

Four kinds of Meaning

By I.A.Richards

A. Richards was an English literary critic and rhetorician. His **works contributed to the foundations of the New Criticism a formalist movement in literary theory.** It emphasized the close reading of a literary text, especially poetry, in an effort to discover how a work of literature functions as a self-contained and self-referential esthetic object.

He collaborated with the linguist, Charles Kay Ogden (C.K. Ogden), in four books: *Foundations of Aesthetics*, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*, *Basic English* and the *Times of India Guide to Basic English*.

He was a mentor and teacher to William Empson and F. R. Leavis. Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, W. K. Wimsatt, R. P. Blackmur, and R. S. Crane .

Richards discusses in **The Principles of Literary Criticism** the subjects of form, value, rhythm. He starts from the premise that "A book is a machine to think with, but it need not, therefore, usurp the functions either of the bellows or the locomotive."

Practical Criticism is an empirical study of inferior response to a literary text.

He provided theories of metaphor, value, and tone, of stock response, incipient action, and pseudo-statement; and of ambiguity to substantiate interpretive criticism,

The theory of *ambiguity*, was developed in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* by William Empson

To Richards, literary criticism was impressionistic, too abstract to be readily grasped and understood, by most readers.

He proposed the New Rhetoric to study the meaning of the parts of discourse, as "a study of misunderstanding and its remedies" to determine how language works. Ambiguity is expected, and that meanings (denotation and connotation) are not inherent to words, but are inherent to the perception of the reader, the listener, and the viewer.

Richards and Ogden created the semantic triangle to deliver an improved understanding of how words come to mean.

Works

1. *The Foundations of Aesthetics* - 1922); co-authored with C. K. Ogden, and James Wood.
2. *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (- 1924; New York- 1925
3. *Science and Poetry* – 1926
4. *Practical Criticism* - 1929
5. *Coleridge on Imagination* – 1934
6. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* – 1936
7. *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*. Co-authored with C. K. Ogden – 1923
8. A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism,
9. Basic Rules of Reason,
10. The Philosophy of Rhetoric,
11. Interpretation in Teaching,
12. Basic in Teaching: East and West,
13. The Wrath of Achilles: The Iliad of Homer

Richards propounded the concept of feed forward. It became a significant term in cybernetics. Marshal McLuhan applied the ideas of feed forward in his works.

He believed that psychology is the science that unearths the secrets of literature so **an adequate knowledge of psychology is essential to literary criticism.**

Richards says that **poetry has a therapeutic function.**

Practical Criticism

Richards wrote **Practical Criticism in 1929.** He analyzed the results of his experiments 'protocols'.

Richards believed that **the close analysis needed to understand the multiple dimensions of a poem that had psychological benefits. They could respond to all the currents of emotion and meaning.**

Richards in his Principles of Literary Criticism gave criticism a scientific precision and objectivity contradictory to a chaos of critical theories. The New Criticism was a **formalist movement in literary theory. It emphasized the close reading of a literary text, especially poetry,** in effort to discover how a work of literature functions as a **self-contained, self-referential esthetic object.**

The Four Kinds of Meaning is an extract from Practical Criticism, Part III, Chapter I.

His works in literary criticism helped to lay the practical foundations and methodology of New Criticism. **The close reading of texts is the strategy of New Criticism.**

‘The original difficulty’ of reading is the problem of making out the meaning. It is the starting point.

The most significant fact for studying literature is that there are several kinds of meaning. When we read/talk, we are like **‘jugglers keeping the billiard-balls in the air** while we balance the cue on our nose. The meaning we arrive at is a combination of different contributory meanings. Language has to perform several functions simultaneously. We have to take note of the differences between these functions. **Richards divides them into four types with four types of meaning.**

I.A. Richards begins his critical essay "Four Kinds of Meaning" with a quotation from Leviathan by Thomas Hobbes.

“From whence it happens, that they which trust to books, do as they that cast up many little summons into a greater, without considering whether those little summes were rightly cast up or not ; and at last finding the error visible, and not mistrusting their first grounds know not which way to cleere themselves ; but spend time in fluttering over their bookes ; as birds that entering by the chimney, and finding themselves inclosed in a chamber, flutter at the false light of a glasse window, for want of wit to consider which way they came in.”

His concept of four kinds of meaning has played a very significant role in **New Criticism and modern tensional poetics.**

Pointing to the difficulty of all reading and of arriving at a universal meaning, in his *Practical Criticism* he suggests that factors – **Sense, Feeling, Tone and Intention.**

“The all-important fact for the study of literature or any other mode of communication – is that there are several kinds of meaning”. **The total meaning of a poem is always “a blend, a combination of several contributory meanings of different types.”** Principally these are four kind of meaning in poetry.

They are Sense, Feeling, Tone and Intention.

Sense

Sense refers to what is said, or the 'items' referred to by a writer.

"We speak to say something, and when we listen we expect something to be said." We use words to direct our hearers' attention upon some **state of affairs**, to present to them **some items for consideration** and to excite in them some thoughts about these items'. In short, **what we speak to convey to our listeners for their consideration can be called 'sense'**. This is the most important thing in all scientific utterances where verification is possible. **Sense -idea conceived from speaker.**

Feeling

Feeling refers to the emotion, attitude, interest, will, desire, etc towards what is being said.

"But we also, as a rule, **have some feelings about these** items, about the state of affairs we are referring to." There is always in what we say "**some personal flavor or colouring of feeling.**"

The attitude towards what we convey is known as 'feeling'. We have bias or accentuation of interest towards what we say. We use language to express these feelings. Similarly, we have these feelings even when we receive. This happens even if the speaker is conscious of it or not. In exceptional cases, say in mathematics, no feeling enters. **The speaker's attitude to the subject is known as 'feeling'**.

eg. anger, excitement, sympathy etc.,

Tone

Tone is the attitude towards the audience/ reader. Tone signifies the speaker's attitude to his listeners. "The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness of this relation his sense of how stands towards those he is addressing."

The speaker has an attitude to his listener. 'He chooses or arranges his words differently as his audience varies, in automatic or deliberate recognition of his relation to them. The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness of this relation, his sense of how he stands towards those he is addressing. Thus 'tone' refers to the attitude to the listener.

Tone is the choice and arrangement of the words according to the kind of audience. Tone of utterance adopted according to the relationship of the

listener-exceptional-pretentious tone gets exposed at times (e.g.- hypocritical speech or egoistical speech)

Intention

There is the speaker's intention, his aim (conscious or unconscious) - the effect he is endeavouring to promote. The speaker's purpose modifies his speech. The speaker's intention operates through and satisfies itself in a combination of other functions. 'It may govern the stress laid upon points in an argument. **It controls the 'plot' in the larger sense of the word.** It has special importance in dramatic and semi dramatic literature. Thus **the influence of his intention upon the language he uses is additional to the other three influences.**

A man writing a scientific treatise will put the 'sense' of what he has to say first. For a writer popularising some of the results and hypotheses of science, the principles governing his language are not so simple; his intention will inevitably interfere with the other functions. In conversation, we get the clearest examples of the shifts of function, i.e. one function being taken over by another

Intention is the writer's conscious or unconscious aim or the effect that s/ he is trying to produce. This means the effect the speaker is endeavoring to promote or produce.

All the four fail together; a reader garbles the sense, distorts the feeling, mistakes the tone and disregards the intention; and often a partial collapse of one function entails deviations in the others."

It should be remembered that **statements in poetry do not aim at starting or promoting any doctrine. They simply express feelings and attitudes.**

He speaks for a purpose-purpose modifies his speech.

Self-Test Questions

1. The Pioneer of practical criticism is
A) Allen Tale B) Cleanth Brooks C) I.A) Richards D) F.R. Leavis
2. Find out which one of the following does not belong to "four kinds of meaning"
A) Sense B) imagination C) tone D) Intention.
3. What, according to Brooks, qualifies the meaning of an utterance?
A) Content B. Context C. Theme D. Tone.
4. Who says that "Poetry is a continuous substance or energy whose progress is immortal"?
A) Dr. Warren Weaver B. O.K. Ogdan
C. Caude E. Shannon D. Dr. Mackail.
5. I.A Richards begins his critical essay "Four Kinds of Meaning" with a quotation from _____.
A)Leviathan 2)Middleton Murry 4)Kathleen Lynch 4)De Flores
6. I.A) Richards distinguishes four different kinds of meaning. They are :
A : Sense, tone, text and discourse B : Sense, feeling, expression and tone
C : Sense, intention, discourse and tone D : Sense, feeling, tone and intention
7. Which one of the following is not one of the four kinds of meaning ?
A : Sense B : Feeling C : Tone D : Emotion
9. I.A) Richards frames that Wordsworth and Coleridge shared two attitudes to nature which he calls the 'Realist' and _____
A : Pessimist B : Creative C : Idealist D : Projective
10. I.A) Richards calls the harmonised state, the balancing of conflicting impulses as ____
A : Pseudo-statements B: Synaesthesia C : Impulses D : Attitudes