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Takahiro Otsu

1. Introduction

One of the research targets of pragmatics is how the meaning of an utterance is constructed and interpreted. The traditional view of communication is a code model, which Katz (1966: 103-104) describes as follows:

> This [The speaker's] message is encoded in the form of a phonetic representation of an utterance by means of the system of linguistic rules with which the speaker is equipped. This encoding then becomes a signal to the speaker's articulatory organs, and he vocalizes an utterance of the proper phonetic shape. This is, in turn, picked up by the hearer's auditory organs. The speech sounds that stimulate these organs are then converted into a neural signal from which a phonetic representation equivalent to the one into which the speaker encoded his message is obtained. This representation is decoded into a representation of the same message that the speaker originally chose to convey by the hearer's equivalent system of linguistic rules.

The code mode has a mirror-image relation of communication and cognition: the speaker encodes a thought into an utterance and the addressee decodes the speaker's thought from the utterance. Needless to say, the prerequisite of the code model is that the same code is already shared by speaker and addressee. However, it is evident that the identity of the code is not empirically valid. In contrast with this traditional view, therefore, Paul Grice proposed an inferential model for human communication from a philosophical point of view. Grice generalizes that 'the speaker meant something by x' is (roughly) equivalent to 'she intended the utterance of x to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention' (Grice 1989: 220). This innovative step is developed by Wilson and Sperber (1987: 9), which elaborate on how the speaker produces such effect in more cognitive terms.

> Communication is achieved not by coding and decoding messages, but by providing evidence for an intended hypothesis about the speaker's communicative intentions. Communication is successful when the audience interprets the evidence on the intended lines. Failures in communication result from misinterpretation of the evidence provided. Indeterminacy results from the fact that a single utterance may provide evidence for a range of related hypotheses, all similar enough to the thoughts the communicator wanted to convey.

The negative terms "failure", "misinterpretation" and "indeterminacy" seem to predict that the inferential model of human communication has limitations; nevertheless, the point of this model is that cognitive systems effectively account for how the addressee interprets the evidence in the intended line successfully. The least-effort comprehension procedure based on the second (communicative) principle of relevance is as follows:[1]

> *Relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure*: follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects.
> (a) Consider interpretations in order of accessibility.
> (b) Stope when your expectation of relevance is satisfied.
>
> (Wilson 2000:420-421)

This procedure indicates that the addressee tests an interpretive hypothesis that has a high accessibility and requires less processing effort in utterance interpretation and that he stops utterance interpretation when he recognizes that he has gained the maximal cognitive effect with the least processing effort. Lots of hypotheses are not tested at the same time, but the order of testing hypotheses is determined by the principle of relevance. The order of accessibility is involved in many aspects of utterance interpretation: disambiguation, reference assignments, enrichments, contextual assumptions, etc. (Carston 2002: 143). The addressee, following a path of least effort when accessing some contextual assumption, enriches it at the explicit level and complements it at the implicit level until the

[1] Second (communicative) principle of relevance: Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance (Carston 2002: Appendix).

resulting interpretation meets his expectation of relevance (Wilson 2000: 420). The least-effort access of contextual assumptions is performed with the aim of achieving maximal cognitive effects.

The cognitive mechanisms Relevance Theory proposes in terms of utterance interpretation seem simple; but in fact, the speaker manipulates or modulates the addressee's cognitive environment (i.e. a set of contextual assumptions) while assessing the effort required in accessing particular assumptions and the cognitive effect they achieve. This article attempts to investigate the manipulation of the addressee's cognitive environment by way of context selection and context construction.

2. Context and Contextual Assumptions in Relevance Theory

Let us first clarify what is defined as a context in Relevance Theory.

> A context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world... A context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances: expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation.
>
> (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995: 15)

In a relevance-theoretic framework, the context seems to be constructed from some of the conceptual assumptions. Contextual assumptions are neither pre-given linguistic information nor non-linguistic information given by the physical condition. Rather, they are a set of mentally-represented assumptions that interact with newly information as ostensive stimuli via perception or communication. A set of contextual assumptions that are manifest to the individual at a time is called the cognitive environment of the individual (the addressee in this article). The manifestness of an assumption is a matter of degree and it depends on how the individual is capable of mentally representing some assumptions accepting it as true or probably true. Therefore, (manifest) assumptions are not like knowledge because they need not to be true in themselves (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995: 40). That is, what is manifest to an individual is not so strong as what is actually known to him.

In contrast with the ordinary pragmatic view of the pre-determinacy of context, Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995: 141) suggest that the context available for utterance interpretation is not determined until some contextual assumptions are accessed. Context and contextual assumptions are constructed as the linguistic stimuli and are processed as follows:

> ... there is nothing in the nature of a context, or of comprehension, which excludes the possibility that context formation is open to choices and revisions throughout the comprehension process
>
> (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995: 137)

This means that the continuous assessment of relevance gradually selects some particular set of assumptions available for interpretation, which constructs the context in which those assumptions are interacted and relevance is maximized. Relevance Theory regards the context as the result of the interpretative process and the assessment of relevance, and does not allow the comprehension process in which the context is first determined, the interpretation of an utterance takes place in such a context, and finally the relevance of utterance interpretation is assessed (i.e. the degree of relevance is assessed). As a discourse proceeds, the addressee retrieves or constructs and then processes a number of assumptions. These form a gradually changing background against which new information is processed (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995: 118). The determination of context and the selection of some particular subset of the addressee's assumptions available for interpretation is consistent with an expectation of optimal relevance: the selection of contextual assumptions and the construction of context require the least processing effort and achieve an adequate cognitive effect. The more cognitive effects a contextual assumption yields, the more relevant it will be. Therefore, the first assumption to achieve an expected balance between processing effort and cognitive effect will be more likely selected in order to construct a context.

3. Manipulation of Context Selection

Constraints on context selection have been the focus of recent studies on manipulative utterances in specific fields of communication such as argumentation, political debate, law and marketing. Maillat (2013) claims that manipulation or manipulative communication can be analyzed as an attempt to

control the addressee's context selection process in a relevance-theoretic framework.

> *Manipulation as Context Selection Constraint*:
> Manipulative communication is a twofold process by which a constraint that limits context selection is combined with a target utterance *U* in order to force the interpretation of the latter within a limited set of contextual assumptions and to effectively ensure that the interpretation is reached before a known, alternative (contradictory) subset of assumptions is accessed. (Maillat 2013: 194)

In this manipulation strategy, manipulative communication induces the addressee to access some restricted set of contextual assumptions to construct a context and to stop accessing any other assumption. Manipulation is about using a communicative device or strategy without which the speaker would not be able to change the addressee's beliefs and behavior (Saussure 2005: 116). With respect to manipulative communication in general, Saussure (2005) says that:

> Communication is manipulative when the speaker retains some relevant information, or provides the correct information in order for the hearer to conclude that he should behave in a way which favours the speaker's interests, without being aware of it. (p. 119)

Manipulation is also commonly used as a rhetorical device in interpersonal discourse and, therefore, it can be recaptured in a more cognitive framework such as Relevance Theory. A relevance-based comprehension or cognition (i.e. the addressee's motivation to employ a processing effort for achieving cognitive effects) is manipulative. The manipulative strategy is used to ensure the intended cognitive effects are achieved (Kamil and Fareed (2017: 79).

The incremental process of context selection and contextual construction sheds light on the manipulative use of discourse markers. Consider example (1), in which two speakers have a different attitude towards the propriety of selling information to others.

(1) A: I just wondered what your response to it was, seeing as er what you're doing is getting information to which you're not entitled, and selling it for money to other people.
B: Ah, I'm sorry I can't comment.
A: Well, don't you think that it's really rather improper for you to be doing this? **After all**, people are entitled to some secrecy, aren't you? (BNC: HE7)

In Relevance Theory, discourse markers are indicators that constrain the inference of utterance interpretation and "directly encode the type of cognitive effects intended" (Blakemore 2002: 95). In the current relevance-theoretic view, *after all* imposes a constraint on strengthening an existing assumption and, as Carston (2002: 161) suggests, the addressee is instructed to process the following clause in such a way that it provides evidence for the proposition communicated by the preceding utterance. In these current accounts, *after all* in example (1) constructs a context including a conclusion (i.e. speaker A thinks that it is improper for speaker B to sell information for money to others) and evidence (i.e. the social norm that people are entitled to some secrecy) as contextual assumptions. However, considering the overall use of *after all*, especially the spoken corpus such as (1), the interpretation of the utterance including the discourse marker obviously involves the implementation of context. Without the inclusion in the context of a more contextual assumption such as the addressee's contrary assumption contextually inferred from the utterance "I'm sorry I can't comment [on selling information for money]", we cannot sufficiently explain the essence of the exchange between two speakers (i.e. speaker A's intention of leading Speaker B to agree with her opinion and influence a change in attitude. Discourse connectives are linguistic devices that help reduce the processing effort required by the addressee for computing how contextual assumptions involved are inferentially related by restricting the range of hypotheses one has to check in order to arrive at an optimally relevant interpretation (Wilson and Sperber 1993: 21). As a matter of fact, the implemental process of context construction leads to an increase in the effort required in processing the additional contextual assumption in the context. However, if we assume the influence of attitudes in the

addressee as an additional cognitive effect, all of the contextual assumptions available for interpretation are relevant.[2]

Another case of the incremental context construction is the multi-occurrence of procedural expressions (underlining is mine).

(2) Well I can't understand anyone want to pull trees down I mean I've got a tree in the in my garden it's about seventy feet high. I know it's a bit dangerous but I wouldn't cut it down. Yeah I mean I think I think they'll pull some more there afterwards but Yes **but** **you know** **I mean** a tr a tree takes a long time to mature doesn't it? (BNC: HMA)

The multi-occurrence of discourse markers and fillers are commonly observed in the dialogic context regardless of the explicit presence of the addressee. In (2), the instruction constrained by the discourse marker *but* is that, in a contradiction of opinions of cutting trees in the garden between the speaker and the (hypothetical) addressee, the addressee eliminates his assumption (i.e. cutting trees down in the garden because they are dangerous). As the discourse proceeds, the speaker adds two more procedural expressions by taking the addressee's cognitive environment into account, which eventually increases the processing effort. In a strict sense, fillers serve a different function from discourse markers. Unlike the discourse markers that are directly linked to comprehension procedures, there are other types of procedural expressions that are linked to capacities such as mindreading, emotion reading, or social cognition (Wilson 2011: 25-26). Fillers seem to be one of the type of procedural expressions that further modulate the inferential combination of contextual assumptions.

You know and *I mean* also contribute to the construction of a context in which contextual assumptions are newly generated. Both procedural expressions convey the speaker's mental state or beliefs in order to avoid the direct denial of the addressee's assumption. *You know* mitigates the intensity of the utterance by making it an implicated premise (i.e. a tree takes a long time to mature) and inviting the route of inference towards some implicated conclusion (e.g. it won't be wise for anyone to cut down trees recklessly). On the other hand, *I mean* is a

[2] The examples that Relevance-theoretic literature exemplifies seem artificial and less empirical. Most of them are investigated in a written context. If we observe the use of discourse markers in spoken corpus data, especially in a dialogic context, the implemental context construction would be much clearer.

reformulation marker that indicates "a speaker's upcoming modification of the ideas or intentions of a prior utterance" (Schiffrin 1987: 304). In (2), *I mean* seems to reformulate the speaker's intention of the previous utterance (i.e. I wouldn't cut the tree down) and slightly modulates the direction of utterance interpretation by representing the following utterance as the speaker's thought. The mitigating discourse function of *I mean* stems from its procedural constraint on making the reformulated utterance relevant as a representation or a thought of the previous utterance which it resembles. In the utterance "P *I mean* Q", the speaker, who assumes a cognitive gap between a thought encoded by the previous utterance P and the addressee's interpretation of that thought, restates the former as Q in a case where the speaker assumes that the addressee may misunderstand and interpret the thought in another way.

Invitation to inferences and reformulation are essentially an effort-consuming communicative act. Procedural constraints encoded by *you know* and *I mean* require more processing effort because the former instructs the addressee to reach an implicated conclusion and the latter instructs him to process two utterances that resemble each other. But optimal relevance is achieved by the offset of a processing effort. In the use of *you know*, the combination of the host utterance (i.e. implicated premise) and the implicated conclusion achieve an additional cognitive effect. *You know* has a strategic device of softening the speaker's assertive attitude because it invites the addressee to an inferential route and leaves the conclusion of inferences to him. It leaves the room open for retreat (Fox Tree and Schrock 2002: 741).

Meanwhile, the cognitive effect achieved by *I mean* is less explicit. Consider the cognitive effect activated by *I mean* in example (3) (underlining is mine).

(3) She looked up at him. He said, "<u>Are you all right? What' wrong?</u> **I mean**, do you ... are you hurting?" (BNC: F7H)

In (3), the combination of the original utterance (underlined) and the reformulated one achieves an additional cognitive effect to offset the extra processing effort. The speaker could ask the addressee about the degree of her pain directly if he wants to. However, the significance of extra processing effort lies in the recognition of the speaker's attitude of consideration or sociability. This additional cognitive effect is gained in addition to the resolution of a cognitive gap between speaker and addressee (i.e. the confirmation of the thought or intention

encoded by the original). The multi-occurrence of three procedural expressions in (2) is not pre-organized but they are added as the discourse proceeds. The incremental process of context or contextual assumptions is consistent with the principle of relevance in that the increase of a processing effort required in computing contextual assumptions is offset by the increase of cognitive effects.

4. Concluding Remarks

This article has attempted to investigate the manipulation of the addressee's cognitive environment (a set of contextual assumptions). The context for the interpretation of an utterance is constructed by the selection of particular contextual assumptions in the cognitive environment. This is the dynamic process of comprehension because the goal of utterance interpretation is achieved by the trade-off between processing effort and cognitive effect. Therefore, the pragmatics of context selection and context construction is best accounted for in a relevance-theoretic framework. The incremental process of context or contextual assumptions available for the interpretation of an utterance increases the processing effort in processing them in the context, but it aims at achieving an increase in cognitive effects.

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