

## **Session 2 Theoretical framework and methodology**

M. Lambert (Paris VIII, CNRS 7023)

### **1. How language learning is viewed**

Learning a language is to learn a particularly way in which complex verbal tasks such as telling a story giving direction, arguing for a raise is typically solved by native speakers of a social community.

### **2. Global and local constraints in text production** (Stutterheim & Klein 1987, 2005; Stutterheim 1997).

Narrating an event involves different levels: the *real event* (level 0) which is *experienced*, transformed into a *percept* (level 1) storied in long term memory (level 2). It is *recalled* according to the expressive intention of the speaker (level 3), components of it are *selected, ordered* and possibly *enriched* by fictitious additions (level 4) and the results *discourse representation* is put into words (level 6, the text).

#### **Local constraints**

Each utterance selects a fragment of the discourse representation and puts it into words. Content selected depends on what has to be expressed and what can be taken over from the preceding utterance(s) and what must be introduced. Introduction, maintenance and change of referents in the domains of entities, time, space, worlds is referred as *referential movement*.

In the perspective described here solving a complex verbal task is envisaged in the interaction between global and local constraints.

#### **Main and side structures**

The shape of the text is to a large extent determined by the explicit or implicit question which the speaker sets out to answer, *i.e.* '*what happened (to you) at this time at this place?*' for a narrative. The main structure is composed of the utterances which directly

answer the *quaestio*, and side structures, utterances which supply different types of information (comments, evaluations).

The temporal relationship between components of the main structure in a narrative can be defined as a **chronological thread of events**.

### **Topic and focus**

The function of a question in relation to a text is not different from the function of a question in relation to an answer at utterance level.

Example from Paul (1896)

*Peter went to Berlin yesterday* may be used to answer different questions:

*Where did Peter go yesterday?* alternative x places specified by Berlin

*When did go to Berlin?* alternative x time interval specified by yesterday

*What did Peter do yesterday?* alternative event/incident specified by went

*What happened?* Set of contextually relevant incidents that could happen at a contextually given occasion. Alternative specified by the whole utterance.

**Topic information:** the person *Peter*, the time *ed* the motion event *go* you are talking about defined by the question

**Focus information:** alternative chosen in the potential set of places *Berlin*

### **Main structure of a narrative**

Each utterance of the main structure is an answer to the series of sub questions of the *quaestio* *what happened (to x) at  $t_i$ ? what happened (to x) at  $t_{i+1}$ ? what happened (to x) at  $t_{i+2}$ ?*

Answer to 'what' is the specification of a singular event which occupies a definite time interval on the real time axis. It thus constrains what is referred to and how this information is maintained or changed.

### **Referential movement and linguistic means**

Different devices according to languages mark what reference belongs to Topic or Focus: word order, intonation specific particles etc.

Example if free word order and topic first/focus last

*Quis cantat : T cantat F Petrus*

*Quid facit Petrus : T Petrus F cantat*

## **2. How language production is viewed**

Levelt (1989) distinguishes three fundamental components in the language production apparatus: conceptualization, formulation and articulation

Decisions at the conceptual level consist in selecting relevant information stored in memory (*what to say*), organizing information into units that are suited for linguistic expression, anchoring what is to be expressed in space and time, select a perspective of representation of events, assigning status to information content (topic/focus), interconnecting material by selecting a linearization principle (in the case of a narrative a chronological frame of reference).

### **Related questions**

- Do we have to take into account the influence of the specific encoding system of the particular language which the speaker uses?
- Are the decisions made for each sentence anew or are there macrostructural principles that guide the speaker at each relevant stage in the narrative?
- If so, are the macrostructural principles influenced by the specific encoding system of the particular language which the speaker uses?

## **3. Role of language in the conceptualiser**

**Position 1:** processes in the conceptualiser are language-free, universal, and operate on the basis of conceptual primitives (cf. Jackendoff (1990), Bierwisch & Schreuder (1992)).

**Position 2:** processes in the conceptualiser are language based in nature (Whorfian view). Gumperz & Levinson (1996) on spatial description *we must mentally encode experiences in such a way that we can describe them later, in the terms required by our language.*

**Position 3** there is an interdependence between conceptualization and linguistic knowledge with two possible assumptions:

- (a) reorganisation of the conceptual content at the end of the planning process according to language-specific requirements. Language-specificity concerns only

*how* content is packaged for verbalisation Levelt (1989).

(b) thinking for speaking-hypothesis, which argues that conceptualization as a component of language production is always based on language-specific principles (Talmy 1987, Slobin 1996). Under this view language-dependent conceptualization is relevant at the global and local level of message generation.

#### **4. On the processes by which grammaticised means drive decisions**

There is growing evidence that speakers have a predisposition to attend to particular domains grammaticised in their language. A specific grammar, focuses certain categories and relations (Slobin 1991, Hickmann 2005, 2006).

*Each native language has trained its speakers to pay different kinds of attention to events and experiences when talking about them. This training is carried out in childhood and is exceptionally resistant to restructuring in adult second language acquisition* Slobin *op. cit.*

Our basic assumption is that concepts that have paved their way into the grammar of a language, i.e., *grammaticised meanings* such as *progressive aspect*, *perfectivity*, *word order constraints* play a significant role in establishing language-specific preferences in the **segmentation, selection and structuring of information**

#### **In relation to Typology**

Since meanings that are grammaticalised differ across languages, cross linguistic diversity consists less of what is possible to specify but what is relatively **easy or hard** to specify (Slobin 1991, 1996; Talmy 1987).

#### **5. What we learn from L2 research**

If we find that L2 learners select and organize information according to preferences in their L1, then we can argue that **this type of interference can only be located at the level of the conceptualiser.**

Consequently **linguistic knowledge** involves not only phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon but also **principles** guiding decisions at the conceptual level (segmentation of the knowledge base, information selection, perspective taking on selected content, ordering

and interconnection of informational units) and at the formulation level so that they fit together in a coherent way and can be executed at high speed in language production.

**In acquiring a second language we not only acquire new forms and new functions. We also have to acquire knowledge about principles of use, i.e. which context licenses/requires a particular grammatical category.**

**Methodology** *How to proceed?*

Stepwise increase in degree of control up to highly controlled experimental studies, testing specific aspects of language production in L1 and L2.

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