



Language and languaging, form and substance

Workshop on Form and Substance, København University,
February 27-28, 2015

Jan Anward

Language and Culture
Linköping University, SE

jan.anward@liu.se

Per Linell

Education, Communication and Learning
Göteborg University, SE

per.linell@gu.se



The nature of language: Two meta-theories

- Language as *abstract objects* (forms); signs and sign systems
Grammar: sentence grammar
- Languaging (language) as situated *actions and activities*
Grammar: utterance grammar (utterances as types)



Languaging

- Term preferred to "language use"
- Languaging (primary) is prior to language system (derived)
- Languaging = (inter)activities involving (at least some features of) (verbal) language
- Language can be more or less important, depending on activity type
- A theory of languaging (activities) needs a theory of language system (abstracted patterns serving as resources and constraints)



Form and substance

Aristotle:

- (a) Form superimposed on, partially integrated in substance
- (b) Substance associated with potentiality, form with actuality

Plato:

Form an abstract (ideal) reality separated from mundane, tangible objects

Humboldt:

Dynamis: power of the language system (or the mind) to provide resources for people's cognitive and communicative activities (activities (*energeia*) resulting in utterances as finished products (*ergon*))

Structuralists:

Form is primarily the (Platonic) "inner form" of language



Perspective shift in the language sciences

- Instead of the assumption of the primacy of language systems over language use, we assume languaging to have primacy over second-order abstractions (“language systems”)
- This perspective shift will have repercussions on how to conceive of form and substance (or their conceptual counterparts)
- Languaging requires an utterance grammar instead of a (formal) sentence grammar



Utterances

- Utterances are situated, embodied, other-oriented actions. (Formal sentences are abstractions outside of time and social interaction)
- Meaningful events that participants are accountable for
- Can have non-sentential forms or be "composite utterances" (Enfield, 2009) (vocal and gestural (postural, etc.) parts)
- Typically built by "increments"
- Utterance *types* are constraints on situated utterances
- Structural constraints support anticipations of upcoming parts; partial parallellism between speaker's and listener's predicaments
- "Dialogical": interdependent with others' actions ("self–other interdependences)



Does the difference between utterance grammar and sentence grammar make a difference? Ex. (1)

Hintikka's "identification" utterances: $N = DD$ vs. $DD = N$ (N = name, DD = definite description):

(1a) *François Mitterand was President of France in 1992.*

(1b) *President of France in 1992 was François Mitterand.*



Utterance with an *it*-cleft

(2) (telephone conversation between G(erda) and V(iveka) about an apologising letter that G's family had received from another couple, A(nnika) and K(rister)) (A. Lindström)

1.G: ((...)) ja träffa ju Annika förresten å hon

2. hälsade så glatt på mej, du hörde de att dom

3. hade skrivit brev

((seven lines omitted))

11.V: **va de eh Krister som hade skriv[i (de)?**

12.G: [Krister hade

13. skriv i re.

14.V: .hha förstog de(h), hehe.h

15.G: ja Annika tyckte ju fortfarande inte att de va

16. nåt som va märklit. så de: förstår ja men men:

17. **de va Krister som hade skriv i re,**

18.V: ja just de.



Some Sw. utterances initiated by *de va* 'it was' (Engdahl)

(3a) *Det var bra att du sa det.* 'It was good that you said that'

(b) *Det var bra att du sa.* 'It was good that you said that'

(b') *Det var bra. (.) att du sa.*

(c) *Det var det bra att du sa.* 'It was good that you said that'

(c') **Det var det bra. (.) att du sa.*

(d) *Bra att du sa.* 'Good that you said that'



Negation+XP-initiated utterances in Swedish

(4)

1. A: så plattfiskarna e inte platta från början?
2. B: nä inte **från början** ä dom inte de.

A: `so the flatfish are not flat from the beginning?´

B: `no not from the beginning they are not´

(5)

1. A: här ska de va hyllor (.) men ingen dörr (.)
2. ska de inte va.

`here there will be shelves (.) but no door there
won´t be´



Some properties of many dialogical utterances (e.g. *de va* examples)

1. *Responsivity (and/or projectivity)*: Backward-pointing (and/or forward-pointing) to prior (and/or possibly next) utterances
1. *Incrementation*: Expansions of utterances (e.g. brief responses) may lead to awkward (even ungrammatical) syntactic expressions
2. *Syntactic ambiguities of constituents, and in-course change of syntactic dependences*



If languaging is primary, what remains of the underlying language system (inner form)?

Three positions:

1. Not much remains: New utterances are formed with reference to attested exemplar utterances ("by analogy")
2. There are abstractions tied to (concrete) utterances, which may be seen as representing grammatical constructions
3. More of structuralism: People develop more or less extensive `second-order´ systems of language structure (largely as an effect of literacy)



Repercussions on the status of form and substance

- The links between form and actuality, and substance and potentiality, are not absolute; for example, "inner form" can be seen as resources (potentials).
- Substance and form must be relativised, since they are co-present in both languaging and language systems: in Humboldt's terms, "inner form" (and *dynamis*) have aspects of both form (abstraction) and substance (resources, potentiality), *energeia* is both form and substance, and *ergon* (finished utterances) have both form (especially outer form) and substance.



Interactionism

- Interactions/interactivities are the primary phenomena, with their own properties of logic
- Goffman: interaction order *sui generis*
- Schegloff (1991): "direct interaction is the primordial scene of social life" (and human existence)
- Interactivities more basic than intersubjectivities; participation more basic than knowledge



Dialogism: The presence of *others*

- Other-interdependence: Mutual dependence between self, others and contexts
- Others: Individual co-present other(s), peripheral others (present or absent individuals or groups), generalised others
- Dialogicality: Ability to make sense (of utterances, actions, the world), in direct or indirect interaction with others



Limited participatory agency

Factors influencing participants' actions:

- own individual initiatives
- biologically induced predispositions
- cultural norms
- sedimented and automatised linguistic patterns
- improvisation, pure chance



Meta-Theory of Linguaging and Language: Some points

1. Linguaging is prior to language
2. Utterances in languaging are embodied actions, multi-modal, temporally distributed, and socioculturally and situationally contexted
3. Linguaging emerged from partly pre-existing natural and semiotic resources
4. Language itself is not entirely sovereign in sense-making: it cannot express everything
5. Other participants are always directly or indirectly present in our sense-makings
6. Interactivities are prior to intersubjectivities



Meta-Theory of Linguaging and Language: Points continued

7. Participants in normal situated languaging can exercise their own agency, but only in limited ways
8. Utterances in real, situated languaging are not always clauses or sentences
9. Phonology is based on gestures designed to aim for target values of their acoustic results
10. The situated meanings of utterances are always dependent on an interplay between meaning potentials (affordances) of linguistic resources and contextual resources
11. Traditional and modern linguistics have been subject to a Written Language Bias
12. Structuralism has been limited in its explanatory power: it started with idealised fully competent users' systems, rather than with a developmental perspective