VERBAL Workshop: “Metadiscourse in spoken language”

OrganisatorInnen/Organisers:
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Description:

The fact that human beings can talk about language as they can do about other things is one of the distinguishing features between human and animal language and has been termed ‘reflexivity’ by Hockett (1960). This phenomenon has been discussed by the majority of linguists by using various constructions with the prefix ‘meta’, such as ‘metalanguage’, ‘metadiscourse’, ‘meta-talk’, ‘metacommunication’. According to Mey (2001:173) “a ‘metalanguage’ indicates a language that is about language, one level ‘up’ from the language itself, the ‘object language’[…]. A metalanguage indicates, comments on, examines, criticizes etc. what happens on the level of the object language”.

The aim of this workshop is to explore the function and usage of this type of language in spoken discourse. We thereby understand metadiscourse as “discourse about the ongoing discourse”, which is the narrow view of metadiscourse (see also Mauranen 1993 and 2010). It is an essential feature of spoken interactions and is not restricted to any particular type of discourse. However, the functions of metadiscourse in spoken texts will depend on the activity type at hand.

Generally, it is not possible to classify certain forms as metadiscourse since it is not the form that determines whether something is metalinguistic but rather the co-text. Identifying metalanguage is difficult due to the vagueness of the boundaries between metalinguistic and other functions, as many utterances are multifunctional (see Schiffrin 1980:201; Techtmeyer 2001:1457; Ädel 2006:23).

Metadiscourse may refer to any level and any aspect of discourse such as channel (e.g. acoustic problems in understanding), roles of speaker and listener, speaking rights and turn-taking, word meaning, sentence and utterance meaning, topic of talk, frames and text types, conversational maxims, textual elements, discourse organisation, etc. (Bublitz 2001:1332).

The functions of metadiscourse can generally be seen in describing, organising and commenting on the ongoing discourse, often serving the purpose of achieving understanding and supporting acceptance (see also Techtmeyer’s (2001:1454) three basic functions of metacommunicative utterances). Metadiscourse can be applied prospectively and retrospectively in the process of negotiating and managing understanding (Bublitz 2001:1332). However, the use of metadiscourse has been found to vary substantially across different genres and different cultures (see Mauranen 1993 and 2010, Hyland 2005, Ädel 2006, Penz 2011, Graf 2015). These differences are not surprising in view of findings that metadiscourse may provide some insights into underlying interactional and pragmatic norms of the language use of a community.

This workshop aims to bring to light the role of metadiscourse in different activity types of spoken and quasi-spoken language. Despite the growing interest in the uses and functions of metadiscourse in written language, its role in spoken language has not attracted much attention. The aim of this workshop is to fill this gap in research.

The presentations will deal with the following topic areas: relationship talk, coaching discourse, intercultural interactions, political debates and interviews, teacher talk, professional discourse, religious discourse, computer–mediated communication, etc.
References:


