

Experimental Studies of Free Indirect Discourse

Block II: Representations and Processes

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Fall School "Shifting Perspectives"
October 1-4, 2012

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Normality assumptions I

- In a typical psycholinguistic experiment, people are confronted with linguistic stimuli under highly constrained, and, admittedly, somewhat artificial circumstances (cf. self-paced reading).
- But the usual Gricean principles hold for these situations.
- That is, the presentation of a sentence expressing proposition p is taken to inform the participant that someone (e.g. the experimenter) wants to inform the participant that she thinks that p is true.

Normality assumptions II

- That is, the participants task in an experiment testing comprehension usually is to create a representation of p allowing her to perform the task. In most experimental situations, this does not go beyond the usual pragmatics of an everyday dialogue situation: she will build a straightforward semantic representation of p , i.e. the state of affairs that the experimental sentence denotes.
- The problem with testing FID is its *literariness* (cf. Frank's class yesterday morning)—it is, to most people, tied to literary genres.

Normality assumptions III

- Literary genres, apart from having the experimentally rather unpleasant property of being multi-propositional, come with a quite peculiar type of pragmatics (cf. ambiguity, “open places”, unreliable narrators, etc.).
- FID uses this strange pragmatics systematically: while it is not quite clear what a question posed by the author in a novel should amount to pragmatically, the interpretation of a question marked as FID is—comparatively—straightforward.

Normality assumptions IV

- Moreover, FID forces the reader to create a special kind of representation: the comprehension of a sentence containing an FID marker and describing some state of affairs does not result in a semantic representation of that state of affairs, but rather in a “second-order” representation consisting of some *attitude holder* who stands in a certain relation to that state of affairs.

Normality assumptions V

Q: Compare the following two minimal discourses wrt to this property!

(1.a) Oedipus peered around nervously. Jocasta stood behind him.

(1.b) Oedipus peered around nervously. Oh no, Jocasta stood behind him!

Q: How would you describe the result of the interpretation the second sentences of (2.a) and (2.b), respectively?

How is FID represented? I

- If we want to learn more (empirically) about how readers represent FID, we will have to account for at least *some* properties of the semantic object that is the result of the comprehension process of a sentence containing FID.
- The theories of formal semanticists like Emar and others can inform us about the formal properties like the interpretation of indexicals, tense shifts, etc.—the *perspective shift* in general.

How is FID represented? II

- But an important question remains: which of the properties of the representation of FID allows the reader to “get into the shoes of the protagonist”, i.e. to partake the mental life of that protagonist, live through his or her thoughts, emotions, etc. about some state of affairs? (Recall the example from Austen’s *Emma* that Frank gave us yesterday, and the notions of identification, empathy, irony, etc. that we discussed in relation to that).
- Let’s try and start with the “normal case” alluded to above. Under normal circumstances, we represent the state of affairs that an assertive statement denotes in some (propositional or analogue) representation.

How is FID represented? III

(1.a) Jocasta stood behind him.

- $\exists x[\text{STAND}(\text{JOCASTA}, \text{LOC}(\text{BEHIND}(x))), x=?]$
- The propositional representation leaves open the question of how to interpret the spatial relation BEHIND: deictically, or intrinsically?
- The FID version of (1.a), (1.b), seems to bias us towards an intrinsic interpretation, if not outright enforce it.

How is FID represented? IV

- Intrinsic representation in the spatial domain is explained by cognitive psychologists by appeal to a *shifted origo* of the coordinate system of the speaker/hearer.
- We can take this as a first approximation of what it means that FID “puts us into the shoes of the protagonist” —we shift our origo to that of the protagonist, i.e. we simply *take the place of the protagonist in the analogue representation, including his/her orientation*.
- Maybe it is this taking over of the protagonist's perspective that is underlying the apparent effects of empathy, identification etc.

How is FID represented? V

- But the shifted-origo story can't be quite right either, because if it were true, we would have to resolve the ambiguity in the propositional representation as follows:
- $\exists x[\text{STAND}(\text{JOCASTA}, \text{LOC}(\text{BEHIND}(x))), x=\text{READER}]$
- And that's probably crediting the imaginative powers of literary prose too much!
- Moreover, this way of rendering the representation will not account for the opacity that FID exhibits (recall Emar's class yesterday); synonymous expressions are not interchangeable in the representation of FID:

How is FID represented? VI

- $\exists x \exists y [\text{STAND}(\text{MOTHER}(y, x), \text{LOC}(\text{BEHIND}(x))), x=?]$
- So we probably have to come up with a more elaborate version of the analogue (and the propositional!) representation. We have to account for the fact that FID represents a mental object of the protagonist.
- This “second-order” property of the representation—and I will leave it open what this representation will exactly have to look like—provides us with a number of possibilities to approach FID experimentally.
- Before turning to these, however, a few words about the processing of FID have to be said.

Processing FID I

- FID is marked by certain expressions (cf. Emar's class yesterday). I'll call them *indicators*. Among these are syntactic (e.g. tense, mood, non-root phenomena), semantic (e.g., evaluatives, expressives, particles overt, “frames” like ‘... he thought’), and “paralinguistic” properties (e.g. hesitations etc.).
- To interpret a passage as FID, the reader has to rely on these indicators. Psycholinguistically, we can conceive of them as *cues* that the processing mechanism uses to come up with a certain interpretation (just as a certain type of pitch accent can be a cue for a contrastive interpretation).

Processing FID II

Q: Try to identify the FID cues/indicators in the following passage (also from *Emma*):

“The hair was curled, and the maid was sent away, and Emma sat down to think and be miserable. — It was a wretched business indeed! — Such an overthrow of every thing she had been wishing for! — Such a development of every thing most unwelcome! — Such a blow for Harriet! — that was the worst of all.”

Processing FID III

- An important question when we investigate FID experimentally is at what point the cue has its effect on comprehension, i.e. on the construction of the ultimate representation.
- Two possibilities:
 - incremental, “on-line”: as soon as the cue is encountered, the interpretive procedure is “shifted” to yield a second-order representation.
 - static, “off-line”: the sentence is interpreted without the semantic impact of the FID cue, and only after that the effect of the cue is added (i.e. reference is shifted etc.).

Processing FID IV

- There is a growing psycholinguistic evidence that quite a lot of interpretation goes on incrementally, i.e. that semantic content is passed up to the interpretive procedure as soon as it is encountered, and that it influences further processing steps. (Note that this is hard to account for in formal semantic frameworks that presuppose a fully parsed syntactic representation for the interpretation process.)
- Problem: to test the online processing of FID, we would have to compare a sentence without the cue with one containing the cue—in many cases, this means additional or dramatically differing lexical material. For most of the experimental procedures currently available, this poses a problem.

Processing FID V

- Thus, the effect of an FID cue on on-line processing can most probably only be measured *indirectly*.
- That is, we try to read of the effect of the cue for FID at some later point in processing—its effect on an intermediate interpretation step after the cue, or on the overall interpretation.

Measuring FID: some suggestions I

- Given the “literary” effects of FID, there are some obvious candidate properties of a text representation that we can test:
 - Empathy
 - Transparency
 - Identification

Q: Any ideas how one could test these? Are these testable on-line?

Measuring FID: some suggestions II

- Further properties that possibly can be tested:
 - perspectivisation
 - semantic inconsistencies
 - memory effects: easier retrievability of
 - protagonist (e.g. anaphor resolution)
 - (properties of the) described situation
 - verbatim information of the FID passage

Q: Are these measurable on-line?

Q: Can you think of any other properties that one might try to test for? Think hard, we'll talk about this on Thursday again!

Measuring FID: some suggestions III

So much for today, see you tomorrow!

Thanks!