

Elliptical utterances in task-oriented dialogues: a cross-linguistic (Japanese/English) analysis of form and functions

Kyoko Otsuki, s0197792@sms.ed.ac.uk

Ellipsis is a phenomenon where constituents which are normally obligatory in the grammar are omitted in actual discourse. The constituents omitted can range one word to a whole clause, and the recovery of the missing item depends sometimes on linguistic and sometimes on nonlinguistic context. Ellipsis is found in all types of discourse, from everyday conversation to poetry. Its contribution is twofold. It serves for economy of expression. The writer/speaker does not include every constituent which the grammar requires, as long as the linguistic product remains informative and clearly expressed. It also renders the linguistic product appropriate for the communicative context. In general, if the level of formality is high, less ellipsis is observed.

The aim of my research is to provide a characterisation of elliptical utterances in English and Japanese, based on a cross-linguistic corpus-based analysis of dialogues in the English and Japanese Map Task corpora. Two variables are investigated: interlocutor familiarity and eye contact. It has been pointed out in the literature that more complex interaction, in terms of exchange structure, is found in familiar pair dialogues while more limited exchange of information and restricted range of moves are observed in dialogues involving unfamiliar pairs. Dialogues without eye contact are claimed by researchers to have less pausing and shorter overlaps. I will examine constituents which are both left in and left out in the utterance as well as their relation to the function move of the utterance. This will provide insights about factors influencing the choice of elliptical expressions in spoken language. My intention is that these findings will have relevance for the teaching of English and Japanese.

In this presentation, I will present a comparative analysis regarding the distribution of constituents in a particular sequence in task-oriented dialogues as well as the background of my study.