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### *Intentions and perspectives in language use*

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# Intentions and perspectives in language use

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and motivation of the presentation

Verbal communication is not the only form of language use.

Various forms of language use  
(cultural differences)

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graph TD; A[Various forms of language use (cultural differences)] --> B[Social forms]; A --> C[Individual forms];
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Social forms

information transmission,  
communication, manipulation

Individual forms

thinking, memorizing,  
learning, singing for fun

Social forms of language use:

- speakers perform utterances toward other persons
- speakers' intentions which are indicated by means of linguistic and non-linguistic clues such as perspective (Németh T. 2008).

## 1.2 Aims

- (i) To analyze how speakers realize their intentions through perspectives in social forms of language use.
- (ii) To examine how partners infer speakers' intentions taking their perspectives relying on indicators provided by speakers and according to their own perspectives.
- (iii) To shed light on whether the success of social language use can be predicted according to the extent the speakers' and hearers' perspectives coincide or differ from each other.

## 2 Perspectives in various forms of language use

### 2.1 On the notion of perspective

(i) In some approaches the terms *perspective* and *point of view* (*view point*) is distinguished in accordance with to whom the informational content of the speaker's utterance is assigned (Sanders and Spooren 1997, MacWhinney 2005).

- Point of view: the speaker is the subject who is responsible for the informational content of the utterance.
- Perspectivization: taking the partner's perspective (shift of point of view).
- The other persons' perspectives can be established by means of various linguistic and non-linguistic elements in the speakers' utterance.

## Situation:

In a Saturday morning the father is talking to his children in their room, while the mother is preparing breakfast in the kitchen. The father and the kids are planning the day and the kids enumerate what they want to do.

## Conversation:

(1) Father: Kids, what would you like to eat for lunch today?

Daughter: Fish soup would be OK, Daddy, as mum said yesterday.

Son: If there are pancakes as well.

The mother in the kitchen can hear the father's utterance and report on what she heard explicitly creating a new actual speaker who is identical with the father whose utterance is embedded in her utterance.

(2) Father asked: “Kids, what would you like to eat for lunch today?”

The indicators of perspective taking:

- father's perspective: *father, asked, direct quotation*
- son's perspective: *father*

(3) My son likes pancakes.

The mother implicitly creates a perspective by using the mental state predicate *like*, by which she attributes a feeling to her son.

(ii) In other, experimental approaches the terms *perspective* and *point of view* are not distinguished (Epley et al. 2004; Keysar 2007; Bezuidenhout 2013).

- People's perceptions of the physical and social world can occasionally differ from the perceptions of others, since they are perspective bound. Egocentrism.
- People are social beings, they are able to take perspectives of their partners in social interactions (Tomasello 1999) and indicate this perspective taking by means of various linguistic and other ostensive stimuli.
- People cannot set aside entirely their own perspective when they take others' perspectives. Perspective taking can happen only through an initial, individual perspective which is altered by taking other people's perspective.

The accounts for perspective taking in communication can be classified into two opposite groups (Bezuidenhout 2013).

- (i) Individualistic approaches: speakers and hearers automatically and subconsciously use their own anchored egocentric perspective as a starting point, and in a second phase they subsequently, serially, and effortfully account for differences between their own and others' perspectives until a plausible estimate is reached (cf. e.g. Epley et al. 2004; Keysar 2007).
- (ii) Non-individualistic theories: speakers and hearers are not egocentric, communication is cooperative (cf. e.g. Brown-Schmidt, Gunlogson, and Tanenhaus 2008; Bezuidenhout 2013). The common ground information is used from the very beginning of production and comprehension processes. Perspective taking occurs from the very first moments of conversations.

Partners are individuals and social beings simultaneously, there must be important points in both opposing theories:

- Human direct perceptions and mental phenomena are individual, egocentric processes and states (Epley 2008).
- Direct perceptions and mental phenomena have relevant common properties between people. Cognition is grounded in the human body (MacWhinney 2005). People cannot perceive the world in an arbitrary way.
- The biological embodiment and social aspects decrease the egocentric character of perspective.
- Perspective taking has egocentric properties as well.
- In a plausible account both egocentric and social phenomena must be assumed in the case of having a perspective and perspective taking.

## 2.2 Intentions and perspectives in language use

Perspective: an initially egocentric mental position of a language user which is grounded in her individual brain.

Perspective taking: in social forms of language use speakers and listeners should take into account their partner's perspective altering their own initially egocentric perspective

- Analyses of (3) and (1).

(3) My son likes pancakes.

(1) Father: Kids, what would you like to eat for lunch today?

Daughter: Fish soup would be OK, Daddy, as mum said yesterday.

Son: If there are pancakes as well.

From these analyses it is obvious that to infer someone's intention taking her/his perspective is needed.

Perspective is a complex mental position which is formulated from two kinds of information:

(i) Perceivable pieces of information from directly observable physical and social environment: time, space, different kinds of participants, and social relations.

- According to observable categories spatial, temporal, and social viewpoints can be assumed with various linguistic indicators which are treated under the label of deixis. Deixis can be organized in an egocentric way.

(4) Can Billie have an ice-cream, *Daddy*? Levinson (1983: 54–68)

(5) Can Billie have an ice-cream, *Darling*?

- The indicators of the mother's perspective taking: *Daddy*, *Darling*.

(ii) The other information package in one's perspective: mental states such as e.g. representations of previous experience, background knowledge, emotions, attitudes.

- The analyses of (4) and (5) reveal that social viewpoint in one's perspective which can be expressed by means of linguistic elements of social deixis is also a complex position.
- The social viewpoint is formulated from information originated from perceptions as well as from general and particular background knowledge concerning relatives' relations.

Modification of the situation in (4).

The father has punished little Billie for his naughty behavior and prohibited him from eating ice-cream. The father starts eating ice-cream and little Billie, who would like to eat ice-cream, does not want to ask his father to let him eat ice-cream. The mother who does not know anything about the punishment enters the room and realizes that the father is eating ice-cream and little Billie is watching the father ravenously.

- Interpretation according to the mother's perspective taking.



From this analysis it can be concluded that

(i) to have intentions is possible only within a particular perspective,

(ii) to infer someone's intentions is only possible if we take her/his perspective,

(iii) it is reasonable to assume an intentional viewpoint within one's perspective similarly to assuming temporal, spatial, and social viewpoints.

The perspectival nature of intentions can be detected in distinguishing between social forms of language use.

## 2.3 Perspectives and intentions in successful social forms of language use

**Verbal communication** can be successful if partners can take into account each other's perspective and altering their egocentric perspective formulate a shared perspective (Semin 2000; Epley et al. 2004).

Communicators attempt to maximize the extent to which partners can share their perspectives providing clear clues about which perspectives they should assume and how they should move from one perspective to the next (MacWhinney 2005: 198).

In successful verbal communication the communicator should have informative and communicative intentions toward her partner which are included in the intentional viewpoint of her perspective.

Modified version of situation and conversation in (1):

The father is cleaning the living room, the mother is in the kitchen, and the kids are playing in their own room. Suddenly, it came to the father's mind that he had forgotten to do the shopping, therefore asks the children what they wanted to eat for lunch.

(6) Father: Kids, what would you like to eat for lunch today?

Daughter: Fish soup would be OK **for both of** us, Daddy, as mum said yesterday.

Son: If there are pancakes as well.

## Analysis of communication between father and daughter:

- Attraction of the kids' attention: loudly uttered sequence of sounds, vocative form *Kids*.
- Expression of the father's social viewpoint: *Kids*.
- Expression of the father's communicative intention: *Kids*, information requesting question.
- The daughter turns her attention to the father and realizes his communicative intention relying on the non-linguistic and linguistic clues.
- Answering the father's question, the daughter accepts the invitation to communicate, she takes her father's perspective realizing the father's informative and communicative intentions.
- The father's and daughter's intentional viewpoints regarding the interaction between them coincide, therefore, the communication is successful.

**In informative language use** the speaker has only an informative intention.

- Attraction of the attention of a person to be informed is necessary: loudly speaking (no vocative forms or information requesting questions (cf. Németh T. 2008)).
- The speaker wants to develop a perspective in the person to be informed which does not contain any pieces of information about her informative intention.
- The speaker does not want the person to be informed to take her perspective totally.
- The speaker's and hearer's perspectives should not coincide absolutely.

## Interpretation of the speaker's behavior in information transmission

- (i) The person to be informed takes a perspective according to which she believes that she has received the information conveyed by the speaker accidentally.
- (ii) The person to be informed realizes the speaker's informative intention.

The son's utterance:

- There is no need to communicate with the father: *both of us*.
- Communication with the sister.
- Information transmission toward the father: loudly speaking of the utterance directly addressed to the sister.

The father's interpretation of the son's utterance from three different perspectives:

- (i) The father believes that he has heard his son's utterance only accidentally. The son's and the father's intentional viewpoints differ from each other.
- (ii) The father assumes that the son has an informative intention toward him as well. The father's and the son's intentional viewpoints coincide with regard to the son's informative intention.
- (iii) The father thinks that the son communicates with him. According to this intentional viewpoint the father assumes that his son has more intentions than he really has, thus, their perspectives do not coincide either.

- The son's informative language use can be successful in all three cases, if the father is able to process the information intended by the son.
- For successful informative language use, it is sufficient if the person to be informed processes the information in the way intended by the speaker.
- If this person recognizes the speaker's informative intention or she assumes that the speaker has informative and communicative intentions, this does not decrease the success of information transmission.
- On the contrary, the supposition of informative and communicative intentions may increase the success of information transmission (Németh T. 2008).

## Manipulation through information transmission

A further interpretation of the son's utterance:

- The son may perform three kinds of language use by one and the same utterance: toward his sister he performs a verbal communicative act, toward the father an informative act, and toward the mother a manipulative act through information transmission.
- The son's intentional viewpoint includes all these three intentions and various combinations of them.
- In order to achieve successful forms of language use, the family members should take perspectives intended by the son.

## Son's language use toward his mother:

- For a successful manipulation, the son attempts to develop in his mother a perspective according to which she should believe that she accidentally hears her son's utterance, and, therefore, as a good mother she will happily make pancakes as well.
- The recognition of the son's manipulative intention can yield unsuccessful manipulation.
- In manipulative information transmission the son's and his mother's perspectives should not coincide, the mother's intentional viewpoint should not contain the son's manipulative intention.

## Manipulation through communication

Another modification of the situation in (6):

The son also has a manipulative intention toward his sister in addition to his informative and communicative intentions. He would like to influence his sister to ask their mother to make pancakes as well. The son performs manipulation through verbal communication.

- Manipulative communication can be successful if the communicator's manipulative intention is not recognized by the partner.
- In successful manipulative communication the intentional viewpoints of the communicator and her partner should not share the communicator's manipulative intention.

### 3 Summary

The analyses have shown that the success of informative, communicative and manipulative forms of language use seems to be partly predicted according to what extent the speakers' and hearers' intentional viewpoints in their perspectives coincide or differ from each other.

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**Thank you for your attention.**