INTERACTION-BASED STUDIES OF LANGUAGE: INTRODUCTION

Cecilia E. Ford and Johannes Wagner

The papers in this issue of *Pragmatics* are aimed at providing accounts for language in what Schegloff has termed its 'primordial' context, that is talk-in-interaction. It is becoming evident to linguists, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists, among other researchers committed to accounting for human behavior, that a full understanding of language is not possible without close and careful attention to the ways in which language is adapted to basic interactional functions. As represented in two major collections that have appeared this year (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 1996; Ochs, Schegloff & Thompson 1996), the study of recurrent linguistic patterns has become, for numerous scholars, inseparable from the study of patterns of social interaction. We offer the present collection of 'Interaction-Based Studies of Language' as a further contribution to the growing literature in this area. The studies in this special issue are based on data from German and English conversations, and they offer new perspectives on how students of language must question and reconceptualize fundamental concepts in linguistic description in order to arrive at an account of language which accords with the empirical data of talk-in-interaction.

The contribution of Gene Lerner calls into question a grammatical category of second person pronoun, a category which many linguists treat as unproblematic. Taking us through several key cases, Lerner demonstrates that an account for the use of you on any particular occasion involves attention to, at least, the sequential organization of the talk so far, the current state of the turn-taking system, and an array of features that are relevant at any point in a conversation, such as shared knowledge and physical setting.

The papers of Peter Auer and Susanne Günthner document turn architecture in German conversation and provide new data and challenges for the study of grammaticalization (Hopper & Traugott 1993). Auer's article also demonstrates the relevance of turn-taking to an account of recurrent patterns in the structure of utterances in German conversation. He provides a description of an initial slot in the architecture of German conversational turns, the 'pre-front field'. Using the term syntactic 'gestalt', a metaphor which captures the emergent and co-constructed nature of the grammatical units in conversation (Auer, this issue, footnote 3), Auer argues that pre-front field is a highly interactional location in turns, but, at the same time, it is a slot which, when filled, still leaves maximal flexibility as to the further projection of the unit in progress. Pre-front field is also shown to be a potential location for interaction-based grammaticalization.

Susanne Günthner's contribution is also one with implications for language

change based on recurrent interactional patterns in conversational German. In her article, Günthner explores the shape of turns involving causal and concessive connectors. Focusing on final adverbial clauses, she documents the variations in word order that are used with such constructions. She reveals social and semantic motivations for such alternations, and offers evidence that, at least for conversational German, a previously reported diachronic tendency merits revision: For German in particular, and for grammaticalization theory in general, clause integration has been postulated to proceed from less syntactic boundedness to more integration, but Günthner's data weigh against such a generalization.

The articles of Selting and Couper-Kuhlen offer models of the kinds of insights that can be gained when the expertise of highly trained linguists is brought to the challenges offered to linguists two decades ago by Sacks et al. (1974) in their account of turn taking. While Sacks et al. pointed to the clear need for some "understanding of sound production" (1974: 721f) for an account of turn projection, they left it to linguists to provide the much needed details of that system. Through the close description of syntax and prosody in turns from German conversations, Selting provides a detailed view of the flexible interplay of prosody and syntax in the projection of possible completion points in her data.

Couper-Kuhlen, like Auer and Günthner, looks at a grammatical pattern that has implications for grammaticalization theory, in this case the recurrent use of 'because' in British and American English interactions. Couper-Kuhlen's study is informed by attention to the acoustic properties of turn production, as is Selting's. In conjunction with interactional analysis of the cases in her data, Couper-Kuhlen uses the acoustic measurement of declination in fundamental frequency as a resource for the description of the connections between clauses.

Finally, the contribution of Ford, Fox, and Thompson takes a critical look at the notion of the turn constructional unit. Similar to Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, this article pays attention to the contributions of syntax and intonation to the shaping of turns. In addition, Ford, Fox and Thompson consider the role of non-verbal features of the interaction in the projection or avoidance of possible turn completion.

The present collection of papers is intended to provide new directions for the combining of linguistic and sociological approaches to language use, - with the goal of moving toward a richer and more widely informed account for the complexities of human interaction.

References

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