

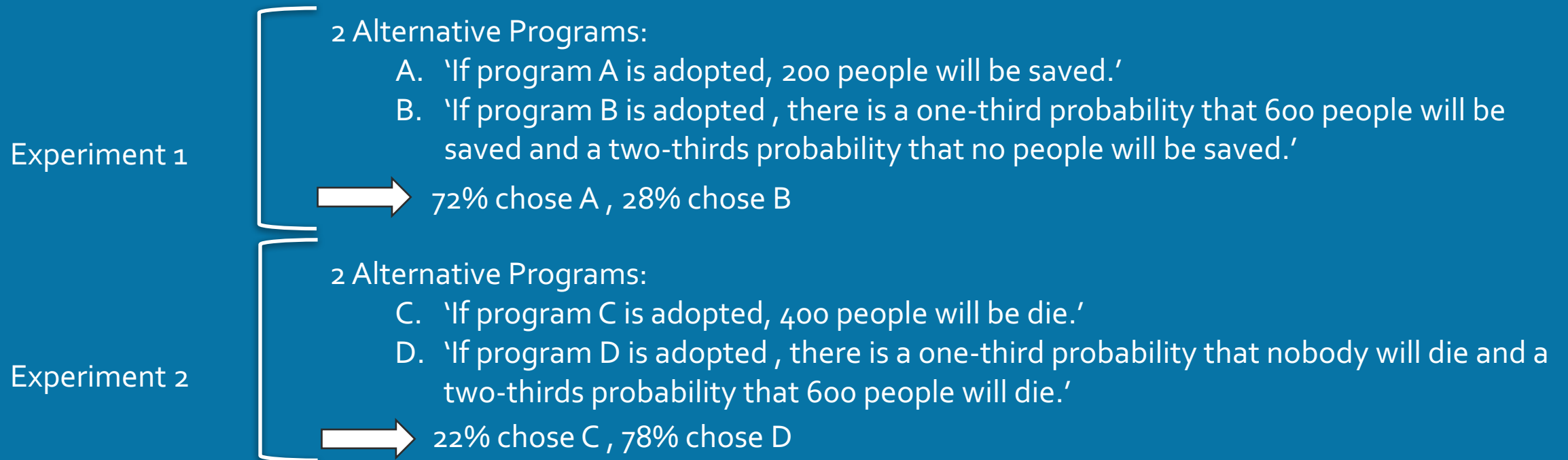
# THE CONSTRUCTION OF RISK IN A DISEASE OUTBREAK

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF FRAMING IN RISK COMMUNICATION

Kahneman and Tversky 1984: Preparations for an imaginary disease outbreak expected to kill 600 people



- The response depends on the way a message is framed.
- Risk perception is dependent on the discourse around the risk message.
- The social world is kaleidoscope of potential realities: Frames allow us to call attention to some aspects of realities while obscuring others

# WHAT IS RISK?

- **Analytical vs. Experiential** risk perception
  - Analytical uses algorithms and normative rules
  - Experiential relies on images and associations, linked by experience, to emotion and affect

## Social theory picking up the relativist approach to risk:

### **Risk Society (Beck 1992)**

- Modernisation led to evolution from a society rooted in production of wealth to a society controlled by the production of risk
- Interpretation of these consequences is causal and risks may be magnified, dramatized or minimized; they are open to social definition and construction, principally mediated through argument

### **Cultural/Symbolic Approach (Douglas 1966)**

- Risk serves to construct cultural boundaries
- Uphold of social and cultural ideas about self and other

- Address pervasive political and cultural nature of risk impacting social life and subjectivity
- Underline social constructionist nature of risk
- Shift away from monologism to dialogism with interaction between human beings at the centre of the construction of versions of reality (Tuominen & Savolainen 1996)

# THEORETICAL LINGUISTICS AND APPLIED LINGUISTICS

- **Theoretical Linguistics:** scientific study of language through investigation by means of controlled and empirically verifiable observations and with reference to some general theory of language structure and the nature of language itself. (Lyons 2010)
  - Semantics
  - Syntax
  - Morphology
  - ...
- ❖ In many ways language is a natural phenomenon, but there are also aspects of language use in which we can intervene and about which decisions and selections are to be made.
- **Applied Linguistics:** academic discipline concerned with the relation of knowledge about language to decision making in the real world' (Cook 2003; 5)
  - Foreign Language Education
  - Forensic Linguistics
  - Translation and Interpretation
  - ...
- Applied Linguistics allows the study of how framing selections are achieved

# RISK CONSTRUCTION DURING A DISEASE OUTBREAK

- Field of Linguistics: While the discursive construction of risk has received considerable scientific attention from a media-centred (e.g. **Swine Flue**: Nerlich & Koteyko 2012; **Ebola**: Kott & Limaye 2016) perspective, this construction process on the level of internal and external communication of a health organisation has received limited attention
- Development of a framework for the analysis of systemic patterns of emotionality and logical expression in the organisational construction of risk.
- Analytical focus on the context of a health consortium where institutional guidelines set the parameters for communication

# LINGUISTIC ETHNOGRAPHY

**Linguistic ethnography** is an 'interpretive approach which studies the local and immediate actions of actors from their point of view and considers how these interactions are embedded in wider social contexts and structures.' (Copland & Creese 2015: 13)

- **Observations** – 'writes down what he or she sees, hears, smells, feels and senses in the field' <sup>(38)</sup>; 'used to record the lived stuff' <sup>(38)</sup>; records of social complexity <sup>(Blommaert 2007)</sup>
- **Written Texts** – 'serve to provide another perspective on the site under scrutiny, and producing analytic insights that might not otherwise be possible' <sup>(Copeland & Creese 2015: 52)</sup>
- **Interviews** – used to support researchers in gaining an emic perspective on research <sup>(29)</sup>

# DATA

Data Type	Participants	Sample Size	Time Frame
A. Recordings of Intra-Organisational Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) Management + Working Group Leads</li><li>ii) Working Group</li></ul>	6 meetings each +/- 1.5h each meeting	Completed
B. External Communication Documents	Public communication of the NGO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- conference/workshop reports and speeches</li><li>- public interviews</li><li>- published articles</li></ul>	15 documents	Ongoing
C. Interviews with Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Management members</li><li>- Working Group Leads + Members</li><li>- Admin Team</li></ul>	10 to 15 interviews	After completion of majority of analysis of data sets A. and B.

# ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

- ❖ “When health officials and researchers focus on 'information' as the only part of human communication in health, they fail to incorporate how humans have been biologically, cognitively, genetically, and emotionally build and wired to communicate with themselves and to others.” (Odugleh-Kolev 2014: 242)
- ❖ Through categorization and verbalization, richly textured conscious feeling can be highly functional for adaptation and regulation (Mulligan and Scherer 2012).
- **Analysis of emotionality through Appraisal Theory framework** (Martin & White 2005; Bednarek 2008) **& of emotionality of logical expression** (Hilton 2008)
  - Appraisal Theory: Analysis of Attitude in communication → Affect, Judgement, Appreciation
  - Logical Vocabulary: Analysis of polarity of quantifiers, probability expressions



# LOGICAL VOCABULARY

- Logical vocabulary 'that humans naturally use when making plans to deal with uncertainty will implicitly signal a speaker's attitude to the action under question, for example, whether he wishes to encourage or discourage it. (Hilton 2008: 100)
- Directionality and emotional undertone influences predictions and decisions taken.

Logical Vocabulary	Rational	Examples from my data
Quantifiers	'[D]o more than just denote proportions: they also signal what the speaker encourages and discourages' (Hilton 2008: 101)	<i>[D]espite available <u>scarce</u> counseling resources, <u>few</u> survivors are willing to disclose and continue to experience increased psychological suffering (...)</i>  <i>'<u>a few</u> studies have shown that the Ebola virus prognosis in children and adolescents is better than that of adults'</i>
Probability Expression	'[E]motional undertone due to the polarity of probability expressions can achieve social coordination' (Hilton 2008: 104)	<i>[C]linical trials that offer <u>some hope</u> of EVD remedy.</i> → Positive probability expression  <i>The results of some clinical trials to be successful is <u>quite uncertain</u>.</i> → Positive probability expression

# CONCLUSION

- Risk as a discursive construct: shared understandings are developed and negotiated in ongoing conversation
- Transfer vs Cultural Approach to Risk Communication:
  - Multi-directional – Stimulate Debate – Transfer Knowledge (Sandman 2012)
- Development of a framework for the analysis of systemic patterns of emotionality in the communication of a health consortium to investigate how we come to an understanding of the nature of risks connected to infectious diseases.

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