

The grammar of intersubjectivity and the structure of joint projects

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Intersubjectivity is a necessary component of the cognitive infrastructure for human cooperation and human (cooperative) communication (Tomasello 2008, Zlatev et al. 2008). It is therefore to be expected that at least *some* parts of the grammars of natural languages refer to this infrastructure, and deictic elements (pronouns and pronominal adverbs (*here, now*), origo-oriented temporal adverbs (*tomorrow, last year*) and verbs (*come, go*), tenses, etc.) are often cited as illustrations in this regard. These crucially depend on mutually shared knowledge ('common ground', cf. Clark 1996) for their interpretation, and it is this reference to shared knowledge that makes them excellent evidence for the central role of intersubjectivity in human cognition and communication.

By contrast, the prime example of a 'construction of intersubjectivity' in the sense of Verhagen (2005, 2008) – negation – crucially invokes argumentation, and thus presupposes and/or projects disagreement, rather than sharing a point of view. The difference between sharing and arguing might be seen as indicative of a conflict between views of intersubjectivity, so that the use of a single term for both should be abandoned. However, I will argue that it is rather indicative of the complexity of the phenomenon: shared knowledge relates to intersubjectivity as a *state*, while argumentation relates to intersubjectivity as a *process*, i.e. the process of (cognitive and/or behavioral) coordination, *given* certain joint assumptions and certain joint goals. The proper places of deictic elements on the one hand and argumentative operators on the other, in an elaborated theory of human cooperative communication, are not the same: joint projects (including verbal communication) being fundamentally structured in a hierarchical way (Clark 2006), the former function at higher levels (already-agreed-upon joint goals, including objects of joint attention), the latter at the lower level that is presently being negotiated, and that is instrumental in achieving higher level joint goals.

In fact, it can be shown that argumentative operators, including negation, can only perform their function effectively against the background of mutually *shared* assumptions that are more general than the one at hand. Such properties of natural language phenomena provide linguistic evidence for the hypothesis that argumentation is essentially a kind of *social* behavior that serves communication and constituted much of the selective environment for the evolution of reasoning (Mercier & Sperber 2011). Recognizing the hierarchical structure of human communication as a kind of joint project in turn allows for a valuable refinement of this hypothesis.

References

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