

Note. This is an open workshop: all LSA participants are warmly welcome!

new location
Hellems 211

Interactional Foundations of Language

Workshop, LSA Colorado, 16-17 July 2011 (Meeting Location ~~ECCR 105~~)

Convenors: N. J. Enfield & Stephen C. Levinson

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	Day 1 (Sat 16 July)	Day 2 (Sun 17 July)
10.00-11.00	Stephen Levinson	Nick Enfield
<i>break</i>		
11.15-12.15	Barbara Fox	Sally Rice
<i>lunch</i>		
1.30-2.30	Michael K. Tanenhaus	Alan Cienki
<i>break</i>		
2.45-3.45	Makoto Hayashi	Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen
<i>break</i>		
4.00-5.00	<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Discussion</i>

Workshop description

In this workshop, we wish to put forward and discuss the following thesis:

“The foundations of language are social-interactional, not semantico-grammatical.”

The language sciences seek to discover the foundations of language, and most efforts have been focused on semantico-grammatical structures that make up the linguistic systems we call languages. It has been widely assumed in linguistics that while social-interactional patterns of usage may vary widely across cultures, a grammatical core is shared. But growing cross-linguistic and cross-cultural evidence suggests the opposite: that social-interactional systems are strongly universal, while grammatical and semantic systems—which nevertheless serve interactional goals—show considerable typological diversity.

When we look at language in its primary niche—sustained social interaction—we find two surprises for mainstream linguistics. First, underlying language there is a substantial hidden infrastructure, one that is not much taught or understood in linguistics; this includes the structures essential to conversation such as those for turn-taking, repair, and reciprocity. Second, the existence of language seems less predicated on a narrow language-specialized faculty for processing information, and more on the fundamental character of human sociality, a suite of uniquely human capacities for cooperation, prosociality and naïve psychology. It is these foundations that constitute a social-interactional infrastructure for language, allowing languages to emerge, be learnt, be used and to culturally evolve in diverse ways. (See Enfield/Levinson 2006 “Roots of Human Sociality” for an interdisciplinary overview.)

The workshop will consist of talks that explore the implications of this thesis from a range of different perspectives within linguistics, using different methodologies, and asking different specific research

questions. A good deal of the proceedings will be devoted to open discussion with particular orientation toward the LSA context. Questions to be explored will include the following:

- How are the demands of the two types of system – interaction and grammar – to be reconciled?
- What are the crucial ingredients for our special interactive ability—e.g. tracking common ground, attributing communicative intentions, assessing joint attention and mutual understanding, established a shared pace of interchange, integrating multimodal signals, handling social relationships, etc.?
- What are the online requirements of the interactive systems, for e.g. prediction and correction, deciding on what kind of a speech act is to be responded to within tight time constraints, etc.?
- How do these interactive systems interlock with the language system, indeed to what extent are the two kinds of system distinct? How are languages grammatically tailored to their interactive uses?
- How do we study these things? How can linguistics contribute and benefit?

Presentation titles and abstracts

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Interactional Foundations of Language: Introduction

Stephen C. Levinson

Max Planck for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen

This talk will introduce the themes of the workshop and defend the thesis “The foundations of language are social-interactive, not semantico-grammatical.” (See convenors’ notes, above.)

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Grammar: a Form(ation) of Interaction

Barbara Fox

University of Colorado at Boulder

This talk explores one possible relationship between grammar and interaction, namely, that grammar en-forms interaction, or is a/the 'body' of interaction. While it has been common to speak of the mutual shaping relationship of grammar and interaction, in this talk I explore the possibility of a deeper relationship, a relationship of union or inseparability between the two. The exploration of this possibility takes us through an examination of the action environment of assessing responses to an extended telling and through an examination of so-called null complements in English.

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Common Ground and Perspective-taking in Real-time Language Processing

Michael K. Tanenhaus

Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences, University of Rochester

Successful communication would seem to require that speakers and listeners distinguish between their own knowledge, commitments and intentions, and those of their interlocutors. A particularly important distinction is between shared knowledge (common ground) and private knowledge (privileged ground).

Keeping track of what is shared and what is privileged might seem too computationally expensive and too memory intensive to inform real-time language processing--a position supported by striking experimental evidence that speakers and listeners act egocentrically, showing strong and seemingly inappropriate intrusions from their own privileged ground. I'll review recent results from my laboratory using unscripted conversation demonstrating that (1) speaker's utterances provide evidence about whether they believe information is shared or privileged; and (2) addressees are extremely sensitive to this evidence. I'll suggest an integrative framework that explains discrepancies in the literature and points to some fruitful directions for future research.

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Projection as a Foundation for Social Coordination, Grammar as a Resource for Projection

Makoto Hayashi

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Human social life depends on the coordination of conduct among persons in their interactions, and such coordination rests on the possibility of projection—the capacity to prefigure future trajectories of each other's actions. Focusing on projection as a foundation for social coordination, my talk discusses the relevance of different grammatical systems to the ways in which the projectability of unfolding action is furnished in talk-in-interaction across languages. Through this discussion, I will address the issue of how a universal feature of social interaction might have shaped grammatical manifestations of projection techniques in diverse ways across different languages.

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Structures of Language in Social Interaction

N. J. Enfield

Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics

In this presentation I look at possible relationships between linguistics and the study of structures of conversational interaction. Progress has been made in recent years to approach key linguistic topics through the lens of social interaction, though the possibilities have been far from exhausted. This talk raises some of the issues by focusing on two of the kinds of linguistic structure that are observed in interaction but are hardly studied in linguistics: repair and turn-taking. Despite many years of progress in linguistic description and typology, little is known of cross-linguistic variation in these two domains of structure, or indeed of constraints on any such variation. The issues are discussed with reference to current comparative work going on within the 'Interactional Foundations of Language' project at MPI Nijmegen.

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Challenges to studying the “social-interactional engine” in endangered language communities: Notes from the Canadian field

Sally Rice

University of Alberta

As a field linguist trying to document two of Canada's endangered indigenous languages and as a theoretical linguist with cognitive/functional leanings, I feel acutely the pull between my philosophical commitments and the practical reality faced by the majority of speakers in the communities I work in. My philosophical commitments tell me that language is usage; it is embodied and situated, and most profitably studied in and across interactional contexts. Yet the situation facing many of Canada's

indigenous language speakers is that they neither use their language daily nor find robust situations of use with other speakers. Consequently, most of the speakers I work with are most comfortable taking a performative stance, only consenting to be recorded when telling a story or otherwise engaged in oft-rehearsed monologues. Despite my staging of both intimate and elaborate conversational circles with both audio and video recorders at the ready, there is a general reluctance on the part of many Elders to being recorded while playing cards, in craft-related activities, or around a table with other speakers except in a fairly formal story-telling mode. My first challenge, then, is being able to document the ebb and flow of casual conversation. It is the rarest of genres in these speech communities.

Nevertheless, my “spontaneous” recording sessions are starting to yield a richness of information about the grammatical systems of these languages that have heretofore gone undocumented (i.e. focus devices, alternate word order patterns, ellipses, evidentials, and general intersubjectivity markers). Because other speakers are present, there *are* opportunities for noting cues for turn-taking, the nature and timing of repairs and overlaps, as well as gaze, gesture, and body posture. However, the transcription of even the overtly coded “semantico-grammatical” aspects of these conversational sessions is daunting as I am encountering phenomena that are poorly understood and, due to a historical reliance on elicitation, under-described for the languages I study. At the same time, I have no training in conversational analysis and feel paralyzed by the prospect of learning new theories, new nomenclatures, new tagging codes, and new ontologies for documenting multimodal interaction aligned with speech. Thus, my second challenge is the actual analysis of the “social-interactional” in language.

Finally, through CILLDI, I am also a linguistics instructor to speakers and second language educators of First Nations languages in Canada. While we are slowly winning the battle of teaching orality and connected discourse over literacy and its attendant obsession with orthographic correctness, the push towards a hyper-orality—a “socialcy” of language if you will—may be hard-fought. Simply put, the best speakers want to preserve a high register of language (oratory) and the semi-speaking teachers are most comfortable with word lists and simple commands. While I have convinced my many consultants about the richness afforded by narrative in terms of the revelation of low-frequency lexical items and high-fluency collocations and discourse particles from these sources, my third challenge is convincing speakers that true conversation, with all of its stops and half-starts and other disfluencies is equally worth recording and whose emulation is our best hope for producing a new generation of fluent speakers. By raising these issues publicly with colleagues facing or having overcome similar challenges, we can hopefully build strategies together for bringing new kinds of social-interactional data to the table from languages whose speakers regard only the semantico-grammatical system of their language as the proper locus of inquiry and documentation.

Note: CILLDI = Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute
<http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/cilldi/>

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Face-to-face communicative usage events and the notion of ‘the scope of relevant behaviors’

Alan Cienki

Vrije Universiteit (VU), Amsterdam, Netherlands

Cognitive Grammar draws on the construct of “usage events” of language as the starting point from which linguistic units are schematized by language users (Langacker 1988, 2008). A usage event is understood as encompassing physical, social, and cognitive factors. However in terms of both theory and actual analyses, cognitive linguistics has yet to seriously embrace the factors of multimodality and dynamicity that are inherent with this approach. Building on work in Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995), the selective activation of meaning (Müller 2008), and the attentional analysis of meaning (Oakley 2009), I will argue for the notion of a dynamic scope of relevant behaviors in order to analyze

how recurrent behaviors in interaction come to gain symbolic status. The consequences for this view are that the traditional concept of ‘language’ gives way to one of a dynamic, multimodal complex of semiotic systems which are brought to bear for communication in face-to-face interaction and its mediated varieties.

References:

- Langacker, R. W. 1988. A usage-based model. In: B. Rudzka-Ostyn (ed.), *Topics in cognitive linguistics*, 127–161.
- Langacker, R. W. 2008. *Cognitive grammar: A basic introduction*.
- Müller, C. 2008. What gestures reveal about the nature of metaphor. In: A. Cienki and C. Müller (eds.), *Metaphor and gesture*, 219–245.
- Oakley, T. 2009. *From attention to meaning: Explorations in semiotics, linguistics, and rhetoric*.
- Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. 1986/1995. *Relevance: Communication and cognition*.

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Formats for compliance: Responding to requests in everyday interaction

Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen

University of Helsinki

This presentation is based on an empirical study of responses to requests in everyday English conversation (Fox, Thompson & Couper-Kuhlen, forthc). The argument is that the way a request is made, i.e. what verbal format is used and thus which claims are made concerning entitlement and contingency (Curl & Drew 2005, Wootton 2005, Craven & Potter 2010, Stevanovic forthc), has implications for the way in which recipients comply with that request. Complying responses to requests, if they are verbal, can vary from simple compliance markers (*okay/sure/alright*) to stronger markers of commitment, e.g. *I will (do)* or *I'll do X* (the action as formulated in the request) or *I'll do Y* (alternative formulation of the action in the request). Requesters display an orientation to compliance format in what they do next: appropriate response forms lead to unproblematic sequence closure, inappropriate forms to sequence expansion through checks of understanding and pursuits of more adequate uptake. The moral of the story is thus that in social interaction linguistic form counts. Participants attend to the formats used for building turns and accomplishing actions – both initiating and responsive – in order to decide what to do next. The challenge for linguists is to describe and explain what grammatical forms are appropriate when. This leads to an appreciation of the linguistic underpinnings of interaction and ultimately to an explication of the interactional foundation of language.

- Craven, A. and J. Potter (2010). Directives: Entitlement and contingency in action. *Discourse Studies* 12(4): 419-442.
- Curl, T. S. and P. Drew (2008). Contingency and action: A comparison of two forms of requesting. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 41(2): 129-15
- Fox, B. E., S. A. Thompson and E. Couper-Kuhlen (forthc). *Building responsive actions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stevanovic, M. (forthc). Participants' deontic rights and action formation: The case of declarative requests for action. *InLiSt, Interaction and Linguistic Structures*.
- Wootton, A. J. (2005). Interactional and sequential features informing request format selection in children's speech. In: *Syntax and Lexis in Conversation*, A. Hakulinen and M. Selting, eds. Amsterdam, Benjamins: 185-207.