DisCorX 2.0

17.11.22 - 18.11.22
Description of the workshop

The DisCorX 2.0 workshop focuses on discourse through the lens of cognitive corpus linguistics and psycholinguistics. The goal is to provide researchers working on discourse an opportunity to exchange state-of-the-art research regarding the production, comprehension and processing of discourse, both for L1 and L2 speakers. Focus will be placed on questions linked to:

- the way native and non-native readers make sense of discourse by using (or not) cues and signals of coherence relations
- individual differences in the interpretation of discourse relations
- the way native and non-native readers interpret and acquire pragmatic functions of discourse connectives

As such, our workshop targets underlying cognitive principles and general assumptions about the way we read and process coherence relations as well as more specific factors that influence the way we produce, process and understand discourse.

This workshop also marks the final stage of the project “Discovering discourse (DIDI): The acquisition of connectives in L1 and L2”, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) (100012_184882).

Language of the workshop: English.

Description of the SNSF project

The main goal of the DIDI project is to investigate the acquisition of discourse connectives by French-speaking teenagers and second language learners of French, through a series of controlled experiments performed in parallel over the two groups. These experiments shed new light on the similarities and differences in the acquisition path of first and second language learners, and provide new evidence about the acquisition of words encoding procedural meaning in the mental lexicon.

Organizers

Mathis Wetzel mathis.wetzel@unibe.ch
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Prof. Sandrine Zufferey sandrine.zufferey@unibe.ch
Location

The workshop will take place at two locations:

Day one (17.11.22): Room 205, Hallerstrasse 6, 3012 Bern
Day two (18.11.22): Room 115, Hochschulstrasse 4 (Hauptgebäude), 3012 Bern
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*Kate Cain* |
| 10:30-11:00  | **Coffee break**                                                        |
| 11:00-11:30  | Individual differences in connective comprehension: The effect of linguistic experience and general reasoning skills  
*Merel Scholman, Marian Marchal, Vera Demberg* |
| 11:30-12:00  | Discourse markers in oral narratives: A study on the acquisition of L2 Spanish  
*Margarita Borreguero Zuloaga, Carmelo Averna* |
| 12:00-12:30  | Using a multi-method approach to identify subjectivity profiles of causal connectives: the case of "poetomu" and "tak chto" in Russian  
*Elena Savinova, Pim Mak, Ted Sanders* |
| 12:30-14:00  | **Lunch**                                                                |
| 14:00-14:30  | Interactive gestures as gestural discourse markers  
*Schuyler Laparle* |
| 14:30-15:00  | The Effect of Imperfective/Perfective Verb Aspect on Children’s Perception of the Ongoingness of Events and Pronoun Resolution within Narratives  
*Gillian Francey, Kate Cain* |
| 15:00-15:30  | Multilingual writing ability: the case of text coherence  
*Vesna Bagarić Medve, Višnja Pavičić Takač, Leonard Pon* |
| 15:30-16:00  | **Coffee break**                                                        |
| 16:00-16:30  | Teenagers’ mastery of connectives: The role of vocabulary size and exposure to print  
*Ekaterina Tskhovrebova* |
<p>| 16:30-17:00  | Interaction corpora in the teaching and learning of polyfunctional discourse markers in French L2: the case of “juste” |</p>
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Lectures

Making Links: The influence of connectives on young readers’ memory and understanding of text.

Kate Cain
Lancaster University

Successful text comprehension requires readers to create an integrated and coherent mental representation that specifies how the meanings of clauses and sentences are related. Connectives are linguistic signals that can aid the construction of this representation by marking the existence and nature of relations. For example, temporal connectives specify the chronological order of events, as in “Ruby played in the garden, after she finished her schoolwork”, causal connectives indicate how two events are causally related, as in “Ruby played in the garden, because she finished her schoolwork”, and contrastive connectives serve to contrast or qualify information, as in “Ruby played in the garden, but Tobias finished his homework.” Thus, connectives can signal a range of coherence relations between events and invite readers to engage in inference making and constructive processing. Studies with adults indicate that connectives do not reliably benefit memory and understanding of text, resulting in calls for researchers to consider the influence of the type of coherence relation signalled by the connective and also the ability of the reader.

The aim of this presentation is to shed light on how, when, and why connectives aid young readers’ memory and understanding of text by integrating findings across studies of connectives that mark temporal, causal, and contrastive relations and through examining the effects of age and reading comprehension ability. A review of the extant literature indicates that the presence of connectives can benefit young readers’ understanding and processing of text, but that competence is still developing during middle childhood. For example, 8- and 10-year-olds are less accurate than adults at supplying the correct connective in sentence and passage cloze tasks, and less sensitive to the correct use of connectives in multi-clause sentences, showing poor discrimination between “Nadia pressed the doorbell so/because it rang.”. However, reading time studies indicate that even 8-year-olds are able to use connectives as ‘processing signals’, evidenced by young children reading a clause following a useful connective more quickly than if following a ‘neutral’ or ‘inappropriate’ link, as in: “Tobias saw the bird before/and/after it flew away.”

To examine the influence of connectives on the quality of children’s mental representations of text, we examined 8- to 12-year-olds’ recall of two-clause sentences linked either by a specific connective or ‘and’. The presence of specific connectives (relative to ‘and’) resulted in superior recall of two-clause sentences in general, but the benefit was moderated by connective type, age, and reading comprehension ability. A key finding was that older readers and better comprehenders often encoded an appropriate coherence relation between the two clauses, even when joined by ‘and’, suggesting that they were engaged in inference making and constructive processing of text. In contrast, the recalls of younger readers indicated that the presence of a connective was useful in aiding them to establish coherence between the two clauses, but the inclusion of connectives did not reliably benefit the memory of children with poor reading comprehension. Other work examining the specific role of ‘because’ to support inference making broadly supports this picture: younger children treated the inclusion of ‘because’ as a signal to engage in inferential processing, whereas poor comprehenders did not.
Together, these findings show that connectives can aid young readers to engage in inference making and constructive processing of text to establish coherent representations. However, reader characteristics interact with text characteristics to influence the degree of benefit obtained from explicit markers of coherence. Insights for educational materials and our theoretical models of comprehension development will be discussed.

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Raising and answering questions in discourse

Hannah Rohde
University of Edinburgh

When we study what makes a text or a conversation coherent, we can be said to be identifying the implicit or explicit questions that are raised and answered by subsequent sentences in the discourse. Such an approach casts discourse relations, and the connectives that help express them, as local connections that contribute to a larger structure defined by an architecture of questions and subquestions. In that framework, one can ask what cues give rise to particular questions in comprehenders' minds, how long expectations for an answer to such questions persist, and how closely comprehenders' expectations align with speakers' decisions about what questions to address as the discourse proceeds. In this talk, I present collaborative work targeting these open questions. The goal is to see how a mix of psycholinguistic and corpus-based methods can provide a window into the comprehension and production of structured discourse.

To the extent that a discourse is comprised of local and non-local question-answer relationships, one can ask how well comprehenders track those long-distance dependencies. I present a set of reading-time studies testing the role of contrastive topics and the discourse markers "On the one hand"/"On the other hand" in signalling upcoming discourse structure. In passages that set up a contrastive pairing ("Linda and Bob have very different views about...") and mention one component of the pairing ("Linda thinks..."), comprehenders are shown to anticipate material that will address the unanswered question (What about Bob?) and maintain this anticipation across multiple clauses. With the discourse marker "On the other hand", comprehenders anticipate more than just the simple "On the other hand" counterpart; rather, they keep track of embedded constituents and establish non-local dependencies.

To look beyond lab experiments with constructed passages, I also present a corpus-based approach to assessing the content and cues that guide comprehenders' guesses about upcoming material in naturally occurring discourse. Using a corpus of TED talks, we elicit questions at different points in the talks from crowdsourced non-expert annotators; we also ask the annotators to indicate whether and where their questions are answered. The corpus contains pre-existing annotations of local discourse relations, namely the explicit and implicit discourse relations that hold between clauses (Penn Discourse Treebank labels). We report preliminary results on the rates at which questions are answered and the relationship between question predictability and implicitness.

Both psycholinguistic studies and discourse-annotated corpora have the potential to bring new evidence to bear in our understanding of discourse coherence, and the examples presented in this talk will hopefully showcase this potential and invite new directions.
Presentations

Individual differences in connective comprehension: The effect of linguistic experience and general reasoning skills

Merel Scholman, Marian Marchal, and Vera Demberg

There is a large body of research showing that comprehenders benefit from the information provided by connectives (e.g., Cozijn et al., 2011; Köhne et al, 2021; Millis & Just, 1994; Sanders & Noordman, 2000; Xiang & Kuperberg, 2015). However, the relationship between connective and relation sense is not always straightforward or easy to infer, partly because the meanings of connectives are abstract, relational, and can be difficult to define (Crosson & Lesaux, 2013). Recent work on comprehension of four French connectives indicates that adult comprehenders do not perform at ceiling on connective comprehension tasks using connectives typical for the written domain (e.g., Zufferey & Gygax, 2020b; Tskhovrebova et al., 2022). These studies indicate that less frequent connectives are more difficult to comprehend, and that individual variation in connective comprehension appears to exist.

In this contribution, we conducted a coherence judgment task and a series of individual difference tasks to study connective comprehension in English, looking at more connectives (20 in total) and a larger range of participant-specific and connective-specific variables. We investigate whether any individual variation between participants (n=266, recruited via Prolific) can be explained by (i) participants' linguistic experience, operationalized as print exposure and word knowledge; (ii) participants' general reasoning abilities, operationalized as non-verbal IQ and cognitive processing style; and (iii) connective-specific features, specifically connective difficulty (as determined through a rating study) and written frequency.

The current study is the first to show that general reasoning plays a role in connective comprehension: comprehenders with higher non-verbal IQ and with better cognitive reasoning skills are also better at understanding the meaning of connectives (p<.001). We believe this can be attributed to the link between general reasoning and relational reasoning in a broader sense. Although relational reasoning does not target the understanding of discourse relations in particular, the two constructs do tap into similar abilities; that is, the ability to detect and establish meaningful relations between propositions.

Further, the results showed that vocabulary size has a greater effect on connective comprehension than print exposure: when vocabulary size is included as a variable in the model, print exposure fails to predict connective comprehension (p<.001 and p>.05, respectively). This weakens the theoretical importance of print exposure for connective comprehension.

Regarding connective features, results indicated that connective difficulty was found to be a significant predictor of connective comprehension: connectives perceived to be more difficult yield lower performance (p<.001). The effect of written frequency is unexpected: more frequent connectives appear to yield lower scores, but this effect is not robust and is only significant when connective difficulty is included in the model (p<.05). We will further explore this effect by studying different operationalizations of written frequency.

References
Discourse markers in oral narratives: A study on the acquisition of L2 Spanish

Margarita Borreguero Zuloaga, and Carmelo Averna

Discourse markers (DMs) are considered an index of fluency and oral competence in L2 acquisition (Müller, 2006; Crible, 2018). There has been a series of studies on the acquisition of discourse markers in different languages with two main foci: the use of connectives in written texts (Piedehierro, 2009; Pavičić Takač & Vakanjac Ivezić, 2019) and the use of discourse markers with interactional functions in face-to-face conversations (cf. the papers in Borreguero Zuloaga & Thoerle, 2016 and Borreguero, Siebold & Thoerle, 2019). In our study we will analyse a different type of texts: oral narratives elicited in formal learning contexts, such as universities and high schools (Jakupčević, 2019). Our interest is on the frequency and functions of discourse markers with interactional, metadiscursive and connective functions in the development of oral abilities in language learning processes. The analysis is based on a corpus of oral narratives produced by 50 Italian students learning Spanish as a Second Language. We have considered four different levels of linguistic competence (from A2 to C1) and have observed the use of DMs in the construction of narrative texts through these four levels.

We are particularly interested in the interface between DMs and discourse units with the aim of exploring the role of DMs as text organisational cues at the macrostructural and microstructural level (Redeker, 2006, Duque, 2016). Thus, we proposed a segmentation of narratives following the Val.Es.Co. model of discourse segmentation (Val.Es.Co. 2014), which has been designed specifically for the segmentation of spoken interactions in Spanish.

We will compare our results with similar research conducted with Spanish native speakers and Dutch-speaking learners of L2 Spanish whose oral narratives have been elicited from the same input (Gras et al., 2017) but also with previous research on the acquisition of Spanish DMs in conversational interactions (Pascual, 2015; Koch & Thoerle, 2019). The focus will be on the differences in the number of types and tokens and in the polyfunctionality of the DMs employed in the learners’ variety, as well as in their position in the global text structure.

References
Using a multi-method approach to identify subjectivity profiles of causal connectives: the case of "poetomu" and "tak chto" in Russian

Elena Savinova, Pim Mak, and Ted Sanders

Casual relations vary in the degree of subjectivity: objective relations hold between events in reality and are simply reported by the speaker, while subjective relations are construed by a conscious mind. Cross-linguistic evidence suggests that languages can employ specialized causal connectives to express subjective versus objective relations (Çokal et al., 2020; Degand & Pander Maat, 2003; Li et al., 2013; Pit, 2003; Sanders & Spooren, 2015). This evidence mostly comes from corpus studies, where occurrences of certain causal connectives in a corpus are analyzed for the type of relation they express. Although this method provides an insight into the natural use of causal connectives, it also has several disadvantages, such as laborious and time-consuming annotation of cases for analysis by multiple annotators, and possible under-representedness of certain connectives or types of relations in the corpus. Several recent studies employed an alternative method of connective insertion task to crowdsource connective interpretations in terms of subjectivity more efficiently (Santana et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2021). However, little attention has been paid to comparing different methods and investigating the different aspects of connective specialization that they elucidate. Our study set out to address this issue by developing a multi-method approach to the problem of connective specialization in subjectivity and testing it on the material of Russian forward causal connectives poetomu and tak chto, which have not yet been studied in this respect.

In addition to the traditional corpus analysis of news and spoken discourse types, we approached the problem of specificity experimentally using two online crowdsourcing paradigms. In the connective insertion experiment, we investigated what connectives Russian speakers chose given prototypical subjective or objective causal relations. In the newly-
developed sentence continuation experiment, we tested what relations Russian speakers chose given different causal connectives. Thus, the sentence continuation experiment also explored whether specialized connectives serve as cues towards the degree of subjectivity of the relation across spoken and news discourse types.

The results of all the three methods provide converging evidence that the two connectives show significant variation in the degree of subjectivity across discourse types: *tak chto* expresses subjective relations more than *poetomu*, which prefers objective relations. However, there are also differences between the results. Namely, the specialization of connectives is most pronounced in the connective insertion task, which is related to the constraining nature of this task and prototypicality of the stimuli. The corpus study and the sentence continuation experiment, on the other hand, show less stronger specialization profiles of connectives because they allow for influence of other contextual factors, such as the context of the story-like stimuli in the sentence continuation task. Furthermore, the sentence continuation experiment revealed that more subjective relations are expected in spoken than in newspaper discourse in general, which leads to decreased specialization of *poetomu* in spoken discourse, and therefore, its decreased effectiveness as a processing cue for objectivity. Our research illustrates the importance of combining different methods for investigating subjectivity profiles of connectives in a language and contributes to the cross-linguistic research in the field.

References

Interactive gestures as gestural discourse markers

Schuyler Laparle

The 'embodied turn' in linguistics calls on theorists to consider language as a fundamentally multimodal and situated phenomena (Nevile, 2015). This turn is reflected in the recent attention paid to integrating co-speech gesture into formal semantic models (e.g. Alahverdzhieva et al., 2017; Lascarides & Stone, 2009; Schlenker, 2020). However, very little attention has been paid to the integration of gesture into formal models of discourse structure. The present work seeks to demonstrate the value of interactive gesture, gestures that convey pragmatic and social meaning (Bavelas et al., 1992), to this endeavor. Specifically, I argue for the consideration of both verbal and gestural cues in analyzing underlying discourse relations in face-to-face...
dialogue and show the ways in which interactive gesture can help to disambiguate relations that remain underspecified in the verbal mode.

I compare hand gestures co-occurring with the lexical discourse markers by the way (BTW) and here’s the thing (HTT), as performed in talk show interviews. These two markers are functionally distinct; BTW prototypically marks digressions (Traugott 2020), whereas HTT elaborates on a topic under discussion. However, they are also both underspecified – digressions marked with BTW may relate to the immediately preceding discourse in a number of ways, and may or may not initiate a permanent topic shift; similarly, the elaborations introduced with HTT may serve to clarify, contradict, or justify preceding discourse segments. Some of this ambiguity is resolved by adjacent lexical items, such as when here’s the thing is immediately followed by though, signaling a contradiction. Co-occurring hand gestures offer another means of disambiguation.

From 100 instances of each lexical discourse marker, collected through UCLA’s Television News Archive in collaboration with the Red Hen Lab, I discuss three recurrent gestural discourse markers occurring with both BTW and HTT – (i) the blocking gesture, similar to Bressem & Müller’s (2014) ‘holding away’ gesture, in which the hand is held palm facing outward as if to stop an object from entering the speaker’s immediate space; (ii) the pausing gesture, in which an index finger is pointed upward as if to say ‘wait a second’; and (iii) the locating gesture, in which a topic, as a metaphoric object, is situated in empty space, as in McNeill et al’s (2003) abstract deixis. Each of these recurrent gestures profiles an aspect of the underlying discourse structure: blocking gestures are associated with evaluation, pausing gestures with contradiction, and locating gestures with clarification and background.

The multimodal approach to discourse structure advocated for here necessitates an expansion of the notion of ‘discourse marker’ to include not only lexical markers, but also gestural ones. Furthermore, because the gestural markers discussed often add to, and occasionally conflict with the lexical markers they accompany, this approach also problematizes the reduction of discourse moves to simplex discourse relations, as is done in Rhetorical Structure Theory (Taboada & Mann, 2006) and derivative computational approaches. Instead, fine-grained relations, such as evaluation or clarification, may be variably active and profiled using different expressive strategies across both the verbal and gestural modes.

References
The Effect of Imperfective/Perfective Verb Aspect on Children’s Perception of the Ongoingness of Events and Pronoun Resolution within Narratives

Gillian Francey and Kate Cain

Experiment 1

Adults judge imperfectively expressed events within narratives (Stephanie was packing a suitcase) as ongoing and perfectly expressed events (Stephanie packed a suitcase) as completed. As narratives proceed adults’ perception that short duration, imperfectively expressed events are ongoing declines (Magliano & Schleich, 2000).

We investigated whether 7- to 11-year-olds are similarly influenced. One hundred and ninety-eight children were presented with imperfectively/perfectively expressed short duration events, embedded within narratives. An additional sentence, neutral with respect to the passage of time, followed half the items. Children were asked whether the event was completed or not, immediately after the event or after the additional sentence. Participants recorded their choice in a booklet.

Children were more likely to state that the events were completed than ongoing. However, the probability of stating the event was ongoing was more likely for events expressed with imperfective aspect than perfective aspect. This tendency increased with age when children were asked immediately after the event. Intervening text reduced the probability that imperfectively expressed events were considered ongoing and this tendency increased with age.

Conclusion

Children’s perception that imperfectively expressed events are ongoing increases within the age range 7-11 years. Like adults, children’s perception that imperfectively expressed events are ongoing decreases as a narrative proceeds.

Experiment 2

An influential account of pronoun resolution, The Event Structure Hypothesis, suggests that the temporal characteristics of events (verbs and their predicates) influence pronoun resolution (Rohde et al., 2006). We examined this proposal by repeating our ongoingness experiment with two hundred 7- to 11-year-old children. In this experiment children were asked to resolve an ambiguous pronoun immediately after the event or after the additional sentence. Participants recorded their choice in a booklet.

When asked to resolve a pronoun immediately after an event, children were more likely to resolve the pronoun to the Subject protagonist when the event had been described as ongoing with imperfective aspect than described as completed with perfective aspect. This tendency increased with age. Intervening text reduced the probability that older children resolved the pronoun to the Subject protagonist following imperfectively expressed events.

Conclusion

Age effects on children’s judgement of the ongoingness of events in narratives were mirrored in children’s pronoun resolution, giving support to the Event Structure account that the temporal characteristic of events influences pronoun resolution.

References
Multilingual writing ability: the case of text coherence

Vesna Bagarić Medve, Višnja Pavičić Takač, and Leonard Pon

Coherence is a multidimensional construct which encompasses grammatical, pragmatic, cognitive and thematic aspects (Brinker 2001) and functions as a regulatory principle in text construction (Adamzik 2004). Language acquisition studies have so far mostly dealt with the grammatical aspects of coherence (cf. Granger & Tyson 1996, Tankó 2004, Carrió-Pastor 2013). However, more studies are needed to shed light on the acquisition of coherence relations (Taboada 2009), especially in light of the findings that point to non-native writers' limited knowledge of conventions referring to written text creation in FL (Olshtain & Celce-Murcia 2001) and to influences that the concept of coherence acquired in L1 may have on the creation of texts in L2 (cf. Breckle & Zinsmeister 2012).

By analysing and comparing coherence dimensions in written texts of multilingual language users, this study aims to provide answers to the following questions: What are the similarities and differences in the ability to write a coherent text in Croatian as L1 and German and English as FLs? Is there evidence of transfer from L1 to FL1 and FL2 and vice versa in the area of coherence?

The corpus comprises 90 texts written by 30 participants whose L1 was Croatian and FLs English and German: each participant wrote an argumentative text in all three languages on the same topic. In the qualitative analysis the texts were assessed according to a set of criteria reflecting different coherence dimensions, whereas the thematic development in the texts was analysed using the Text Coherence Analysis method (TCA) which was designed building on the methods by Daneš (1970) and Lautamatti (1978).

The preliminary results reveal differences in the progression types among participants’ texts in three languages. Also, some coherence dimensions are transferred from English as FL to Croatian as L1 and German as FL rather than from L1 to FLs. Acquisitional, pedagogical and methodological implications are discussed.

References
Teenagers’ mastery of connectives: The role of vocabulary size and exposure to print

Ekaterina Tskhovrebova

Connectives such as however and since play an important role for marking coherence relations in discourse (e.g., Degand & Sanders, 2002) and therefore are crucial for reading comprehension, which in turn is a strong predictor of academic success (e.g., Beek, 2020). Most research on the acquisition of connectives targeted younger children (e.g., Pyykkönen and Järvičivi, 2012). Yet there is evidence that connective development extends well into adolescence (e.g., Nippold et al., 1992) and even adult speakers have difficulties with some coherence relations when they are conveyed by infrequent connectives bound to the written mode (e.g., Zufferey & Gygax, 2020).

In this study, we investigated the ability of native French- (N=154, M_age=14.43, range: 12 to 19) and Russian-speaking teenagers (N=107, M_age=13.93, range: 11 to 17) to use 12 connectives encoding 6 coherence relations in a cloze task. In order to track individual differences, we assessed whether teenagers’ vocabulary level and degree of exposure to print predicted the accuracy of connective use.

Our findings show that in both languages, the ability to use connectives appropriately increases with age. However, age played a lesser role compared to vocabulary knowledge and degree of exposure to print, thus indicating that lexicon size and reading habits are important factors explaining individual differences in the acquisition of connectives.

References

Interaction corpora in the teaching and learning of polyfunctional discourse markers in French L2: the case of ‘juste’

Anita Thomas and France Rousset

The use of authentic corpora of conversation in foreign language teaching has gained importance in recent years. Corpora allow L2 learners to be exposed to variation and polysemy in an authentic setting (Thomas & Ådel, 2020). Such a teaching resource could have a positive effect on noticing as well as on learners’ metalinguistic knowledge (Mitchell 2020). While working with corpora is generally appreciated, especially for spoken language (André, 2018), it is difficult to establish its influence on L2 learning.
In this paper we present a study which aims to investigate the effect of corpus-based learning resources on the longitudinal development of discourse markers in oral L2 French. In this contribution, we will focus on the polyfunctional and polysemous marker “juste” in the meaning of “correct”, “only” and proximity as well as the roles of attenuator and emphasis (e.g., Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2001; Mellet & Monte, 2009). These uses were integrated into a digital and interactive exercise, using audio and video from corpora such as FLEURON, CLAPI and OFROM.

Our analysis is based on data that are collected in an ongoing two-year research project with ten mixed classes of L1 (n=±40) and L2 (n=±40; intermediate level) French-speaking students following an education for manual professions. We carry out two interventions per semester and each time we record free student peer-interactions. After each intervention, the students have to do two exercises on an educational platform, autonomously. This was the case for the marker “juste”.

The results are based on three kinds of data including free peer interactions, an interview with a team member in which participants were asked to provide examples of the use of “juste” in speech and a test item on LimeSurvey. Preliminary results in the L2 learners show an increase in the use of “juste” in free interactions after the exercise was done and a diversification of its use beyond the meaning of “only”. Moreover, there seems to be a relationship between the completion of the exercise and the ability to use “juste” spontaneously in interaction, to cite concrete examples of use in the interview, and to recognise its pragmatic functions in the test.

These results suggest a positive effect of our teaching material. However, this effect must be treated with caution. First there is a need to compare it with other taught phenomena, especially those with no correspondence in English. Secondly, an analysis of the French language used by the L1 classmates would allow the discussion of a possible frequency effect on the production of the L2 learners. (Ellis et al., 2016).

References

Collaborative meaning making across contexts: Reference production and processing in spontaneous interaction

Rahel Oppliger and Daniela Landert

In spontaneous conversation, interlocutors engage in collaborative meaning making: they work together to establish a shared understanding of the stories they are telling, the information they are imparting, and the references they are making. While this process has been studied from a
cognitive perspective before, little is known about how it is affected by the situational context and the type of interaction. In our study, we combine cognitive and pragmatic approaches to analyse the production and processing of reference. By combining three different types of spontaneous spoken interaction, we investigate how contextual factors shape collaborative meaning making.

Reference is a central element in collaborative meaning making. In order to achieve their communicative goals, interlocutors are said to coordinate or align their cognitive representations of the communicative situation (e.g., Clark, 1996; Pickering & Garrod, 2004). Such coordination is achieved partially through joint reference making: one interlocutor may propose a reference to an entity in the discourse, which is then explicitly or implicitly accepted (Brennan & Clark, 1996), with such conceptual pacts forming the basis of a mutual understanding of meaning in spontaneous conversation.

Our data show that the discursive processes involved in such collaborative meaning making via the establishment of shared reference vary across settings and functions of spontaneous communicative interactions. We focus on three different forms of spontaneous spoken interaction: recordings of improvised theatre performances, where one of the main functions of language is to entertain; recordings of task-based conversation in an experimental setting, where informativeness was the focus of the interaction; and casual conversations taken from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE), which combine various functions, including interpersonal relationship building. Our focus lies on the establishment and use of shared references, a process which has been argued to be sensitive to setting, relationship, and purpose of a conversation (e.g., Brennan, Kuhlen & Charoy, 2018). Our analysis focuses on the negotiation of reference, as well as on discursive practices, such as the use of repetition. We identify both parallels in the use of such practices across the three contexts, as well as differences in the form and function of some of the practices, and we argue that differences can be related to the structure and function of the communicative situation.

References


The sensitivity to incoherence during text processing in a second language: the role of the type of connective and coherence relation

Mathis Wetzel

While reading a text, readers expect coherence, whether it is there or not (Hartnett, 1986). This leads to processing disruptions when discourse is actually incoherent, as observed by slower reading times, which persist even to following discourse elements, especially when the incoherence cannot be resolved by finding a conclusive interpretation (Lyu et al., 2020). While the effects of incoherence on native speakers’ processing are rather well documented (e.g., Murray, 1997, Lyu et al., 2020), it is still unknown to what extent non-native speakers are sensitive to incoherent discourse. In this regard, different scenarios are possible.
One the one hand, one may argue that non-native speakers should be somewhat less sensitive to incoherence, as their processing is shallower and needs more cognitive resources, resulting in incoherence remaining undetected a little longer (Clahsen and Feller, 2006). On the other hand, it is also possible that non-native speakers do react to incoherence on a native-like level: it is known that text processing in a second language is much slower, which may compensate for the higher need of cognitive load to read in a L2. Therefore, the detection of incoherence does not necessarily have to be more difficult in a second language.

In order to answer this question, we conducted several self-paced reading tasks in which we tested factors that potentially influence the sensitivity to detect and process incoherence in a second language. In a first experiment, we tested incoherent and coherent sentences that contained either a causal or a concessive coherence relation. Generally, we observed that non-native speakers were quite sensitive to incoherence, but showed only a temporary processing disruption for incoherent causal sentences.

In a second experiment, we assessed whether the processing of incoherent discourse depends also on the type of connective that is used. This time, we presented only concessive sentences that were coherent and incoherent. Importantly, some were marked by a connective that is frequent in spoken language, whereas other sentences contained an infrequent one. Once more, results of this experiment showed that non-native speakers were generally sensitive to incoherent sentences. Yet, the length and occurrence of processing disruptions observed depended on the connective: the frequent connective facilitated the detection of incoherence in comparison to the less-common one.

We conclude that while non-native speakers are sensitive to incoherent discourse, the detection and processing of it depends on linguistic factors.
This paper investigates (i) how contrastive DRs are signalled by L1 and L2 speakers of English in argumentative and narrative discourse, and (ii) how this signalling unfolds during the real-time process of discourse editing. The data stem from an editing-based task in which participants – 14 English native speakers and 22 advanced learners of English (at C1 level) – were asked to edit skeleton-like argumentative and narrative source texts and turn them into well-formed texts of identical genre. Half of the datasets are supplemented with keystroke logging data.

As summarized in Table 1, L1 and L2 speakers signal contrastive DRs in the vast majority of the argumentative texts. However, the difference between L1 and L2 is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3.046; \text{df} = 1; p < 0.1$). The most frequently used contrastive signals are but (as in (1)), however, although and while.

(1) L2_arg08:
9. Some respiratory viruses hit children hard,
10. but Covid-19 has had rather mild effects in kids.

The keystroke data analysis suggests that both groups tend to insert contrastive connectives right from the start of the editing process, which may be due to the high proficiency level of the L2 participants.

In the narrative data, contrastive DRs are signalled less frequently across the two groups and the two data sets. The difference between the narrative and the argumentative data is statistically significant for L1 and L2 ($\chi^2 = 4.977; \text{df} = 1; p < 0.05; \chi^2 = 6.519; \text{df} = 1; p < 0.05$). There is considerable variation regarding (i) the interpretation of which type of DR holds between particular discourse units (e.g. causal vs. contrastive) and (ii) the connective used to signal the relation (e.g. because in (2) and however in (3)).

(2) L1_nar05:
5. The physical pain she suffered was compounded by emotional and psychological distress
6. because her doctor and her family didn’t believe her.

(3) L2_nar04:
5. The physical pain was compounded by emotional and psychological distress.
6. However, her doctor and her family didn’t believe her.

This variation in the narrative data may be due to genre constraints. In argumentative texts a sound argumentation is at issue. In narrative texts, it is chronology, leaving more room for temporal, if not causal, interpretations.

References
The effect of clause structure on discourse relation expectation and interpretation

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A wide variety of textual cues exist that can signal the relation between clauses (Das & Taboada, 2018). Non-connective cues (e.g. negation) have been shown to influence how discourse relations are processed during reading (Crible, 2021; Crible & Pickering, 2020), despite the fact that signaling discourse relations is not their primary function. Here we show how such cues affect other aspects of discourse relational processing. We focus on gerund free adjuncts (GFA), which are subordinate clauses starting with a present participle, as in (1) below:

(1) [Working on her thesis,] Laura drank coffee.

In a corpus investigation of the Penn Discourse Treebank (Webber et al., 2019) and the Blog Authorship Corpus (Schler et al., 2006), sentences with a GFA were found to often convey causal and synchronous relations. The present study investigates how these structures affect readers’ expectations for and their interpretation of these discourse relations.

To examine whether clause structure elicits different expectations for discourse relations, we conducted a sentence continuation experiment. Participants (n=60) were presented with a prompt consisting of either a GFA or a full matrix clause (FMC). Their continuations were annotated for the relation sense with the prompt. Causal (i.e. result) continuations occurred more often after a GFA prompt than an FMC prompt (p < .01). This was also true for synchronous discourse relations (p < .001).

Using a paraphrase selection task, we investigated whether clause structure influences discourse relation interpretation. 24 event pairs were designed such that both a causal and a temporal connection were plausible. The experiment contained four conditions: (1) single sentence with GFA, (2) two separate full matrix clauses (FMC), (3) two clauses connected with a temporal connective (while) and (4) two clauses connected with a causal one (because). Participants (n=88) were asked to read the prompts and select the best-matching paraphrase. The paraphrases were created such that they made the causal, the synchronous or a distractor relation interpretation explicit. Contrary to expectations based on the results of the corpus study and sentence continuation experiment, participants did not select the causal paraphrase more often in the GFA condition compared to the FMC condition (p = .68). Causal paraphrases were,
however, selected more often in the because condition (p < .001). This suggests that connectives, but not clause structure, influences how discourse relations are interpreted.

Our study shows that GFA’s often form a causal or synchronous discourse relation with their matrix clause, which is reflected in the off-line expectations that readers have for discourse relations based on clause structure. However, we found no evidence that this results in differences in how the discourse relation is interpreted. This discrepancy suggests that the effect of non-connective cues on discourse processing might be limited, compared to the widely established effect of connectives (e.g. Sanders & Noordman, 2000; Xiang & Kuperberg, 2015). We are currently conducting a self-paced reading task examining the role of clause structure in the on-line processing of causal relations, which will provide additional insight in the discourse relation expectations elicited by structural cues.

Evaluating speakers’ preferences for different ways of organizing information units in discourse

Audrey Bonvin

The cross-linguistic study of information structure focuses on how speakers of diverse languages tend to use different linguistic means to express similar ideas. Prior research on additive and contrastive relations in narratives concluded that German and Dutch speakers tend to construct their utterances focusing on the assertion component with specific cohesion means such as particles or prosody. In contrast, French and Italian speakers prefer to organize their discourse around other information units such as entities, predicates, or time using a variety of markers like lexical adverbials, anaphoric verbal phrases, pronouns, enrichments of the predication, or cleft sentences (Dimroth, Benazzo, Andorno & Verhagen 2010). For example:

Previous context: Louisa went home.
Observed additive context:
1. Peter ist AUCH nach Hause gegangen (Peter went home, too).
2. Pierre a fait la même chose. (Peter did the same).

These subtle differences in structuring information are partly robust to late L2 learning (Benazzo, Dimroth & Santiago 2021; Benazzo & Andorno 2010). Not matching the target language trends may result in a discourse that sounds unusual. However, we do not know if L1 speakers perceive these cross-linguistic differences in the organization of entities, actions, and time in discourse and whether they prefer a particular cohesion style. Answering this question will help improve our understanding of human cognition (is an individual’s production style congruent with his perception?) and estimate whether these characteristics are worth teaching in L2 classes.

In this workshop, I will focus on methods to assess which structures might be considered unusual. I will draw on two exploratory qualitative studies before opening the discussion about a possible investigation of the cognitive process underlying language treatment via experimental methods.

In study 1, I asked seven L1 speakers of French to evaluate pairs of texts in French, each one structured once according to the French way and once to the Germanic way: a piece of radio news and a live football commentary. Participants were instructed to think aloud during the whole process. Results showed that the preferences depend on the text genre. Moreover, it
shows that people generally do not verbalize the differences between the two versions of one text when only listening to them, but they do it after reading and comparing them.

In study 2, a colleague translated the French-styled radio news into Italian. 18 German students of French or Italian translated these texts into German. We analyze which structures are translated word by word and which ones are changed, and if so, if they were adapted to the German way of structuring information. For instance:

Original context: Le personnel de l'hôpital a fini par les réanimer [...]. (~ The hospital staff ends up resuscitating them)

Translated context in a German style: Diese […] konnten jedoch vor Ort reanimiert werden. (~ These could actually be resuscitated on site)

Future research should investigate spontaneous and unconscious factors affecting L1 speakers’ evaluations or translation choices.

Predicting topic in conversation: A study of turn initial discourse markers in Spanish

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Discourse markers (DMs) have been described as part of the linguistic resources that speakers turn to in order to manage topicality in interaction (e.g., Fraser 1990, Pons Bordería & Estellés Arguedas 2009, Ionescu 2020). Yet, experimental work focusing on their predictive power in this phenomenon remains more limited. The aim of this study is to find out whether speakers can predict topic shift based on discourse markers. To do so, a combination of corpus work and experimental methods is proposed for three DM configurations in Spanish: single “y” (‘and’), perceived lengthened “y” and combined “bueno y” (‘well and’). We hypothesize that topic continuity will be managed by “y” alone, while topic discontinuity will be marked by a combination of cues: DM+ prosody (lengthened “y”) or DM+DM (“bueno y”).

A sample of 400 occurrences of “y” and (perceived) lengthened “y” was randomly extracted and annotated from PRESEEA (Universidad de Alcalá 2014-). A chi-square test of independence showed a significant relation between perceived length and topic continuity in turn initial occurrences by the interviewer, X2 (1, N = 165) = 30.5605, p = < 0.001: lengthened “y” tends to appear at topic shifts, while single “y” is more frequent when the interviewer continues on topic. A subsequent interrater agreement resulted in 82.9% of agreement (κ = 0.63).

Three online tasks –programmed on PsychoPy (v2021.2.3) (Peirce et al. 2019) and hosted on Pavlovia (https://pavlovia.org)— were run; Prolific (https://prolific.co) was used for the recruitment of sixty participants per task. The first one, a norming study, looked to verify the annotation made by raters on topic (dis)continuity. A first threshold of 70% of agreement was applied per condition per item. A total of 13 items was rerecorded and renormed by 30 participants. Renormed items were all included into the final set of stimuli of the second task, a perception study interested in the speaker’s preference for one of two DMs when presented interactions that either stayed on topic or changed topic. A logistic regression model was run using lme4 package in R (R Core Team 2021) to predict the type of discourse marker from the type of continuation; participants and items were included as random effects. Results of a pairwise comparison showed i) a preference for lengthened “y” instead of single “y” when the utterance introduced a new topic instead of the same topic (β = 0.47, SE = 0.12 , p <0.001), ii) a preference for “bueno y” instead of (perceived) lengthened “y” when the utterance introduced a new topic instead of the same topic (β = 1.39, SE = 0.13 , p <0.001) and iii) a preference for
“bueno y” instead of “y” when the utterance introduced a new topic instead of the same topic ($\beta = 1.42$, $SE = 0.13$, $p <0.001$). A third and final task measured the expectations triggered by DMs regarding upcoming discursive topic. Using the same data analysis procedure, topic continuity was predicted by the discourse marker; participants and items were included as random effects. Results showed that the chance for speakers to select new topic instead of same topic increased when presented with a lengthened “y” instead of a single “y” ($\beta = 0.22$, $SE = 0.09$, $p <0.05$); furthermore, this was even higher when presented with “bueno y” instead of “y” ($\beta = 0.93$, $SE = 0.09$, $p <0.001$). Rationale and results will be discussed more in depth during the presentation.