INCREMENTS IN CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS[1]

Tsuyoshi Ono and Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen

Abstract

A new area of research called Interactional Linguistics highlights linguistic structure in relation to naturally occurring interaction and is characterized by its cross-linguistic orientation. As a contribution to this new area of research, the present volume is a collection of papers with a cross-linguistic focus; they examine what is often called an 'increment', a grammatical extension of the already completed unit. In this paper, we briefly discuss frameworks and orientations adopted by these studies, as well as some overall themes and common issues.

Keywords: Cross-linguistic; Increment; Interaction; Interactional Linguistics; Linguistic structure.

Recent multidisciplinary approaches to the study of human language have seen the development of a new area of research called Interactional Linguistics, or Interaction and Grammar (Interactional Linguistics hereafter). Representative publications in this new area of research will be found in Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, eds. (1996), Ochs, Schegloff, and Thompson, eds. (1996), Selting and Couper-Kuhlen, eds. (2001), Ford, Fox, and Thompson, eds. (2002a), Couper-Kuhlen and Ford, eds. (2004) and Hakulinen and Selting, eds. (2005). Interactional Linguistics takes naturally occurring interaction as its starting point, as does Conversation Analysis. The latter is the approach which has been perhaps most influential in the development of Interactional Linguistics, in that it provides a model for the interactional underpinnings of grammar. Among the unique contributions of Interactional Linguistics are its highlight on linguistic structure in relation to interaction and its cross-linguistic orientation. That is, linguistic structure, what might be considered by many to be a mostly mechanical yet fundamental part of human language, has traditionally been studied based on the inspection of isolated sentences constructed by the researchers themselves. More recently, however, through microscopic examinations of naturally occurring talk, Interactional Linguists have been uncovering the inseparable nature of linguistic structure and interaction, thus establishing the study of language use as the prerequisite to understand linguistic structure. That is, it is becoming increasingly clear that only by examining language use, can one begin to understand what grammar is and how it functions. Similarly, only through a cross-linguistic comparison based on studies of actual usage of individual

---

languages can one meaningfully pose questions about possible structural variations among different languages and shared features.

As a further contribution to this new area of research, the following is a collection of papers with cross-linguistic focus, the outcome of international collaboration over the past few years. Specifically, these papers examine what is often called an 'increment', a phenomenon which has been the focus of a recent series of investigations including Auer (1996), Schegloff (1996, 2000, 2001), Uhmann (1997, 2001), Tanaka (1999, 2001), Koike (2003), Walker (2001, 2004), Ford, Fox, and Thompson (2002b), Schneider (2003), and Vorreiter (2003). Apart from the studies by Koike and Tanaka, however, the target of these investigations has been limited to Germanic languages, English and German specifically. The aim of this collection of papers is to report the results of initial studies of 'incrementing' in several genetically, areally and typologically diverse languages. We hope that the examination of incrementing in these diverse languages and the theoretical explorations based on it will add to our understanding of 'increments' in particular and of grammar and interaction in general.

The rest of this introduction will briefly discuss frameworks and orientations adopted by the studies included in this volume, as well as some overall themes and issues common to the studies. Before going any further, however, we present an example which will serve to illuminate the arguments made in the papers to follow. On occasion, speakers who reach a point of possible completion in some turn-at-talk may subsequently decide – for whatever reason or contingency – to continue that turn instead. It has been argued that for this situation there are two alternatives: the speaker can produce more talk by building a new turn-constructional unit (TCU), or the speaker can produce more talk by adding on material which extends the structure of the prior unit (an increment) [cf. e. g. Schegloff 1996]. The following conversational excerpt shows these two possibilities being implemented:

```
1 Ava:  I'll give yih call tomo[rrow.]
2 Bee:                          [Yeh: ] 'n [I'll be ho:me t'mor]row.
3 Ava:                                     When I-I get  home.]
4 Ava: I don't kno-w- I could be home by- hh three, I c'd be home
         by two I don't know.                    (from Schegloff 1996: 90)
```

In line 1 Ava's talk has reached a point of possible completion at *I'll give yih call tomorrow*. This bit of talk is grammatically complete and is also heard as prosodically complete (as indicated by the period). However, in line 3, in overlap with Bee's perfectly legitimate incoming, Ava continues talking with *When I-I get home*. This is an **increment** because it grammatically extends her prior unit: *I'll give yih call tomorrow when I-I get home*. At the end of this extended unit, which is grammatically complete and also heard as prosodically complete (again as indicated by the period), there comes another point of possible completion. Yet once more Ava produces further talk: *I don't kno-w-* (an epistemic discourse marker) *I could be home by- hh three*. Since this new material cannot be construed as a grammatical continuation of her prior (extended) unit, it must be considered as forming a **new** (clausal) **TCU**.

1. Frameworks/orientations

As in other studies within the framework of Interactional Linguistics, the papers in the present collection exhibit influences from diverse areas of research on language, including Conversation Analysis, Functional Linguistics and Phonetics. Being multidisciplinary, the Interactional Linguistic approach is not confined to the narrow spheres of traditional investigation, which are founded partly on the belief that language is modular and therefore can be, or even should be, studied by looking at only one module at a time. Instead, it embraces a much broader perspective from the outset.

The five 'case study' papers are oriented towards a variety of more specific theoretical and methodological frameworks. Kim's study on Korean may be characterized as closely associated with Conversation Analysis proper (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974; Schegloff 1996). Couper-Kuhlen and Ono's cross-linguistic study of English, German, and Japanese is couched in terms of the classification of 'increment' recently proposed in Vorreiter (2003), which was in turn influenced by such studies as Geluykens (1994), Auer (1996), Schegloff (1996, 2001), and Ford, Fox, and Thompson (2002b).

The study by Seppänen and Laury on Finnish is based on Ford, Fox, and Thompson's influential work (2002b) on English 'increments'. Seppänen and Laury focus on a particular Finnish form, clauses marked with *et*(*tä*), and show how their various uses are associated with different degrees of syntactic (in)dependence on/from a previously completed utterance. This has the consequence that, at least in structural terms, only some *et*(*tä*) clauses can be considered increments, or perhaps more precisely, that *et*(*tä*)-clauses must be considered more or less incremental. (More about this below.)

The main goal of the study by Field is to describe 'increments' in Navajo, a language for which we have very little information about grammar in interaction. Field makes eclectic use of several of the above-mentioned studies, including Schegloff (1996), Ford, Fox, and Thompson (2002b), and Vorreiter (2003), for her purposes.

The study by Luke and Zhang on Mandarin Chinese develops its own framework and demonstrates what may be gained when a language other than English is taken as the starting point for an examination of grammar in interaction. This paper serves as a reminder of how it can be problematic for so-called studies of human language to start with English.

Due to the variety of frameworks and orientations, the reader may find some terminological differences between the contributions in the volume. (The paper by Luke and Zhang reviews some of these.) In order to respect the tradition of each framework presented, we have not insisted on a standardization of terminology. Yet, although there are orientational differences among the studies, they actually share important interconnected themes and issues, several of which will be addressed in the sections below.

2. Structural definitions and the nature of language

Though syntax plays a major role in early conceptions of incrementing (e.g., Schegloff 1996), studies in this volume take into consideration not only structural factors but also functional factors. The motivation behind such a stance is that if structural criteria alone

are used for determining what an increment is, cases where the candidate increment is syntactically independent from the preceding unit but still functions like an increment may be missed (e.g., Free constituents in Vorreiter's classification (2003)).

It should be pointed out that there is a diachronic dimension to what counts as an increment: The determination of increment status is interconnected with grammaticization. For instance, the various uses of *et(tä)*-clauses in Finnish form a cline from being clearly incremental to being clearly non-incremental. This cline seems to reflect an on-going change, namely that *et(tä)*-clauses are becoming syntactically independent. If the object of investigation is in the process of changing, then it makes sense that the outcome is not either increment or non-increment but more or less incremental. Yet *et(tä)*-clauses, even if fully grammaticized as independent clauses, are doing incremental work. This example is one that demonstrates the necessity of taking function into consideration in order to see the entire spectrum of related constructions, and the ways in which they can develop out of other structures. Nor is this phenomenon an isolated one; similar cases are observed in other languages, e.g. (*be*)*cause* in English, *weil* in German, and *kara* in Japanese, some of which will be discussed in this volume. Linguistic structures then are what are temporarily captured at various points in the on-going and constant processes of grammaticization.

To appreciate the domain of inquiry proposed with this collection of research, it is necessary to remember that the object of study, human language, is one of constant change, and that it is therefore necessary to begin with an inclusive scope of investigation. This stance is all the more essential when the exploration of a phenomenon is still in the initial stages, as it is with increments.

3. Cross-linguistic starting point

As in many other cross-linguistic studies, most of the papers in this collection are informed by studies of increments in English, especially Schegloff (1996, 2000, 2001) and Ford, Fox and Thompson (2002b). This begs the question of what the results of a study might be that takes its starting point from another language. Auer's seminal work on German (1996) and Luke's and Zhang's study on Mandarin Chinese (this volume) give us some idea of what we stand to gain by doing so. Indeed, some of the distinctions which are made based on English may turn out to be invalid from a cross-linguistic perspective (e.g., Replacement vs. Insertable in Vorreiter's classification (2003)). A cross-linguistic perspective may even suggest the possibility that the importance of the distinction between TCU continuation vs. new TCU itself might vary between languages, since a TCU is a syntactic unit and it seems reasonable to suppose that the nature of syntactic units, both in size and fixedness, can vary across languages.

4. What an 'increment' does

As for what an 'increment' does, Schegloff (2001: 42) explicitly states that increments serve many functions. In a subsequent paper, Ford, Fox and Thompson (2002b) find that their increments are used to solve recipiency problems, i.e., to elicit uptake by the recipient, by recompleting the just completed syntactic unit and providing a second transition-relevance place. The cross-linguistic investigation reported here seems to

support Schegloff by showing that more than just recipiency is at play. Kim's study (this volume), for instance, shows that increments in Korean are often motivated by the allusive nature of the host TCU, i.e. by a practice of turn design rather than by a problem of uptake. In fact, as Field's paper (this volume) suggests, eliciting uptake may not be a factor at all in Navajo interaction, where the idea of recipiency appears to be radically different from that in English.

5. Canonical syntax

As seen in much of the work in Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics, the papers in this volume assume 'canonical' syntax at some level. For instance, Japanese and Navajo are considered to be predicate-final languages, and German is considered to have a 'right brace'. The unanswered question seems to be how 'canonical syntax' is established. What is considered 'canonical' in each language is often influenced by the grammar of written language, or worse, by native linguists' intuition. As a result, what has been assumed to be standard syntax may actually not be the standard syntax of spoken language. In fact, if actual interaction is taken as a basis for canonical syntax, some categories of 'increment' may disappear altogether, either merging into another category or morphing into non-increments (e.g., Insertables and Non-add-ons in Vorreiter's classification (2003)). Thus, establishing 'canonical syntax' based on interactional data, using both qualitative and quantitative methodology, should become one of the immediate goals on the research agenda of Interactional Linguists (Ochs, Schegloff, and Thompson, eds. (1996), Selting and Couper-Kuhlen, eds. (2001), Ford, Fox, and Thompson (2002c), Hakulinen and Selting, eds. (2005)).

6. Papers

Five papers in the volume (those by Couper-Kuhlen and Ono; Seppänen and Laury; Kim; Luke and Zhang; Field) are case studies on 'increments' and related phenomena in English, German, Japanese; Finnish; Korean; Mandarin Chinese; and Navajo, respectively. Specifically, Couper-Kuhlen and Ono report on a cross-linguistic study of English, German and Japanese which explores what might be gained by looking at linguistic structure in actual use in more than one language at a time. It proposes a working typology of turn continuation based on syntactic, prosodic and pragmatic completion of prior talk. The typology is used to establish the intimate connection between various turn continuation types and actions. This paper serves as the lead article to the rest of the papers in the volume.

The paper by Seppänen and Laury on Finnish examines the *että*-clause, which has traditionally been described as a complement clause. The *että*-clause in actual use, however, is found in various grammatical configurations, each associated with different actions including its clear incrementing use. These uses can be seen to reflect different stages of a gradual on-going change, thus adding a diachronic dimension to our collective efforts to understand turn continuation in terms of linguistic structure and interaction. Further, it allows us to appreciate the nature of linguistic categories with which interactants operate.

More so than other papers in this volume, Kim's detailed examination of Korean is couched in terms of Conversational Analysis proper in terms of the adoption of terminology and analytic procedures. At the same time, however, this paper is rather unique in that it treats affect and prosody, especially rhythm, in relation to various actions associated with turn continuation types in Korean.

Luke and Zhang propose another typology of turn continuation in their examination of Mandarin Chinese. This involves the characterization of further talk in relation to prior talk: Syntactic (dis)continuity, main vs. subordinate intonation, prospective or retrospective orientation, and information (non-)focus. We welcome this 'competing' conceptualization since the categories we work with obviously should not be predetermined, but instead be constantly negotiated reflecting the reality of data and findings accumulated through our continued research.

Field provides us with precious data from Navajo, whose grammar in relation to interaction has been studied only minimally. The well-documented interactional style of Navajo which Field discusses forces us to re-think the cross-linguistic applicability of proposed and/or established categories in turn continuation and perhaps even the notion of turn continuation itself.

As an 'incremental' contribution to these articles on increments, Peter Auer takes a more theoretical stance, exploring further possibilities while summarizing the current state of investigation and providing constructive criticism. In particular, he points out that what might be considered the current standard definition of increment is too narrowly focused on English and thus might not be well-suited to handle other languages. He also advocates taking a multi-modal perspective by examining not only syntax, prosody, and semantics but also actions and non-verbal behavior to approach the phenomenon.

Finally, it should be noted that several different transcription systems and their variants are employed by the papers represented in this volume. Readers should consult Atkinson and Heritage (1984), Du Bois et al. (1993) and Selting et al. (1998) for further details of these systems.

The papers in this volume are based on presentations given in the panel 'Turn continuations in cross-linguistic perspective' organized by the present editors at the 8th IPrA meeting at Toronto in July 2003. We would like to thank our discussants, Peter Auer and Sandy Thompson, and the audience for their invaluable input, and for creating an intellectually stimulating, yet friendly forum. We would also like to thank the reviewers and the editors of *Pragmatics* for their detailed comments and their assistance throughout the course of editing the volume. It is hoped that this volume will be one way to share our findings and the excitement of that event with those interested, while at the same time making a positive contribution to our collective endeavors in the interaction-centered investigation of human language.

References

Atkinson, J. Maxwell, and John Heritage (eds.) (1984) *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*, ix - xvi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Auer, Peter. (1996) On the prosody and syntax of turn-taking. In Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen and Margret Selting (eds.), *Prosody in Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 57-100.

Couper-Kuhlen, Elizabeth, and Cecilia E. Ford (eds.) (2004) *Sound Patterns in Interaction*. Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company.

Couper-Kuhlen, Elizabeth, and Margret Selting (eds.) (1996) *Prosody in Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Du Bois, John, Stephan Schuetze-Coburn, Danae Paolino, and Susanna Cumming (1993) Outline of discourse transcription. In Jane A. Edwards and Martin D. Lampert (eds.), *Talking Data: Transcription and Coding Methods for Language Research*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 45-89.

Ford, Cecilia E., Barbara A. Fox, and Sandra A. Thompson (eds.) (2002a) *The Language of Turn and Sequence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ford, Cecilia E., Barbara A. Fox, and Sandra A. Thompson (2002b) Constituency and the grammar of turn increments. In Cecilia E. Ford, Barbara A. Fox, and Sandra A. Thompson (eds.), *The Language of Turn and Sequence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 14-38.

Ford, Cecilia E., Barbara A. Fox, and Sandra A. Thompson (2002c) Social Interaction and grammar. In Michael Tomasello (ed.), *The New Psychology of Language: Cognitive and Functional Approaches to Language Structure, Vol. 2*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 119-143.

Geluykens, Ronald. 1994. *The Pragmatics of Discourse Anaphora in English: Evidence from conversational repair.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Hakulinen, Auli, and Margret Selting (eds.) (2005) *Syntax and Lexis in Conversation*. Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company.

Koike, Chisato (2003) An analysis of increments in Japanese conversation in terms of syntax and prosody. In P.M. Clancy (ed.), *Japanese/Korean Linguistics 11*. Stanford: CSLI, pp. 67-80.

Ochs, Elinor, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Sandra A. Thompson (eds.) (1996) *Interaction and Grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sacks, Harvey, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson (1974) A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language* 50.4: 696-735.

Schegloff, Emanuel A. (1996) Turn organization: One direction for inquiry into grammar and interaction. In Elinor Ochs, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Sandra A. Thompson, eds., *Interaction and Grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 52-133.

Schegloff, Emanuel A. (2000) On turns' possible completion, more or less: increments and trail-offs. Paper delivered at the *1st Euroconference on Interactional Linguistics*, Spa, Belgium.

Schegloff, Emanuel A. (2001) Conversation analysis: A project in process - increments. Forum Lecture, LSA Linguistics Institute, UC Santa Barbara.

Schneider, Daniela (2003) Free constituents in English and German conversations. MA thesis, Department of Linguistics, University of Konstanz.

Selting, Margret, Peter Auer, et al. (1998) Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem. *Linguistische Berichte*, 173: 91-122.

Selting, Margret, and Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen (eds.) (2001) *Studies in Interactional Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company.

Tanaka, Hiroko (1999) *Turn-taking in Japanese Conversation: A study in grammar and interaction*. Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company.

Tanaka, Hiroko (2001) The implementation of possible cognitive shifts in Japanese conversation: Complementizers as pivotal devices. In Margret Selting and Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen (eds.), *Studies in Interactional Linguistics,* 81-109. Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 81-109.

Uhmann, Susanne (1997) *Grammatische Regeln und konversationelle Strategien. Fallstudien aus Syntax und Phonologie*. Tübingen, Niemeyer.

Uhmann, Susanne (2001) Some arguments for the relevance of syntax to same-sentence self-repair in everyday German conversation. *Studies in Interactional Linguistics*. M. Selting and E. Couper-Kuhlen, eds. Amsterdam, Benjamins**:** pp. 373-404.

Vorreiter, Susanne (2003) Turn continuations: Towards a cross-linguistic classification. *InLiSt, Interaction and Linguistic Structures, No. 39*. http://www.rz.uni-potsdam.de/u/inlist.

Walker, Gareth (2001) *A phonetic approach to talk-in-interaction – increments in conversation*. MA thesis, University of York, UK.

Walker, Gareth (2004) On some interactional and phonetic properties of increments to turns in talk-in-interaction. In E. Couper-Kuhlen and C.E. Ford (eds.), *Sound Patterns in Interaction.* Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company: pp. 147-169**.**