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Approaches to spoken interaction

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1. Introduction

The papers in this collection were originally presented at the International Pragmatics Association congress in Toronto 2003 in a panel with the title 'Approaches to spoken interaction'. The papers discuss empirical, corpus-based studies in various settings and types of interaction. They all fall within the discipline of discourse analysis in a wide sense.

Finally, significant attention is devoted in discourse analysis to spoken language and the functions it performs. Several approaches to the analysis of spoken language are based on recordings of naturally occurring spoken interaction in the form of corpora.

2. Spoken corpora

The existence of spoken language corpora provides excellent opportunities for the study of spoken interaction, and there is an identifiable trend in approaches to discourse to rely on corpora. Spoken language corpora are increasingly used across different disciplines, ranging from the humanities to social sciences and information technology (for an overview see Leech et al., 1995). One of the earliest corpora of spoken English is the London-Lund Corpus (see, e.g., Svartvik, 1990). A considerable amount of research has been carried out on the basis of this corpus, which has the advantage of being prosodically marked and representing a large number of different text types. Spoken corpora are used to analyse phenomena characteristic of natural spoken language, such as discourse markers, hedges, tags, backchannels and ellipsis, and practical handbooks are provided for natural

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spoken English (Carter and McCarthy, 1997; Stenström, 1994). Nowadays there are corpora of different regional varieties of English (e.g., British, American, New Zealand). The Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English, i.e., the American component of the Corpus of International English, is a useful resource for studying spoken American English and for comparing British and American discourse features. Corpora have also been built up to study features typical of conversations by adolescents, such as *like* and *innit* (Stenström et al., 2002). Such studies are valuable because they can mirror ongoing linguistic change.

Spoken corpora can also be used to study cognitive phenomena, such as pauses, tip-of-the tongue phenomena, remembering, and phenomena which have both social and cognitive functions, such as repairs and the introduction of new referents. There are also spoken corpora which are specially designed for speech processing research (the Spoken English Corpus; see Knowles et al., 1996).

A fruitful avenue of research is to use corpora to compare discourse practices in different languages (Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen, 2003). For comparisons between two or more languages there are bilingual and multilingual corpora. Pragmatic expressions such as discourse markers, for instance, have different functions across the languages even when they are cognates. Such differences may be expected when we study spoken language (or its representation in fiction), where changes can be assumed to be more rapid than in written language and more dependent on the context of situation.

3. Conversation analysis

The interest in spoken interaction received an impetus in the 1970s with the emergence of conversation analysis (CA). CA was influenced by American sociology and its structuralist methodology. At the same time CA was a reaction to the quantitative techniques adopted in sociology, which resulted in a strictly empirical approach that avoided 'unmotivated theoretical constructs and unsubstantiated intuitions' (Levinson, 1983: 295).

The approach, which is inherited from ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), focuses on how people produce utterances, assuming that hearers can make sense of them by using special methods and procedures. CA approaches (see, e.g., Schegloff, 1972, 1979; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973; Schegloff et al., 1977) consider the way participants in talk construct solutions to recurrent problems in conversation in order to create social order. One can analyse members' 'knowledge of their own ordinary affairs' by analysing specific micro-structural patterns such as turn-constructional units, turn-taking procedures, adjacency pairs, various types of sequences (e.g., pre-sequences, insertions and repairs) and preference organisation (Schiffrin, 1994: 239). Despite its many advantages, CA has been criticized for its lack of 'systematic analytical categories', its 'fragmentary focus' and its mechanistic interpretation of conversation', which precludes a comprehensive quantitative analysis (cf. Eggins and Slade, 1997: 31–32).

Conversation analysis has been shown to be combinable with other theories such as Construction Grammar. This, however, assumes that, in addition to meanings which are negotiated and therefore are achieved interactionally, we take into account coded meanings and constructions or fixed phrases.

4. Discourse analysis

Approaches focusing on the structure and functions of spoken interaction are useful especially when we want to study varieties which are more rigidly structured, such as classroom lessons. In order to analyse many phenomena, it is important to think in terms of discourse units on the local and global level. Discourse analysis (DA) employs the methods and analytical concepts typical of linguistics. The model for discourse analysis worked out by John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard ('the Birmingham School') described the structure of classroom talk as a hierarchical system consisting of discourse units made up of units on the 'rank' next below. For example, the lesson, which is the highest unit, consists of transactions, exchanges, moves and acts (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). Their major contribution was the description of the structure of the conversational exchange, seen as the basic unit of conversation. The DA theory of conversation, which has been criticized for being based on 'premature formalization' (Levinson, 1983: 287) and restricted to 'formal' discourse, such as classroom interaction, has been elaborated and adapted to dialogues and spoken interaction in general (e.g., Berry, 1981; Burton, 1980; Stenström, 1984, 1994; Andersen, 2002; Hasselgren, 2002; Hasund, 2002; Kirk, 2002). Labov and Fanshel's (1977) 'comprehensive discourse analysis' is related to DA rather than CA. Their analysis of therapeutic discourse is based on the notion of speech acts and speech act relations between utterances. Utterances are 'translated' into speech acts such as questions, challenges, and requests, which are concatenated according to sequencing rules.

The main strength of the DA approach, according to Levinson (1983: 287), is 'that it promises to integrate linguistic findings about intra-sentential organization with discourse structure; while the strength of the CA position is that the procedures employed have already proved themselves capable of yielding by far the most substantial insights that have yet been gained into the organization of conversation'.

5. Interactional linguistics

It is becoming evident that we can only understand the complexities of language by taking into account how it is adapted to and shaped by interactional functions. Interactional linguistics (see, e.g., Ford and Wagner, 1996) combines a sociolinguistic and a linguistic approach, aiming at a grammatical description of 'talk-in-interaction'. As in CA, the focus is on the analysis of naturally occurring spoken data, now with particular attention paid to the way in which syntax, lexis, and prosody are used and their role in the conversational organization. For example, the description of the interplay between syntax and prosody in conversation makes it possible to describe where a turn ends and a new turn may begin. The papers in a volume entitled *Interaction and grammar* (Ochs et al., 1996) demonstrate, however, that there are divergent views on the role of grammar in the interaction. The question is whether pragmatic and interactional or grammatical factors play the principal role. Some papers argue that grammar organizes social interaction, (e.g., in terms of turn-constructional units; cf. Ford and Thompson, 1996) and others that grammar is shaped by the position in the turn of a conversational unit. Schegloff (1996), for example, envisages a

''syntax for conversation'' including how grammar is shaped by the position of a turn-construction unit within a turn and the position of a turn within a sentence.

6. Cognitive models of spoken interaction

Cognitive models, such as Chafe's model of information flow (1994), are used to explore the relationship between language, conversation and time. The flow of consciousness and conversation has been investigated by Chafe on the basis of recorded dinner-table conversation and the Pear Stories (in which speakers of different languages see the same film and discuss it afterwards; cf. Chafe, 1980). Chafe found, for instance, that we can distinguish between given, new, and accessible information in terms of their different activation costs. A number of phenomena in spoken corpora can best be understood by considering information flow and spoken language such as anaphora, prosody, subjecthood, and definiteness (Chafe, 1994: 202).

7. Discursive practices and social identity

Discursive strategies can also be indexically associated with social acts, such as challenging and contesting, and indirectly with the establishment of a social identity and power authority (Ochs, 1996). In critical discourse analysis (CDA; cf. Fairclough, 1992), discourse analysis is seen as a 'multidisciplinary activity'. The focus is on the fact that language is never neutral, and that the choice of language and of linguistic strategies is therefore related to the social surrounding in terms of social domains and institutional framework. According to Fairclough, discourse, i.e., language use, is 'a form of social practice, rather than a purely individual activity or a reflex of situational variables' (1992: 63). On the one hand, discourse is 'shaped and constrained by social structure', as it is influenced by various types of social relations, norms, and conventions. On the other hand, it is 'socially constitutive', by contributing to the dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it' (1992: 64; cf. also Wodak, 1997: 6).

8. New types of spoken interaction

The difference between speech and writing, and the conditions under which they have been produced, have been given considerable attention in the literature (Chafe and Danielewicz, 1987; Halliday, 1989, 1985). Moreover, in a pioneering work, Biber (1988) has given a more precise analysis of the spoken and written registers in terms of different dimensions.

Recently, however, we have seen the development of new types of communication which are difficult to analyse in terms of speech and writing.

For example, the rapid development on computer-mediated communication (CMC) since the 1970s shows that the boundaries between spoken and written interaction are

getting blurred (cf. Herring, 1996). An interesting question in this connection is whether computer-mediated communication is a variety of is own. Crystal (2001: 238), for instance, characterizes the language on the internet as a variety of language that is "neither 'spoken writing' nor 'written speech'", the main differences from face-to-face interaction being the lack of simultaneous feedback and overlaps, caused by the time-delay between the messages, or 'turns', and the lack of prosodic, paralinguistic, and kinesic features (2001: 29–34). But some of these differences are likely to disappear as the technology advances. The evidence so far, Crystal finds, suggests that the 'electronic revolution' will bring about a 'linguistic revolution' (2001: 238).

9. Overview of the papers in this issue

Miriam Fried & Jan-Ola Östman's paper shows how regular patterns of spoken data can be analyzed within the framework of Construction Grammar (CxG). The focus is on pragmatic particles in two language varieties, the Finland-Swedish dialect Solv and Czech. The paper begins with a brief summary of the most important features of CxG, the primary aim of which is to account for all linguistic constructs of a language, which includes its core as well as peripheral structures. This is also the aim in CA, the approach chosen for analyzing the communicative patterns of the interaction. The empirical analysis is preceded by a comparison of the main similarities and differences between the two approaches, which, though they differ in many respects, are seen as compatible and complementary. One important feature is, for instance, the close connection between the CxG notion of construction and the CA turn-unit. The first part of the analysis involves the utterance-final particles *tå*, *då*, *elå*, and *na* in Solv, which can all be used as question particles, and the utterance-initial *åm*, with multiple potential functions, one of which is as a subordinating conjunction. The functions of the Czech particle *jestli*, which like *åm* can serve as a subordinating conjunction, is richly illustrated and discussed. Besides functioning as a conjunction, it often introduces free-standing utterances; it can serve as a quotative, as a rhetorical question, as a directive, and to mark uncertainty, estimation and negation. It is emphasized in the paper that the items discussed do not make up a list of unrelated items but 'form networks of overlapping grammatical patterns' (p. X). The paper also shows that constructional analyses permits a comparison between two typologically different languages, and that Construction Grammar can capture the complex patterns of speech, 'if one allows the notion of construction to be extended in a dialogical direction' (p. X).

Janet Holmes' contribution deals with *communication skills* as reflected in **male** and female leaders' mentoring styles in interactions with 'mentees', recorded at various New Zealand workplaces. The strategies used are identified as *procedural*, *corrective*, *approving*, *advising* and *indirect coaching*. The analysis points to some fairly clear gender differences. The male mentors tended to adopt the procedural and corrective mentoring strategies, focusing on formalities and errors and deviations from the standard, while largely disregarding the negotiating aspects and leaving the mentees rather passive and discouraged. The approving strategy, although positive, adopted by a male mentor turned out to be too direct to be appreciated. The female mentors were more inclined to adopt the

advising model, which involved negotiating and working together, an important characteristic of which is the high proportion of pragmatic particles, and the indirect coaching model, where the mentor encouraged the mentee by asking questions instead of producing direct advice. By and large, the feminine style of mentoring is said to be more appreciative, indirect and negotiative, while the masculine style involves greater directness, contestation and challenge. However, Holmes emphasizes the danger of over-generalizing female and male style, and refers to the strategies mentioned as 'relatively masculine' and 'relatively feminine'. Effective leaders, she says, draw from a range of mentoring strategies, including both the typically masculine 'up front' and 'on record' style and the feminine indirect 'backstage' style.

Diana Lewis discusses certain aspects of computer-mediated communication, manifested in a corpus of asynchronous online political discussion fora, hosted by two French and three English periodicals. One crucial question is whether CMC represents a language variety of its own, deviating from speech and writing. Lewis concentrates on two aspects of CMC discussions, notably topic development, including message structure, and concessive structures initiated by *bien sûr* and *of course*. As regards the first aspect, the analysis shows that what started as a topic-oriented message very soon turned into a two-person reactive dialogue. The predominating internal organization was found to instantiate a two-part structure: reaction followed by a position statement, which is in contrast to the three-part 'basic electronic message schema' suggested by Herring (1996), consisting of a link to previous message + expression of views + appeal to participants. The comparison of French and English concessive structures, typical of argumentative discourse, showed that the *typical* pattern consisted in the concession marker (*bien sûr/of course*) + satellite idea + contrast marker (*mais/but*) + nuclear idea. So far, Lewis concludes, the question whether CMC has developed stylistic features that allow it to be described as a variety of its own vis-à-vis speech and writing is too early to answer and demands further research.

Neal Norrick discusses the role of remembering and forgetfulness in conversational story-telling, arguing that such talk, which is governed by the context, reflects not only the teller's internal cognitive state, but has interactional as well as discourse strategic functions. In his review of the literature, he stresses the interactional significance of the construction of forgetfulness and remembering and the effect of the 'tip-of-the-tongue state'. Using illustrative examples from corpora involving both British and American speakers, he shows that talk about remembering marks not only story beginnings but also transitions from background information to the proper story and story closings and that, by addressing the listener's memory, talk about remembering can also have a collaborative purpose, leading to co-narration or simply securing uptake. According to the 'paradox of forgetfulness in conversational narrative' described by Norrick, forgetfulness is taken by listeners as 'proof of authenticity', as opposed to polished storytelling with no signs of hesitation, which has the effect of 'practiced performance'. Norrick demonstrates that patterns of remembering and failure to remember, along with ways of speaking about remembering and forgetfulness, serve as resources for the construction of personal identity through storytelling.

Maryann Overstreet compares the use of certain pragmatic expressions referred to as 'general extenders' in English and German, realized by an adjunctive or disjunctive

conjunction followed by a noun phrase, (e.g., *and stuff, or something; und so, oder so*), which typically occur in phrase- or clause-final position. Unlike many other scholars, she argues that such expressions have no specific reference, but only extend 'otherwise complete utterances'. Their predominant function, she says, is interpersonal, very much like the discourse marker *y'know* in English. The comparison, based on telephone and face-to-face conversations among familiars, pointed to differences in frequency of use (more common in English) as well as grammatical distribution (generally clause-final position in English and often clause-internal in German). Among shared functions in the two languages, Overstreet mentions intersubjectivity, solidarity (tied to positive politeness), iconicity ('a lot more could be said'), evaluation ('the more that could be said is of little importance'), and emphasis. She also points to the hedging effect of general extenders cooccurring with reported speech or reflecting a lack of commitment. The lack of previous research and of an established label for the formulaic expressions had the effect that the identification of comparable functions across English and German was rather complicated.

Based on a silent Charlie Chaplin movie, the paper by **Sara W. Smith et al**. offers an analysis of the strategies used by speakers in a dialogic and monologic narrative situation to introduce new characters. Since the original research question 'how does an introduction occur?' proved to be unrealistic, it was replaced by 'what strategies make it possible for the listener to construct the needed representation?' The introductory strategies were found to involve a series of utterances and turns, making up a so-called 'reference episode' consisting of several potential parts: 'Pre-Introduction', Formal Introduction, Self-Repair, and Grounding. The first strategy, which serves cognitive as well as social functions, differed, since only the dialogue setting permitted negotiation of common ground. All in all, Smith et al. argue that the speakers' ability to prepare their audience mentally is an example of intersubjectivity as well as communicative competence.

Sali Tagliamonte discusses the recent development of the discourse markers *so, like* and *just* in young Canadians' conversations, based on a 20,000 word corpus of interview data with 8- to 20-year-olds in Toronto. An important question in this connection is whether the rich use of these items reflects linguistic change or just a passing trend in teen-talk. Tagliamonte's findings showed that *like* is used predominantly by the 15–16 year olds and drops at the university level, which points to 'age-grading' rather than grammatical change. The use of *just* showed a different pattern, notably an increase in frequency from the youngest to the oldest speakers, which would indeed point to a change in progress. However, at the university level, the male students use *just* more often. The use of *so*, on the other hand, suggests both age grading (the use drops among the university students) and ongoing linguistic change (the figures among the female speakers are steadily rising). All in all, the use of *like*, *just* and *so* dominated among the 15–16-year olds, and among the female speakers in particular. Tagliamonte emphasizes that 'particular positions in sentence structures hint at deeper changes in the language', i.e., the fact that *like* tends to occur before a noun, developing into a kind of nominal marker, and *just* before a verb, developing into a verbal marker. In other words, here there may be an ongoing change from discourse to grammar. Tagliamonte also studied the use of intensifiers occurring with adjectives, and here she found that a high average rated was consistent across all age groups, with *really* as the most frequent item.

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