

Abstract

Workshop on Tight and Loose Grammar

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Turn transitions, projectability and “tight” grammatical constructions

Taking turn transitions as evidence of participant orientations to units of talk, this paper examines sequences where a response is positioned in overlap at a non-TRP. The focus is on the overlapped turns and the grammatical constructions in them: What types of constructions become overlapped? At which point in the construction does the overlap begin? Based on an analysis of naturally occurring everyday face-to-face talk-in-interaction in Finnish and Estonian, this paper attempts to illustrate several points. First, it is evident that word order has an impact on the overlapped elements as it is always the last elements of the utterance that become overlapped. However, since the word order in both Finnish and Estonian is relatively free, what results is that several types of elements may be those that become overlapped. Second, the overlapped elements are usually clearly projectable and recognizable due to sequential and semantic-pragmatic factors. Still, also the grammatical construction itself helps the participants project the upcoming elements. The end of a grammatical construction is thus projectable, but the upcoming concrete lexical elements might not be. Third, concerning tight and loose grammar, it will be argued that the phenomenon in question has more to do with the tightness of the grammatical constructions rather than their looseness: it is hypothesized that tight constructions enable projectability more easily and thus may also be more easily overlapped. However (and fourth), the data suggest that the grammatical constructions are merely by-products of other phenomena such as social actions, and that syntax is more like an epiphenomenon and hence instead of syntax itself, the participants are more oriented to semantic-pragmatic issues and social actions.