



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S6. Interpretation of Novel Words

Tuesday 29 August: 4.30-6.30pm

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New words come into existence hand-in-hand with the development of human knowledge. These words later come to be interpreted by language users. The seminar will provide a discussion of multiple factors that influence the interpretation of various types of novel words (compounds, affixed words, conversions, blends, etc.) including linguistic and extra-linguistic (cognitive, pragmatic) factors. Space will be given to various psycholinguistic and morphological approaches to and models of novel word interpretation under both context-dependent and context-free circumstances, as well as to papers discussing unequal predictability of various possible readings of a coinage encountered by a speaker for the first time.

***Bouncebackability* – a Web-as-corpus-based case study of a new formation, its interpretation, generalization, spread and subsequent decline**

Peter Hohenhaus

Bouncebackability is a recent formation, coined originally to describe a football team's averting defeat in a particular match in 2003. Football fans subsequently picked up and generalized the neologism. Associated online communities even started campaigning for its inclusion in "the dictionary". There were also signs of natural spread, with a broadening interpretation, beyond the formations's original domain. However, various Web-searches indicate that the initial "success" of the formation is not lasting, and that it may already be dropping out of use. Subconscious resistance against the formation's "odd" morphological make-up is suggested to be accountable for this lack of lasting institutionalization.

Interpretations of Novel Noun-Noun Compounds by Preschool Children

Andrea Krott (University of Birmingham)

We will give a brief overview of the literature on children's acquisition of compounding and describe the results of our recent studies on children's interpretations of novel

noun-noun compounds. These studies investigate for the first time how children relate compound constituents to arrive at interpretations of the combined concept. Our results show that pre-school children are affected by their knowledge of similar compounds, in particular compounds with the same head noun. In addition, they seem to focus on concrete modifier-head relations (HAS, LOCATION, AND) in contrast to abstract relations (FOR).

Using Conceptual Combination Research to Better Understand Novel Compound Words

Christina Gagné (University of Alberta)

Interpreting a novel modifier-noun phrase (e.g, licorice guitar) involves both the conceptual and lexical systems; one must access the concepts denoted by the words and select a relation (e.g., noun MADE OF modifier) to form a unified conceptual representation. We describe recent empirical work that demonstrates that the ease of interpreting a novel noun phrase is influenced by the availability of the required relation, and discuss the implications of this research for the processing of both novel and familiar compounds.

On Predictability of Conversion Relations in Selected Conceptual Fields

Pavol Štekauer (Safarik University) & Ana Diaz (University of Jaén)

The present research aims to find out whether there are certain prediction-related regularities between objects falling within a particular conceptual field (and their corresponding names) on the one hand, and the general semantic relations between the converting and the converted naming units on the other. A sample of conceptual fields is studied based on lexicographic evidence recorded in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, as well as on native speaker competence by production questionnaires. The Predictability Rate (PR) and the Objectified PR are examined for regularities at the level of specific meanings. The study shows dissimilar results between and within conceptual fields.

Comprehending New Words beyond their Original Contexts

Gregory L. Murphy (New York University)

When one encounters a novel word, it may be in a context that does not specify its complete meaning and possible uses in other contexts. One source of information speakers can use is how similar, familiar words are used. I describe preliminary results from an experiment in which people read novel words in one context and then had to understand them in a new use. In some cases, these uses followed patterns of familiar words. The question is whether such patterns aid in comprehension even when the word has never been encountered in that use before.

Acceptance as an Integral Factor in the Interpretation of Novel Words

Dorota Smyk-Bhattacharjee (University of Zürich)

Two contributing factors in the interpretation of the novel word are discussed: (1) speaker acceptability, and (2) the anticipated unfamiliarity with the new formation, of the

potential reader. The corpus used here comes from samples taken from English language blogs, and currently consists of one million words of text. Writers often give clear clues as to whether the words form part of their lexicon. They also make predictions of whether the word familiarity will be shared by the readers. First, already established words are filtered out. The remaining novel formations are classified according to the lexical distance manifested by the writer.