DELI ÁGNES

MEANING WITH LEXICAL REPETITION

Abstract: The paper examines repeated lexical items in dialogical discourse concentrating on the role of repetition in the process of text development. In terms of the relationship between lexical meaning and the context the following claims will be made:

Lexical repetition is not necessarily semantic repetition; a repeated lexical item may carry contextually new information. In discourse repeated words have an existential paradigm. Sense selection from the existential paradigm is marked prosodically, by prominence and tone.

To describe the interdependence of grammatical and lexical cohesion Hasan (1984) uses the technical term 'COHESIVE CHAIN'. In Halliday and Hasan (1985) she explains her term as follows:

> "... a chain is formed by a set of items each of which is related to the others by the semantic relation of co-reference, co-classification and/or co-extension. Taking the type of relation into account, we can sub-categorise chains into two types: IDENTITY CHAINS and SIMILARITY CHAINS" (ibid.:84).

She exemplifies the two types of relationship in a text, in which *I* with *girl,* and *she* is an identity chain, whereas *went* with *walk* is a similarity chain.

This model seems to suggest that all repeated lexical items of a text are related in an identity chain. This is not necessarily true, however, especially not so in conversation. In the following extract speaker B evaluates a housewife's work repeating the noun *work* three times, and her addressee, speaker A, expresses agreement by repetition, too:

[1]   B1:   But the the the **work** itself is is **work**.
         A1:   Of course,
         B2:   But not | acknowledged |
         ~A1: | of course, |
         ~B2:   as **work**, because it is not paid. It's [e]
         ~A1:   very hard **work**.
                              O16A:554

If speaker B's utterance were an instance of pure lexical repetition, it would have no communicative import. But, obviously, this is not the case, as the addressee is able to interpret the statement and she gives reply to it. As a matter of fact, the utterance *But the work istelf is is work can* not be regarded an example of tautology.

Levinson (1983) takes a radical pragmatic approach to the question of tautologies. Instead of interpreting sentences like '*War is war*' in terms of their logical form, he refers to Grice's conversational maxims and pragmatic inference.

Wierzbicka (1987), on the other hand, from a 'radical semantic' position argues for tautological patterns having distinct meanings. Among other things she maintains that the tautology '*A husband is a husband*' can have as many as four distinct semantic interpretations. In contrast,

Fraser (1987) argues that

> "the very form of the sentence – a nominal tautology – signals that the speaker intends to convey the belief that the participants share a view towards some aspect of the objects referenced by the sentence noun phrase, and wishes to bring this belief to the hearer's awareness" (1987:218).

He also emphasizes that what this property intended by the speaker is, depends on the utterance context, and as a consequence much is left to the hearer's inference (cf. ibid.).

McCarthy (1987) points out that in conversation a repeated lexical item may be used by the co-conversationalist with a slight shift of meaning, i.e. the meaning of a lexical item may arise in the course of renegotiation between the participants. Renegotiation is not the only source of meaning shift; polysemy is another cirsumstance for the inconsistencies of meaning with repeated lexical items.

McCarthy's observation is also valid for the meanings of *work* in the above extract.

Three questions arise on closer investigation of the meaning of the initiating utterance:

1. how many interpreations of *work* are involved?
2. can the meaning of the word be specific while it is usually meant to be unspecific?
3. how are the various shifts of meaning marked prosodically?

Let us do a step-by step interpetation of the discourse.

The first noun determined by the definite article in utterance B1 has anaphoric reference, and the topic of the conversation being a housewife's job, it refers back to that. The second appearance of the same noun seems related to a more general meaning of the word: work in the broad sense, a purposeful activity which involves an effort. The 'specific' meaning is grammatically marked by the definite article, whereas the generic meaning is implied by the zero article. The zero article not only marks the generic reference of the noun, but also gives it the status of the superordinate member of a hyponymy. In this respect the repeated lexical item *work* represents the realization of a semantic change which arises in the course of the conversation. For this special relationship between the repeated lexical items I propose the term **existential hyponymy**. 'Existential" is used here after Brazil (1985), and is taken from his term **existential paradigm,** meaning the here-and-now reference at a specific time and place, a unique conversational setting and the peculiar understanding between speaker and hearer as opposed to some general, permanent feature of understanding. Existential paradigms are

> "that set of possibilities that a speaker can regard as actually available in a given situation" (1985:41).

The third occurrence of the noun *work* in move ~B2 implies yet another semantic change which can be interpreted in the light of the prosodic features of the following utterance:

> // because it's NOT PAID //.

Paid work is the third member of the hyponymy. Speaker A's acknowledgement in utterance ~A1 is a mere repetition of the hypernym *work* used by speaker B in the last tone unit of utterance B1, i.e. *work* in the general meaning. This is clearly indicated by the speaker's decision to make the word non-prominent, as it usually

happens in those cases when the word is already "in the play", i.e. when it represents a 'given' item (for the communicative value of prominence see Brazil, 1985).

In discourse the intended shifts of meaning, are mirrored in the prosodic features of the repeated lexical items.

Brazil (1985) emphasizes, that prominence is a feature which the speaker can change voluntarily, and that his decision is meaningful. It is this choice which carries some kind of communicative value in the discourse. Prominence choices represent the constraints which do not come from the language system as a whole, but from the interaction itself. Prominent syllables project a world of interaction as well as lexical discourse relations; they embody the speaker's assessment of the situation in terms of 'given' and 'new' information.

Our extract shows it clearly that repeated lexical items can represent contextually new information, i.e. the speakers' choices from the existential paradigm. These items are always prominent:

B1:   // *0* BUT <u>THE</u> // *0* <u>THE</u> // *p* the $\overline{\underline{\text{WORK}}}$ // *p* IT$\overline{\underline{\text{SELF}}}$ // *0* <u>IS</u> //

    // *p* IS $\overline{\underline{\text{WORK}}}$ //

  A1: // *p* OF $\overline{\underline{\text{COURSE}}}$ //

  B2: // *p* but NOT | ack<u>NOW</u>ledged // |

  ~A1: | // *p* OF <u>COURSE</u> // |

  ~B2: // *p* as <u>WORK</u> // *p* because it's NOT $\overline{\underline{\text{PAID}}}$ // *p* <u>IT'S</u> //

  ~A1: // *p* VERY <u>HARD</u> work //

In extract [1a] above the word 'work' occurs four times, out of which three times it is prominent. This sense selection is not incidental. It projects several senses of the word (cf. **Figure 1** above, p. 109): a housewife's work (the first occurrence in move B1), the general idea (the second occurrence in move B1) and paid work (in move ~B2). The 'newness' of the meaning in the latter two cases is

underlined by falling tone. The last occurrence of 'work' is non-selective (move ~A1), as it is the repetion of the general sense.

To summarize the taxonomy of the meanings of the noun *work* as understood in extract [1] I suggest the following distribution:

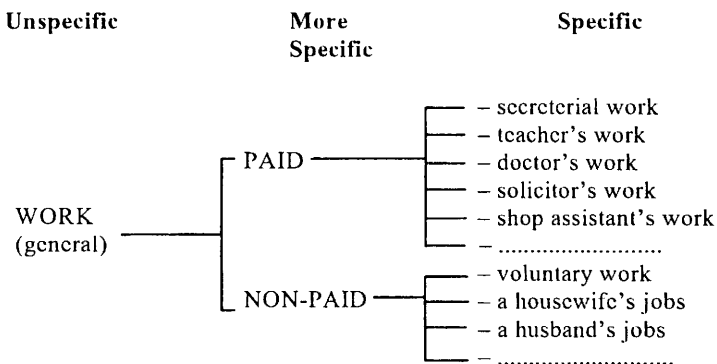| Unspecific	More Specific	Specific
		— — secreterial work
		— — teacher's work
	┌ PAID ──	— — doctor's work
		— — solicitor's work
WORK		— — shop assistant's work
(general) ──		— ....
		— — voluntary work
	└ NON-PAID ──	— — a housewife's jobs
		— — a husband's jobs
		— ....

Figure 1

The diagram is not to suggest that all the possible interpretations can be listed in an inventory, as implied by Wierzbicka (1987) and (1988). The meaning of the word is context specific, new interpretations can arise in conversations, and the above diagram is meant to allow for this.

Although two maxims of Grice (1975) seem to have been violated in the discourse above, viz. the maxim of Quantity – make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange –, as well as that of Manner – avoid obscurity –, there is no misunderstanding between the two speakers. The inference on the addressee, speaker A's part, is not a logico-semantic one: B's message is communicated by appealing to A's knowledge of the world which is supposed to exist as their common experience or **shared knowledge**. The response is a cue that it has been specified for the purposes of the exchange.

The context-dependency of the interpretation of a polysemic word like *work* can be described in a formula as follows:

$$X = X1 + X2 + X3 + Xn, \text{ where}$$
$$X1 = X + C1, \quad X2 = X + C2, \quad X3 = X + C3, \quad Xn = X + Cn$$

(Symbol X stands for lexical item, X1 – Xn represent specific interpretations, and C means the context.)
The formula is meant to also allow for the interpretation of the notion of existential hyponymy:
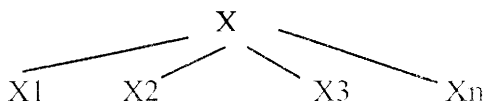

Figure 2

   The following extract is an example of a proper noun entering into hyponymic relationship with itself through its repeated form.
   The interpretation of the referent of the proper noun 'Germany' in ext.[2] below is based on the specific real-life situation, the historical circumstances of the country in the year 1989 before the reunification of West Germany and East Germany:

> [2]   A: Now, you said [dfe] no country has been successfully divided for very long. Remember # Germany was, I mean unified for over a hundred years or so.
>   B: [DfedMeN] there's there's Germany and there's Germany. [e] there's a still a spiritual Germany which has which is of course [m] many [e] thousands of years old.
> <div align="right">O14A:341</div>

   The context of this discourse involves not only that of the situation in which it is produced, but also a much wider context, that of the history of Germany, and the interpretation of the situation at the moment of the conversation by speaker B. He presupposes a spiritual reality besides the physical reality we live in. The sentence *There is Germany and there is Germany* is only interpretable in the light of the following.
   The presence of the conjunct *and* carries interpersonal meaning; it implies the meaning of contrast by separating the two, formally identical parts of the sentence. The word for word repetition of the clause without *and* would carry a totally different meaning. A sentence like *'There is Germany, there is Germany'* in discourse can have the interpersonal meaning that the speaker needs time to continue, or that he wants to keep the floor.

Bolinger (1977:7) argues for a*nd* having the effect of separation when e.g. used in sentences describing two separate events. Linguists who take a cognitive semantic approach to language argue that formal complexity corresponds to conceptual complexity, i.e. „More is more" (see Haiman, 1985). Proximity, or conceptual distance tends to be expressed syntactically. Adjectives like *black and white* or *good and bad, e.g.* are incompatible in meaning, there is a conceptual distance between them, which seems to be he reason why they cannot be coordinated asyndetically (cf. Haiman, ibid.:117).

A similar example can be taken from the area of everyday conversation. It is not uncommon that to a polar question like *'Would you like to come?'* the response can be *'Yes and no'*. The form of the response seems a reflection of conceptual incompatibility. Due to the incompatibility the speaker is very likely to give an explanation, why he cannot give a definite answer, i.e. 'why yes, and why no'.

In extract [2] it is also the conjunct *and* that is responsible for the meaning of contrast. In order to interpret B's utterance the listener has to use the following conceptual system:
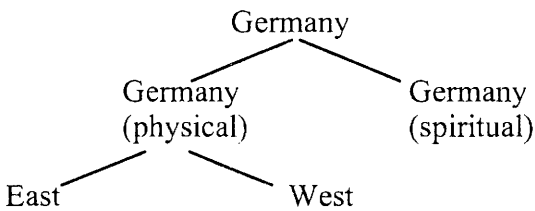
Germany

Germany
(physical)

Germany
(spiritual)

East   West

Figure 3

The General-Particular relaionship behind the different interpretations of 'Germany' assigns the taxonomic relation of superordination to the proper noun (on taxonomic relations see Martin, 1992:294–309).

The Germany mentioned by the first speaker in move A is used as a superordinate (a hyperonym), whereas in move B the second speaker uses the co-hyponyms (the physical Germany and the spiritual Germany), which is made clear in the utterance *There is a still a spiritual Germany which has which is of course [m] many [e] thousands of years old.*

It is sense-selecting repetition in ext.[2a], too, which projects the context of interpretation for 'Germany'. The prosodic transcription is to show this sense selection:

A: // r GERmany has only been ^{Unified} // p FOR WHAT // r a HUNDred ^{YEARS} or so //

B: // 0 there's GERmany // p and there's GERmany // 0 [e] //

// p THERE IS a // r STILL a SPIritual germany // 0 WHICH HAS

// 0 WHICH IS // r OF COURSE // [m] // 0 MAny [e] // p THOUsands of years OLD //

The tone unit with the repeated occurrence of the proper noun is pronounced with falling tone, which is a mark of the shift of meaning. The falling tone implying new information adds to this implication. Semantically this word for word repetition is partial repetition.

On the basis of the two conversational extracts above the following conclusions can be drawn:
1. Lexical repetition is not always complete repetition, consequently it does not always simply mean the repetition of old information as some linguistic theories might imply (see Halliday & Hasan, 1976, Winter, 1977, 1986).
2. The meaning of repeated lexical items in discourse is context-dependent, as it is emanated from the participants' shared experience of the world.
3. Prominence on the repeated word and falling tone mark entirely or partially new information.

Abbreviations and Symbols

A	speaker A's move
~A	speaker A continues his move
A1	speaker A's first move
A2	speaker A's second move
| |	parallel talk
ext.	extract
[1]	number of extract
[1a]	number of prosodic transcript
// p	falling tone: proclaiming
// r	fall-rise tone: referring
// 0	level tone
// //	boundaries of the tone unit

CAPITAL LETTERS in tone units signify the prominent syllables

UNDERLINED SYLLABLES IN CAPITAL carry the tone

At the end of each extract I have a **code number**. This locates the speech in the recorded data.

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