The Configuration of Metarepresentational Negation

The aim of this presentation is to discuss the mental configuration of metarepresentational negation (MetNeg) with an emphasis on the triggered inferences and the generated cognitive effects. The corpus of data represents authentic Romanian data in the attempt to capture the functioning of MetNeg in natural language use. The presentation is a linguistic contribution situated in the subfield of cognitive pragmatics with applications in political discourse. The approach uses the tools and methods provided by Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995).

Our study is based on the premise that MetNeg is always the actualization of metarepresentation, i.e. a higher order representation with a lower order representation embedded in it (Wilson 2000). We postulate the hypothesis that the action of the negative operator *not* on the material found in its cognitive domain is an action of **'**rejection', interpreted as a mental activity generated in accordance with the cognitive effect represented by the 'contradiction and elimination of an existing assumption'. Therefore, MetNeg is the outcome of an input processed in a context in which a 'contradicting and eliminating' inference is applied, i.e. some existing assumptions are rejected and a new set of assumptions is suggested.

Depending on the context and background knowledge, rejection can target different aspects and may be applied to different elements. It can be used alone or it can combine with other mental operations. Thus, we have identified two major types of structures in our corpus of data: structures built on [simple rejection] and on [rejection + substitution]. In the first situation the accent is put only on the material that is rejected for different reasons. In the case of [rejection + substitution], rejection combines with different types of mental activities, generating different subtypes of the 'contradicting and eliminating' cognitive effect, such as exclusion, accumulation, inclusion. Several negative structures fall into these categories, such as: simple rejection [not (X)], metarepresentational negation [not (X) but (X')], MetNeg [(X') not just (X)], the cumulative structure with negative form [not only (X) but also (X')].

We support the view that the MetNegs are intrinsically metarepresentational, namely they are always instances of second order interpretation. From this viewpoint, we dissociate between 'metarepresentational structure' and 'metarepresentational discourse'. In other words, we delimit between the manner in which the negative structures are configured (i.e. in terms of the content of the negative structures) and the way in which a discursive form is presented (in terms of 'pure quotation', 'reported speech and thought', 'mixed quotation' etc.).

We take special interest in the elements involved in the configuration of these negative structures, i.e. the (X) and (X') segments and their relationships with the existing correlative pairs. The analysis focuses on the status, type and nature of the rejected assumption and on the manner in which the attribution is realized.

References

Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson, (1995): *Relevance: communication and cognition*, Wiley-Blackwell.

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