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CONSCIOUSNESS PEDAGOGY

Frame Semantics as Technologies of Attention in Mediumship Training

Poster Winner Presentation in
Experiential Approaches & Culture

Kenna Knight-Schoeler

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KENNA KNIGHT-SCHOELER



Academic Background

Linguistics
BA | UC Berkeley

Speech Language Pathology
Post-Bacc | CSU San Marcos

Instructional Design and Learning Technology
MS | University of Wisconsin

Research Focus

My research examines relationships among language, learning, attention, and conscious experience. Drawing on linguistic theory, instructional design, and ethnographic methods, I investigate how culturally situated teaching practices make subjective experience recognizable, interpretable, and teachable.

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THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

How are experiences that cannot be directly demonstrated, taught, recognized, and interpreted?

Research Question

How do instructional metaphors and their underlying semantic frames organize attention, interpretation, and learning within mediumship training?

Analytical Focus

1. What conceptual structures are evoked through instructional language?
2. What attentional orientations and expectations do these structures make available?
3. How might these linguistic practices contribute to the cultivation of subjective experience?

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ARTHUR FINDLAY COLLEGE

ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK | MAY 2026 | ENGLAND

RESEARCH SETTING

Arthur Findlay College, located in Stanstead Hall in Essex, England, is an established center for Spiritualist education and mediumship developement.

Its instructional environment brings toether teachers and practitioners engaged in the cultivation, interpretation, and communication of experiences understood within the tradition as spiritual or mediumistic.

The college provides an opportunity to examine how experiences that are largely subjective and difficult to demonstrate directly become objects of structured instruction.



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METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic Participant Observation

Five days of immersive participant observation at Arthur Findlay College, encompassing classes, workshops, demonstrations, and panel discussions, with multiple instructional sessions each day.

Through direct participation and observation, the study examined how subjective experiences were communicated, interpreted, and cultivated within mediumship training.



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DATA COLLECTION

Instructor utterances were documented verbatim in ethnographic field notes, preserving the language used in instructional settings.

Personally identifiable information was removed to protect participant identities.



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ANALYSIS

Qualitative Semantic Analysis

Primary verbatim instructional utterances documented across five days of ethnographic fieldwork were examined through an interpretive approach informed by Fillmore’s frame semantics.

The analysis investigated how instructional metaphors recruit familiar conceptual structures to communicate expectations, organize attention, and guide experiential learning.



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ANALYSIS

Analytical Dimensions

1. **Linguistic Expression**: The specific language and metaphors employed.
2. **Evoked Semantic Frames**: The conceptual structures, relationships, and expectations invoked.
3. **Attentional Orientation**: The aspects of subjective experience that the language encourages learners to notice.
4. **Pedagogical Function**: How the framing may support the recognition, interpretation, and cultivation of subjectice experience.



What is Frame Semantics?

Developed by linguist Charles J. Fillmore, frame semantics proposes that understanding language involves activating structured systems of background knowledge. Words do not acquire meaning in isolation. They evoke conceptual frames involving familiar situations, participants, relationships, and expectations.

These frames help organize knowledge concerning:

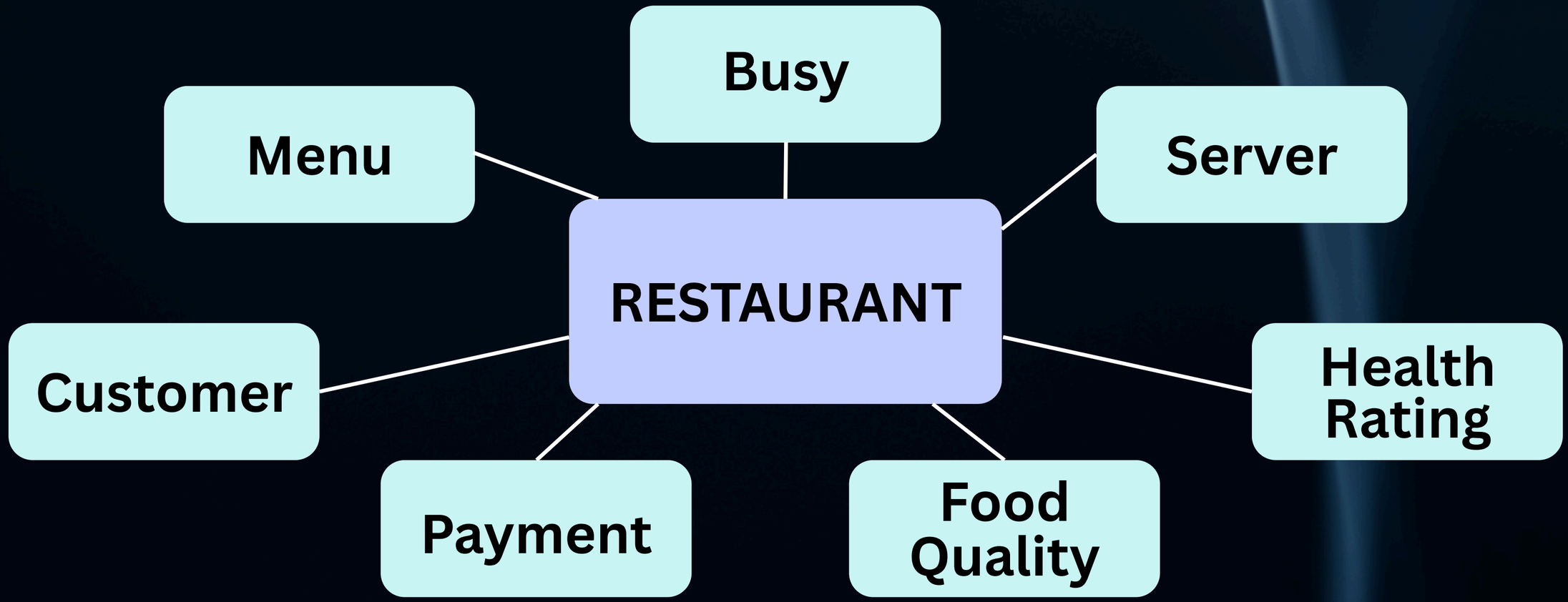
- **Participants**: Who or what is involved?
- **Relationships**: How are the elements connected?
- **Events and acitons**: What occurs within the situation?
- **Expectations**: What normally happens, and what behaviors are appropriate?

Meaning emerges through the larger conceptual structures that language evokes.

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A FAMILIAR CONCEPTUAL FRAME: THE RESTAURANT



FRAME SEMANTICS AND METAPHOR

Frame semantics examines the structured knowledge conceptual knowledge evoked through language.

Metaphorical expressions can recruit familiar conceptual structures and apply them to less familiar or more abstract domains of experience.

For example:

When an instructor tells a learner to “build a bridge,” the language evoves a familiar conceptual structure involving connection, construction, and movement across separation.

FRAME SEMANTICS AND METAPHOR

Within mediumship instruction, this framing may provide a way of conceptualizing the development of a communicative relationship.

The analytical question is not simply what the metaphor means, but what the framing invites the learner to **notice**, **expect**, or **do**.

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LANGUAGE, ATTENTION, AND EXPERIENCE

Charles Fillmore – Frame Semantics

→ Language evokes structured systems of conceptual knowledge.

Thomas Csordas – Somatic Modes of Attention

→ Embodied attention can be culturally organized through learned practices.

Tanya Luhrmann – Attentional Learning

→ Religious practices can cultivate attention to, and interpretation of, internal experience.

This Study

Examines how the linguistic and pedagogical mechanisms of instructional language may participate in such processes.

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THE PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGE OF SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

In learning envirionments centered on subjective experience, the phenomena learners are taught to recognize and interpret may be inaccessible to direct observation by others.

This creates a distinctive instructional challenge:

How can instructors teach learners what to attend to when the experience itself cannot be directly demonstrated?

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THE PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGE OF SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

One possibility is through linguistic structures.

Instructional metaphors may provide conceptual scaffolding that helps learners identify, interpret, and respond to aspects of experience that would otherwise be difficult to communicate.

ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE 1

Instructional Utterance

“If we want to blend deeper with the spirit world we have to blend deeper with ourselves.”

Evoked Conceptual Structures

Blending, integration, depth, and increasing connection.

ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE 1

Semantic Interpretation

The expression draws on familiar ideas of blending and depth to establish a relationship between internal self-attunement and the development of mediumistic practice.

ANALYSIS: BLENDING AND SELF-ATTUNEMENT

Attentional Orientation

The metaphor invites learners to direct attention inward, toward self-awareness and internal experience.

Instructional Expectation

Deeper engagement with oneself is positioned as relevant to developing a connection understood within the practice as spiritual.

ANALYSIS: BLENDING AND SELF-ATTUNEMENT

Pedagogical Function

The instruction presents self-attunement not as incidental to training, but as a component of mediumship development.

Interpretive Significance

A familiar conceptual structure provides a way to connect the cultivation of internal awareness with a less directly demonstrable learning objective.

ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE 2

instructional Utterance

“How do you feel when you’re turning yourself over to spirit”

Evoked Conceptual Structures

Surrender, transfer of control, receptivity, and agency.

ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLE 2

Semantic Interpretation

The phrase “turning yourself over” invokes a familiar understanding of relinquishing control or transferring agency. However, the instructional question simultaneously directs learners to attend to their own felt experience.

ANALYSIS: SURRENDER AND AGENCY

Attentional Orientation
The instruction invites learners to examine their internal bodily and emotional experience.

Instructional Expectation
Receptivity is framed through the familiar concept of relinquishing control.

ANALYSIS: SURRENDER AND AGENCY

Pedagogical Function

The question makes the subjective experience of receptivity an explicit object of attention and reflection.

Interpretive Significance

The instruction reveals a potential tension between agency and surrender: learners are asked to deliberately attend to an experience characterized as relinquishing control.

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EMERGING PEDAGOGICAL FUNCTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMING

Analysis of instructional language suggests several potential pedagogical functions:

1. Attentional orientation – directing learners toward particular dimensions of subjective experience.
2. Conceptual organization – using familiar structures to make unfamiliar experiences interpretable.
3. Expectations of practice – communicating ideas about effort, development, receptivity, and progression.
4. Distribution of agency – structuring relationships between deliberate action, receptivity, and perceived sources of experience.
5. Experiential interpretation – providing shared language through which learners can describe and discuss subjective experience.

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ADDITIONAL FIELDWORK EXPRESSIONS

Instructional Language in Mediumship Training

Selected expressions documented during ethnographic participant observation at Arthur Findlay College, May 2026.

- “Don’t be a microwave medium.”
- “Mediumship readings sprinkle seeds of spirituality. It’s up tot he sitter to let the seeds grow.”
- “Don’t treat your mind and body like a trash can that people think they can drop their rubbish into you.”
- “Sometimes sitting in the power is like a good night’s sleep…sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn’t, but you don’t give up on going to sleep.”
- “When we go on holiday, what do we do? We pick up the phone and tell our loved ones we’ve arrived safely. Spirit world is the same.”

What familiar conceptual structures do these expressions evoke? What roles and expectations? What implicit instruction is made explicit when considering the frames of each expression? How does this inform the practice of a developing medium?

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A PROPOSED MODEL OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

1: LINGUISTIC FRAMING

Instruction introduces familiar conceptual structures and expectations.

2: ATTENTIONAL ORIENTATION

Learners are invited to notice particular aspects of subjective experience.

3: EXPERIENTIAL INTERPRETATION

Experiences may be interpreted through the conceptual structures introduced during instruction.

4: SOCIAL FEEDBACK

Instructors and community members may reinforce, challenge, or modify emerging interpretations.

5: REINFORCEMENT OR REVISION

Repeated participation may contribute to the consolidation or transformation of interpretive practices.

Feedback informs subsequent framing and attention

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSCIOUSNESS PEDAGOGY

This study suggests that **instructional metaphors** may function as culturally situated tools for **organizing attention** and the interpretation of **subjective experience**.
By recuiting familiar **semantic frames**, instructors provide learners with conceptual resources for **recognizing**, **describing**, and **cultivating** experiences that are **difficult to demonstrate directly**.
The analysis highlights a potential relationship between **linguistic framing**, **attentional orientation**, and the social organization of **experiential learning**.
More broadly, the findings invite investigation into how language participates in the cultivation of conscious experience across different learning traditions.

Ordinary language may help make extraordinary phenomenal experience teachable.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations

This exploratory ethnographic study examines instructional language within a specific mediumship training environment.

The analysis itendifies possible relationships between semantic framing and pedagogical orientations of attention.

It does not independently establish causal effects of instructional language on learners' subjective experiences.

Future Research

Further investigation could examine how learners respond to instructional metaphors, how interpretations develop through repeated practice, and how comparable linguistic mechanisms operate across other experiential learning traditions.

REFERENCES

Fillmore, C. J. (1982). Frame semantics. In *Linguistics in the Morning Calm*. Hanshin Publishing.

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THANK YOU

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

Language • Attention • Experiential Learning • Anthropology of Consciousness

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