

Grammar, interaction and intersubjectivity

Marja Etelämäki
University of Helsinki

Using examples from audio and video recorded everyday conversations the paper will discuss levels of shared understanding in interaction. It will merge the theory of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 2008) with the method of Conversation Analysis (see Schegloff 2006), and propose that grammar provides means for constituting intersubjective understanding of the referential world as well as of the on-going speech situation in interaction. The paper will pay particular attention to the construals of the speech situation i.e. the *ground* that are provided by grammar. It will suggest that analyzing data from naturally occurring interactions will give insight as to what is involved in intersubjective understanding in different types of activities.

The activity in the focus of the paper is third party assessments in everyday interaction. In the conversation analytic tradition, assessments are viewed as inherently affective activity sequences with which participants in a conversation negotiate positive or negative stances towards states of affairs, persons or groups of people. With assessments, participants create a sense of sharedness concerning experiences in the world (Goodwin & Goodwin 1992), and negotiate entitlement to experiences and affect (Heritage 2011; Lindström & Sorjonen in press). The paper will focus on assessments that concern non-present persons or groups, and discuss the everyday micro-mechanisms in and through which social relationships, images of 'self', 'us' and 'the others' are construed and evaluated. The focus will be on grammatical organizations of the speech situation (*ground*): how the linguistic structures used for assessments position the participants of a conversation, e.g., as co-evaluator, as having direct/indirect access to the experience, as having/not having equal rights to evaluate.

In discussing both, the on-line construal of intersubjective understanding between the participants of an interaction, and the linguistic means by which the on-line construal of intersubjective understanding is achieved, the paper approaches intersubjectivity from two perspectives: as an inherent human property, and as an interactional achievement. It will conclude that grammar can be understood as a product, a means for, and as a manifestation of human intersubjectivity.

References

- Goodwin, C. & Goodwin, M. Harness 1992: Assessments and the construction of context. – A. Duranti & C. Goodwin (eds.), *Rethinking context. Language as an interactive phenomenon*. CUP.
- Heritage, J. 2011: Territories of knowledge, territories of experience: empathic moments in interaction. – Stivers, T., L. Mondada & J. Steensig (eds.), *The morality of knowledge in conversation*, 159–183. CUP.
- Levinson, S. C. 2006: On the human "interaction engine". – Levinson, S. C. & N. J. Enfield (eds.), *Roots of human sociality*, 39–69. Berg.
- Lindström, A. & M.-L. Sorjonen (in press): Affiliation in conversation. – J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (eds.), *Handbook of conversation analysis*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Schegloff, E. A. 2007: Sequence organization in interaction: A primer in conversation analysis. CUP.
- Tomasello, M., M. Carpenter, J. Call, T. Behne & H. Moll 2005: Understanding and sharing intentions: The origins of cultural cognition. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 28:675–735.
- Zlatev, J. A., T. P. Racine, C. Sinha & E. Itkonen 2008: Intersubjectivity. What makes us human. – J. Zlatev, T. Racine, C. Sinha & E. Itkonen (eds.), *The shared mind: Perspectives on intersubjectivity*, 1–14. Benjamins.
- Zlatev, J. A. 2008: The co-evolution of intersubjectivity and bodily mimesis. – J. Zlatev, T. Racine, C. Sinha & E. Itkonen (eds.), *The shared mind*, 215–244. Benjamins.