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Enikő Németh T., Károly Bibok (Eds.)

# THE ROLE OF DATA AT THE SEMANTICS-PRAGMATICS INTERFACE

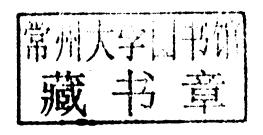
**MOUTON SERIES IN PRAGMATICS** 

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# The Role of Data at the Semantics—Pragmatics Interface

edited by

Enikő Németh T. Károly Bibok



De Gruyter Mouton

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#### Introduction:

## The semantics-pragmatics interface from linguistic and metalinguistic perspectives

Enikő Németh T. and Károly Bibok

#### 1. A general overview of the book

#### 1.1. The data problem in linguistics

In recent years, several works have been published discussing the nature of linguistic data and evidence in different linguistic theories (cf. e.g. Lehmann 2004; Penke and Rosenbach 2004; Borsley 2005; Kepser and Reis 2005). These works raise the following questions:

- (i) What constitutes data and evidence in linguistic theories?
- (ii) What kind of relationship is there between data/evidence and hypotheses of linguistic theories?
- (iii) What is the relationship between evidence and the rest of data in linguistic theories?

In a state-of-the-art study of the answers given to (i)-(iii), Kertész and Rákosi (2008a) characterize the current approaches through two kinds of duality. The first one is that the approaches, on the one hand, maintain methodological prejudices in connection with the structure and function of data and, on the other hand, attempt to shed fresh light on these methodological issues. The second is that they recognize the necessity for metascientific reflection but do not search for an alternative perspective instead of the untenable standard view of analytic philosophy. Such an emerging picture is confirmed in further papers by Kertész and Rákosi (2008b, c), discussing two more recent debates on (un)grammaticality and data in generative grammar, published in thematic journal issues edited by Stefanowitsch and Gries (2007) as well as Sternefeld (2007). These contributions have both conservative and innovative elements but even the latter are fragmentary and clearly require metatheoretical reflection. Therefore, one can state that the views in the literature could serve as points of departure to continue reflecting consciously on data use in particular object theoretical research,

but we should also take it one step further to seek and apply highly new metatheoretical tools.

To join the recent debate on the data problem in linguistics, we propose a volume of 10 original contributions. The chapters of the book, relying on a large range of data sources from a number of languages (English, including its Australian variety, Dutch, German, Norwegian, medieval Spanish, medieval Catalan, French, Hungarian as well as even Hebrew, Amharic, Slave and Zazaki) and applying several current linguistic theories, attempt to address the above mentioned metatheoretical questions from new perspectives. They do this on the basis of various object theoretical investigations situated at the interface of semantics and pragmatics. They concern a broader spectrum of themes than the recent studies on the data problem in pragmatics, namely, explorations by Pons Bordería (2008) and Jucker (2009) on discourse markers and historical speech act research, respectively.

### 1.2. On conceptions of the semantics-pragmatics interface in the studies of the book

All chapters of the present book are devoted to linguistic phenomena which have their own semantic and pragmatic aspects depending on one approach or another. Nevertheless, some chapters focus on the (formal or model-theoretic) characters of the objects of their studies and are not too specific regarding particular pragmatics theories, indicating only general factors of the use of language like the hearer's viewpoint, communicative skills and background assumptions. A conception of pragmatics as the study of language in use, however, is one of the few points that all pragmatists share (Németh T. and Bibok 2004: 227; Pons Bordería 2008: 1353). These constituents of language use seem to be suitable for purposes of indicating a necessary pragmatic addition even to precise and fine-grained semantic analyses of the definiteness effect and indexicals.

Other chapters concentrate on the pragmatic side, leaving semantic representations somewhat undetailed, or attempt to equally elaborate both sides of the semantics—pragmatics interface. The authors of these chapters use a wide range of pragmatics approaches: Gricean pragmatics, neo-Gricean theories (including optimality theoretic pragmatics), Levinson's theory of presumptive meanings, relevance theory, lexical pragmatics, historical pragmatics, and interactional pragmatics such as conversation analysis. In order to handle a phenomenon under investigation several papers argue in favor of one or another of these approaches, showing that this favored

approach also requires some refinements, or even combine approaches in order to get more reliable and plausible solutions.

Because of the different approaches to different object theoretical issues, one cannot expect a common definite delimitation of the two linguistic subfields. This could have been achieved only if, for instance, all chapters had been oriented to the component of the utterance meaning which is called what is said and which is explored in the semantic minimalism vs. contextualism debate (cf. Jaszczolt, in press). Incidentally, what can seem to be fairly surprising for those who are accustomed to this opposition is that Wedgwood (2007) states that the whole outlook of Cappelen and Lepore's (2005) semantic minimalism is in essence very similar to that of relevance theory occupying a contextualist stance. In particular, the notion of minimal semantic content is largely equivalent in function to the notion of encoded meaning in relevance theory, but the former is propositional while the latter is not.

Consequently, despite their different topics and approaches, all of the issues the contributions to the present volume attempt to solve do not only belong to semantics or pragmatics but are also situated at the interface of semantics and pragmatics. Instead of a unified view of the dividing line between semantics and pragmatics, a number of points of contact and transitions are inevitably emerging when one deals with issues of meaning. While the papers in the present volume have significant contributions to various problems currently discussed in the semantics and pragmatics literature, an overall view of an intensive interaction emerges not only between semantics and pragmatics, but also between the whole of grammar and pragmatics. The authors repeatedly demonstrate and exemplify that pragmatics and semantics, including what is called formal semantics, necessarily complement each other in a broader conception of contextualism.

#### 1.3. Methodological findings in the volume

We think that our volume presents achievements which go beyond those of current approaches to linguistic data because the contributions contain conscious reflections on the data problems listed in (i)–(iii) above. They are made through actual object theoretical research which involves and contrasts two linguistic subfields of their own techniques and methods of data gathering and handling. At the same time, some papers apply specific metatheoretical tools such as Lehmann's (2004) functional view of data, Steen's (2007) categorization of data, and Kertész and Rákosi's (2008d) plausible reasoning.

As to question (i) in 1.1, i.e. "What constitutes data and evidence in linguistic theories?", it is clear from the chapters of the book that the common distinction of sources of data collection, i.e. introspection, corpora and experiments (cf. Jucker 2009), is not sufficient. Contributors to this volume rely on a truly wide range of data sources, including, among other things, various types of experiments (cf. minimal pair experiments, thought experiments, pragmatically relevant psycholinguistic experiments), linguists' intuitions and intuitions of speakers who are not trained as linguists, written and spoken, monolingual and parallel corpora, dictionaries, previous results and analyses as well as comparisons with other languages. A special kind of data deserves peculiar attention, which has not been considered to any great extent thus far by those working at the semantics-pragmatics interface. Namely, there is a way in which one can access speaker intuitions through an analysis of the co-construction of syntactic units by two or more speakers in conversation when participants themselves orient to the interactional achievement of meanings. Beside such a pluralism of data, two statements have to be stressed. First, despite the existence of a widely propagated assumption that linguistic intuition is not reliable, but data gained from corpora are, no general claim can be made that a type of data is inherently better than or supersedes another type of data. However, in cases that are too fine-grained for introspection, experimental approaches to issues in the semantic-pragmatic interface may offer critical data. Second, there are limits to all forms of data, including even corpora. Corpora have to be used with an at least as great caution as intuitive data, and the limitations of corpus studies are clearly evident, for instance, in studies of the relative contribution of decoded and inferred conceptual material to the content of an utterance or in cases when examples from corpora can be interpreted in pragmatically or contextually different ways. Therefore, the various types of data have to be considered necessarily complementary. In fact, they are intertwined in a complex way. Taking, again, corpora and corpus studies as an example, one should bear in mind the fact that the data contained in linguistic corpora are data which are presumably judged well-formed by some speakers, so corpora also originate from intuition. What is more, the thorough analysis of contexts (real and constructed) seems to be of primary importance in all fields of pragmatics where one wants to find data concerning inferred meanings, i.e. meanings that are not present explicitly in linguistic forms.

In connection with question (ii) in 1.1, i.e. "What kind of relationship is there between data/evidence and hypotheses of linguistic theories?", the authors agree that data can have several functions in linguistic theorizing:

they can simultaneously be regarded both as the empirical basis for theory formation and as tools of testing in various phases of theory formation, and data have a special function in reporting on research as well. At the same time, data are theory- and problem-dependent. The relationship between theory and data is cyclic and even prismatic (in Kertész and Rákosi's (2008e) sense), and it is always the actual aims, problems and argumentation processes that determine what "things" can serve as data in what functions.

With regard to (iii) in 1.1, i.e. "What is the relationship between evidence and the rest of data in linguistic theories?", and also to (i), the metatheoretical relevance of the well-known type—token distinction is put forward. Ignorance, false judgments or deficient analyses of data as separate tokens cannot destroy a theory. What counts as evidence (i.e. a crucial empirical basis) for theory construction is only a set, or a type, of data considered in their totality.

#### 2. Chapter by chapter synopsis of the book

The 10 papers constitute chapters of the book divided into three parts according to their object theoretical topics as follows: Issues of referentiality, Scalar implicatures and Pragmatic ways from words to constructions and utterances. Let us briefly overview the individual chapters in this arrangement.

#### 2.1. Issues of referentiality

The subject of *Márta Maleczki's* paper is the definiteness effect in existential sentences. An existential construction exhibits the definiteness restriction if the DP called *pivot* and denoting the entities whose existence is claimed cannot be a proper name or a pronoun, or if the affected DP contains a common noun, it cannot be preceded by definite or universal determiners in neutral contexts. Maleczki compares three previous studies on definiteness effect in English existential sentences (Keenan 2003; Beaver, Francez and Levinson 2006; Ward and Birner 1995) from both theoretical and methodology points of view. These studies differ from each other in types of data and methods of data analysis as well as in the linguistic nature of the proposed explanations of the discussed phenomenon. They use data drawn from corpora or intuition, apply statistical methods, context analysis or the minimal pair method contrasting well-formed and ill-formed strings. Their conclusions are formulated in traditional syntactic/semantic, formal seman-

tic or pragmatic terms. To evaluate these different types of research, the author handles three apparent dichotomies, namely, rules vs. tendencies, semantics vs. pragmatics, data bases vs. intuitions, and establishes four options concerning the nature of the rules which generate human language structures. The option fitting the results gained by the thorough analysis of the three approaches and of the relevant English data, to which some important data from Hungarian are also added, is the following: the sharp semantic property characterizing the allowed DPs in the existential constructions is the determiners' cons<sub>2</sub> property (conservative on the second argument, also called anticonservativity property). The exemptions from the restriction due to this semantic property are fake data in that they do not belong to the proper existential constructions. This is supported from three sides: the semantic condition put on the interpretation of the existential sentences, the productivity criterion, and the Hungarian counterparts show equally well that the there-sentences with a definite pivot are not par excellence existential sentences. However, the occurrence of the definite DPs in there-sentences is systematic enough to be explained by pragmatic considerations: the referent of the pivot can be interpreted as hearer-new (at least in some respects).

In the next chapter, Zoltán Vecsey questions one aspect of Kaplan's (1989a, b) model-theoretic view of indexicals. According to the double index theory, indexicals are evaluated with respect to two different collections of parameters: contexts and circumstances. First, contexts determine the content of characters. Second, for each structured proposition, circumstances yield truth values or truth conditions. While there is a general consensus that modal, tense and locational operators can explicitly shift the circumstantial parameters of the evaluation process, opinions differ on the possibility of context-shift. Kaplan claims that operators which would modify the contextual behavior of characters do not exist in natural languages such as English. Others maintain that context-shifting operators exist in some languages, perhaps even in English (Schlenker 2003a, b; Anand and Nevis 2004; Nishiguchi 2007). Sidelle (1991), Bezuidenhout (2003) and Recanati (2004) are of the persuasion that contexts can be shifted without the presence of any operators. In their view, there are specific communicative settings in which contexts shift freely. After a brief account of operator theoretic strategy, the author discusses the following communicative situations as the putative cases of free context-shifting: recorded messages, post-it notes, fiction, historical present and free indirect discourse. Then he raises an important question concerning the relationship between the theory and the data at his disposal: what is the theoretical status of the conclusions one

draws from this restricted range of empirical data? He sees the methodological significance of empirical data not as derived from their epistemological properties, but as a consequence of their argumentative function. Viewed from this perspective, what is of primary importance is that once a research object has become part of an argumentative chain, then it should be acknowledged, at least provisionally, as datum. Therefore, he elaborates an alternative critical approach which does not depend directly on empirical counterexamples, but which is able to predict and explain the existence of such counterexamples. Vecsey reshapes the Kaplanian framework at the most general level supplying the contextual parameters with a particular pragmatic component. Non-Kaplanian contexts, where shifting is possible, come "in double packages". The first context is c, in which an indexical expression occurs. The second context is  $c^*$ , which functions as a proxy of c. The role of the proxy context  $c^*$  is to provide one or more parameters for the indexical. Not any context can function as a proxy for c. There must be a passage between c and  $c^*$  and this passage is pragmatic. The possibility of the passage depends on contextual factors such as general communicative skills, conventionalized norms of reasoning, conventionalized norms of using syntactic structures, implicature patterns, and background assumptions.

In the third paper of Part I, Thorstein Fretheim challenges the dominant view that demonstratives, both complex and simplex ones, are directly referential terms that pick out an individual (Kaplan 1989a, b; Recanati 1993). Like relevance theorists (Sperber and Wilson 1995; Carston 2002), who hold that semantic representations resulting from decoding of linguistic material are notoriously gappy compared to the proposition the speaker intends to express, he believes that the speaker's intention plays a crucial role in the (context-sensitive) interpretation of any utterance, including the interpretation of the reference of any demonstratives that an utterance may contain. In both English and Norwegian, grammatically definite demonstratives are semantically underspecified with regard to whether the reference is to an object or to a type of entity defined in terms of certain properties. However, his exploration of a parallel corpus revealed that there is a much greater tolerance for definite demonstratives that are intended to represent a type of entity in English, while in Norwegian there is a tendency to avoid use of definite demonstratives under such circumstances, preferring the indefinite demonstrative determiner corresponding to English such when the referent is a type of thing. The author strengthens his generalizations about systematic differences in usage between English and Norwegian pointing to some other linguistic phenomenon in English and Norwegian that might be related to the noted tendency, namely, the speaker's pronominal options in

equative sentences and in left-dislocation structures where the pronoun and the dislocated phrase are traditionally taken to be coreferential. Data gained from informants suggests a causal relationship between a speaker's choice between a personal and a non-personal pronominal copy of a left-dislocated noun phrase and the ontological value of the entity so represented. An intraclausal, non-personal pronoun encodes the information that the entity represented is a property instantiated by tokens, while a personal pronoun is consistent with either a token-level or a type-level interpretation, depending on whatever input guides the pragmatic process of reference resolution for the addressee. This applies equally to English and Norwegian, but it was shown that a few combinations of formally indefinite, left-dislocated noun phrases and non-personal pronominal copies are grammatical in Norwegian but ungrammatical in English, and, conversely, it was shown that personal pronouns that agree in number with the dislocated phrase have a wider range of distribution in English than in Norwegian. As to the methodological point of this chapter, Fretheim combines the use of diverse research methods in an attempt to improve our knowledge of what demonstratives do for us. Intuitive judgments are central throughout the paper. In addition, however, he deploys results from the study of a bilateral translation corpus of English and Norwegian texts, while being aware of the limitations of strict corpus studies which are probably nowhere more evident than in studies of the relative contribution of decoded and inferred conceptual material to the content of an utterance. In another section of his paper he tests his own intuitions against those of a small group of native informants who were not trained as linguists.

#### 2.2. Scalar implicatures and beyond

Napoleon Katsos and Richard Breheny experimentally investigate the semantics and pragmatics of scalar expressions and numerals, a much-discussed issue on the semantics-pragmatics interface. The authors first summarize the theoretical positions. According to what they call implicature accounts (e.g. Atlas and Levinson 1981; Horn 1989; Levinson 2000; Chierchia 2004), disjunctions, quantifiers and numerals are all scalar expressions, and the upper-bound interpretation is derived from a lower-bound semantic meaning by means of a scalar implicature. According to what they call anti-implicature accounts (e.g. Sadock 1984; Carston 1998; Guerts 1998; Breheny 2008), the upper-bound 'exactly N' interpretation of numerals does not depend on a scalar implicature, and it is the lower-bound one 'at least N' that must be derived from it in some way. With respect

to the issue of numerals and scalars, the authors show how various theories ascribe different aspects of meaning to semantics and pragmatics. They also document the emerging consensus that theories about this issue as well as others on the semantics-pragmatics interface should be psycholinguistically as well as linguistically valid. The authors then go on to review the extensive recent literature on empirical investigations of the meaning of numerals and scalars. The authors themselves also present one offline and one online self-paced reading experiment, both of which investigate the processing of logical scales (existential/universal quantifier; disjunction/conjunction) and numerals by adult native speakers of English. These experiments have indicated that adults are sensitive to contextually induced expectations of informativeness when interpreting both logical scales and numerals offline, but the online task shows that the time-course of these interpretations is different. These results cannot be attributed to the extralinguistic factors suggested as explanations of the pattern of acquisition. However, in attempting to adduce these data as evidence for or against particular theories, the authors run into conceptual difficulties. They see, in many cases, the question of whether data disconfirm a theory depends crucially on whether they make additional assumptions that are not necessarily integral to that theory. In particular, they discuss how the introduction of contrast sets might give rise to processing costs, and how costly the processes are by which senses are derived from one another. In doing so, the authors uncover issues on which many theories are non-committal but which could greatly influence the interpretation of the relevant experimental findings. The authors conclude that deriving straightforward empirically testable predictions from anti-implicatures accounts requires further conceptual and experimental work. Nevertheless, Katsos and Brehenv have already demonstrated how experimental approaches to issues in the semantic-pragmatic interface may corroborate intuitions and offer critical data in cases that are too fine-grained for introspection.

In the second paper of Part II, Reinhard Blutner aims to argue for optimality theory as a conceptual framework that can help to close the gap between experimental pragmatics and neo-Gricean theories of pragmatics. The author demonstrates that optimality theoretic pragmatics has the potential to account both for the synchronic and the diachronic perspective in pragmatics. In discussing modern pragmatic theories, he shows that relevance theory and Levinson's theory of presumptive meanings account for the resolution of the conflict between effort minimization and effect maximization in different ways. The crux of both approaches can be translated in optimality theoretic pragmatics by making use of particular linking con-