Title: Reference and Cognition
Session conveners: Renate Pajusalu, Maria Reile, Helen Hint

Introduction

Reference is one of the basic functions of language – it connects the speaker, the hearer, and the entities (both in the physical and mental world) that are talked about. Communication between the speaker and the hearer can be successful only if they manage to focus their attention to the same entity at a given point (see e.g. Langacker 2001). In terms of language, this is usually achieved by the use of various referential devices, such as personal and demonstrative pronouns, full NPs, and proper names. In the framework of cognitive linguistics, semantically motivated interpretations of deixis and epistemic grounding have been developed to explain these phenomena (Langacker 2002).

In the workshop, we will be taking a cognitive perspective on referential devices in different languages. We will focus on how cognitive abilities of a human being (such as categorization of space and time, attention, memory etc.) shape the usage of referential devices and, vice versa, what could we say about human cognition on the basis of the usage of referential devices. We will take under investigation devices used in referring to entities in discourse as well as those in the physical world. We are also interested in the borderline cases of reference, where the use of referential devices in discourse and in physical surroundings cannot be clearly distinguished and which illustrate that a conversation is always an interaction of particular conversational needs and cognitive abilities.

The workshop will bring together experimental and observational research. The development of experimental linguistics has given new statistically grounded data on the use of demonstratives and other referential expressions, for example on the interaction of spatiality, accessibility and salience in the choice of referring demonstratives (Coventry et al. 2008, 2014; Piwek et.al. 2008). Also, research by Kaiser and Trueswell (2008) suggests that the form-specific multiple-constraints approach is more beneficial in explaining the use of pronouns and demonstratives than a unified salience hierarchy. At the same time, the use of authentic conversational data has made it possible to analyse referential expressions in real interaction and has shown the importance of a mutually negotiated referential framework, based on joint attention of the interlocutors (Hanks 1996, Diessel 2006).
We also aim to shed light on the diverse nature of referential devices and their usage contexts by bringing together cross-linguistic data from different languages, for example Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian (Uralic) and English, Dutch, Russian, Polish (Indo-European).

References:


List of the authors and titles of the individual papers

Jorrig Vogels, David Howcroft, Zijian Lu, Vera Demberg “Referential overspecification in response to the listener’s cognitive load”

Marja Etelämaki “The socio-cognitive ground for demonstrative reference in Finnish”

Elizabeth Riddle “Indefinite Determiners with Proper Names”
Helen Hint, Tiina Nahkola, Tereza Shpongolts, Renate Pajusalu “Same-same, but different: referential systems of Estonian, Finnish and Russian”

Marja-Liisa Helasvuo “Between me and you: Creating reference with 1st and 2nd person forms in Finnish”

Elsi Kaiser “Finnish referential forms for humans and animals: Insights into perspective-taking”

Harmen Gudde, Kenny Coventry “Spatial Demonstratives across languages”

Enikő Tóth, Péter Csatár “Factors and their interaction in the choice of demonstrative pronouns”

Maria Reile, Piia Taremaa, Tiia Nahkola, Tereza Shpongolts, Renate Pajusalu “Reference on the borderline of space and discourse: an experimental approach”

Magdalena Rybarczyk “Towards a methodology for studying intersubjectivity: The case of demonstratives”

Katri Priiki “Tota tota, toi noin – from pronoun to particle”

Anna Vatanen, Ritva Laury, Karita Suomalainen “Building referring expressions with the Finnish se että”