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(eds.)

# Interpretive Sociolinguistics

Migrants — Children — Migrant Children



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## NOTES ON THE INTERNAL ORGANIZATION OF A LEARNER VARIETY

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### 1. Introduction

This paper belongs to a series of studies carried out by the Heidelberg project which deal with the untutored second language acquisition of adult migrant workers (cf. HDP, 1976; 1979; Klein/Dittmar, 1979)<sup>1</sup>.

Migrant workers learn German almost exclusively in everyday communication. Thus, the learner's situation is somewhat paradoxical: in order to communicate, s/he has to learn the language, and in order to learn the language, s/he has to communicate. This is, of course, no real paradox because 1) communication might be restricted to domains which do not require a broad range of language skills and 2) because successful communication does not coincide with knowledge of the specific verbal means of a particular language. Often, there is even a considerable gap between mastering the formal means of a language - rich vocabulary, elaborated syntax, correct pronunciation - and communicative efficiency. A learner may well get along with an extremely restricted verbal repertoire if s/he knows how to play her/his register well by clever application of non-language-specific communicative knowledge. S/he seems to develop certain strategies to express meaning and to ensure understanding without knowing those expressive devices the language to be learned provides. High communicative skills in this sense may both facilitate and inhibit the acquisition process: they facilitate it, because they allow communication with native speakers, and there is no language learning without this communication; they inhibit it because they enable the learner to get along without the extreme cognitive effort which higher-level language learning constitutes. In any case, a careful analysis of how a learner uses his learner variety in actual communication may provide direct insight into the internal systematicity of a learner variety, on the one hand, and the way in which learner varieties change, on the other.

In this paper we will have a closer look at a conversation between two Germans and a Spanish worker with a highly restricted, fossilized learner variety. It is not our aim, however, to analyze the whole conversation. Rather, we would like to give some evidence for two more general assumptions:

1. In order to understand how and why a learner variety does or doesn't allow successful communication, it is necessary but not sufficient to look at general conversational strategies, such as turn-taking, monitoring etc. One has to take into account, too, the internal structuring of the given learner variety.
2. The functioning of a given learner variety cannot be understood by relating its components to the corresponding components of the target variety; rather, the learner variety exhibits an internal systematicity of its own which can only be understood by studying how it functions in actual communication.

Neither of these assumptions can be proven here; but we hope that they can be made plausible enough to justify further investigation along these lines.

## 2. The data base

The data are taken from an interview lasting approximately two hours - type *conversation dirigée* - between a Spanish migrant worker and two members of the Heidelberg group. The conversation consists mainly of question-answer sequences. Topic of the conversation is the biographical, social and cultural background of the migrant.

The migrant comes from a small village where he worked as a day labourer on farms. He attended school for two to three years. He came to the Federal Republic of Germany at the age of 42. His wife and four children stayed in Spain. In Germany he got a job as an unskilled worker in a quarry. His contacts with Germans were regular but weak, especially in leisure time, since he lived with other foreign workers in a dormitory belonging to the company. At the time of the interview, he had been in Germany for five years. Shortly after that, he went back to Spain.

His German is extremely poor. Half of his utterances have no verb, he never uses an auxiliary or a modal together with a verb form, there are no copulas. Most of his noun phrases consist of names or simple nouns. He has no inflection whatsoever. His lexicon is small: in the course of the two hours, he uses a dozen different verbs (mainly: 'work', 'pay', 'come', 'speak'), seven adjectives

('good', 'much', 'little', 'small', *egal*, 'German', 'Spanish'), two prepositions (*in*, *bei*).

Despite this restricted repertoire, the informant who is very communicative and interested in taking an active part in the conversation gives a lot of information about his life, his feelings and his opinions and tells a number of complex and admirable stories. We shall try to show some of the techniques which allow him to do so.

### 3. Facilitating understanding

In the given type of conversation - and this is not typical of verbal interaction between Germans and migrant workers - both parties try their best to understand each other and to make oneself understood. This provides us with a wide range of techniques which the participants regularly apply in order to cooperate in facilitating and ensuring understanding.

Some of the techniques are used by both parties; these primarily include code-switch to Spanish and adaptations of the own language to the listener's language (cf. HDP, 1979).

As to the interviewers, they use particular techniques in putting their questions, namely the following:

- narrowing down the possible answers to a question by giving reply suggestions:
  - "what does the labour office stamp, *ää*, *permiso de trabajo*?"
  - "which province is this, province Avila or province Salamanca?"
- modification of prosody either to produce slow and overarticulated speech or else to highlight certain constituents:
  - "did you go to school in this village?"
  - "how - long - would - you - like - to -stay?"
- partial repetition of the question in order to stress the crucial element:
  - "waht does your wife do, your wife, at home?"
  - "your work, when does your work start?"
- topicalization, i.e. a constituent which is thought to be particularly important is preposed and taken up by an anaphoric element:
  - "and your wife, is she still in Spain?"
  - "and your wife, does she write, write?"

- lexical specification, i.e. the interviewers add a lexical paraphrase to interrogative pronouns which the informant often does not understand:  
"and where? in which town?"  
"and when? in which year?"

Most of these techniques are more or less trivial. More interesting, especially in the given context, are the informant's attempts to give the appropriate answer to the right question. In most cases, he does not give an answer directly but checks back by using four types of questions:

- echo-questions, by which the informant asks for confirmation that he got the point of the preceding question:  
X: "how many years did you go to school?"  
I: "me, school? oh, me school how many years?"
- paraphrases of the question in this learner variety which have the same function as echo-questions  
and finally
- particular usages of *'ich?* and *wo?* ('me' and 'where').

In the present context, we will only consider these two constructions since they immediately bear on the first of our assumptions made in the introduction.

### 3.1. 'ich'

In a number of cases, the informant reacts with an unexpected 'ich' to a preceding question. Consider the following case<sup>2</sup>:

X: wo waren sie denn im Urlaub? in welchem  
where have you been on holiday? in which

I: nnn ich?  
nnn me?

X: ja  
yes

I: vielleicht Meister spreche ich - zehn August  
maybe foreman speak me - ten august

Normally, this ich would be interpreted as a check question in the sense of 'is it me who is talked about' and this corresponds to the interviewer's reaction. It becomes, however, clear by the informant's reaction that he obviously had not intended it this way.

This construction is rather frequent. Some other instances are:

X: und wohin? in welche Stadt?  
and where? in which town?

I: nnn ich? Avila  
nnn me? Avila

X: wo sind Sie zur Schule gegangen?  
where did you go to school?

I: ja  
yes

X: ja, wo?  
well, where?

I: ich?  
me?

X: donde, donde?  
donde, done?

I: ich? mein Dorf Schule  
Me? My village school

There are numerous examples but these may suffice to illustrate the point. *Ich* can have the function of a check-question, but in most cases, this interpretation is somewhat odd. Moreover, this use of *ich* is independent of whether the informant has or has not understood the question. This suggests that *ich* functions as a very cautious means of taking the turn so that his question means: 'is it my turn to speak?' This assumption would be compatible with all occurrences.

### 3.2. 'wo'

In some cases, the informant does not understand the interviewer's question word *wo*, even if stressed. This is somewhat strange because he himself often uses *wo*, mainly as a check question, for example in:

X: nach der Schule haben Sie gearbeitet?  
after finishing school did you go to work?

I: nnn wo?  
nnn where?

X: in Spanien  
in Spain

I: nää  
no

X: aber damals, also früher, Sie, haben sie als Kind gearbeitet?  
but then, that is earlier, you, did you work as a child?

I: wo?  
where?

X: in Spanien  
in Spain

Y: was haben Sie gemacht, also auf dem Land, auf dem Feld  
what did you do, i.e. in the country, in the field

I: aa, ich arbeite?  
oh, I work?

Y: ja  
yes

X: wie sind Sie gekommen, durch deutsche Kommission oder  
how did you come, by "deutsche Kommission" or

I: wo Kommission  
where "Kommission"

This *wo* has no local meaning although the interviewer interprets it this way, which leads to misunderstandings. Whenever the informant is asking *wo*, he does not give an answer. Either he does not understand the question or he does not want to understand it. Hence, the communicative function of *wo* roughly corresponds to German *wie bitte*, *was* or *hä* ('pardon me?', 'what?', 'huh?'). It indicates that the question was not understood and that it should be repeated, paraphrased or specified.

These two examples - *ich* and *wo* - are anecdotal: but they demonstrate that learner varieties may have rules of their own. In the following section we shall turn to three more systematic and pertinent features of the informant's language.

#### **4. The immanent organization of the informant's language: three characteristics**

In what follows we shall first consider the overall organization of utterances, then turn to the expression of temporality, and finally, we will consider the informant's way of indicating modality.

##### **1.1. Overall organization of utterances**

German grammar has various sentence patterns; with some exceptions they all have a verb or a copula, a subject, between zero and three other noun phrases, possibly some adverbials and particles. Our informant has no copula, no verb in half of the cases, and often omits the subject. Obviously, he has to organize his utterances in a completely different way. His elementary sentence pattern

is a kind of 'theme-rheme-structure', where both components are marked by intonation and are interrupted by a break:

theme - break - rheme

The first part is in general marked by high pitch at the end, the second by falling pitch. 'Theme' as it is used here does not exactly correspond to what is referred to by the term in literature, namely what is 'given' as opposed to 'new', or else what the message is 'about'. 'Theme' as used here, may have these two functions, but most often, it has the function of introducing a background or setting, and within this setting, the 'rheme' gives the specific information the speaker wants to give. A few examples:

ich Kind - nicht viel moneda Spanien  
I child not much moneda Spain

ich nicht komme Deutschland - Spanien immer Bauer arbeite  
I not come Germany - Spain always farmer work  
(before I came to G., I always worked as a farmer in Spain')

arbeite andere firma - obrero eventual  
work other factory - obrero eventual  
(when you are working for other people, you are a casual labourer')

fünfundsechzig Jahre - Pension  
sixty-five years - pension

These examples illustrate the principle: something is introduced as a background, a setting, or a topic - and against this background, or about the introduced topic, something is stated. To call this schema a 'theme-rheme-structure' is admittedly vague and insufficient; but it seems to represent a sort of general pattern underlying the speaker's utterances.

This elementary pattern may now be modified and elaborated in various ways. The first and most radical change is the complete omission of the first part. This typically happens after questions, but also in other cases, when the speaker is entitled to assume that the theme is already set. The second modification consists of chain formation of the subparts, i.e. of theme or rheme. The whole theme, for example, is made up of a series of subthemes standing in an 'and'-relation among each other; similarly for the rheme. A third technique is the repetition of the whole pattern; in this case, there is typically an opposition between the repeated patterns. And finally, the theme or else the whole pattern may be marked by a modalizing particle. Very often, these possibilities to elaborate the basic pattern are used simultaneously, as in the following example:



dieses Jahr Winter gut, nicht kalt, nicht Schnee, verstehst du -  
immer fort, Zement fort. Vielleicht Schnee, vielleicht kalt - Zement nicht  
fort, keine Arbeit.

this year winter good, not cold, no snow, you understand -  
always away, cement away. Perhaps snow, perhaps cold - cement not  
away, not work.

('since the winter was good this year, since it was not cold and there  
was no snow, you see - we always sold, we sold all the cement. If there  
is snow, however, if it is cold, - then no cement is sold, then there is  
no work.')

The first pattern reports what happened this year: first the background is  
set by a series of contiguous themes - then it is said what happened. The  
second pattern reports an alternative, which is marked as fictive or possible  
by the particle *vielleicht*; again, the whole background is introduced by two  
subthemes, and the speaker then states what would happen in this case by  
two contiguous rhemes.

In the next example, the structure of the thematic part seems more com-  
plex.

ich, mein Vater kaputt, vier Jahre - meine Oma komme;  
meine Mamma wieder komme heirate - ich zurück Mamma.

I, my father 'kaputt', four years - my granny come;  
my mother again come marry - I back mother.

('when my father died - I was four years old then - I came to my grand-  
mother; when my mother married again, I came back to her.')

The three parts of the first theme are juxtaposed in this case, however, their  
interrelation goes beyond the pure 'and'-relation. Nothing of this sort is made  
explicit; it is left to the interpretation of contiguous elements.

To summarize in brief: although the learner has no grammar in the usual  
sense, he clearly has principles which underlie the organization of his utterances.  
It should be clear that what has been said here is just a first glimpse of how  
utterances are organized in the early or rudimentary acquisition stages; but  
it seems plausible that the whole acquisition of syntax has its offspring in these  
basic patterns.

#### 4.2. The expression of temporality

Temporal reference is very often an obligatory feature of utterances. The most  
common devices to express temporality are adverbials and the morphological

tense marking of the verb. Our informant omits the verb in half of his utterances, he has no inflectional morphology at all, only four adverbs, no temporal prepositions and no temporal conjunctions. Nevertheless, he tells stories with all sorts of sub-events, he speaks about his youth and compares it to the present time, and he is able to take events or facts out of the normal flow of time - such as general or fictitious givens. How does he achieve this?

In order to understand his strategy, we must look into how reference to time usually functions in natural language. This can be summarized as follows:

The successful expression of temporality in natural language presupposes:

1. a shared conception of time;
2. shared 'origins' or 'basic reference points', such as the calendar origin or the deictic origin;
3. expressions for time intervals and time relations such as adverbials and tense markers;
4. pragmatic principle, in particular
  - (a) discourse rules based on a certain 'world knowledge' about the nature of events and how they are usually structured;
  - (b) the usual conversational maxims.

It seems that, in our culture, we imagine time to be a kind of stream in which actions, situations - in brief: events - may be situated. This is done in relation to a certain designated point within the stream; this 'origin' may be given by an arbitrary event which is thought to be important. such as the birth of Christ, some revolution, or whatever; it may also be given by the speech act itself. In the first case, we speak of 'calendar origin', in the second case of 'deictic origin'. Time intervals may be seconds, hours, years, eras etc., and time relations are relations between certain intervals during which events happen; we may say that event a takes place before event b, after b, simultaneous to b, overlapping with b, or contained in b, to name the most important ones. All natural languages have simple and compound expressions to denote intervals and relations; often both functions are combined, for example in a word like *yesterday*, which means something like 'at the day before the day which contains the deictic origin'. So far to explicate points 1-3; all of this is well known, though not uncontroversial, of course. In the present context, however, point 4 is much more important. It is also less familiar.

What is meant by "discourse rules" is best illustrated by a well-known example. In each of the following coordinate sentences *Kate married and she became*

*pregnant and Kate became pregnant and she married*, the same two events are reported, but we interpret the temporal order of both events differently. There seems to be a general discourse rule which says that, if two events are reported, and their temporal relation is not specifically marked, then the event reported first took place before the event reported afterwards; i.e. the linear order of clauses corresponds in the unmarked case to the temporal order of what is reported. Stated in this way, the rule is clearly incorrect.

In *They played a wonderful string quartet; Peter played the violin, John played the cello, Mary played the ciola d'amore, and Henry the bass*. We do not assume that they played one after the other. We know that they played, more or less, at the same time. I.e. our world knowledge, of string quartets in this case, tells us that the time relation between the events reported in the linearly ordered clauses is simultaneous. This is what is meant by 4 a. 4 b is rather trivial: it is these conversational maxims that make an answer like 'very often' to the question 'did you see my glasses' somewhat inappropriate, whereas it would be well put after a question like 'did you ever eat a frog'.

The discourse rules for temporal reference as shown above might be stated in the following way:

Let  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  be expressions denoting events  $a$  and  $b$ , respectively:

1. If " $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ " are coordinated to " $a$  and  $\beta$ " or " $a, \beta$ ", then the time relation *a after b* must be marked, if world knowledge admits *a after b*, *a before b*, and *a simultaneous* with  $b$ .
2. If " $\alpha$ ", " $\beta$ " are coordinated " $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ " or " $a, \emptyset$ ", then the time relations *a contained in b* as well as *b contained in a* must be marked, if world knowledge admits *a before b*, *a after b* and *a contained in b*.
3. If " $\alpha$ ", " $\beta$ " are non-coordinately linked (eg. in adjacent sentences), then the time relations *a after b* must be marked, if world knowledge permits *a before b*, *a after b*, *a simultaneous* with  $b$  and *a contained in b*.

These rules are very tentative but they illustrate the principle. Let us now turn back to our informant. We may assume that the first two of the pre-requisites for successful expression of temporality are given. The third pre-requisite - expressions for time intervals and time relations - is almost completely missing; all he has are some means to express time intervals like 'Stunde', 'Jahr', 'heute'. What is left, are the pragmatic principles, and a careful analysis of his utterances indeed shows that he is most systematically and economically using discourse rules. His strategy can be roughly described as follows:

Introduce a time interval as a first reference time by an expression *a* ,  
 let  $\beta, \gamma, \delta$  , . . . follow in such a way that not *b* after *g*, not *g* after *d*,  
 ... - i.e., take the time of event *a* as a reference time for event *b*, that  
 one of *b* as a reference time for *g*, etc., where the relation is *before* or  
*simultaneous*; if this is impossible, introduce a new basic reference time.

The best way to explain the functioning of this strategy is again to consider  
 how it works in the text. The first example is the beginning of one of his  
 marvellous stories:

In erste Jahr ich komme in Urlaub, in Madrid, eine Frau  
 In first year I come on vacation, in M., {there was) a woman  
 naja du gross, ich, nee du. Ich komme, ja, hier  
 well (as) you tall, (as) I, no (as) you. I come, yes, here  
 ((*deutet auf eine Stelle*)) Frau, Kollege nicht verstehen,  
 ((*pointing to a spot*)) woman, colleague not understand,  
 Frau nicht verstehen; y meine Frau sage: "Name P. . . . esa  
 woman not understand; y my wife say: "Name P...., esa  
 mujer es alemana o francesa!" Ich sage: "guten Tag", buenas  
 mujer es alemana o francesa!" I say: "good day", buenas  
 tardes; y Kollege spreche Frau: "Wieviel Uhr Zug Paris?"  
 tardes; y (to) colleague speak woman: "what time train Paris?"  
 Kollege spreche: "no te comprendo", nicht verstehen...  
 colleague speak: "no te comprendo", not understand ....

The informant here introduces one temporal interval 'the first year when I was  
 on vacation in Madrid', and within this interval a second more specific one:  
 'there was a woman' or 'I met a woman'. And this interval then is the starting  
 point of the following chain of events; at no point, the relation *after* or  
*simultaneous* is violated. Thus, the whole story can develop without the necessity  
 of introducing any explicit new reference time.

The second example is more ambitious. He is comparing the school system at  
 different times in Spain:

ja, klein - nicht viel Schule. Heute - hundert Prozent besser  
 well, (when I was) little - not much school. Today - 100 % better  
 Spanien. Mein Sohn zehn Jahre - immer Schule, alle Schule. Ich vielleicht  
 Spain. My son, ten years - always school, all school. I perhaps  
 zehn Jahre - fort, arbeite, verstehen? (...) Heute - vier Schule neu, mein  
 ten years - away, work, understand? (...) Today - four schools new, my  
 Dorf. Ich klein Kind - eine Schule vielleicht hundert Kinder. Heute  
 village. I little child - one school perhaps one hundred children. Today  
 vielleicht ein Chef o maestro - vielleicht zwanzig Kinder o fünfundzwanzig  
 perhaps one boss o maestro (teacher) - perhaps 20 children o 25

Kinder. Ich Kind - vielleicht hundert Kinder alle Tag.  
children. I child - perhaps 100 children all day.

Here he first introduces a reference time 'when I was a child' and tells how the situation was then. He then switches to another time, 'today', contrasts the present situation to the former one and illustrates this with the example of his son. He then again switches back to the past, and this reference time has to be reintroduced: *Ich vielleicht zehn Jahre* - 'when I was about ten years old'. And this constant back and forth goes on until the end of the explanation.

These examples show how the informant makes the most systematic use of a discourse strategy based on discourse rules.

### 1.3 The expression of modality

We often speak about events - in the most general sense of the word - which can be given a certain relative position in the stream of time. We also want to speak about purely possible or about hypothetical events which do not occupy a certain and in principle well-defined place in the stream of time. This also holds if we want to speak about something like the normal, habitual course of events rather than about some specific event. Natural languages have developed a number of devices to express these different 'modalities', in particular the verb category of mood, adverbials like *perhaps*, *possibly*, *assume that ...* etc., modal verbs like *must*, *can*, and constructions like *if ...then*. Our informant does not have the category of mood; neither does he have conjunctions equivalent to *if* or *in case that*; he has *muss* and *kann* but rarely uses them, and he never uses them in connection with another verb form. How, then, is he able to characterize the modality of what he speaks about?

What he does is to overgeneralize two adverbs, namely *vielleicht* and *normal*. *Vielleicht* ('perhaps') is used to mark whole utterances or even sequences of utterances as only possible or hypothetical. We may roughly distinguish three grades of overgeneralization which we will illustrate by some examples (the three are difficult to separate, and all examples are to some extent open to interpretation).

The first use corresponds to 'it is possible that..':  
vielleicht sprechen Arbeitsamt - nicht mehr  
perhaps speak labour office - no more (work)

vielleicht sprechen Arbeitsamt Arbeit - ich August in Urlaub  
perhaps speak labour office work - (then) I August on vacation

Both cases are very close to the regular use of *vielleicht*. In the two following examples, what he speaks about is hypothetical. Here, *vielleicht* means something like 'imagine the following situation':

vielleicht diese Frau ((zeigt auf Interviewerin)),  
imagine this woman ((pointing to an interviewer))

vielleicht du verheiratet, y spreche, du arbeit heute für mich  
imagine you married y (they) say you work today for me

He is explaining here the way in which day labourers got their work in Spain when he was young: 'imagine this woman and you, you were married, then they would say you work for me today.' (Du is overgeneralized to plural here).

The third use represents an 'if-then'-relation, eg.:

vielleicht Kollege Deutschland keine Arbeit - Spanien  
perhaps colleague Germany no work - (to) Spain

He wants to express a general statement: if somebody can no longer get work - he must go back to Spain.

The other important modal particle is *normal*. It marks all that is in its scope as a sound course of events rather than as a single real event. It may occur with *vielleicht* if the normal case is explained by a hypothetical instance.

normal vielleicht August nicht Urlaub - Dezember alles Urlaub  
normal: perhaps August not vacation - December all on vacation

He wants to say: 'Usually, things are as follows: if you are not on vacation in August - you go in December.'

These two particles are still a very restrictive expressive repertoire, but he uses them very efficiently, and they clearly allow him to go beyond what is real to what is possible, hypothetical or usual.

Misunderstanding the modal function of these particles, or neglecting them, may destroy the communication. We will conclude with an example in which all understanding breaks down and all attempts to restore it fail, because the modalizing character of *vielleicht* is not understood by the German interviewer. This text is taken from an interview with a different speaker who is at about the same level of language acquisition however. The informant was asked if he sometimes has problems in speaking with Germans:

I: Ich vielleicht krank. Ich fahre Doktor; nicht verstehen.  
I perhaps sick. I drive doctor; not understand.

viel Probleme, viel Komplikation.  
many problems, much complication.

X: (...)

I: Doktor vielleicht ein Papier (...) ein Papier schreibe  
doctor perhaps a paper (...) a paper write

Deutschland; ich gucke, nicht verstehen.  
Germany (= in German) I look, not understand,

viel Komplikation  
much complication

X: War das ein Rezept?  
was this a prescription?

I: ((*does not understand*))

X: War das Papier ein Rezept? una - receta  
Was the paper a prescription? una - receta

I: ((*versteht nicht*)) Papier vielleicht - ja, receta  
((*does not understand*)) paper perhaps - yes, receta

X: ein Rezept  
a prescription

I: receta - meine Auto schreibe - viel Komplikation  
receta - my car write - much complication

X: Was hatten Sie? Oder was haben Sie? Sind Sie krank?  
What did you have? Or what do you have? Are you sick?

I: Ich vielleicht krank, fahre - das oben, eine Doktor;  
I perhaps sick, drive - that above, a doctor;

Ich gucke Doktor; sage, viel spreche, aber -  
I look doctor; say, talk a lot, but -

X: ((*unterbricht*)) Der Doktor spricht viel?  
((*interrupts*)) The doctor talks a lot?

I: Das Doktor spreche, aber ich nicht verstehn.  
The doctor speak, but I not understand.

X: Was tut Ihnen weh?  
Where do you have pain?

In order to illustrate his language problems, I. introduces a hypothetical example: suppose I am sick and I go to the doctor, then I don't understand and there will be a lot of problems. The interviewer does not react appropriately, and the informant stresses again the hypothetical character of his example: imagine he writes a prescription. The interviewer again missed the point: he asks whether this was a prescription, i.e. he assumes that the informant tells a factual story. Now, the informant does not understand. The interviewer sees that but attributes it to the lack of clarity of his question. He repeats it in a more explicit way and switches to Spanish. The informant tries to make clear again that this is a fictitious event (*paper vielleicht - ja, receta*). Now the

interviewer thinks that he has understood, but it was only the word *receta* that was confirmed by the informant. The informant goes on and turns to another quite analogous example: he has problems when he has to write something in connection with his car. This example is not explicitly marked as hypothetical, but the informant is still in the world of fictitious examples. But the interviewer is completely lost now. The informant realizes the problem and explicitly stresses the hypothetical character of his first example: *ich vielleicht krank*. But B does not know the modal function of this particle, he is still in the real world, and it is impossible for the informant to get his message across.

We would like to conclude the above considerations with two remarks.

1. It is quite obvious that the presentation given here is no more than a first glimpse of the phenomena.
2. But we think that it might well be that by pursuing this further it might give us more insight into 'communicating as a learner' and 'learning by communicating'.

## Notes

- 1 This paper, like all other work of the Heidelberg project, is largely a product of joint research.
- 2 The utterances of the informant highly deviate in their phonetic form from standard pronunciation. Since phonetic problems are of no particular interest in the present context, we give all examples in an 'edited' and normalized orthographic version.

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## Comments

Lüdi

I have two questions. The first one concerns the amount of consistency your informant displayed in the results. Normally, a learner variety is characterized by a great deal of inconsistency, for example, when a learner produces the same element with several meanings or when there's a rule which sometimes seems to be used in one way and then other times seems to be used in a different way. So I'm not sure if it's not the case that you may be dealing with a speaker whose language has become fossilized. It would be interesting if you could perform the same analysis of the same phenomena in context in different parts of his speech. This is one of the problems I see. Although I think such a thing is possible I think it would be an exception.

My second question is addressed to Professor Gumperz. I believe I understood Wolfgang Klein as having said that the techniques for organizing discourse without syntactic patterns are not language bound, or not dependent on the individual speaker's variety of language - that it was something like a universal of language learning. Now it may be that you don't share this opinion because the data you spoke of would clearly show that it's not true. But rather that the same patterns at work in the mother tongue are also at work in the language that he learns.

Gumperz

Well I would say that there must be certain universal properties of narratives. You can't have a narrative without listing temporal relationships of some sort. You also cannot have conversation without signalling some kind of modality. Those are universals. But then, you have to look at the particular situation. Certain kinds of discourse structures are more frequent in certain kinds of situations. There you rely on certain prosodic cues; you use particles like *vielleicht*, etc. and that is related to the source language, the speaker's native language. What this suggests about these data is that these speakers have a system of prosody which is in a sense Pan-European.

The problem I discussed with Wolfgang Klein was not the necessity of having some means to express temporality, but on the universal character of some basic ordering principles. For instance if one element comes first in an acquisition sequence and the other element comes second, then the universal would say that one is first and the other is second. The authors are discussing data from Spanish, German or from Indoeuropean languages with the same cultural context. My question is whether they would claim that this is true for other pairs of languages too, or if it is limited to this pair. In some papers both on language acquisition and on the language of migrant workers you get the impression that if you know what the target language is then you are able to understand all the strategies used by the learner. I think that in some cases at least you also need to know the source language. In other words you need to know strategies the learner uses in his mother tongue to understand the strategies he uses in an intermediary languages like this.