

Remembering in discourse and grammar: Integrating Social Interactive and Corpus-based Approaches

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Remembering (including forgetting) as both an important cognitive process and a pervasive linguistic phenomenon has been a major concern of many disciplines in the humanities (e.g. philosophy, oral history, literary studies) and social sciences (e.g. anthropology, communication studies, law, and psychology). Not surprisingly, remembering has had a special place in broadly defined functional linguistics. For example, typological studies have been conducted to investigate the universal properties of the language of memory (Amberber 2007); discourse analysts have appealed to memory and information status in the discussion of the role of information flow in language organization (e.g. Chafe 1994); and the verb "remember" has been examined to exemplify the impact of prefabs (Bybee 2010) and the tenets of Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin and Wilkins 1993), while Conversation Analysis (e.g. Goodwin 1987) and Discursive Psychology (e.g. Middleton and Edwards 1990, Edwards 2004) have revealed important social interactive functions that remembering has in conversational encounters.

In this talk, I take remembering as a case study to support a methodological proposal for looking for ways forward for the field of cognitive and functional linguistics. I suggest that it is both necessary and advantageous to investigate language use through an integration of the single case-based social interactive approach and the quantitative corpus linguistic approach - two lines of inquiry that have rarely been acknowledged to be compatible.

I examine data from audio/video-recorded casual conversations in American English and Mandarin Chinese to discuss the deployment of expressions of remembering/forgetting. I will show first of all that remembering/forgetting is a common resource for social interaction, confirming some of the previous findings in Conversation Analysis (Goodwin 1987) and Discursive Psychology (Middleton and Edwards 1990). In everyday conversation, the social interactive functions of remembering/forgetting expressions are shown to manifest mainly in the forms of negotiating epistemic stances (i.e. as a strategy to manipulate epistemic authority) and of regulating speaker-addressee interaction. After the social interaction-focused micro analysis, I move on to show that a corpus-based investigation of large quantities of discourse instances can yield useful information on emerging linguistic structure, as reflected in such cases as the evolvement from phrasal units to lexical entities via the mechanisms of string frequency, phonological reduction, and pragmatic loading.

Overall it will be shown that while the quantitative approach is valuable in revealing important aspects of the organization of linguistic structure, a social interactive analysis affords the needed detailed information on the type of factors influencing the deployment and development of such structure. Each approach is undoubtedly useful in its own ways, yet an integration of both can yield a richer picture that may not be available without one another. Such an integrated approach, I contend, is advantageous for understanding not only the cognitive verb-centered expressions, but also for a wide range of other linguistic structures.