Meaning and Understanding across Languages

Report by Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen

Group leader 2010/2011

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1. Research objectives

Our use of language is an everyday affair – but we still do not have a clear picture of how we ’encode’ complex thoughts etc. into linguistic signals and how we interpret such signals in appropriate ways. The project Meaning and Understanding across Languages addresses three core questions relating to this problem:

• How can the interaction between syntax-semantics on the one hand and pragmatics on the other be spelled out in a theory of the relation between language and meaning, i.e. what is the interplay between the linguistic ’code’ and the context in which language is used? We approached this central problem of the semantics-pragmatics interface partly from an overarching theoretical point of view, partly from an empirical perspective with a special focus on perspective in reported speech, specificity of reference, (adversative, additive and causal) discourse particles, and non-restrictive modification (Research area 1: coherence, competition and compensation)

• What impact do specific grammatical features of a speaker’s mother tongue have on how s/he conceptualizes reality and organizes her/his description of it, i.e. in how far does so-called ‘linguistic relativism’ hold as far as grammar is concerned. Research in this area has had a renaissance recently due to important methodological progress in cognitive and experimental psycholinguistic research. It has centred on tense and aspect in oral and written narrative. The present project extended experimental research to other text types and other grammatical categories (Research area 2: Language-specific perspectivation in text production).

• How do specific structural features and patterns of the speakers’ mother tongue affect the way they process and interpret texts in their second and third languages? Such questions have been investigated experimentally on the basis of single sentences, by and large out of context. The aim of the present research group was to develop precise hypotheses and robust methods of investigating speakers’ processing of second and third language texts (Research area 3: Language-specific constraints on text comprehension).

Research areas 2 and 3 take up cognitively oriented issues concerning mother tongue impact on the productive and receptive construal of meaning. A cross-linguistic approach is essential in both areas. Research area 1 involves the working out of a theoretical model for how complex linguistic expressions are assigned an interpretation. Research in the past has demonstrated quite clearly that a context-oriented cross-linguistic approach is an essential condition for real progress even in theory design.
2. Participants and research organization

In accordance with the objectives of the project, the research group consisted of experts representing different approaches to the basis theoretical questions and different linguistic disciplines (theoretical linguistics vs. psycho-linguistics), and specializing in different languages (English, Norwegian, German, Russian, Czech). 20 researchers participated in the project during stays of varying length.

Five scholars spent the **whole academic year** (10 ½ months) at CAS:

*Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen*, Professor, project leader; Norway, University of Oslo; working on non-restrictive modification (research area 1), partly in collaboration with Bergljot Behrens, and collaborating with Barbara Schmiedtová and others within research areas 2 and 3 (see below).

*Jekaterina Jasinskaja*, postdoctoral researcher; Germany, University of Stuttgart / Humboldt University, Berlin; working on grounding in discourse, iconic update and (adversative and additive) discourse particles, partly in collaboration with Elena Karagjosova; research area 1.

*Barbara Schmiedtová*; Assoc. Professor; Germany, University of Heidelberg; primus motor in experimental cross-linguistic studies within research areas 2 and 3: the interpretation of coordinate clauses, specific reference in reported speech, possessives in L2, subject choice in expository text; (in varying combinations) collaborating with Bergljot Behrens, Kaja Borthen, Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen, Barbara Hemforth, and Arnt Lykke Jakobsen.

*Kjell Johan Sæbø*, Professor, Norway, University of Oslo; working on reports of specific indefinites, appositives, descriptive indexicals, competition between determiners (in collaboration with Atle Grønn); research area 1.

*Henk Zeevat*, Professor; The Netherlands, University of Amsterdam; working on the parity problem in language production and interpretation and, more specifically, adversative and additive discourse particles; research area 1.

Two fellows spent **6 months** at CAS:

*Bergljot Behrens*, Assoc. Professor; Norway, University of Oslo; 6 months; working on non-restrictive modification at clause level, partly in collaboration with Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen (research area 1), and collaborating (in varying combinations) with Kaja Borthen, Barbara Hemforth, Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen, Lyn Frazier, Arnt Lykke Jakobsen and Barbara Schmiedtová on cross-linguistic studies concerning the interpretation of coordinate clauses verb phrases and specific reference in reported speech, on subject choice in (L2) expository texts, and on the relationship between translation competence on the one hand and reading and writing competence on the other (research areas 2 and 3).

*Maria Filiouchkina Krave*, Ph.D.; Norway, University of Oslo; working on Russian converbs as well as on word order and information structure in (L1 and L2) Russian compared to Norwegian and English; primarily research area 1.

Four scholars spent **around four months**:

*Oliver Bott*, postdoctoral researcher; Germany, University of Tübingen; collaborating with Torgrim Solstad on theoretical and experimental cross-linguistic studies of implicit causality and abductive inferences in explanatory discourse; research areas 1 and 3.
Atle Grønn, Assoc. Professor; Norway, University of Oslo; collaborating with Arnim von Stechow on a dynamic analysis of adjunct tense and counterfactuals in different European languages; research area 1.

Elena Karagjosova, postdoctoral researcher; Germany, University of Stuttgart; working on German discourse particles (in particular aber and nämlich), with a special view to the information-structural function of particles in so-called post-initial position; in part collaborating with Jekaterina Jasinkaja; research area 1.

Torgrim Solstad, postdoctoral researcher; Germany, University of Stuttgart; collaborating with Oliver Bott (on theoretical and experimental cross-linguistic studies of implicit causality and abductive inferences in explanatory discourse; research areas 1 and 3.

Five scholars spent two months at CAS:

Kaja Borthen, Professor; Norway, NTNU; studying the implicit-explicit dimension with a special view to possessives and 1st person plural pronouns (research area 1) and collaborating with Bergljot Behrens, Barbara Hemforth, Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen and Barbara Schmiedtová on a cross-linguistic experimental study of specific reference in reported speech (research area 2/3).

Regine Eckardt, Professor; Germany, University of Göttingen; conducting research on perspective in free indirect report, and (additive/adversative) discourse particles as a means of discourse management; research area 1.

Thorstein Fretheim, Professor em.; Norway, NTNU; studying the semantics-pragmatics interface from a radical contextualist perspective, in particular equative clauses and descriptive content in referential noun phrases; research area 1.

Hans Kamp, Professor; Germany, University of Stuttgart /USA, University of Texas, Austin; developing an adequate (DRS) representation of the different types of contexts that play a role in the construal of linguistic meaning, with a special view to specificity of reference; research area 1.

Arnim von Stechow, Professor em.; Germany, University of Konstanz; collaborating with Atle Grønn on a dynamic analysis of adjunct tense and counterfactuals in different European languages; research area 1.

Four members of the group visited CAS for (altogether) 4-6 weeks:

Lyn Frazier, Professor; USA, University of Mass., Amherst; collaborating with Bergljot Behrens and Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen on an experimental study of conjoined clauses / verb phrases in English and Norwegian (research area 2/3).

Barbara Hemforth, Professor; France, University Paris-Descartes; collaborating with Bergljot Behrens, Kaja Borthen, Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen, and Barbara Schmiedtová on cross-linguistic studies concerning the interpretation of coordinate clauses verb phrases and specific reference in reported speech (research areas 2/3).

Lyn Frazier and Barbara Hemforth, both internationally renowned psycholinguists, visited CAS for two weeks in the fall 2010, returning for another 2-3 weeks during the spring term. Between their visits, they worked actively on the CAS-project(s), organizing relevant experiments at their home universities and staying in contact with their collaborators at CAS per mail (and Skype). Their participation, albeit brief in terms of physical presence, was indispensable for the progress of the collaborative projects.

Arnt Lykke Jakobsen, Professor; Denmark, Copenhagen Business School; collaborating with Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen and Barbara Schmiedtová on an
experimental study of the production and interpretation of possessives in German and Danish (L1 and L2) and with Bergljot Behrens on a study of the relationship between translation competence on the one hand and reading and writing competence on the other (research areas 2 and 3).

**Antje Roßdeutscher**, Professor; Germany, University of Stuttgart; collaborating with Hans Kamp on the principles of DRS construction and, more specifically, studying the construal of meaning verb roots; research area 1.

### 3. Activities

Throughout the academic year, the group met regularly on Tuesdays to present and discuss work in progress, sometimes also organizational matters. Many of these internal seminars were open for ‘outsiders’, e.g., colleagues from UiO, including CSMN. In addition, group members collaborating on specific projects met for discussions in the lounge whenever needed. In general, interaction between the fellows was vivid.

On **August 20, 2010**, the research group gathered for a one-day kick-off seminar.

On **September 1, 2010**, Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen presented the project in a talk on the official opening of the new academic year at CAS.

The group arranged three 1½ day workshops on central topics of joint interest, inviting one or two scholars from outside as speakers and discussants:

- **Adversative Workshop**, February 7-8, 2011, organized by Henk Zeevat. Guests: Carla Umbach, University of Osnabrück, and Grégoire Winterstein, University Paris-Diderot

On **March 10, 2011**, Barbara Schmiedtová gave a luncheon talk – "I See How You Think: Using Eye-Tracking to Study Effects of Language on Thought" – at CAS.

**March 23 – 26, 2011**, seven members of the group had a winter workshop at Sørnesset, presenting and discussing work in progress.

On **June 6-8, 2011**, Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen, Barbara Schmiedtová and Kjell Johan Sæbø organized a concluding international workshop “Discourse Representation, Comprehension and Production in a Cross-linguistic Perspective” at the Norwegian Academy of Sciences and Letters in Oslo, with six invited speakers and three external moderators. The research group gave nine presentations of its results.

During their stay at CAS, Bergljot Behrens, Kaja Borthen, Thorstein Fretheim, Hans Kamp, Maria F. Krave, Barbara Schmiedtová, Kjell Johan Sæbø and Henk Zeevat presented ongoing research at seminars / workshops / conferences arranged at the University of Oslo.

Between September 2010 and September 2011, the fellows altogether gave 30-35 presentations outside CAS on topics directly or indirectly related to the CAS project.
4. Achievements
The time at CAS was an extremely fruitful and positive research experience for all members of the group, leading to new insights in all three areas, new collaborations, new research plans for the future – and new professional and personal friendships. In addition, the CAS administration, taking efficiently care of all practical matters, and the ambience, made daily life at CAS very pleasant.

4.1 New Insights
Work carried out in area 1, supported by related work in area 2, has added substantially to the evidence that considerations belonging to the domain of pragmatics, in particular, attunements to interlocutors' perspectives, have impacts in the domain of semantics, and thus contributed to the growing realization that the borderline between semantics and pragmatics is more porous than has generally been supposed.

The study on tense in subordinate clauses resulted in a compositional semantic theory for temporal constructions and an explicit theory for the syntax-semantics-morphology interface.

Cooperation between researchers from different theoretical and linguistic backgrounds shed new light on presupposition-triggering particles like ‘again’ and ‘too’ as a means of discourse management, ensuring that the interlocutors keep track of the whole communication; and they have increased our understanding of the impact of cross-linguistic differences on so-called free indirect speech – and literary writing in general.

Cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic collaboration brought up a novel perspective on the interaction of linguistic code and context in language production and comprehension (research areas 2 and 3). The main focus of the joint enterprise was on the interpretation of expressions of causality (e.g., because) and coordination (e.g., and, or). In addition, a new experimental design based on a combination of acceptability judgments and sentence completion was developed to examine temporal interpretation of conjoined clauses embedded in context. This design was applied to test cross-linguistic differences in various languages including Norwegian, German and English.

4.2 Relevant Publications
All publications listed below have been or will be peer-reviewed.

Special issues/Edited books
1. Henk Zeevat, Antje Roßdeutscher & Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen (eds.): Adversativity and Additivity. Special issue of Lingua (Elsevier) containing five papers by CAS fellows (under reviewing; to appear July 2012), including:
   • Regine Eckardt: “Particles, ‘Maximise Presuppositions’, and Discourse Management”
   • Jekaterina Jasinskaja: “Correction by Additive and Adversative Markers”
   • Elena Karagjosova: “On the Discourse Function of Particles in Post-initial Position”
   • Henk Zeevat: “Objection Marking and Additivity”
   • Henk Zeevat (with Grégoire Winterstein): “Empirical Constraints on Accounts of ‘Too’”.
2. Barbara Hemforth, Barbara Schmiedtová & Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen (eds.), *Psycholinguistic approaches to meaning and understanding across language*, volume in the series *Studies in Theoretical Psycholinguistics* (Springer), containing seven joint papers by CAS fellows (under reviewing):

- B. Hemforth, B. Schmiedtová, & C. Fabricius-Hansen: “Introduction: Meaning and Understanding across languages”
- B. Behrens, C. Fabricius-Hansen & Lyn Frazier (with Charles Clifton Jr.): “Pairing Form and Meaning in English and Norwegian: Conjoined VPs or Conjoined Clauses?“
- B. Schmiedtová, B. Behrens, C. Fabricius-Hansen, & B. Hemforth: “Understanding Coordinate Clauses in Czech, English, German, and Norwegian”
- Oliver Bott (with Fritz Hamm): “Cross-linguistic Variation in the Processing of Aspect”
- Kaja Borthen, B. Schmiedtová, B. Behrens, C. Fabricius-Hansen, & B. Hemforth: “Referring Expressions in Direct and Indirect Speech”
- Barbara Hemforth (with Peter Baumann and Lars Konieczny): “Coreference and Expectations: how alternative constructions and referring expressions can serve as cues”
- Torgrim Solstad & O. Bott: “Implicit causality bias in German and Norwegian”

**(Other) Joint Papers**

**Oliver Bott & Torgrim Solstad:**

- “Abductive inferences in explanatory discourse”. To be submitted to *Discourse Processes* (Taylor & Francis)
- “Explaining the implicit causality bias”. To be submitted to *Journal of Semantics*.

**Atle Grønn & Arnim von Stechow:**

- “Tense in adjuncts”. Submitted to *Linguistic Compass*.
- “Tense in (bare) indicative conditionals”. To be submitted 2012.
- “Tense in subjunctive conditionals across languages”. To be submitted 2012.

**Jekaterina Jasinskaja & Elena Karagjosova:**

- "Elaboration and Explanation". To be presented at *Constraints in Discourse 4* (CiD4), published in the pre-proceedings and probably submitted to an edited volume of post-proceedings.

**Kjell Johan Sæbø & Atle Grønn:**

- “A, the, another: a game of same and different” (26 pages). To appear in *Journal of Logic, Language and Information*, special issue on speaker-hearer perspective interaction.
(Other) Individual Papers

Kaja Borthen:
- "Om det uuttalte - det relevensteoretiske implikaturbegrepet i møte med autentiske data" (with Gøril Thomassen and Signe Rix-Berthelin). Submitted to *Norsk Lingvistisk Tidsskrift*.

Regine Eckardt:
- “Hereby explained”. Submitted to *Linguistics & Philosophy*.

Thorstein Fretheim:

Jekaterina Jasinskaja:
- "(A)symmetric correction markers in English, Russian, Polish, and Japanese". Submitted to *Formal Description of Slavic Languages* (FDSL).

Barbara Schmiedtová:
- “Acquisition of L2 narrative competence: Tense switching by Russian L2 speakers of German”. In: *Journal of Slavic Linguistics*, 19, 2. (in Press) (with N. Sahonenko)

Kjell Johan Sæbø:
- “Reports of specific indefinites” (34 pages). Submitted to *Journal of Semantics*.
- “Lessons from descriptive indexicals” (36 pages). Submitted to *Mind*.

Henk Zeevat:
- “Parity”. To appear in JOLLI, special issue on Bidirectionality, ed. by Petra Hendriks, Helen de Hoop, Henriëtte de Swart.

Individual book projects

Regine Eckardt:
- *Who is talking? The semantics of free indirect discourse*. Book project submitted to Oxford University Press.

Hans Kamp:
- *Articulated Contexts*.

Henk Zeevat:
- *Production and Interpretation of Natural Language*. To be finished within the first half of 2012 and submitted to the series CRISPI (*Current Research in the Semantics/Pragmatics Interface*) (Elsevier).
4.3 Plans for the future

To a large extent, the collaborative teams that were formed, or strengthened, during the project period will continue working on issues related to the CAS project. Specifically:

- Barbara Schmiedtová has submitted a (3-4 years) research proposal *Psycholinguistic Perspectives on Foreign Language Acquisition: a corpus-based experimental approach* to the Norwegian Research Council, to be conducted at ILOS, UiO, in collaboration with Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen, Atle Grønn and Diana S. Santos. Collaborative work on possessives and the relationship between translation competence on the one hand and reading and writing competence on the other will be subsumed under this project.

- Barbara Schmiedtová and Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen will organize a theme session on *Experimental Approaches to Meaning and Understanding Across Languages* at the 11th International Conference on Nordic and General Linguistics in Freiburg, April 2012, with five presentations from the CAS project.

5. The participants

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