The role of the usage-event in usage-based acquisition research

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In the past 25 years, the usage-based approach to language acquisition has revolutionized the field by showing how language learning is possible based on language use (e.g., Tomasello 2000). As far as corpus (= usage) data are concerned, the interplay between learning mechanisms and the affordances of the distributional properties of the input is a major research focus in order to identify the relevant properties and units when generalizing over the input data. There is abundant evidence by now that the input properties shape the developmental trajectories, leading to individual differences in the long-term outcome of language learning (e.g., Hart & Risley 1995, Dąbrowska 2019).

Less attention has been paid to the actual usage event, although this is at the heart of the theory:

> In usage based models of language … all things flow from the actual usage events in which people communicate linguistically with one another. The linguistic skills that a person possesses at any given moment in time - in the form of a "structured inventory of symbolic units" - result from her accumulated experience with language across the totality of usage events in her life. (Tomasello 2000: 61-2)

In this presentation I would like to shift the focus from implicit, data driven learning to observational and instructed learning in concrete interactions. What makes a usage event a learning or even teaching event? What can an interactionist perspective contribute to constructivist theories of language development (Behrens & Pfänder 2022)? What are the conditions under which children do not just learn *from* conversation, but *in* conversation (Veneziano 2018)? From the perspective of interactional linguistics, interactions can be characterized as participation frameworks (Goodwin 2007, 2017) against the backdrop of conversational gestalts (Holler & Levinson 2019; Stukenbrock 2020) that provide orientation for the overall organization of certain activities.

I will present data on a certain problem-solving activity at age 5 to 6 that stem from a longitudinal project on mother-child interactions, representing a large array of different interactional styles regarding maternal sensitivity, responsiveness, and contingency, as well as aspects like joint attention and commitment to the joint project. Of particular interest are structuring and feedback devices that lead to topic maintenance, which in turn manifests itself in more language use (number of turns, words) and more diverse and varied syntactic structures.

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