

Elliptical utterances in task-oriented dialogues: a comparative study of the use of ellipsis

Speakers do not always produce every constituent which is required by the syntax of the language. Lyons (1977) discusses the fact that utterances are context-dependent, which is realized through various linguistic features including ellipsis. From a practical point of view, the contribution of ellipsis in the context is twofold. First, it serves for economy. The writer/speaker does not articulate all the constituents which are required by the syntax, as long as the utterance remains informative and clear. Secondly, ellipsis contributes to communicative appropriateness determined by the type of linguistic activity (e.g. narrative, casual conversation), the form of communication (e.g. written/ spoken) and the relationship between participants. For instance, it is well-known that if the level of formality among participants is high or if the activity uses the written medium, less ellipsis is observed.

So far, a lot of the work on ellipsis has been done from the viewpoint of cohesion. The aim of the present research is to shed light on the second contribution as mentioned above and describe pragmatic effects of elliptical utterances in English and Japanese, based on cross-linguistic analysis of dialogues in Map Task dialogues. It has been proposed that motivation for ellipsis is efficiency, emphasis, expression of contrast, as well as politeness, sense of selflessness and indirectness (Nariyama 2003). As for Japanese, the fact that subtle expressions are culturally preferred is also considered (Shibatani 1990).

My aim is to explain some of the pragmatic effects of elliptical utterances, especially politeness and solidarity between the task participants, in the framework of systemic functional linguistics using Map Task dialogues (English and Japanese). The ellipted elements are categorised according to the constituent types in the systemic functional approach, namely, Subject, Finite, Predicator, Complement and Adjunct. The occurrence of ellipsis is discussed in relation to various settings, such as ellipsis in responding moves.

In this presentation I will discuss the occurrence and frequency of elliptical utterances as well as present discussion of its pragmatic effects, focusing on ellipsis of several types of constituents in the Japanese and English Map Task Corpus dialogues.

References:

- Lyons, J. (1977) *Semantics 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Nariyama, S. (2003) *Ellipsis and Reference Tracking in Japanese*. Benjamin: Amsterdam.
Shibatani, M. (1990) *The Languages of Japan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.