On the interactions with pragmatics in Role and Reference Grammar

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Unlike Chomskyan theories, in which syntax is the core component providing input to semantics and pragmatics, parallel architecture theories consist of equally dominant components which interact with each other directly (Jackendoff 2002). Role and Reference Grammar employs parallel architecture, in which syntax, semantics, and pragmatics are independent components but receive input from each other so that they jointly represent a sentence (Van Valin 2014).

With respect to the role of pragmatics as part of the parallel architecture, Van Valin (2005: 182) states that "discourse-pragmatics can influence every aspect of grammar," and many examples have been discussed which show the pragmatic input on syntax, semantics, and the linking algorithm which relates the two. Yet, what has to be demonstrated is the bi-directionality of the interactions with pragmatics, with descriptions of the influence on pragmatics by the other components of grammar. The purpose of this presentation is to show how the discourse representations are influenced by the semantic and syntactic properties of a sentence and to show what input the discourse representations receive from the grammar so that the cognitive model of context can serve as common ground for the subsequent development of discourse.

The discussion will be based primarily on discourse analysis in Japanese. In particular, I will discuss observations which relate to the selection of privileged syntactic argument [PSA] and the use of different argument forms (zero anaphora and post-nominal markings) and post-verbal arguments (in a postcore slot and a right-detached position). Each of these serves as input for the discourse representations because the choice of the forms reflects the speaker's pragmatic intentions about the information conveyed and the relative importance of the information for the purpose of the given discourse. For example, the referents represented by a PSA are more likely to persist in the subsequent discourse (Shimojo 2016); hence, they are intended to be more important. Yet, not all PSA's are presented equally. Among the possible argument forms, ellipsed, topicalized, and case-marked arguments are more likely to persist than those without any post-nominal marking, and those placed in the pre-verbal positions are more likely to persist than those placed post-verbally (Shimojo 2005). These observations suggest that the structural properties serve as "mental processing instructions" (Givón 1993) for the hearer/reader to construct and update their episodic memory as the discourse is processed.

With the discourse-based observations, I propose a mechanism to represent the salience ranking of referents in the discourse representation structure and argue that the ranking is constantly updated on the basis of input from syntax and semantics and that the updated discourse representation serves as input for the construction of subsequent sentences in turn. This new mechanism is necessary because salience is related to continuity of information, and it does not necessarily correlate with presupposition or assertion, which derives the focus structure of sentence.

References

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