The concept of *relevance* is employed by Sperber & Wilson (2008) to help make sense out of how we process the wealth of information we receive moment to moment, and in particular, the specific process of *hypothesis confirmation*. This is related to the processing of assumptions picked up from the speaker via perception and linguistic decoding. Hypotheses are introduced to make sense out of our experience, and they are processed against a background of assumptions drawn from prior perception, memory, and previous deductions.

We are information-processing devices, but we are primarily interested in information that is connected to our lives and is not redundant. That is, we are interested in information that is *relevant*, in an intuitive sense. But what does this intuitive concept mean in this context? That is, how can we render it more precise than this? Sperber and Wilson argue that we must understand this concept from the perspective of cognitive psychology; in particular, we must begin our analysis by observing that there is a close relationship between the relevance of an assumption and the relation it has to the rest of our assumptions that are currently shaping our experience. This leads to their first definition:

*Relevance*: An assumption is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context.

So understood, it is a classificatory concept, but it is psychologically important in its comparative form. We get the comparative form by noting that *contextual effect in a context* has two moments: *impact* and *cost*.

*Relevance*

*Extent Condition #1*: an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large.

*Extent Condition #2*: an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort require to process it in this context is small.

Thus, relevance comes in degrees. Further, it might be difficult to make comparisons between assumptions as to which is more relevant.
We choose contexts, modifying them as we go, on the basis of accessibility and processing costs. This yields a different definition of relevance, viz., *relevance to an individual*. This definition is more apropos to the business of communication theory.

*Relevance to an individual*

*Extent condition #1*: an assumption is relevant to an individual to the extent that the contextual effects achieved when it is optimally processed are large.

*Extent condition #2*: an assumption is relevant to an individual to the extent that the effort required to process it optimally is small.

Phenomena and stimuli are also relevant, and they are relevant to the extent that they have an impact on an individual’s information processing.

This sets up the principal relating the concept of relevance to the concept of ostensive-inferential communication:

*Principal of relevance*: every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.