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DOES EVIDENCE FROM SPOKEN LANGUAGE INVALIDATE TRADITIONAL LINGUISTICS (= TL)?

Abstract:

Many people working within the tradition of discourse and/or conversation analysis (= D/CA) are willing to answer this question affirmatively; cf. Miller & Weinert (1998), Bybee & Hopper (eds.) (2001), Stubbs (2014). Several (overlapping) arguments have been adduced by different authors in support of this view:

1. TL has never been designed to describe spoken language at all (= the ‘written language bias’).
2. The structure of spoken language is different from, i.e. "less rigid" than, the structure of TL-type data.
3. The categories of TL and D/CA are, respectively, discrete and non-discrete (= gradual, ‘fluid’).
4. TL deals, crucially, with argument structure. But the method for determining argument structure is ‘vulnerable’, based as it is on intuitions/introspections about ‘imagined scenes’.
5. TL-type data consists of exemplifications of (preponderantly transitive) argument structures; but "everyday conversation is intransitive"; therefore, TL deals with unauthentic data.
6. The defects of TL go back to de Saussure’s langue vs. parole distinction, according to which "language structure is independent of language use”.
7. TL is supported by no adequate philosophy of social life.

In this talk the arguments (1)-(7) will be refuted, one by one.

References:

