

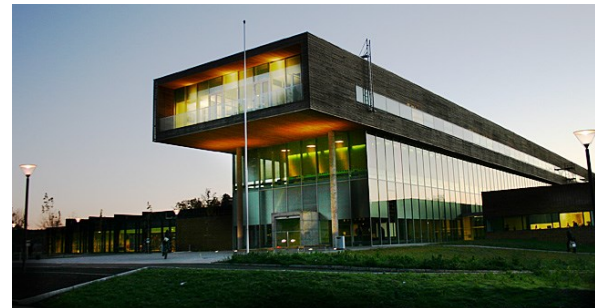
# Critical reading – selective perspectives and some “tools”

Seminar within Erasmus+ 09.12.21



# Professional background

- Anders Eilertsen
- Teacher since 2000
  - Secondary school/junior high school
  - Upper secondary school/high school
  - Norwegian, history and several subject within social sciences
- Assistant professor at Østfold University College since 2019
  - Faculty of Teacher Educations and Languages
  - Institute of Language, Literature and Culture
  - Teaching subject: Norwegian

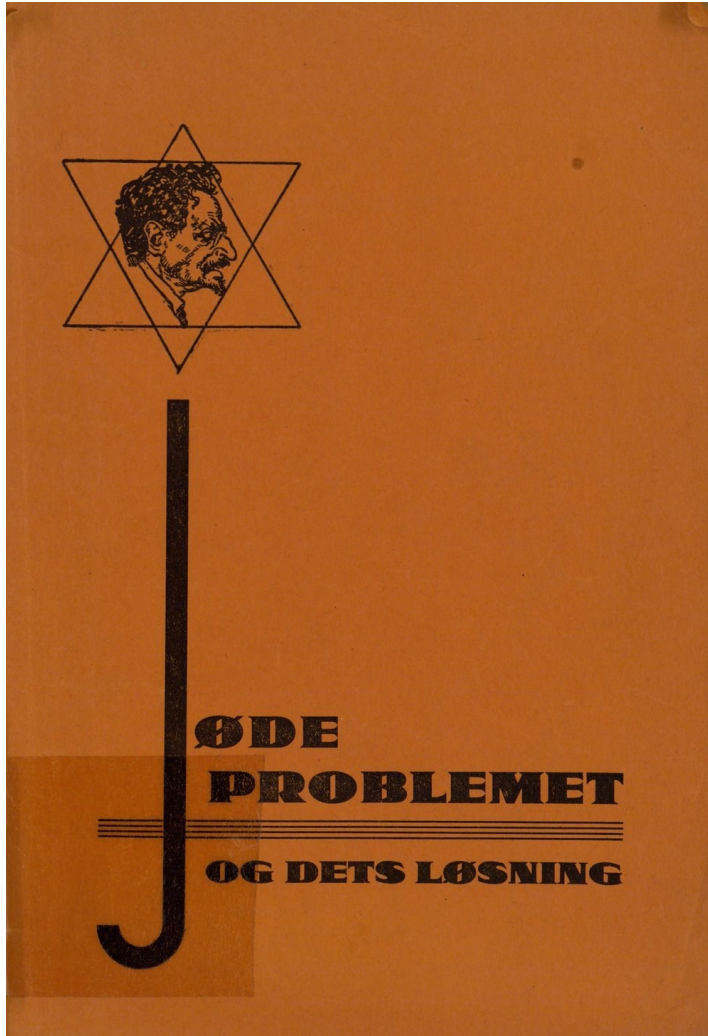


# Professional interests

- Critical literacy
- Social semiotics
- Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)
- Text in context
- Hate speech



# A text for critical reading



- Published in 1938
- Halldis Neegård Østby
  - The leading anti-semitic ideologist
- All the established anti-semitic conspiracies promoted in a seemingly scientific and undisputable fashion
  - Descriptions of jews as rootless parasites throughout the book
- The solution to the so-called “jew problem” presented in the final chapter:
  - Give them their own territory – the African island of Madagascar

# Findings in the interviews

- Contextual background knowledge is of great importance in giving the pupils a relevant and expanded understanding of the text.
- This kind of knowledge makes the pupils able to see parallels between the historical text and similar descriptions in society today.
- The students think of people living today as more competent, enlightened and critical than earlier generations.



CONTEXT  
MATTERS

# Disposition for the seminar

- 1) Basic perspectives on language and texts
- 2) Some “tools” for critical reading
- 3) Workshop: Critical reading of various texts





# Selective perspectives on how to make meaning of language and texts



# Social semiotics

**Semiotics:** Theories on how signs make meaning



**Social semiotics:** Theories on how people make meaning through language and other forms of expression in a *social context*



# Constructing meaning

This photograph illustrates wood fires in Australia (seen through satellite), and it was shared on social media in early 2020.

**How do you interpret it as you see it?**



anthony\_hearsey



- Search the name Anthony Hearsey on the Internet. What is the story behind this illustration?

# Fake news?

What kind of news do *you* consider to be fake news?



# The importance of developing literacy

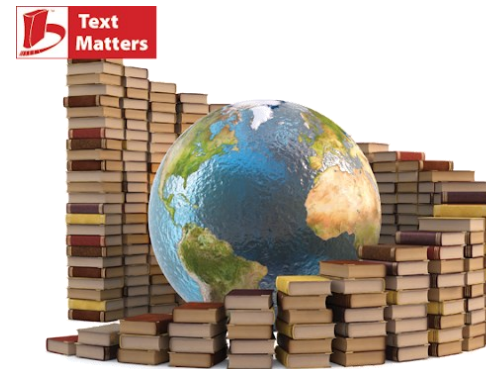
«**Literacy** is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.»

(UNESCO, 2004, s. 13)



# Literacy – more than just “being able to read and write”

*“Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world”.*



# Critical literacy

## Reading both *with* and *against* the text

- Reading *with* the text:
  - Decode the text
  - Understand the text
  - Make meaning of and engage in the text
- Reading *against* the text:
  - Examine and challenge how the text reproduces and creates pictures of reality, social relations and questions of power
  - Examine and challenge values and ideologies which are integrated in the text

(Janks, 2010, p. 21-22)

How would you read *with* and *against* this text?



# Context matters

In November 2018 a janitor and handyman was reported to the police for driving his firm car with this advert/slogan.

This is (fairly) what the Norwegian words mean in English:

***“We help everyone!  
Do all kinds of nigger work!”***



# Situation context (Michael Halliday)

## ➤ Field

- Topic(s)?
- Purpose?
- Social actions?

## ➤ Relation

- Relationships between participants:
  - Equal power?
  - Often or rarely in contact?
  - Emotionally engaged in one another?

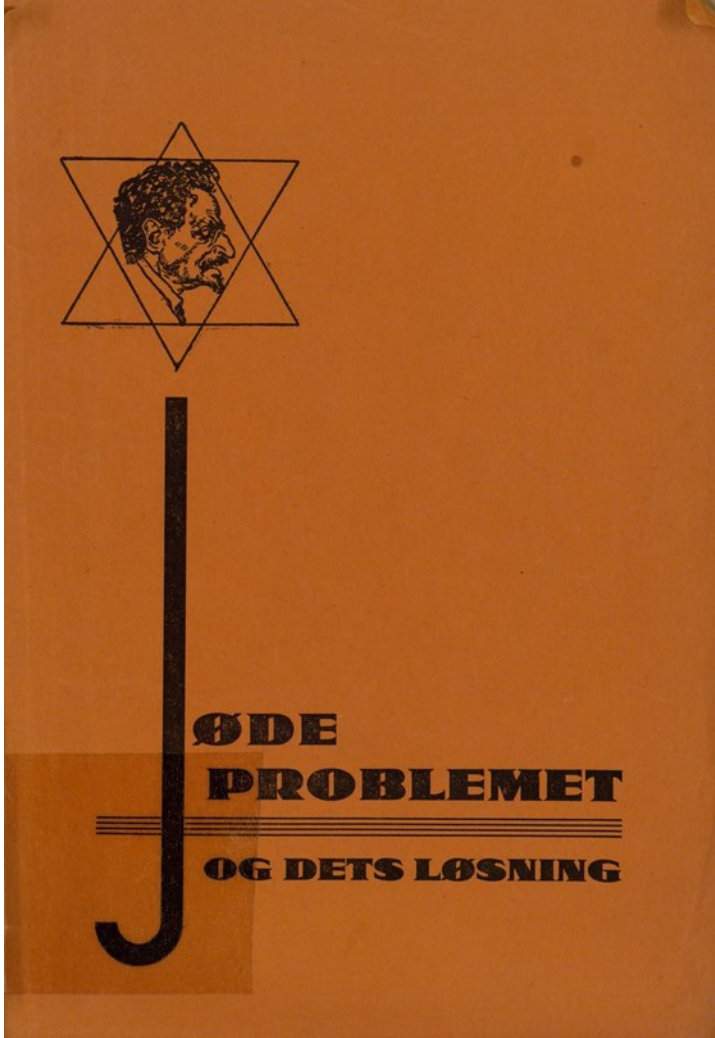
## ➤ Mediation

- Words, pictures, multimodality?
- The “platform” for publication?

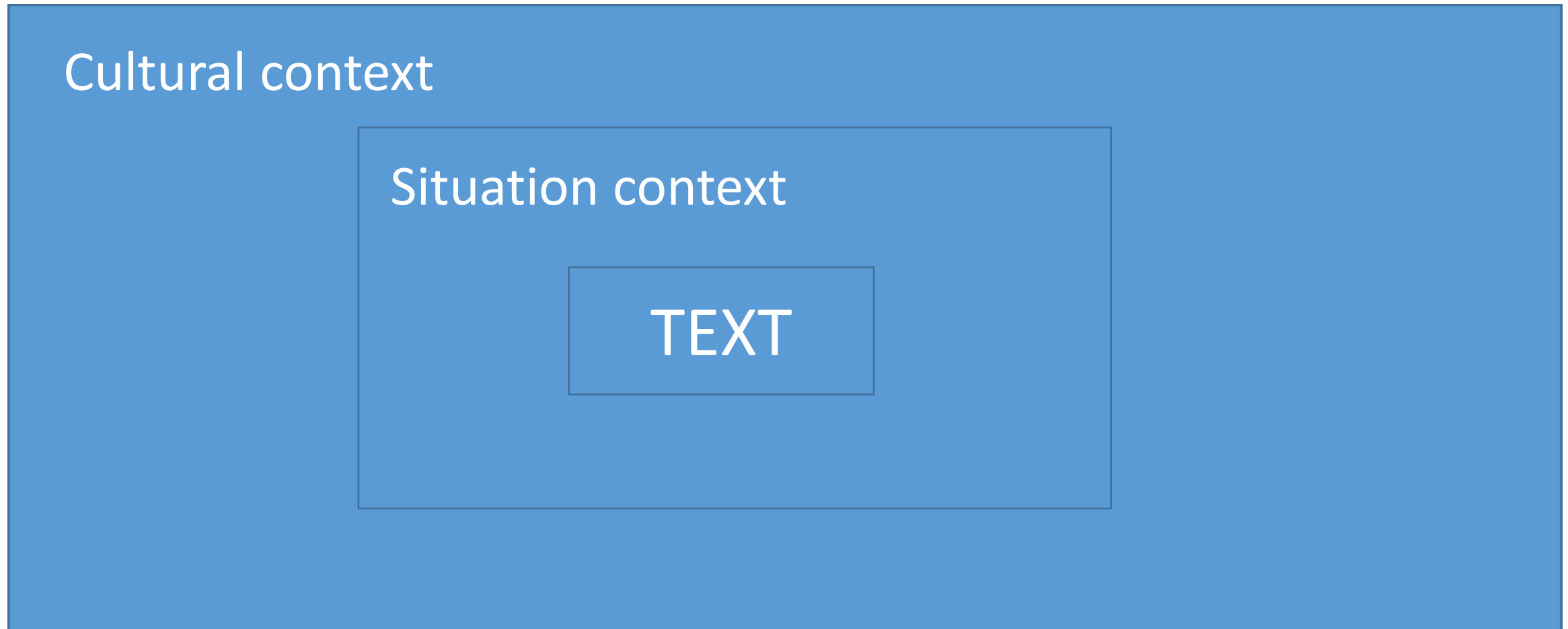




# Cultural context



# «The Frame Problem» (Gee, 1996; 2003)



- Language in use, text in context
- Culture and society are reflected in the ways we speak
- Understandings of the world are visible in the words we use
- Texts and words can both reproduce discourses and produce new discourses
- **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

## Discourse and battle over words

- “War” or “peace keeping effort”?
- “Killed” og “neutralized”?
- “Indians” or “native Americans”/”first nations”?
- “Cleaning lady” or “cleaning worker”

# Some “tools” for critical reading

# Constructing reality

# Presuppositions

- Implicit, hidden propositions
- Views which are taken for granted
- Harder to discover and challenge than open propositions
- Can help constructing seemingly logical and reasonable argumentation

## Example:

“The muslim-loving government gives away our jobs and destroys Norwegian values.”

## Presuppositions:

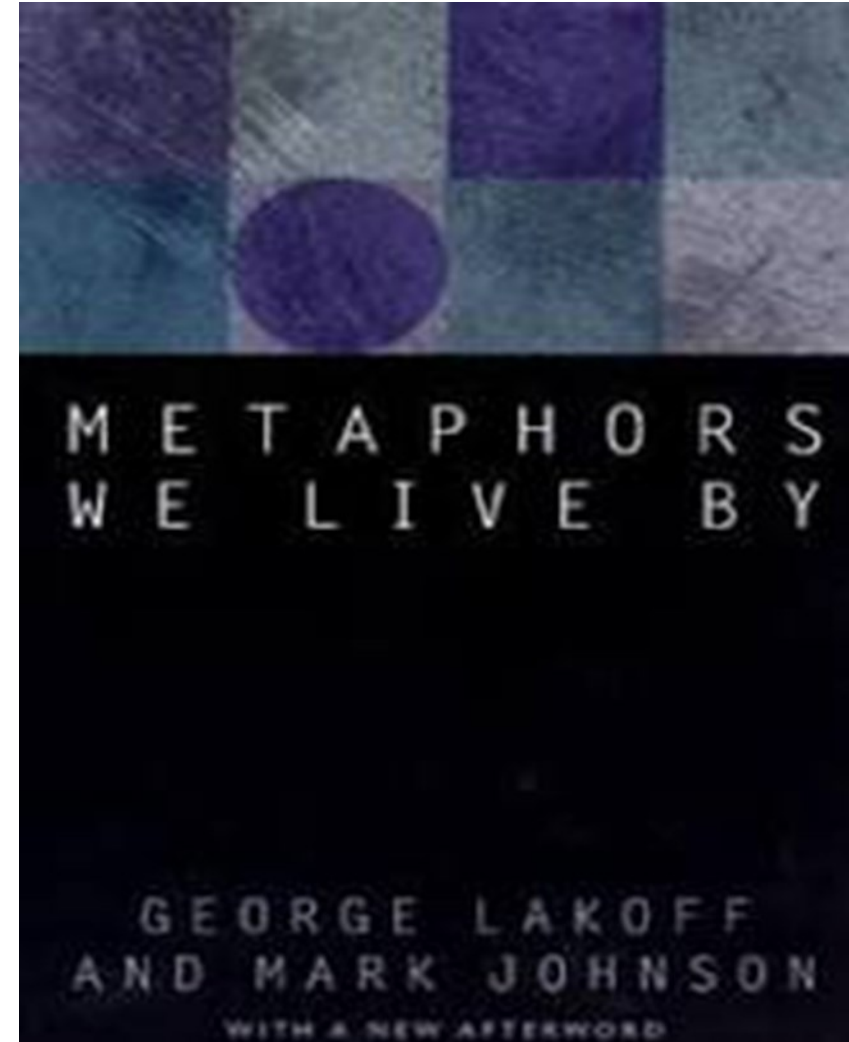
- The government loves Muslims.
- Jobs in the country belongs to a certain group ogf people (and not others)
- There are specific values shared by (all) Norwegians.

# What are the presuppositions?



# Metaphors

- Help structuring our understanding of the world
- Transfer from a **source domain** to a **target domain**
- **Time** (target) is **money** (source)
  - “You are stealing my time”
  - “He can earn a few seconds on this round”
- **Debate** (target) is **war** (source)
  - “She was victorious in the debate”
  - “The two politicians went into the trenches”





# Metaphor example: “Dandelion children”, Høgskolen i Østfold

## Source domain

- › Botanics

## Target domain

- › Childhood
- › A metaphor used to describe children experiencing abuse by their parent/carers (sex, violence, alcohol, drugs, mental illness, neglect...)



# Effects of this metaphor

- Highlights the strength of these children – hides their vulnerability
- Defines all these children as “same” – hides differences in:
  - Personality
  - Relationships with parents/carers
  - Abuse
  - How to survive



# Nominalizations

- An active process becomes a static “state of being”
- A nominalization makes it unclear who is responsible for an action

## Examples:

- “Immigration is stopped at the border”
- “Refugee camps are being moved”

## Who is responsible?

“The civilians were killed during a bomb raid”

(or)

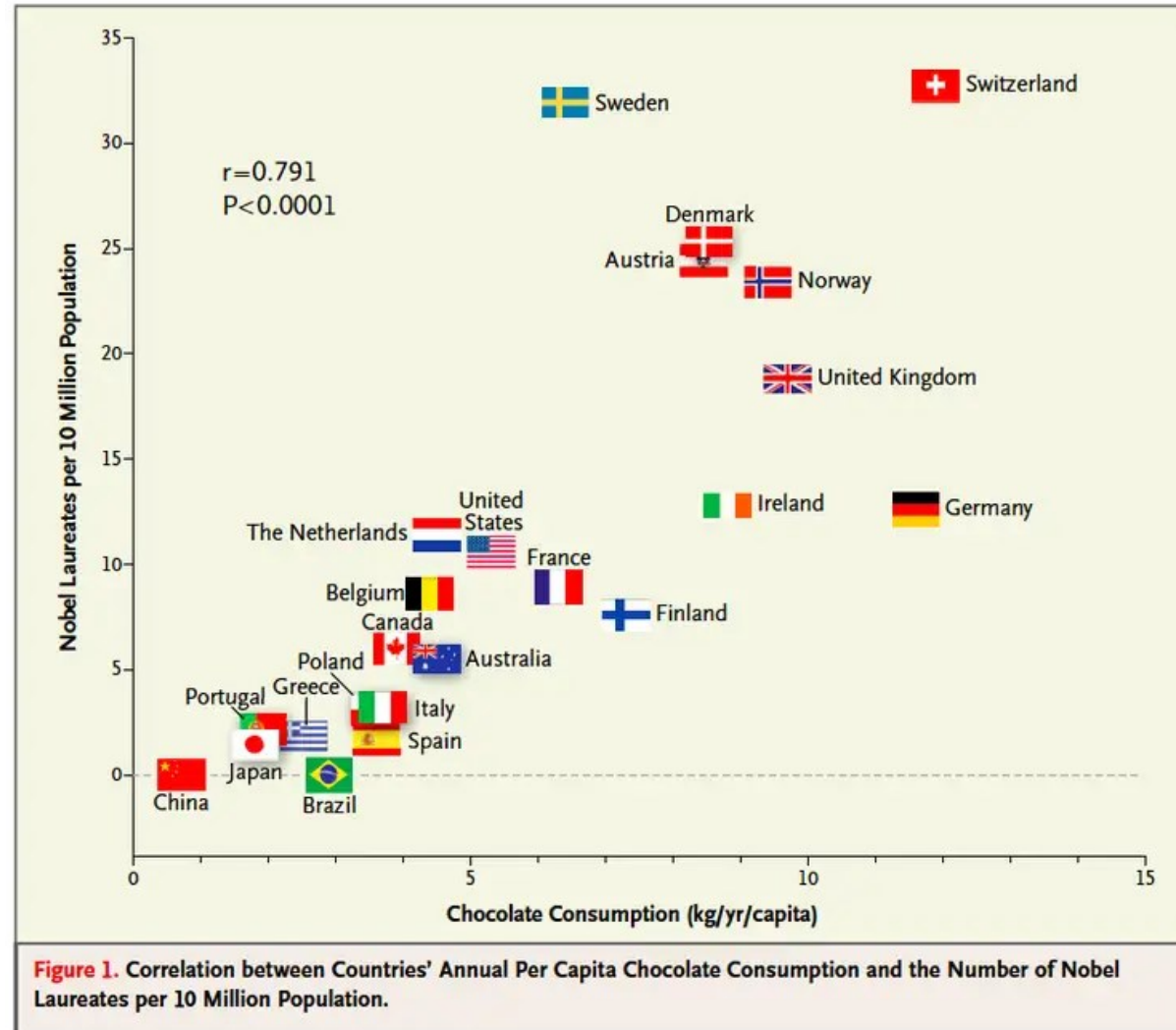
“The American bombers killed the civilians during the raid”



# Constructing reality through *visual* *resources*



Does eating  
chocolate make  
you a Nobel prize  
winner?



# Naturalistic coding



# Sensoric coding



## Conceptual photographs



## Narrative photographs





# Concluding points on critical reading

- Language is never neutral
- Critical reading is about questioning and challenging choices made in texts
  - How is reality constructed?
  - What kind of values and ideologies are promoted?
  - Which discourses are reproduced – or produced?
  - How does context affect the text?



## Some suggestions for further reading

Fairclough, N. (2015): *Language and Power*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York. Routledge.

Gee, J.P. (1996): *Social Linguistics and Literacies. Ideology in Discourses*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London (UK)/Bristol (USA). The Falmer Press.

Janks, H. (2010): *Literacy and Power*. New York. Routledge.

Jewitt, C. (Ed.) (2016). *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal analysis*. London: Routledge.

Machin, D. & Mayr, A. (2012): *How to do Critical Discourse Analysis*. London. SAGE Publications.

Mills, K. (2016). *Literacy Theories for the Digital Age. Social, Critical, Multimodal, Spatial, Material and Sensory Lenses*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Rogers, R. & Wetzel, M. M. (2014): *Designing Critical Literacy Education through Critical Discourse Analysis*. New York. Routledge.

# Critical Reading Workshop

# Choose a text written in your own language

- What contextual knowledge is necessary for a relevant understanding of the text?
- How is reality constructed in the text?
- Which values, ideologies, discourses or questions of power are visible?



# Final discussion

What do *you* consider most useful from this seminar?

