Interaction & Constructions

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Abstract

In this article, I observe how a construction emerges, through a method of turn construction which I call recycling with différance, in an informal conversation between four peers. Basing myself on a detailed analysis of the social impact of the turns at talk through which the construction emerges, I argue that a construction never substitutes for or absorbs a series of individual turns, but is a socially negotiated interim structuring of these turns. As such, it is potentially open to new modifications and new uses, which, however, also have to be socially negotiated.

> There's a piece that was torn from the morning
> And it hangs in the gallery of frost
>
> Leonard Cohen: Take this waltz

1.

In this article, I explore what can be learnt from observations in the wild, i.e. observations of how constructions are created and maintained in ordinary conversation.

Four physicians, one woman and three men, who know each other, have volunteered to participate in a formal discussion of euthanasia. An hour before the discussion session will start, they have gathered to plan the discussion[1]. About five minutes into the planning session, Arne introduces a piece of relevant information about euthanasia, in turn 1 below. This is followed by a news receipt from Björn, in turn 2, and a minimal response from Clara, in turn 3. Then Björn, in turn 4, sets out to support Arne's distinction by wording it in yet another way.

1 Arne:

sen	e	ja eh:	sen	e	där	ju
then	am	I eh	then	is	there	you-know

hela	eutanasiproblemet
whole	the-euthanasia-problem

'then I am eh then there is you know the whole euthanasia problem'

sönderfaller	ju	som (p)	som
falls-apart	you-know	as (p)	as

ni	vet	i	två	begrepp
you	know	in	two	notions

'falls apart you know as (p) as you know into two notions'

nämligen	aktiv å	passiv
namely	active and	passive

eutanasi	också	ju.
euthanasia	also	you-know.

'namely active and passive euthanasia also you know.'

2 Björn:

jaha.
oh

3 Clara:

mm (p)[2]

4 Björn:

medveten	å	omedveten. (p)
deliberate	and	indeliberate. (p))

In doing turn 4, Björn uses Arne's preceding turn 1 as a resource, verbalizing only his own reformulation of Arne's distinction and retaining, implicitly, the overall format of Arne's turn. In diagraph format (Du Bois 1996), where successive turns are analyzed into recurring equivalent units, placed in the same column, turn 4 is, as shown below, straightforwardly analyzable as a combination of (at least) *hela eutanasiproblemet sönderfaller ju som (p) som ni vet i två begrepp nämligen* and *medveten å omedveten*, supporting an interpretation of turn 4 as effectively proposing 'the whole euthanasia problem falls apart as you know into two concepts namely deliberate and indeliberate euthanasia'.

```
1 Arne: sen e ja eh:
        sen e där ju hela eutanasiproblemet
                     sönderfaller ju som (p)
                     som ni vet i två begrepp
                     nämligen        aktiv å passiv eutanasi också
  ...
4 Björn:                             medveten å omedveten. (p)
```

This is a method of turn construction, which has been variously called format tying (Goodwin & Goodwin 1987, Goodwin 1990), repetition (Johnstone 1987, 1994, Tannen 1989, ch, 3, Fant 1999, Blanche-Benvensite 2000), quotation (Gasparov 1997), and resonance (Du Bois 1996). Elsewhere (Anward & Lindblom 1999, Anward 2004), I have dubbed this method of turn construction recycling with différance. Basically, in

recycling with différance, speakers model new turns on old turns, in such a way that the overall format of the old turn is kept (implicitly or explicitly), and a new expression is substituted for a part of the old turn. Thus, each new recycling of an old turn also introduces a difference, or sets into play différance, in the sense of Derrida, difference as it unfolds, or is constructed, in time (Derrida 1981: 10).

2.

In offering a reformulation in support of Arne's distinction by the method of recycling with différance, Björn is at the same time creating a construction.

First of all, by modelling his turn on Arne's previous turn, Björn is creating a resemblance between the two turns, of a kind which Bloomfield took as absolutely fundamental in his set of postulates for linguistics as a science: "Within certain communities successive utterances are alike or partly alike." (Bloomfield (1966 [1926]: 26). Moreover, the resemblance created in this way is a working resemblance, put to a social use, in this case a potential alliance. As Douglas (1996) eloquently argues, following Goodman (1970), similarity comes cheap to any observer and needs, to have any descriptive value, to be secured in a demonstration of its practical relevance to participants. In this case, the resemblance is unproblematically part of a local communicative project, and we are entitled to say that Björn, in doing turn 4, effectively subsumes that turn and turn 1 under a common turn type, a recurring turn format with a recurring function – a linguistic sign, in other words , in an extended Saussurean sense (Chafe 1967, Langacker 1998).

Secondly, by making his turn parallel to a key part of Arne's turn, and implicitly retaining the remainder of Arne's turn, Björn, as we have already seen, effectively makes a proper analysis of turn 1 into two parts, and proposes a paradigmatic alternative to one of these parts. Thus, the turn type created through turn 4 is also, both formally and functionally, a combination of a constant part and a variable part, as shown below. In other words, it is what Tomasello (2003: 117) calls an item-based construction. The semantic composition is straightforward: the constant part is predicated of the variable part.

(1) Arne: sen e ja eh:
sen e där ju   hela eutanasiproblemet
sönderfaller ju som (p)
som ni vet i två begrepp
nämligen   { aktiv å passiv eutanasi } också ju.
...
(4) Björn: { medveten å omedveten. (p) }

3.

However, when the conversation moves on after turn 4, we find that Björn's proposed reformulation of Arne's distinction is in fact rather emphatically

rejected by Arne, who directly proceeds, in turn 5, to define the distinction. By using clearly deliberate actions to define both active and passive euthanasia, Arne shows that euthanaisia can only be deliberate and hence, that Björn's reformulation is incorrect. Arne is also supported by Clara, in turns 6 and 8.

4 Björn:

medveten   å   omedveten. (p)
deliberate   and   indeliberate. (p))

5a Arne:

näej aktiv e de där förstår du
noo active is it there see you

'no active is that you see'

att du helt enkelt slår ihjäl [folk.]
that you quite simply hit to-death people

'that you quite simply kill people'

6 Clara:

[gör] fel.((laughter))
do wrong)

5b Arne:

på ett eller annat sätt
in one or another way

'in one way or another'

[passiv e bara att du skiter i dom]
passive is just that you don't-care about them

'passive is just that you don't care about them'

7 Björn:

[( ) ja
yes

8 Clara:

ja
yes

This repartee by Arne makes what would otherwise seem to be a straightforward move at this point, namely the subsumption of turns 1 and 4 under a context-free construction, such as

hela eutanasiproblemet | aktiv å passiv eutanasi | (också ju.)
sönderfaller ju som (p) | medveten å omedveten. (p)
som ni vet i två begrepp
nämligen

quite problematic.

What the context-free representation of the turns says is that the alternatives of the middle paradigm are of equal status. However, this is far from true, as we have just seen. The very point of the sequence we have been looking at is to establish the distinction between active and passive

euthanasia and relegate the distinction between deliberate and indeliberate euthanasia to the realm of the unsayable, in the sense of Wittgenstein (1921), that which it makes no sense to affirm or deny of euthanasia. Of course, we could try to annotate the construction on this point, but that would really amount to somehow incorporate the full sequential contexts of the paradigmatic alternatives into the construction. A notational variant, at best.

4.

Many linguists find it natural to assume that concrete turns are dissolved in memory, leaving only a residue of general patterns, from which new turns can be formed; thus projecting the grammarian's decontextualising practices of collecting and sorting (Harris 1980) onto everyday languaging.

However, as we have just seen, in such a process of dissolution, information is lost which is absolutely vital to the way recurrent patterns can be further used. To be able to use experienced turns as models for new turns, participants cannot let them dissolve into abstract patterns, but must remember them as fully detailed experienced exemplar turns, in their sequential contexts, comprising a dynamic pattern of participants, topics, activities, and contributions, and as situated events, embedded in an ongoing social activity.

This means that linguistic competence cannot be regarded as something extracted from our linguistic practices. Rather, it is precisely the sum of these practices, of situated conversations and texts, which constitutes our linguistic competence (Hopper 1987, 1998, Becker 1995, Gasparov 1997, Jusczyk 1997, Bod 1998, Anward & Lindblom 1999, Barlow and Kemmer 2000, Anward 2004).

5.

Such an exemplar model of language, where participants have unproblematic access to fully detailed exemplar turns in their sequential contexts, has the added advantage that it can easily account for cases where participants use not just the wording, but also the gist, speaker, setting, etc. of a previous turn as resources for further turns, i.e. quotations, in a broad sense. For example, in the conversation we are looking at, about two minutes before the sequence I have discussed, Daniel produces the following turn.

B1a Daniel:

å å frågan   e å vem ska man
and and the-question is and who shall one

diskutera detta   me,
discuss   that   with

'and the question is and who should you discuss it with'

ni vet   den där   håtunaläkaren eller
you know that there Håtuna-doctor   or

var de va   som   diskuterade
where it was   who   discussed

detta me den   sjukes   anhöria. (p)
that with the   sick's   relatives

'you know that Håtuna doctor or where it was who discussed it with the patient's relatives'

B2 Arne:

mm (P)

B1b Daniel:

å de va   naturlitvis °skulle   man
and it was   of-course   would   one

tro   ett grundläggande fel°   att dela
believe a   basic   mistake to share

ansvaret   me (p)
the-responsibility   with

'and it was of course a basic mistake would one believe to share the responsibility with'

B3 Clara:

just.
right

B1c Daniel:

de anhöria eller så   va?
the relatives or   so   what

'the relatives or so, wasn't it'

About a minute later, just before the sequence I have discussed, Arne reintroduces the speaker, the gist, and even particular words (*fråga* and *anhöria*) of turn B1 in a new turn.

C1 Arne:

just de å   de   de de e   just som Daniel
just it   and it   it it is just   as   Daniel

sa   innan att eh (p) de här   me   å
said before that eh   it here with and

fråga anhöria för   å liksom försöka få (p)
ask   relatives for   to like   try to get

eh (p) väga   mänsklia skäl   mot
eh   weigh human   reasons against

medicinska de ger   ju   ofta helt
medical   it   gives you-know often quite

horribla (p) resultat. (p) skulle   ja tro. (p)
horrible   results   should I think

'that's right and it is just as Daniel said before that this thing about asking relatives in order to weigh human and medical reasons against each other that gives often quite horrible results I would think'

As turn C1 suggests, we should think of a particular instance of recycling with différance as a reflexive act of identification and differentiation. The current speaker takes the rôle of a previous speaker and models her turn on the turn of that speaker. If the previous turn is not locally available, as in the case we are looking at, it has to be explicitly situated, for example by mentioning speaker and time, as in C1.

6.

Thus, when I wrote a bit into this article that Björn, in offering a reformulation in support of Arne's distinction, is also at the same time creating a construction, we should not take this to mean that the construction so created is somehow absorbing the exemplar turns on which it is based. Rather, Björn's act of recycling with différance turn 1 in doing turn 4 makes available a possible articulation of these two turns into parts, and this articulation can then serve as a resource for the creation of further turns.

A construction is then, when observed in its natural habitat, conversation, one possible articulation of a series of turns.

Note that it is precisely the method of recycling with différance, the modelling of new turns on old turns, retaining the overall format of the old turn, and substituting a new expression for a part of the old turn, which makes series of turns articulable as constructions. As I have shown elsewhere (Anward 2004), a constant overall format typically indicates a common ongoing activity (like describing or defining), while successive substitutions indicate a variety of combinations of progression and individuality. Thus, the hallmark of constructions, a constant part and a variable part, emerge quite naturally from a series of turns devoted to individual contributions to a common activity.

7.

In turn 5, repeated below,

5a Arne:

   näej aktiv e de där förstår du

   'no active is that you see'

   att du helt enkelt slår ihjäl[folk.]

   'that you quite simply kill people'

6 Clara:

             [gör] fel.((laughter))
             'do wrong'

5b Arne:

   på ett eller annat sätt
   'in one way or another'

[passiv e bara att du skiter i dom]
'passive is just that you don't care about them'

a construction is also created, but in a different way. In turn 4, as we saw, Björn made a proper analysis of turn 1 into two parts, and proposed a paradigmatic alternative to one of these parts. This mode of recycling with différance might be called paradigmatic expansion (Anward 2000). In turn 5, Arne uses another mode of recycling of différance, which we might call syntagmatic expansion (Anward 2000). In turn 5, Arne, using the proper analysis of turn 1 performed by Björn, recycles one part of that turn, *aktiv å passiv eutanasi*, and expands it into a full turn. In fact, he does this in two steps, first expanding *aktiv*, and then *passiv*, using the same basic format in both cases. By modelling his expansion of *passiv* on the expansion of *aktiv*, he also makes a proper analysis of these expansions into the parts shown below. Note also that Clara, in her supporting turn 6, contributes a paradigmatic expansion of one of these parts.

```
5a Arne:   näej aktiv   ede där att helt enkelt slår
                              förstår du  ihjäl[folk.]
                        du
6  Clara:                     [gör] fel. ((laughs))
5b Arne:                                              på ett eller
                                                      annat sätt
          [passiv e bara    att skiter i dom]
                        du
```

8.

The highly articulated turn 5 potentially lends itself to many further recyclings. As the conversation continues, one such possibility is explored. After Clara's feedback in turn 8, Björn strikes up a mild protest in turn 9 but is interrupted by Arne, who proposes to wrap up the discussion in turn 10. However, he does not get away with that. Instead, Daniel offers further support for Arne. by producing, in turn 11, his own variation on Arne's definition of the distinction. Daniel then gets support from Arne and Clara, in turns 12, 13, and 14, and the conversation can then move on with a common interpretation of the distinction firmly established.

8 Clara:

   ja
   'yes'

9 Björn:

   ja   ja   jo   [men
   'yes yes   yes   but'

10 Arne:

             [så de å   de e även
              so it and it is even
   där e   de ju   väldit mycke
   there is it you-know   very   much

'so there and there is even there there is very much'

11 Daniel:

de aktiva e att stänga droppe. (p)
the active is to close the-drip

'the active thing is to close the drip'

de passiva att aldrig sätta (.) [in droppe.]
the passive to never set in the-drip

'the passive thing is never to set in the drip'

12 Arne:

      [just precis de.]
      just precisely it

      'precisely'

13 Clara:

jaha just de ja [mm
oh just it yes

'right'

(14) Arne:

      [just precis de.
      just precisely it.

      'precisely'

Daniel aligns with Arne in turn 11 by recycling, with some minor variations of his own, the entire complex format of turn 5, and making a paradigmatic expansion in each of its two major parts. Thereby, the already established articulation of turn 5 is reinforced, as shown below.

```
5a Arne   nä  aktiv   e de där  att du helt enkelt slår ihjäl[folk.]
          ej          förstår
                      du
6  Carla                         [gör] fel. ((laughs))
5b Arne                                               på ett eller
                                                      annat sätt
          [passiv e bara  att du skiter i dom]
11 Daniel de      e       att     stänga droppe. (p)
          aktiva
          de              att     aldrig sätta (.) [in droppe.]
          passiva
```

This network of turns potentially supports a number of constructions. To begin with, it supports the complex construction shown below, which stays fairly close to the actual turns on which it is based.

```
{ aktiv    }  e (de där förstår du) (att du { helt enkelt slår ihjäl folk. })
{ de aktiva}                                {                               }
                                            {         gör fel.              }
                                            { att     stänga droppe.        }

{ passiv   }  e (bara)      { att du skiter i dom         }
{ de passiva}              { att    aldrig sätta (.) in droppe. }
```

It also supports the following more abstract simple construction.

```
{ aktiv    }  e ((de där förstår du))   att { du { helt enkelt slår ihjäl folk. }
{ de aktiva}    (bara)                       {    { gör fel. ((laughs))          }
{ passiv   }                                 {    { skiter i dom                  }
{ de passiva}                                {    { stänga droppe.                }
                                             {    { aldrig sätta (.) in droppe.   }
```

In the first case, the semantic composition is something like A ⊇ E & P ⊇ E', where A and P are sets of active and passive euthanasia events, respectively, and E and E' are sets of events. In the second case, the semantic composition is something like A ∪ P ⊇ E ∪ E'.

However, a crucial point of the sequence is lost in these abstract representations, namely that the events that make up E and E' are designed precisely to undermine turn 4, by being deliberate events - first on a general level, in turn 5, and then on a more specific level, in turn 11. Again, we have a case where the full sequential contexts of the paradigmatic alternatives crucially determine their further use.

The second, and most abstract of the two constructions in addition allows for combinations that actually contradict what is arrived at during the sequence, for example that passive euthanasia is that you kill people. Being able to say also what is 'wrong' is of course a pervasive trait of human language, but in this case it is precisely the distinction between wrong and right, determinable from the full sequential contexts of the paradigmatic alternatives, which disappears in the construction format.

9.

We arrive again at the conclusion that a construction never substitutes for or absorbs a series of fully specified exemplar turns, but is a socially negotiated interim structuring of a series of turns, potentially open to new modifications. Since activities can be continued or reintroduced, the possibility for a next contribution must always be there. But the productivity of a construction is not primarily a linguistic question, but basically a social question, as we have seen. Each new contribution is negotiated with other participants, and concrete substitutions become not simply part of a growing paradigm, but are positioned with respect to a tradition of languaging (Becker 1995), as sayables and unsayables, among other things.

Thus, constructions are always constructions-so-far, summations of previously encountered instances, and paradigms are likewise paradigms-so-far. A proposal for a next paradigmatic expansion is consequently never licensed by an abstract cover category, such as noun, but is always a creative act, a proposal for a legitimate continuation of at least some of the relevant concrete items in the paradigm-so-far, to be negotiated with other participants right then and there. And studies of large corpora confirm that actual paradigms in fact are less general and show much less semantic variation than is normally

assumed in grammatical descriptions ("co-selection of lexis and grammar"; Stubbs 1996: 36 – 41).

Consider again the two paradigms of event descriptions created in the sequence we are looking at.

```
       ⎧ att du ⎧ helt enkelt slår ihjäl folk. ⎫ ⎫
       ⎨        ⎨                               ⎬ ⎬
       ⎪        ⎩ gör fel.                      ⎭ ⎪
       ⎩ att      stänga droppe.                  ⎭

       ⎧ att du skiter i dom]                     ⎫
       ⎨                                          ⎬
       ⎩ att     aldrig sätta (.) in droppe.      ⎭
```

These two paradigms are, as we have seen, built of two pairs of contrasting items, all of them denoting deliberate actions: *att du helt enkelt slår ihjäl folk* (that you quite simply kill people) vs. *att du skiter i dom* (that you don't care about them), and *att stänga droppe* (to close the drip) vs. *att aldrig sätta in droppe* (never to set in the drip). Moreover, the items of the second pair are exemplifications, or hyponyms, if you like, of their counterparts in the first pair. There is also a repeated vocalic pattern in both paradigms. In the first paradigm, the pattern consists of the vowel *ä* in the stressed syllable of the most prominent word of the item, followed by *o* as the vowel of the stressed syllable of the next word. In the second paradigm, the vocalic pattern consists of the vowel *i* in the stressed syllable of the most prominent word of the item, followed, again, by *o* as the vowel of the stressed syllable of the next (phonological) word, a syllable which, moreover, starts with *d*. This kind of assonance is typically used to mark coherence, when another participant does the same thing as a first participant, but in his or her own words (Anward 2006).

What we see here is the pattern writ large in the corpus studies referred to above. Participants ground their proposed paradigmatic expansions quite robustly in the paradigm-so-far, overlaying simple paradigmatic equivalence with a network of associative relations (Saussure 1967: 170-175), a morphosemantic field, in Guiraud's sense (Guiraud 1966).

In the first paradigm, there is also another branch, Clara's contribution of a hyperonym, 'does wrong', to 'simply kill people', evoking a quite different dimension from that pursued by Daniel. A paradigm thus need not cohere towards a single (classical) category but may instead cohere through family resemblance. Note also that there is assonance in this case, too, between *slår ihjäl folk* and *gör fel*. It has the same function as before: to mark coherence between lexically dissimilar contribution, but uses another kind of recurring sound pattern, a repeated pair of consonants. In both expressions, the penultimate syllable starts with [j] and the final syllable, with [f].

10.

Again, and for the last time: a construction never substitutes for or absorbs a series of fully specified exemplar turns, but is a socially negotiated interim structuring of a series of turns, potentially open to new modifications and new uses. And its productivity is contingent on socially negotiated acts of recontextualisation, identification, and differentiation, through which conversationalists replay an old scene, with variation, in a new context.

Thus are corroborated both Hopper's original contention that constructions are always emerging and open-ended, embedded in, and 'dispersed' across longer conversational stretches (Hopper 1987, 1998, 2011; see also Couper-Kuhlen & Thompson 2006), and recent demonstrations that an interim structuring achieved in conversation may become a powerful resource for further conversation (Auer & Pfänder 2011, Couper-Kuhlen & Thompson 2006, Doehler 2011, and Günthner 2006, 2011, among others).

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Transcription Conventions

me̱n	phrase accent
[	start of overlap
]	end of overlap
:	lengthening
(p)	pause
(men)	transcription uncertain
( )	inaudible
((LAUGHTER))	comment
.	falling contour
,	level contour
?	rising contour

Notes

1 For background information about this material and the project Talsyntax (Syntax of spoken language) of which it forms part of the data, see Loman 1977.

2 *mm* is a minimal, positive response item.