



Lector in fabula

High level skills in reading comprehension assessment

Gabriella Agrusti (Italy) & Marian Sainsbury (United Kingdom)

8th Aea-Europe Annual Conference

Stockholm, Sweden

Everything begins with a fairy tale..

- “Lupus in fabula”
- Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula*, 1979
- *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of the Text* (English translation)
- Subtitle: *Interpretative Cooperation in narrative texts* (Italian version)





An example..

“John went to Lutece last night.
He had the lobster.”

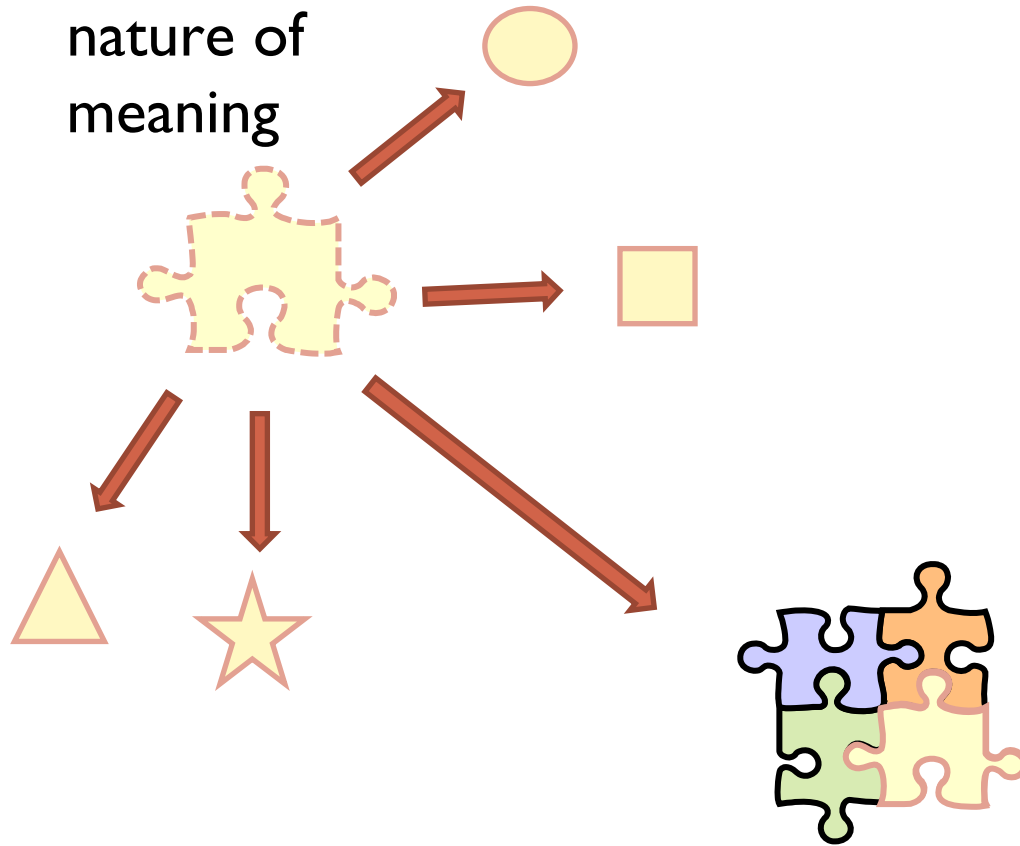


The reader: perfect or not?

- Text as a “lazy machine”
- Implicit or previously mentioned concepts in the text compel the reader to cooperate in constructing meaning
- Eco imagines a “model reader” and a successful strategy in understanding the text..
- ..but the reader has always the possibility of “walking in the woods of narrative” (making inferences)

Meaning or meanings?

Polysemic
nature of
meaning



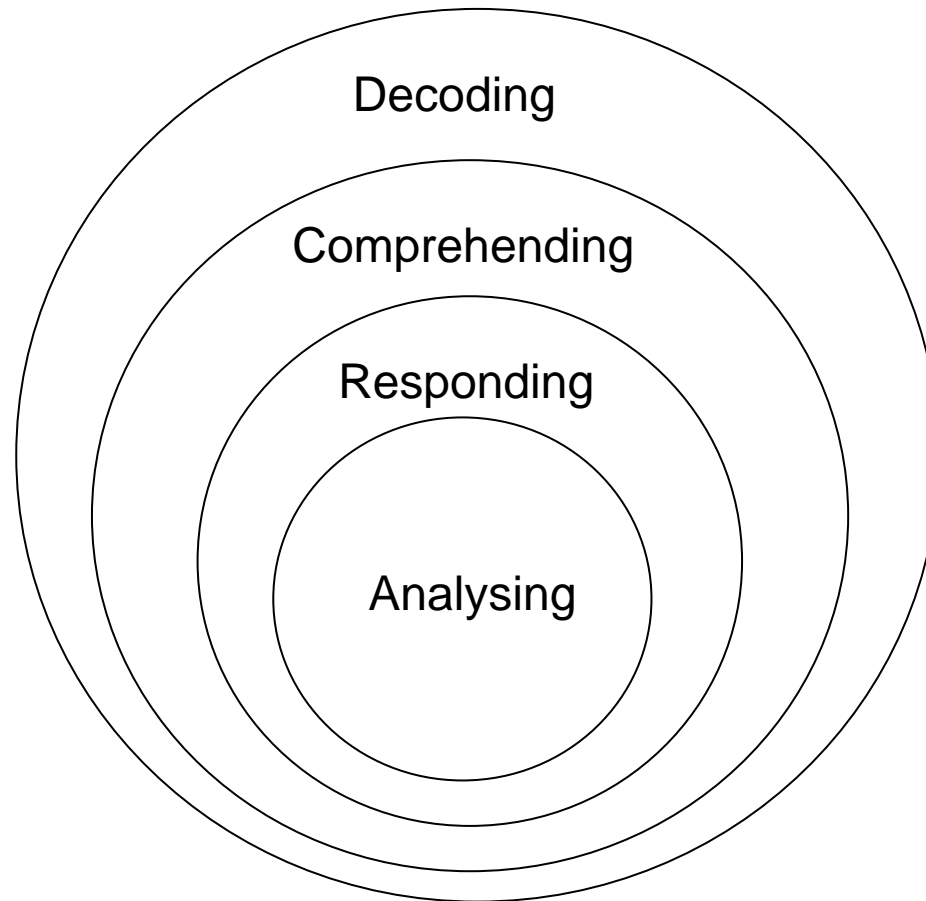
Contextualised
theory of truth



Texts, tests and validity

- Construct definition the first step in test validation
- What do we mean by ‘reading’ and ‘appreciating the meaning of a text’?
- Construct representation
- How well does the test score ‘stand for’ students’ high-level reading skills?

Diagram of the construct of reading



An example from Italy..



- Question: Between the text and the picture there is an inconsistency. Explain it briefly.



..an example from United Kingdom

Night Music by Brian Lee

*The mail train south fades out into the dark.
The clock ticks, tocks, downstairs in the hall.
Conversations come in murmurs through the wall.
The dog barks once that only gives one bark.
The leaves are rustling all around the empty park.
...
And always there, behind, a ceaseless monotone,
The steady stir; the sound of everyone.*



..an example from United Kingdom

Night Music by Brian Lee

Question 14:

The poet lists many different sounds but what is the overall impression created by the end of the poem?

Use evidence from the poem to support your answer.

Up to 4 marks



..an example from United Kingdom

Night Music by Brian Lee

Extract from the mark scheme

Acceptable points:

- constant, dull hum
- familiar sounds
- reassuring
- quiet, background sounds
- separate sounds combine to make one



..an example from United Kingdom

Night Music by Brian Lee

Example of a good student response:

the overall impression by the end of the poem is that it's quiet at night with lots of sounds that you hear every night, but don't really hear them or take them in, like the leaves rustling, which you would not normally notice.

But what about this student ...?

it's a spooky impression with all those frightening sounds



Prompts for discussion..

- What do we test in reading comprehension when we are targeting high level skills?
- Which kind of texts could be better used for this scope?
- Which kind of question format (MCQ, open-ended, cloze,..)?
- What could be the issues on validity?