Exploring the inter-personal context: methods and tools

Henrik Bergqvist
henrik.bergqvist@ling.su.se
A documentary perspective

• How do we best approach the issue of documenting linguistic constructions that express aspects of the interactional/inter-personal context in language?

• How do we identify and elicit relevant constructions?
From the perspective of epistemicity

• How can we distinguish between different motivations for assuming ”sharedness”, or ”exclusiveness” between the speech-act participants?

• Access

• Knowledge

• Epistemic authority

• Attitude

• Problems of definition and conceptual overlap
Overview

• Background and aims
• Engagement, evidentiality, and epistemic authority
• Structured elicitation tasks
• Parameters of the interactional context
• Final remarks
Background and aims

• “Towards a Typology of Engagement”, a project recently funded by the Swedish Research Council and the Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg’s Stiftelse (MAW)

• The project aims to develop a typology of “engagement” in five genetically and typologically distinct languages in order to determine the typological range of such expressions in terms of their form, meaning, function, diachrony, and use

• Requires strategies to elicit forms of engagement with an aim to pinpoint their semantics in terms of accessibility, knowledge, and authority
Engagement

• “a grammatical system for encoding the relative accessibility of an entity or state of affairs to the speaker and addressee” (Evans et al. 2018a: 118).

• targets (a)symmetries in the speaker-hearer dyad with respect to how reference is made to objects and events.

• E.g. ”I know $p$ and I assume you do too.”, vs. ”I know $p$ and I assume that you do not.”
Kogi: *na-/ni-*

(1)a. *kwisá na-gu-kú*
    dance.PERF SPKR.ASYM-do-1S
    ‘I danced.’
    [e.g. as a reply to a question about what the speaker was doing before]

    b. *kwisá ni-gu-ku*
    dance.PERF SPKR.SYM-do-1S
    ‘I danced.’
    [the speaker confirms what the addressee already knew]

(Bergqvist 2016)
Southern Nambikwara: verification

• “individual” (-na\textsuperscript{2}) vs. “collective” observation (-ti\textsuperscript{2}tu\textsuperscript{3})

(2)a. \textit{wa}\textsuperscript{3}\textit{kon}\textsuperscript{3}-\emptyset-\emptyset-\textit{na}\textsuperscript{2}-\textit{la}\textsuperscript{2}
work-3SG-T/E-IO-PERF
‘He worked today (I saw it, but you didn’t)’
(Kroeker 2001: 88, ex 300 [my adjusted glossing])

b. \textit{wa}\textsuperscript{3}\textit{kon}\textsuperscript{3}-\emptyset-\textit{tait}\textsuperscript{1}-\textit{ti}\textsuperscript{2}\textit{tu}\textsuperscript{3}-\textit{wa}\textsuperscript{2}
work-3SG-OA.MIDP-COL-PERF
‘He worked (we saw both saw it)’
(Lowe 1999: 276 [my adjusted glossing])
Differences in scope

• Percetual/cognitive accessibility: Southern Nambikwra
• Knowledge: Kogi
• Epistemic authority
Kogi: shi-/sha-

(3)a. *nas hanchibé sha-kwísa=tuk-(k)u*
    1s.IND good ADR.ASYM-dance=be.loc-1S

    ‘I am dancing well {in your opinion}?’

(BUN_090824)

- Marks a proposition as inaccessible to the speaker, acknowledging the epistemic authority of the addressee

b. *kwísa-té shi-ba-lox*
    dance-IMPF ADR.SYM-2S-be.loc

    ‘You’re dancing {confirming/apparently}?’

(BUN_090824)

- Marks a proposition as accessible to the speaker, but acknowledging the epistemic authority of the addressee
Epistemic authority

• Concerns a speech-act participants’ claim of ”rights to information” (cf. Kamio 1997; Heritage 2012)
• Non-defeasible semantic feature in egophoric marking (Bergqvist & Knuchel 2017; cf. San Roque et al. 2018)
• Markers of epistemic authority may evolve from evidential forms (Grzech 2016) and from person markers (Schultze-Berndt 2017; Bergqvist 2018; Bergqvist & Kittilä 2017)
Kamio (1997): territories of information

1) information obtained from internal or direct experience,
2) detailed professional/expertise knowledge,
3) reliable information that one of the speech-act participants commits to,
4) information about persons, objects, events and facts close to one of the speech-act participants, including personal information

(Kamio 1997: 39)
Also, the speaker’s involvement..

• Volitional actions
• Participation
• Affectedness
• Attitudes
Eliciting engagement

• Elicitation strategies for engagement aim to pinpoint differences and overlaps between the access/knowledge/authority that may be attributed to the speech-act participants.

• Can these distinct, but overlapping, motivations for expressing engagement be teased apart in developing strategies for eliciting forms of engagement?

• Such strategies put the configuration and the roles of the speech participants at center stage, possibly including the conductor of the elicitation task, bringing meta-level communication into the setting of the elicitation.
Elicitation tasks

• The HCRC Map Task (groups.inf.ed.ac.uk/maptask)
• The diff-task: A symmetrical dyadic multimodal interaction task. (Enfield & De Ruiter 2003)
• Family Problems Picture Task (San Roque et al. 2012)
The HCRC Map Task

• Two, visually isolated speakers each have a map before them. One speaker has the task of guiding the other along a path. The maps are not identical, which requires verbal strategies for solving the existing differences in perspective.
The Map task in Chiapas, Mexico
The diff-task

• The objective of the task is to obtain data on structured and symmetrical dyadic multimodal interaction
• Participants are asked to verbally negotiate a difference in the representation of pictured objects on two distinct images
• It is similar to traditional ‘director-matcher’ tasks, but is designed to avoid the interactional asymmetry inherent in the director-matcher design; i.e. the assignment of each individual to a unique and different communicative role.
• Participants have to solve a problem using referential communication, but each have precisely the same objective and precisely the same role.
Family Problems Picture Task

• A task-oriented elicitation tool that produces both narrative and dialogue

• It consists of a picture-based elicitation task, which allows speakers to choose their own formulations for the same situations, limiting the meta-language bias, and elicits naturalistic interactions between speakers and the audience while prompting different language genres in producing descriptions, conversations, and (collaborative) narrative discourse.

• Targets aspects of social cognition, e.g. how the mental states of others are reported in an interactive setting
Example pictures
Three-stage task

1. Two (or more) participants describe a group of pictures, one at a time

2. The same participants arrange the pictures in a coherent sequence to form a plot sequence

3. Finally, this sequence is related in the form of a narrative to a third person who has not participated in the previous two stages.
Some results and observations

• Cultural and social parameters have important consequences for the outcome of the task, e.g. identification of picture content; the dynamics between participants

• The shaping of the task itself has been affected and altered from suggestions by the speakers, e.g. first person narrative; enactment of the story; ”mock-trials”

• Meant to produce expressions of quotation (speech, emotion, intention), knowledge states (assimilated knowledge; asymmetries between speech-participants), and evaluations of actions and events, among other things
How can we evaluate these tasks against our goals for using them?

Parameters of eliciting engagement

Elicitation tasks:
• Symmetry relation
  • Participant configuration
  • Role of the researcher
• Socio-cognitive orientation
  • Referential salience
  • Content

Engagement semantics:
• Symmetry relation: -/-; -/+; +/-; +/+  
• Socio-cognitive orientation: access; knowledge; authority  
• Scope: objects; events, meta-events
Methodological issues

• Accessibility and (assimilated) knowledge are better represented in the elicitation tasks than epistemic authority

• Personal involvement is elusive in the make-up of the tasks

• Epistemic authority is mostly possible to investigate when it overlaps with cognitive access and belief

• Expertise and the personal sphere of the speaker are not well represented in the tasks

• The Family Problems Picture Task is an exception, although this task mainly produces projected instances of personal involvement as belonging to the actors represented in the pictures (reported speech)
Final remarks

• Engagement encompasses perceptual/cognitive access, knowledge, and epistemic authority as a basis for assuming sharedness/exclusivity between the speech-act participants.

• There are non-verbal situumli that can be used to elicit engagement forms, which also permit a measure of comparability between languages.

• These show coverage gaps with regard to the socio-cognitive orientation of the tasks.

• Epistemic authority, specifically is not well represented.

• An elicitation task aimed to produce forms expressing epistemic authority must target aspects of the speaker’s involvement and the personal sphere of the speaker.
References


