [**affinity**] the writer’s relations of social affinity with the putative addressee, as construed in the text(s)
  - [**value positioning**] the nature of the value positions which the writer puts at risk and the terms under which they negotiate rapport with the **putative** addressee over these value positions



Halliday's (2002: 14) intersection of stratification and instantiation



# Affinity/Solidarity: contact(affiliation) v. alignment”



After Don 2010, 2013

## power/social standing issues

- field (**expertise** and classification)
- tenor (**status** in a social hierarchy)
- mode (**prominence** – how mass communicative discourses construct public figures)
- genre (**control** – as participants direct others to do things)
- experiential (**expertise** - use of language indicating ability to construe the categories and relations of a given experiential domain, notable in the context of specialist domains)
- interpersonal (**authority** - use of language demonstrating or implying ability – lack of ability - to control or influence others; membership in a hierarchically positioned social grouping)
- textual (**elocution** - use of language demonstrating ability to control or manipulate the discourse/communicative exchange)

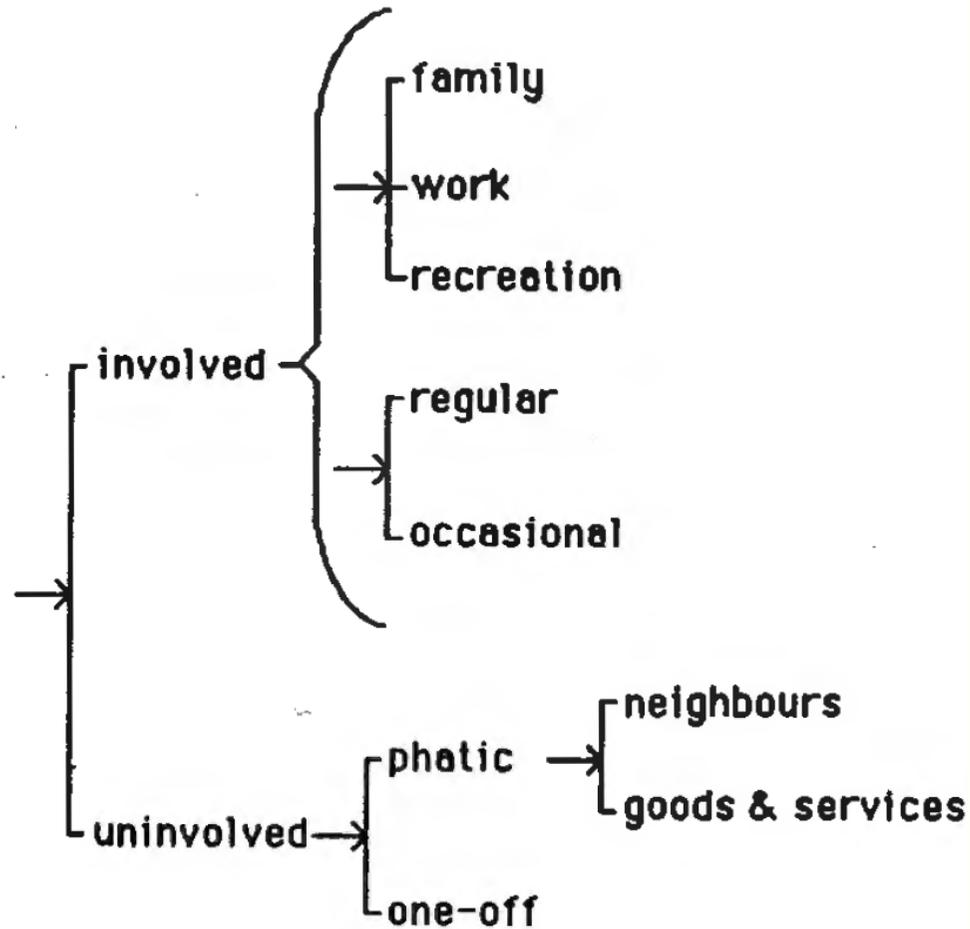
Martin 1992: 527

*[based on a poorly remembered chat with Sue Hood]*

*Table 7.10. Aspects of the realisation of unequal status*

<b>Unequal status</b>	<b>dominate</b>	<b>defer</b>
<b>NON-RECIPROcity</b> <b>[grammar foregrounded]</b>		
PHONOLOGY	tone certain (1,5) establish rhythm standard accent	tone uncertain (2,4) follow rhythm non-standard accent
GRAMMAR	no ellipsis polarity asserted modalization: high modulation: obligation attitude: manifested comment: presented vocation: familiar person: 1st tagging: inviting; agency: I /Agent	Residue ellipsis polarity matched modalization: low modulation: inclination attitude: concur comment: invited vocation: respectful person: 2nd tagging: checking; agency: I /Medium
LEXIS	explicit bodily functions swearing	euphemise tempered swearing
DISCOURSE SEMANTICS	negotiation: primary knower initiating challenging [not anticipate] turn controlling  initiate chains  initiate strings	primary actor responding tracking [anticipate] turn respecting  elaborate chains (pronominal)  elaborate strings (repetition)
interaction patterns	interpersonal congruence	interpersonal metaphor

## Affiliation (contact/ social distance)



*Fig. 7.14. Tenor — CONTACT systems*

# Contact/social distance (affiliation)

Table 7.12. Tenor — aspects of the realisation of contact

<b>Contact</b>	involved	uninvolved
PROLIFERATION/ CONTRACTION [phonology foregrounded]		
PHONOLOGY	Pre-tonic delicacy marked tonality marked tonicity varied rhythm fluent reduction processes native accent range of accents acronym	basic tone unmarked tonality unmarked tonicity constant rhythm hesitant full syllables standard accent single accent full form
GRAMMAR	◦ minor clauses ◦ Mood ellipsis ◦ Mood contraction ◦ vocation ◦ range of names ◦ nick-name	major clauses no ellipsis no contraction no vocation single name full name
LEXIS	◦ specialised ◦ technical ◦ slang ◦ general words	core non-technical standard specific words
DISCOURSE SEMANTICS	/ dialogue / homophoric / implicit conjunction	monologue endophoric explicit conjunction
interaction patterns	experiential metaphor	experiential congruence

**construed  
social standing**  
(the language  
such as to  
construe...)

balance

**balanced:** the speaker and addressee/some other presented as having equal social standing?

**imbalanced:** the speaker and addressee/some other presented as having unequal social standing

empowerment

**empowered:** speaker presented as having higher standing with respect to expertise, authority **and/or** elocution

**disempowered:** speaker presented as having lower standing with respect to expertise, authority **and/or** elocution

**affinity**

affiliation

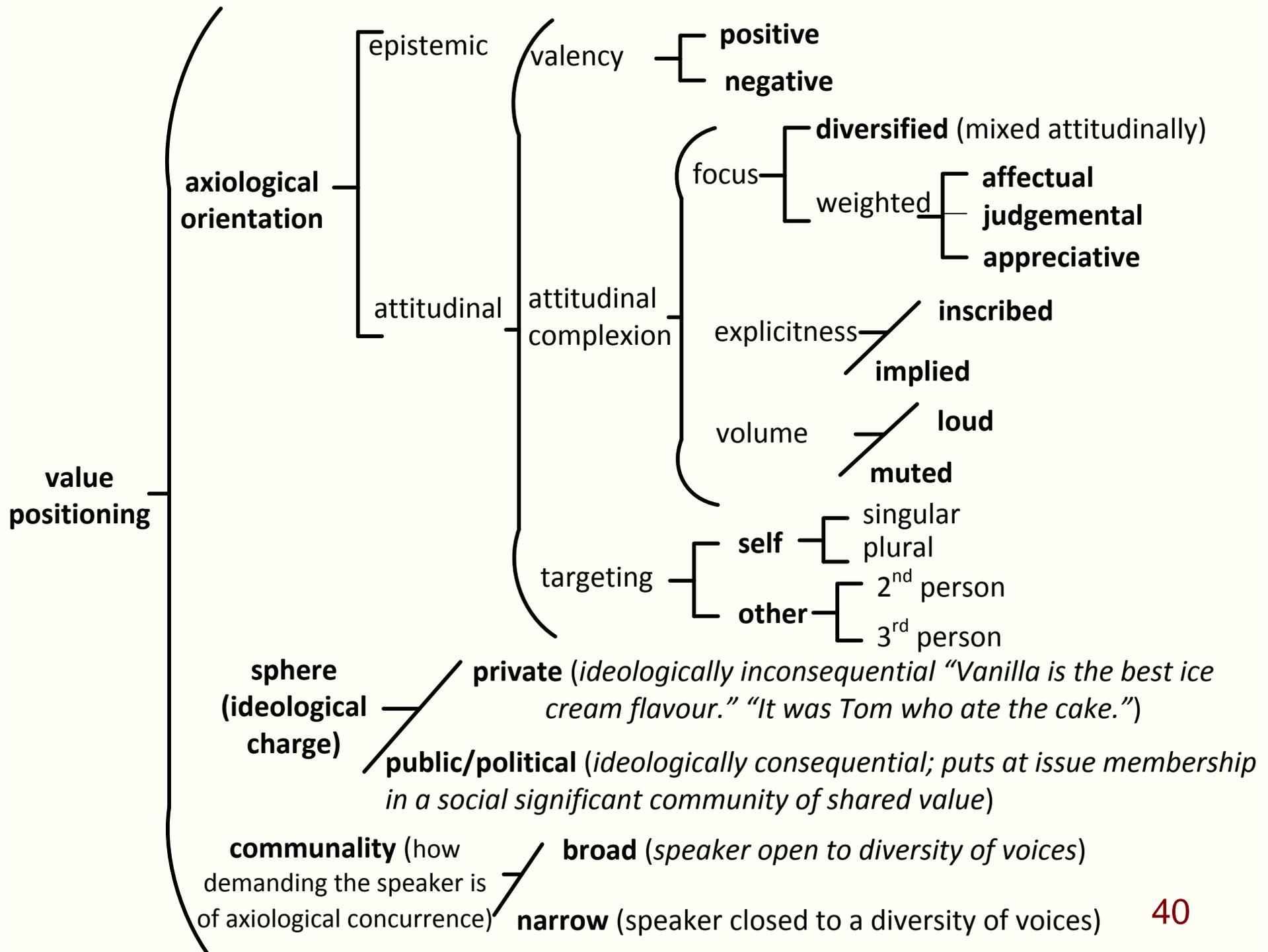
**close:** addresser-addressee presented as more affiliated (*sharing of common experiences, knowledge*)

**distant** - less affiliated

alignment

**aligned:** addresser-addressee presented as *sharing values and beliefs*

**disaligned**

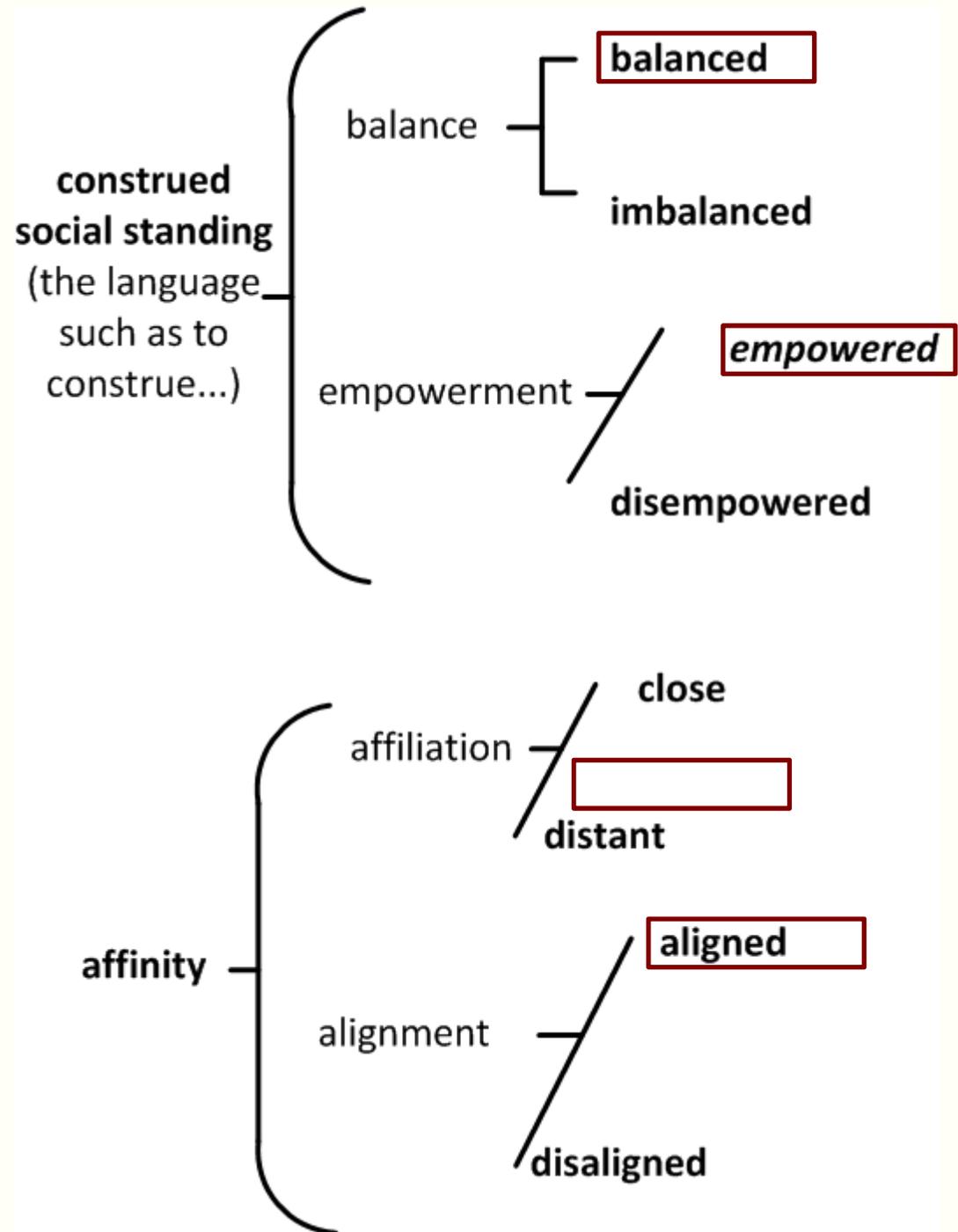


# Communality

- White 2005, 2008. How “conditioning” is the speaker/writer with respect to axiological conjunction?
  - To what degree does that speaker/writer assume the addressee shares their beliefs, values, tastes or feeling?
  - What allowance does the speaker/writer make for alternative viewpoints?
- **Narrow communality** - assumes axiological commonality, admits only those who share the author’s views, puts rapport at risk with those who don’t hold the beliefs and/or values being advanced
- **Broad communality** - makes fewer assumptions as to axiological commonality; allows for the possibility that the addressee may not share the speaker/writer’s beliefs and/or values; wider scope for rapport.
- Realised typically via the resources of Engagement
- Narrow – monoglossic utterances which ignore the possibility of alternative positions.
- Broad – heteroglossic and particularly dialogically expansive utterances, those which actively engage with and recognised the legitimacy of alternative positions.

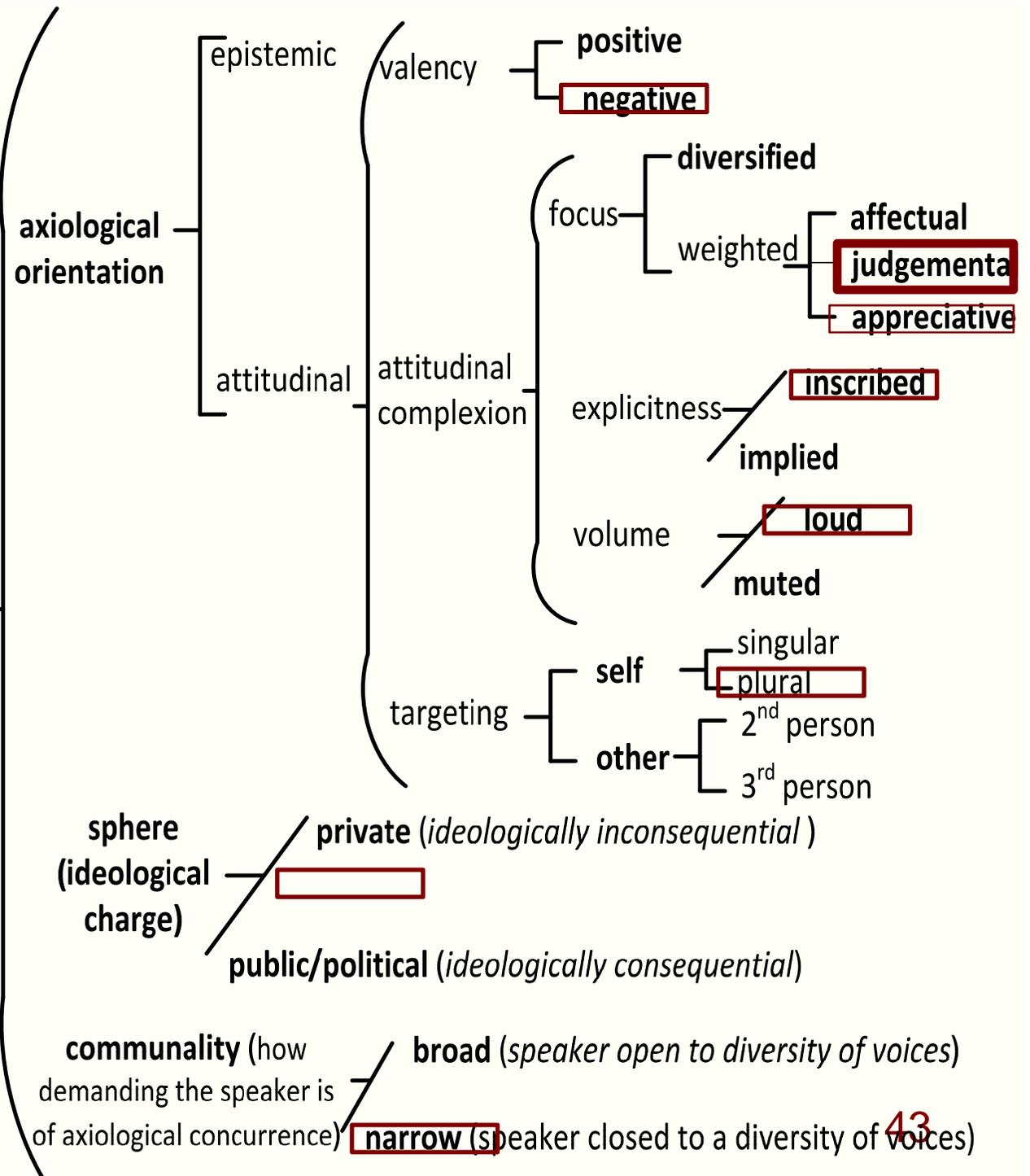
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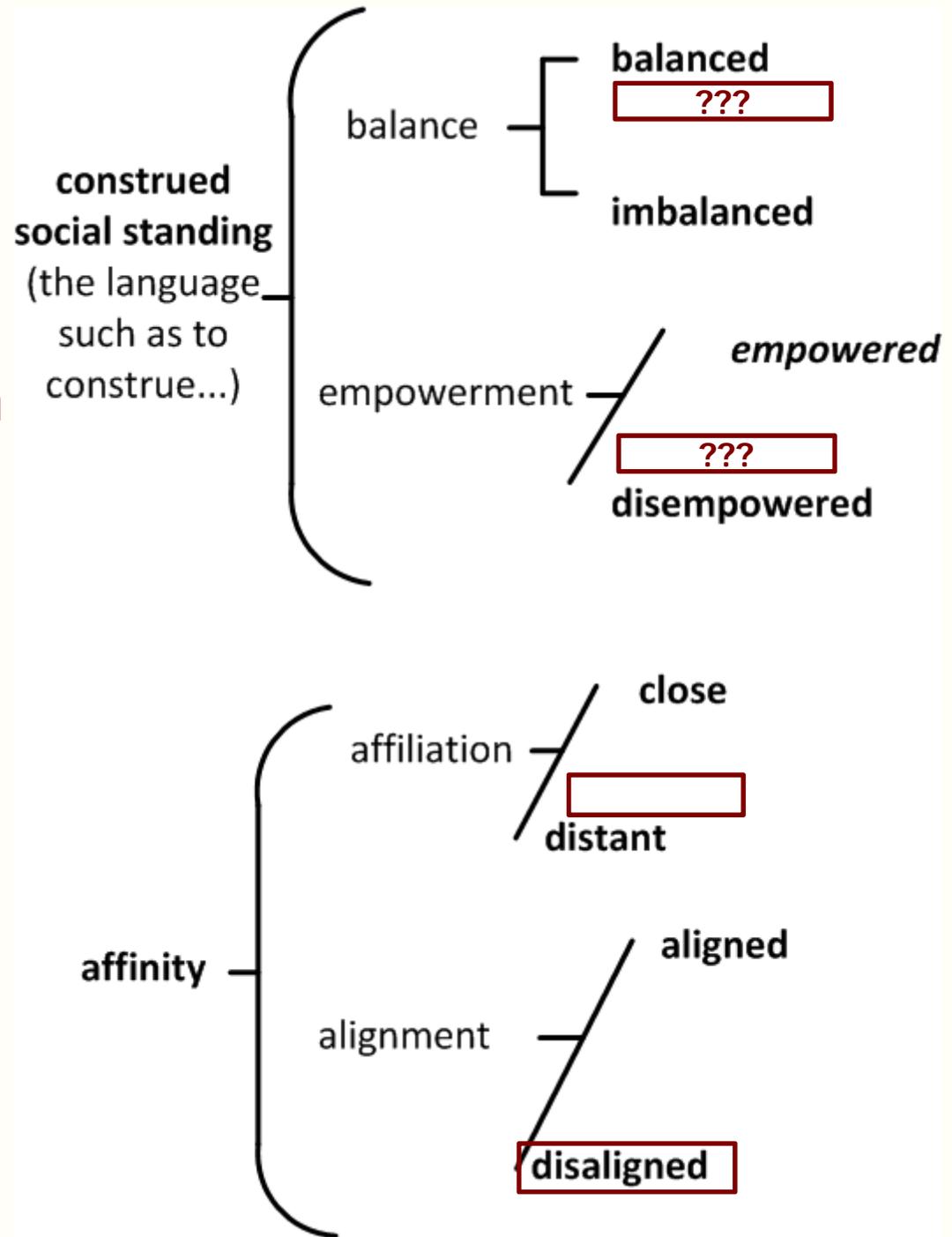
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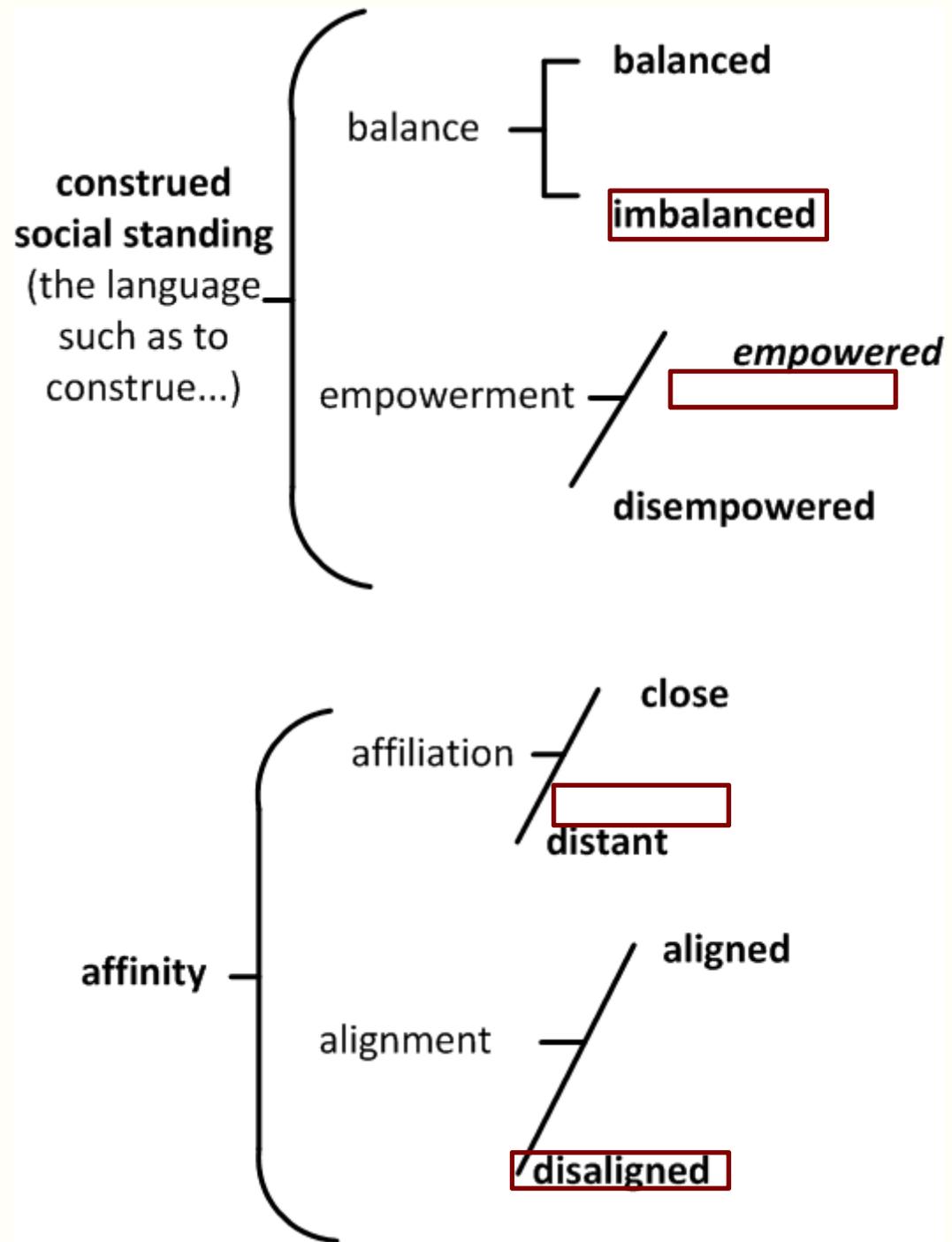
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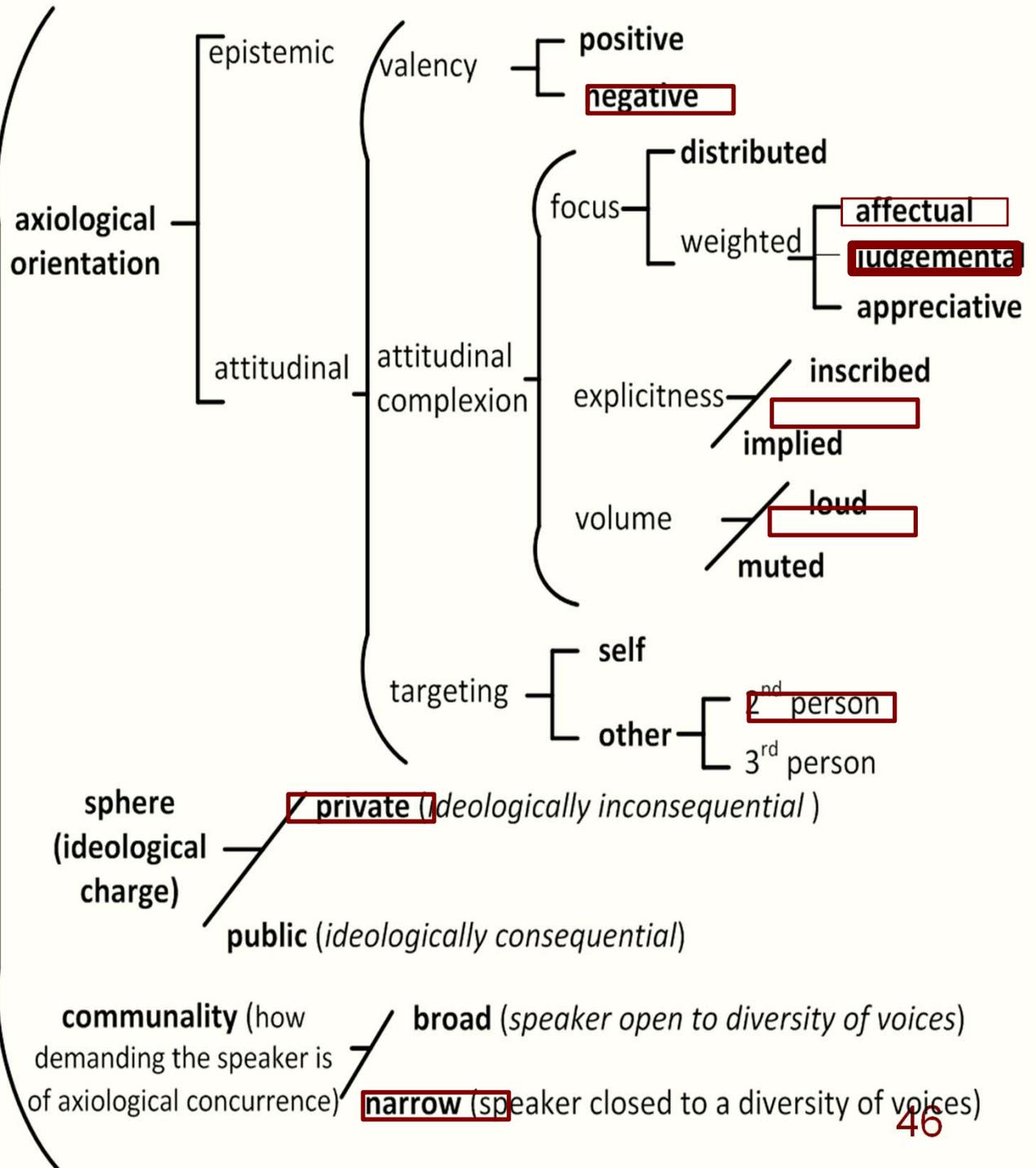


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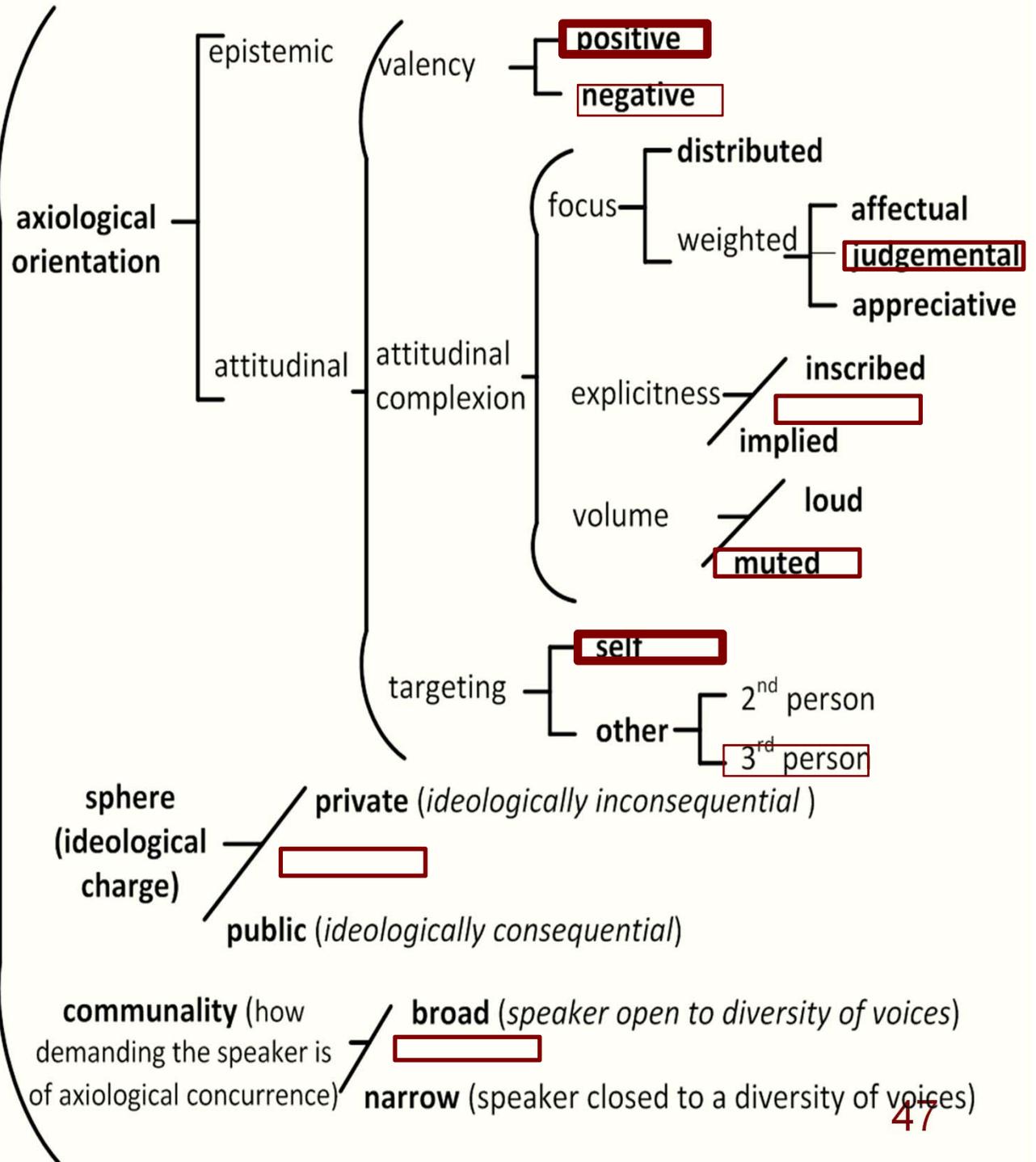


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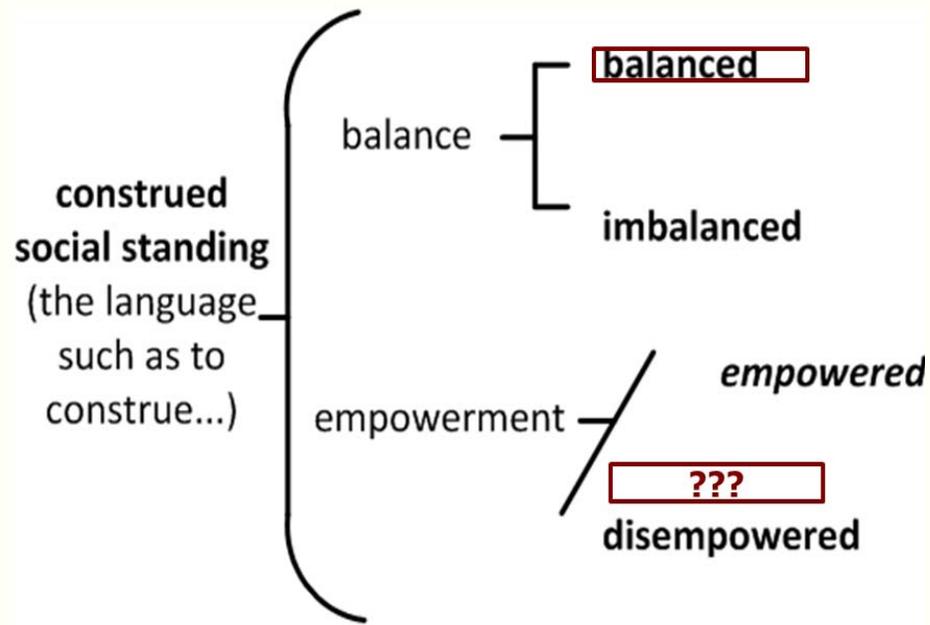


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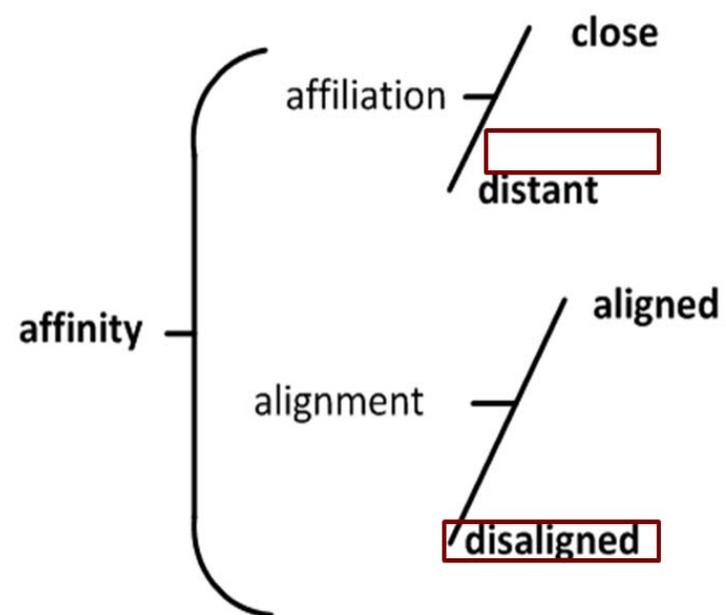
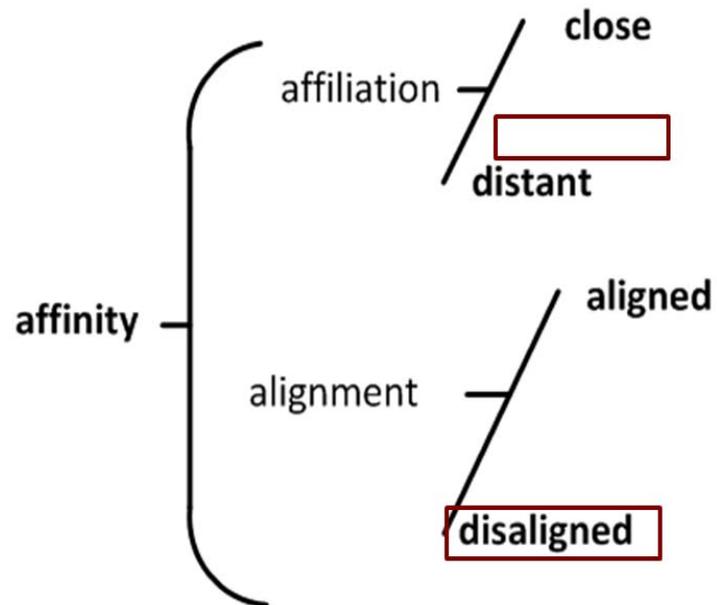
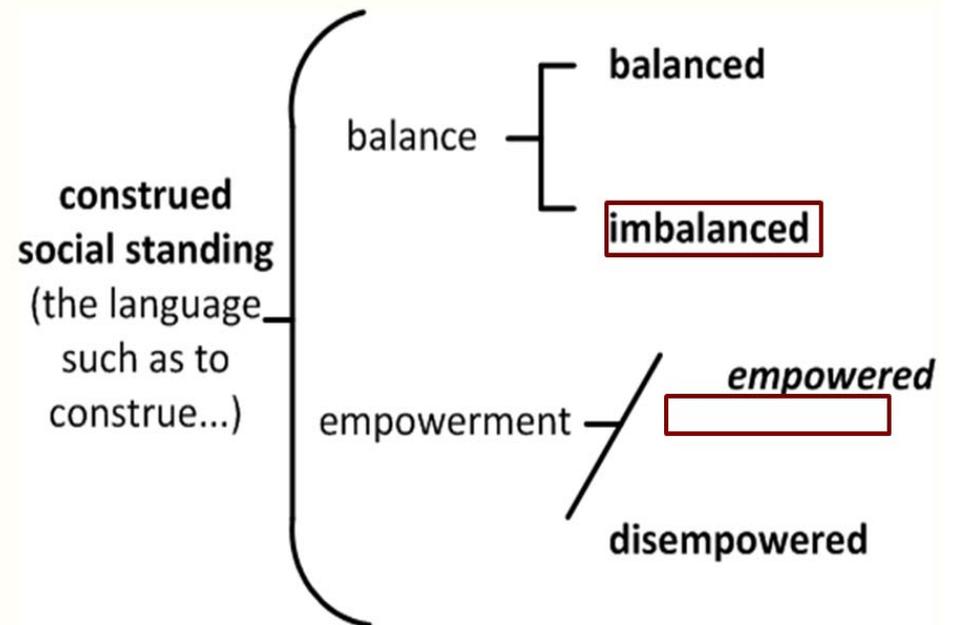
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## Keep your randy cat

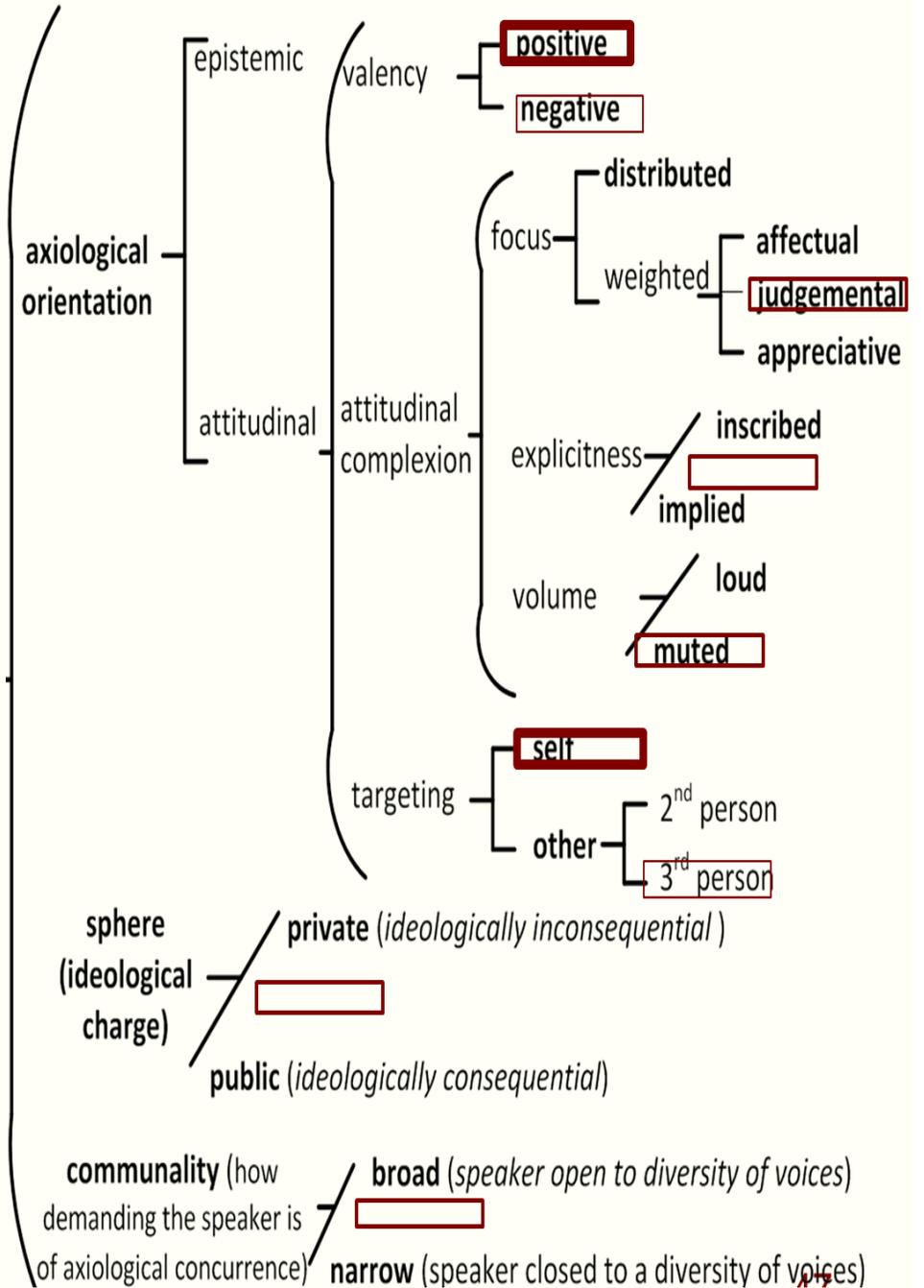
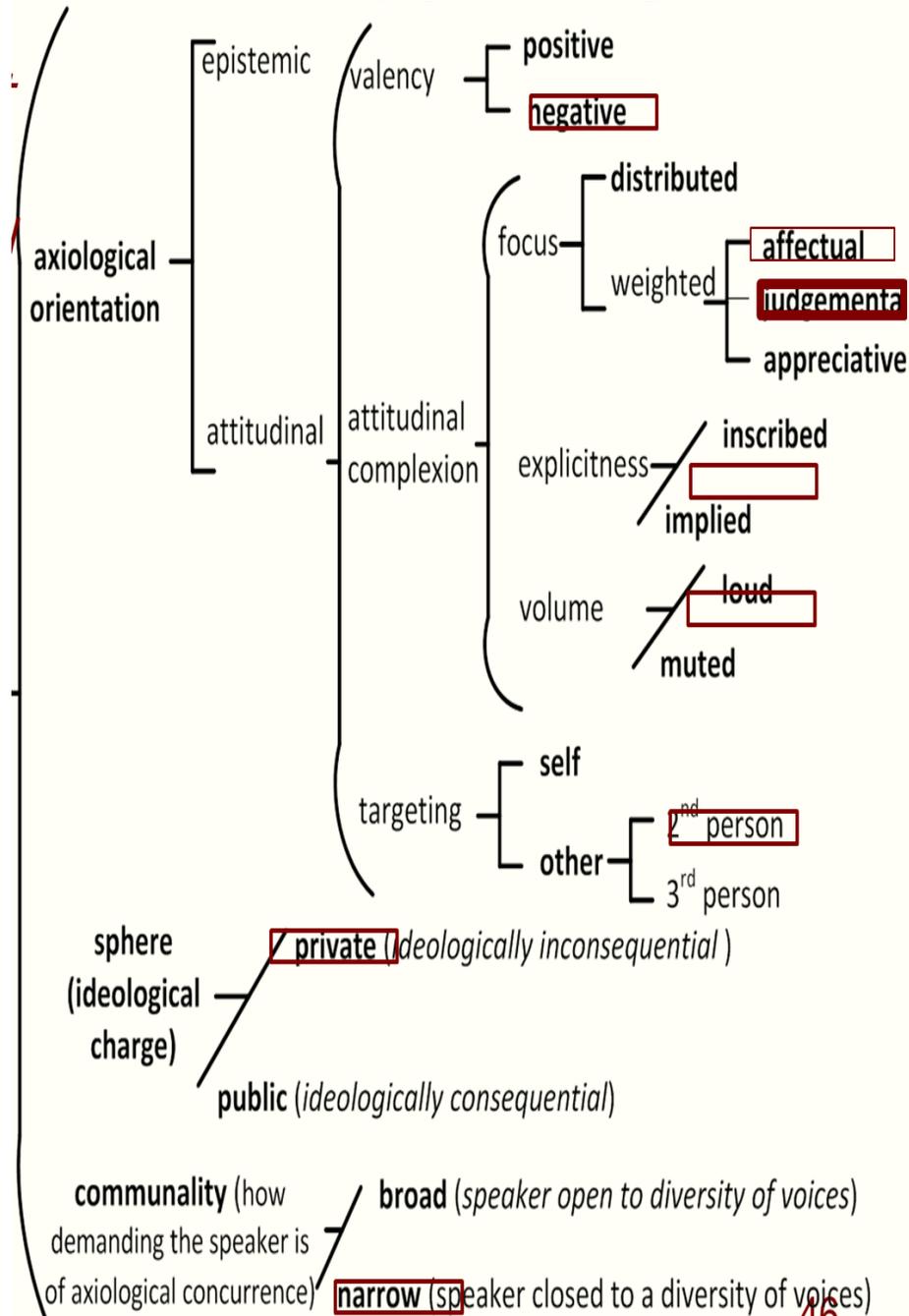


## It is true....



## Keep your randy cat

## It is true....



JUST hours after our Consul-General and two dozen other people were murdered in Istanbul on Thursday, an idiotic, self-indulgent rabble of wreckers went to demonstrate in London's Trafalgar Square. As part of their 'fun', they imitated the fall of the genocidal maniac Saddam Hussein by toppling a Saddam- style effigy of President Bush. Every American should be told that this insult to an honoured guest and strong ally of this country was not carried out in the names of most of the British people. It was committed by a group of morons who have no idea how dangerous this world is, and how essential it is that every step is taken to make it safer. (continues...)

[Simon Heffer, *The Daily Mail*, November 22, 2003]

My neighbour recently asked me, on behalf of her friend Julie Christie, to sign a petition against a war on Iraq. Many of those approached - the Great and the Good and assorted thespians (many of whom are friends of mine), all decent, caring and humanitarian people - did sign.

And their illustrious names were duly printed in full-page ads.

Indeed many of you decent, caring and humanitarian Mail readers will have signed similar petitions - and some of you may even be marching today with my neighbour's friends against 'Bush's and Blair's War'.

But I could not sign. And I cannot join this march... I reluctantly believe (whatever Hans Blix or the U.N. Security Council say) that war is probably the only answer

[Ann Lesley, *The Daily Mail*, Feb, 15, 2003]

For a copy of the slides and for references  
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