A Cognitive Pragmatic Review of Natural Discourse

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The central issue of this paper is the relation of discourse to its contextual background. First I will outline the concept of context in a cognitive pragmatic approach, and then I will explore how mental processes get involved with the "interpersonal plane of discourse" (the term is Sinclair's, 1983). The extracts used for analysis were selected from recordings of natural conversations on BBC Radio, and they are meant to reveal linguistic and pragmatic factors that I assume to be determining components of the verbal interaction of the two participants at the current moment of the discourse. My research was qualitative, and the paper is basically expository, aiming at the observation of the emergence of discourse coherence in the light of relevance.

1 Introduction

Meaning in context has been investigated by philosophers and linguists from various aspects for over half a century now. Austin's revelation of speech acts opened a door on meaning in actual communicational situations. Speech act analysis is concerned with utterances in terms of their potential force in the communication, i.e. with their function in a particular context, albeit within the framework of the theory there is no scope for the interpretation and definition of the concept of context. The social dimensions of a verbal communicational event are the concern of conversational analysis, which explores the organization of speaking turns, and the recognition of signals, verbal and non-verbal, that the participants exploit in the course of a conversation. The structure of discourse, the nature of its units and the functions of the participants' acts in these units are the subject matter of discourse analysis (see Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Coulthard, 1977: 1985).

The theoretical issues raised for the explanation of the production and interpretation of utterances are the concern of pragmatics; its goal is to account for some non-linguistic dimensions of linguistic 'performance' with focus on the force of an utterance in context and principles of language use. For the past twenty-odd years, however, pragmatics has moved from its original concern rooted in philosophy towards the field of cognitive science. Advocates of the cognitive approach to pragmatics and communication propose theories of how mental processes operating in the production and understanding of utterances

can be captured and described in a general framework (see Sperber and Wilson 1986, 1995; Carston 2002a, 2002b). Due to its target and scope of interest, pragmatics illustrates theories mainly with invented data, and frequently, the examples are simple and goal-directed individual utterances. In this respect the validity of pragmatic explanations of language use may sound somewhat paradoxical. In order to think about discourse in a pragmatic frame there is an obvious need for investigations of natural language in a corpus-bound approach.

Difficult as it is to trace mental processes in natural language, let alone in conversation, it should be a central issue for the analyst to reflect on such questions as: what is the basis for a valid decoding and verbal response to the thoughts and communicative intentions of the speaker in a natural communicative event? From another perspective: what is the nature of coherence in an exchange of a natural conversation? My assumption is that the surface linguistic phenomena of a discourse can give us cues to the cognitive processes in progress during the production and interpretation, and this paper is meant to explore these cues.

2 The form–function dichotomy

In a number of cases the form of the utterance is supposed to guarantee the discourse function; the grammar can be a token for the hearer to infer the speaker's intention. However, as it was first proved by speech act specialists, form does not serve as the only signal of function. Discourse analysts also point out that conversation cannot be given a meaningful structural description based on the four major sentence types; at the same time, we have to face the fact that the functional units of discourse are realized by these four grammatical options. What is possible in discourse analysis is "to provide a meaningful structure in terms of Question and Answer, Challenge and Response, Invitation and Acceptance" (Coulthard 1985, 7). Labov (1972) emphasizes that it is most important to distinguish between *what is said and what is done*, and he sketches rules for interpretation. These rules, however, do not make reference to how the actual forms of the speaker's utterances are conditioned. Grice (1975) subscribes to the Labovian observation about the possible difference between 'saying' something and 'doing something' by it, and introduces the term *implicature* to explain how the force of an indirect utterance can be represented. He assumes that inferencing by listeners is essential for interpretation, and that "the presence of a conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out" (1975:50). He also suggests that the participants of a conversation have an orientation to be co-operative and are supposed to follow basically four principles in the areas of *quality*, *quantity, relevance* and *manner* (ibid., 45–6). Supporting the Gricean theory of inferencing Sperber and Wilson's discussion of communication processes emphasizes the observation that pragmatic interpretation goes well beyond decoding (1986; 1995). They propose a new theoretical framework for an explanation of comprehension, setting out from the assumption that human

cognition tends to seek relevance in communication, which is an essential contextual factor of interpretation processes. In their later work they argue that interpretation mechanisms of inferential comprehension are metapsychological through and through (Sperber and Wilson 2002b). They support the view that inferencing involves „the construction and evaluation of a hypothesis about the communicator's meaning on the basis of evidence she has provided for this purpose" (2002b:9).

Natural discourse clearly shows that linguistic straightforwardness is not a must in communication. Carston makes a justifiable note about communication saying that "the majority of our exchanges are implicature-laden" (2002a:145), and yet, our experience is that it is relatively infrequent that the hearer misunderstands the speaker's meaning. This fact allows us to presume that in natural discourse there are some contextual factors continually available to the hearer, other than the grammatical form of an utterance, which control the interpretation process and the hearer's consequent linguistic behaviour.

In view of the crucial role of the contextual factors in comprehension, in the following part of the paper on the one hand I will be concerned with the concept of the context and those factors of it that induce the intended meaning or allow the hearer's meaning. On the other hand, I will see whether there are felicitous lexical signals in the speaker's utterance of the intended meaning. These issues are expected to provide for some answers as to what are the conditions for the hearer to interpret his partner's utterance when it is not straightforward in form, and also to respond in a way satisfying the pragmatic principles of cooperativeness.

The investigation will be cognitive-pragmatically oriented. First of all, the concepts of *context*, *knowledge,* and *relevance* will be discussed, for I assume that it is through these concepts that some 'unarticulated' constituents of a discourse event can be elucidated. In section 4.2 the analyses of discourse extracts aim at a discovery of the discourse acts realized by pragmatically interpretable schemata and their lexical - conceptual maps. The extracts used for illustration come from natural conversations on BBC Radio.

3 Interpretation and context

In pragmatic literature the context is usually characterized as indispensable for the identification of meaning, but its concept is frequently left undefined. Givón (2005) finds that since the pivotal year of the publication of Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) pragmatics has proven itself both indispensible and frustrating:

> "Indispensable because almost every facet of our construction of reality, most conspicuously in matters of culture, sociality and communication, turns out to hinge upon some contextual pragmatics. Frustrating because almost every encounter one has with context opens

up the slippery slope of relativity", and "everything is 100 percent context-dependent" (2005:xiii).

In line with Givón's assessment of context we have to admit that due to its non-objective nature, the concept of context is particularly troublesome to define.

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975:28) define their 'context of situation' as "all relevant factors in the environment, social conventions and the shared experience of the participants", but they do not go beyond this general statement. Van Dijk's view about the relationship between discourse and context is that one needs to distinguish between the actual situations of utterances in all their multiplicity of features, and the selection of only those features that are linguistically and culturally relevant to the production of utterances (1977). In his later work van Dijk advances a socio-cognitive description of context by providing a mental model embedded into a social context and situation (2005; 2006).

Ochs (1979:1) points out that the scope of context includes 'the social and the psychological world in which the language user operates at any given time' and he explains that all this involves "the language user's beliefs and assumptions about temporal and social settings, prior, ongoing and future actions (verbal, non-verbal), and the state of knowledge and attentiveness of those participating in the social interaction in hand" (ibid., 5).

Leech (1983) argues that meaning in language use combines semantic and pragmatic aspects. His 'general pragmatics' has a combinatory character in the sense that he is both concerned with 'pragmalinguistics', which is related to grammar, and 'socio-pragmatics' which he relates to sociology. He includes context in the criteria of meaning in speech situations, and notes that it has been understood in various ways, "for example to include 'relevant' aspects of the physical and social setting of an utterance" (1983:13). He considers it "to be any background knowledge assumed to be shared by *s* and *h,*" speaker and hearer, "and which contributes to *h*'s interpretation of what *s* means by a given utterance" (Leech 1983:13). The 'problem-solving' procedures of planning and interpreting on the speaker's and on the hearer's part, respectively, Leech suggests, "involve general human intelligence assessing alternative probabilities on the basis of contextual evidence" (ibid., 36).

Coulter (1994) challenges some 'deconstructionist', 'objectivist' arguments about contextuality, and argues for any minimally intelligible text "to possess certain self-explicating features due to the inter-articulation of its conceptual devices, a parallel to the *gestalt-contexture* character of situations, rules and conduct in everyday life" (ibid., 689, italics as in the original).

Cognitive pragmatic approaches to communication regard the context as a mental phenomenon which is essentially dynamic in character. Similarly to van Dijk (1977) or to Ochs (1979), Sperber and Wilson (1986) see the context as a psychological construct in the communication process which is controlled by *knowledge* as well as by the *co-text*, two factors which change from moment to

moment. They also propose that the participants make selections from a variety of possible interpretations at every crucial point of the discourse, and that the possible choices involve shared assumptions about the world between the speaker and hearer (cf. Sperber & Wilson 1986:14–7). By advocating this view Sperber & Wilson assume that for the hearer the context constitutes not only the immediate physical environment or the meanings of the immediately preceding utterances, but "expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation", too (1986:14–5). Thus in the interpretation process of "each item of new information many different sets of assumptions from diverse sources (long-term memory, short-term memory, perception) might be selected as context" (1986:138). To refer to the psychological process Sperber and Wilson coin the term *context selection*, and the relevance of an utterance is defined in the theory in terms of *contextual effect*. Sperber and Wilson argue that newly presented information is relevant to the hearer "when its processing in a context of available assumptions yields a POSITIVE COGNITIVE EFFECT" (2002a:251, full capitals as in the original), and that the greater the contextual effect, the greater the relevance of the utterance. One type of cognitive effect is CONTEXTUAL IMPLICATION, while other types of it include the strengthening, revision or abandonment of available assumptions (ibid.).

3.1 Knowledge: a feature of the context, or context: a feature of knowledge

Some cognitivists emphasize that in communication social meaning and context are conceived of as internal rather than external phenomena (Marmaridou 2000:13; Fetzer 2004:226; van Dijk 2005; 2006). Likewise, van Dijk (2006), in a broad multidisciplinary approach, considers context a "participant construct".

Fetzer (2004:3, 164) points out that the connectedness between a linguistic expression and its context, in another psychological approach, viz. gestalt psychology, can be considered in terms of the *figure–ground* distinction as figure and ground, respectively. According to this approach the ground represents context or common ground, which is generally assumed to denote knowledge, beliefs and suppositions that are shared, while figure, viz. the phenomenon being investigated, stands for the linguistic expression with which it is connected.

In a cognitive understanding of context *knowledge* is a central concept. The context is a composite psychological construct which entails awareness of the physical environment of the communicational situation and familiarity with socio-cultural aspects of pragmatic meaning, managed by the participants' various mental faculties. In this approach, abilities of retrieving the valid knowledge structures – scripts and schemata – from the memory, skills of reasoning and association are part of the context (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1986). Knowledge is basically implicit, but presupposed. From the principle of co-

operativeness (Grice 1975) it also follows that assumed knowledge between the participants is crucial; without a sufficient amount of shared knowledge between the participants efficient communication cannot take place.

The essence of the interdependence of context and the mind can be framed in the following motto: **the context is actually in the mind and the mind is in the context** (see Herczeg-Deli 2009a:105).

3.2 Interpretation and relevance

The speaker's meaning cannot be coded in a linguistically explicit form, hence hearers have to be able to work out implied meanings. In communication valid inferences are achieved on the basis of knowledge through cognitive operations. Sperber and Wilson's theory (1986; 1995) proposes that all the pragmatic factors and processes that operate in communication can be explicated within the framework of one cognitive phenomenon, which they term *relevance* after Grice (see Sperber & Wilson 1986, 1995; Wilson & Sperber 2004; Smith & Wilson 1992).

The core of the theory is Grice's proposal that "communication is successful not when hearers recognise the linguistic meaning of the utterance, but when they infer the speaker's 'meaning' from it" (Sperber & Wilson 1986:23). A further point of Wilson and Sperber is that the decoding phase of utterance interpretation provides only input to an inferential phase "in which a linguistically encoded logical form is contextually enriched and used to construct a hypothesis about the speaker's informative intention" (Wilson and Sperber 1993:1). The theory proposes that in a communication situation every utterance creates an expectation of relevance worth of the listener's attention and consideration: "any external stimulus or internal representation which provides an input to cognitive processes may be relevant to an individual at some time", as the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition (Sperber & Wilson 2002a:250). Thus, every utterance conveys a presumption of its own relevance. This claim is called the Second, or Communicative, Principle of Relevance, and the authors argue that it is the key to inferential comprehension (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, chapter 3; 2002b). Contradicting Grice (1975), advocates of Relevance Theory emphasize that "relevance is fundamental to communication not because speakers obey a maxim of relevance, but because relevance is fundamental to cognition" (Smith & Wilson, 1992:2).

In a relevance-theoretic approach the basis of the explanation of how communication happens is the assumption that for successful communication utterances in discourse are supposed to be relevant to the context. My interpretation of context is that it involves a multiplicity of physical, social and psychological factors, of which the latter play a crucial role. An utterance is motivated by the speaker's need and her goal in the immediate linguistic or non-linguistic context, and the hearer, potential speaker B, is assumed to be able to interpret this goal, i.e. speaker's meaning, applying his knowledge and information

available for him in the context. Both decoded and inferred meanings are the result of mental processes involving various factors of the context which include the participants' intelligence, awareness, knowledge, as well as his logical and verbal skills. In my view lack of knowledge or insufficient knowledge, just like uncertainty also have to be considered part of the psychological context, as these mental states can serve as motivation for elicitations for information or confirmation in a conversation (cf. Herczeg-Deli 2009a).

   No context can be analysed by compositional parsing. Its psychological component emerges as a result of interacting mental processes constructed and negotiated all through the communication, and at the same time it has control over the process of the communication. The following figure, a modified version of the figure in Herczeg-Deli 2009a:106, is meant to be a schematic illustration of the processes of production and interpretation of an utterance in discourse as conditioned by the context:

CONTEXT

SPEAKER A: need
             motivation

intended meaning
(message)

Broader circumstances (code, culture)
Immediate circumstances:
   – physical factors (location)
   – social factors (time, co-participants)
Psychological factors:
   – the speaker's goal, will,
   – the participants'
      KNOWLEDGE potentials
      (information pool, memory,
      real knowledge and lack of knowledge,
      beliefs and assumptions, expectations,
      cognitive capacities, logical skills,
      experience)
   – linguistic environment (preceding
      discourse)

choice of **linguistic form**

SPEAKER B:

INTERPRETATION

DECODING   SELECTION
INFERENCE-MAKING   observing relevance
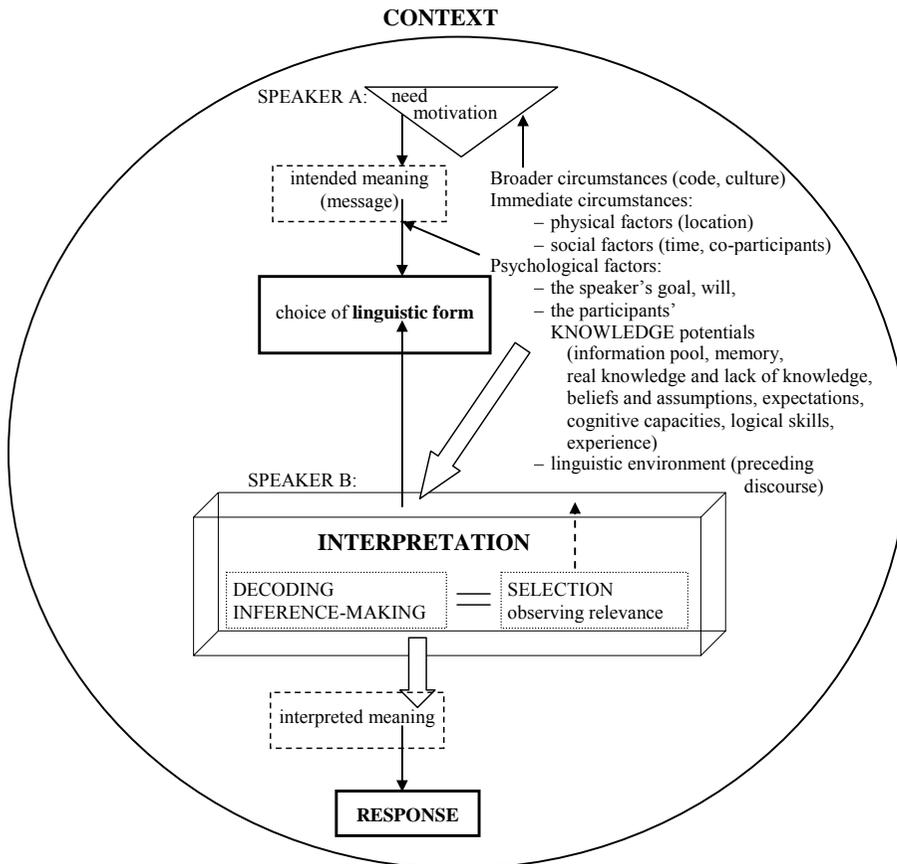
interpreted meaning

RESPONSE

Fig. 1. Production and interpretation in discourse

From the empiricist perspective there may be arguments against a cognitive interpretation of the context reasoning that mental states are too private to be detectable, and that there are no clear empirical data available for a study of what goes on in a mind. In another point of view, however, it is sensible to assume that even if we don't know exactly what neural processes are going on in the brain, we can make some hypotheses about how interpretation emerges. A close linguistic analysis of natural discourse, the investigation of its lexico-grammatical properties usually provides cues for some 'inconspicuous' cognitive factors obtaining in the local interpretation. This can also permit assumptions about some schemas and mental processes involved in the discourse. My research and observations about discourse processes are in accordance with the following assumptions made by van Dijk and by Levinson:

> i) "contexts are not observable – but their consequences are" (van Dijk 2006:163), and

> ii) certain „aspects of linguistic structure sometimes directly encode (or otherwise interact with) features of the context" (Levinson 1983:8).

4. Relevance in discourse

In the following part of the paper linguistic evidence will be found of some ongoing cognitive processes and of the operation of relevance in natural discourse.

I assume that relevance in a discourse exchange is conditioned by the following contextual factors:

a.   Hearer's inferences regarding Speaker's linguistic behaviour satisfy Hearer's expectations of a relevant act in the communication event.

b.   This judgment about the suitability of Speaker's utterance(s) in the current context serves as a basis for Hearer's processing of the stimulus as well as for her/his response.

Proper interpretation leads to a relevant response, or, looking at it from the other end of the process: the proof of the positive cognitive effect of Speaker's utterance is a response from Hearer accepted by Speaker as relevant. In the light of the theory Hearer's interpretation can be considered the function of an utterance understood in terms of its relevance in its context.

4.1 Socio-cultural aspects of the data

Analysing talk in institutional settings or in public contexts such as talk radio shows requires consideration of certain contextual factors which are not a component part in other kinds of natural discourse when, for instance, the

participants have a private conversation. In radio discourse the listeners are not simply eavesdroppers, but the target audience, which is a relevant factor of the context. The goal of a talk show is to induce the guest to contribute to the success of the conversation with a considerable amount of information about him/herself, and to allow a third party to listen in. Due to the characteristics of the genre the conversational partners have to restrict themselves to their communicational roles: the host asks questions and the invited guest answers. In this respect the participants are not equal, and their discourse strategies are predetermined accordingly. Participation in such conversations also shows some asymmetry: the host speaks less, as it is the guest who has to be in the focus of attention. These controlling factors of the context are, of course, all in the cognitions of the participants. As regards other types of discourse I assume that in terms of the intentions, communicational strategies and the mental processes behind these show similar, if not the same, general properties.

4.2 Interpreting the speaker's meaning: the observable and the unobservable

Natural discourse manifests a lot of observable properties. An investigation of the linguistic realization can provide us with cues for some of the mental processes generating it, and it also allows for assumptions about contextual prerequisites for the interpretation. Stubbs (2001:443) notes that "what is said is merely a trigger: a linguistic fragment which allows hearers to infer a schema….", also pointing out that communication would be impossible without the assumptions which are embodied in schemata. This part of the paper will be devoted to the analysis of some discourse extracts from a cognitive pragmatic perspective as it follows from my views of context, knowledge and relevance discussed in sections 3.1, 3.2 and 4 above.

In the following extract speaker A is the host of the talk show, late John Dunn, one of the best-known voices in his time on BBC2, and B is his special guest, Keith Waterhouse (died in 2009), newspaper columnist for the Daily Mirror until 1988 and thereafter for the Daily Mail, writer of a newspaper style book. The time of the interview is 31st October 1989.

(1)   A1: *But they must have you must have been accused # from many quarters of turning your coat, surely.*

       B1: *[ə] # Well, I hadn't all that much because [ə] [ə] the column was there but it still got barbed wire around it. [əm] # Nobody can touch it. It's the same column, # you know. As I said to Captain Bob I'm simply # moving from the Palladium to the Colosseum. It's the same act. It's like Max Wall.*

A2: (laughs*) # You're your column is inviolate* | *if if* | *no one's*
B bch: | *yes* |

~A2: *allowed to touch a single thing on it.*
B2: *No, no, 't was too valuable to me.*

A3: *Somebody just can't get at it.*
B3: No.
A   (laughs)
B   (laughs)

To respond appropriately speaker B has to grasp the relevance of the first speaker's words, and find out his intention. For the latter, in the context described above familiarity with the character of the programme, the participant roles and the goal of the host serve as a plausible cue: A's job is to ask, and for interpretation the linguistic form has to be measured against the Hearer's, B's, assumption about this goal. A's accepting attitude (see turns A2 and A3) towards the response is proof of B's proper "context selection" (see Sperber and Wilson 1986). The indirect form used by A had a "positive cognitive effect" (Sperber and Wilson 2002a): his partner interpreted it as Elicitation for Confirmation and/or for Information. The epistemic modality represented by the auxiliary *must* has the contextual implication of the speaker's strong hypothesis concerning a Situation B may have experienced. As regards their function, my data show that Hypothetical utterances in an Initiation Move of a discourse exchange typically elicit some kind of Evaluation of the assumed situation submitted by the speaker in the proposition. The hypothetical situation then is either accepted as true or rejected as false by the communicational partner. Rejections are generally supported by some Reason, some explanation or details of reality, as in our case above.

In the interpretation process the Hearer's further cognitive task is contextual meaning selection for the lexical units in the Speaker's utterance, by considering relevant contextual information. The referents of the indexicals and the noun phrases in discourse have to be activated in the memory of the participants or selected on the grounds of the available contextual information. There is a good reason for us to think that in extract (1) the referents of the personal pronoun *they* were identified by B without difficulty, in spite of the fact that after a short consideration speaker A changed his initial linguistic choice for a passive structure. Due to the context selection going on in the minds of the participants such kind of vagueness does not necessarily disrupt mutual understanding, or cause communicative failure, and from the preceding discourse even the listeners of the programme can infer a plausible meaning: A probably had B's colleagues working for the Daily Mirror in mind, where B had his previous job. As this is not a crucial topic in the process of interaction, the interviewer's change for the noun phrase *many quarters* does not sound misinterpretable either. Contextual knowledge is a guarantee for proper sense selection for

quarters. The interpretation obviously requires the abandonment of several of the possible context-independent meanings such as *one of four parts, fifteen minutes, a part of a town, an American or Canadian coin*, and in the current context in A's rerun it possibly involved the broadening of the possible circle of the referents of the pronoun *they* to many others who the speaker could not or did not want to name. No referent has to be identified for the noun phrase *your coat*, as for anybody who speaks good English it is inferable that the speaker uses it in the metaphorical sense in an idiom, in which the verb *turn* is also used in the abstract sense, and it would not be plausible to associate the situation with the law court either just because the verb *accused* appears in the discourse.

The response in Move B1 entails a lot of diverse sources of assumed common knowledge, too. From B's profession, which is journalism, contextual information is available for the proper selection of the meaning of the noun *column* excluding the possibility of reference to *a tall cylinder which is usually part of a building*, to *a group of people or animals moving in a line* or to *a vertical section of a printed text*. The selection of the metaphorical meaning of *barbed wire around it* is a plausible corollary of the contextual meaning of the noun *column*, and it is this metaphor that allocates the verb *touch* an abstract meaning. B's discourse presupposes a common cultural background for the interpretation of the proper nouns *the Palladium* and *the Colosseum*, and similarly, for his reference to *Captain Bob* and *Max Wall*. The assumed knowledge that the two names, the former of which was a nickname dubbed by him, speaker B personally, refer to one and the same famous English comedian, and the context in which the speaker associates himself with him is exploited as a source of humour, which is appreciated by his host, and potentially by the audience, with laughter.

Speaker A's reaction in the Follow-up Move, A2 and A3, is an excellent example of contextual inference, which he made on the grounds of B's explanation of his circumstances. It emerges as a kind of summary, a reformulation of the assumed essence of speaker B's words: *your column is inviolate if if no one's allowed to touch a single thing on it. Somebody just can't get at it,* which B accepts as a valid interpretation (B2 and B3), and gives a logical Reason: *'t was too valuable to me.*

The first exchange of the extract, A1–B1, shows a discourse pattern which Winter (1982; 1994) identifies as a frequently occurring semantic structure in written text: the Hypothetical–Real, a cognitive schema, which also commonly emerges in conversations (cf. also Deli 2004; Deli 2006; Herczeg-Deli 2009a).

The analysis of the short discourse above permits the conclusion that the following are essential contextual factors for interpretation:

- awareness of the situation, the goal of the discourse and of the participant roles
- knowledge of the subject matter of the discourse
- knowledge of the relevant socio-cultural environment
- linguistic knowledge

- logical skills and abilities for sense-selection observing relevance
- knowledge of relevant cognitive schemas.

In the characterization of natural discourse exchanges some of the cognitive perspectives of the context are fairly easily identifiable. The discourse attributes of extract (1) e.g. can be summarised as follows:

Participant roles:	Host = interviewer (A)	Guest = interviewee (B)
Contextually assumed intentions:	Seeking information/ confirmation	Giving information
Discourse moves:	Initiation	Response
Discourse functions of utterances:	Elicitation	Giving information/ confirmation
Cognitive operations:		
in A1–B1	Assumption	Rejection (+ Reason)
in A2–B2	Assumption (inferred)	Acceptance
in A3–B3	Assumption (reformulated)	Acceptance
Emerging discourse schemas:		
in A1–B1	Hypothetical —	Real
in A2–B2	Evaluation —	Evaluation
in A3–B3		

Table 1. The discourse attributes of extract (1)

Communicative goals can be achieved by various linguistic forms, which can be detected in natural speech via insight into the speaker's discourse planning process. The following extract reveals how the first speaker, after deliberating as to which linguistic form to chose for his information seeking Elicitation, decides on a Hypothetical Evaluation, reinforced by a tag question:

(2)   A: *But [ð] the idea [i i] # it is quite important, actually, when you think about it that a newspaper should have # a universal style. I mean it would look a bit silly if it printed recognize in one place with a 'zed' and one place with an 'ess', wouldn't it?*

        B: *Yes, │ but [əm] │ some [ən] [ən] [ən] I think what's more [im] important is that a newspaper should have a good # recognizable [ə:] voice. And the idea of this # thing was that was that when I # first came to to [ə:] [ə] work in popular journalism # [ə] we # used to talk in in [ə] what my [k] [ə] guru, Hugh Cudlip would, you know, one of the founding fathers of the Daily Mirror called good, clear doorstep English. [ə] you It was the language of the people, you know, it was the language the people spoke themselves…………..*

In this context the question tag at the end of A's Elicitation is obviously not crucial for the interpretation, which is clear from the fact that B starts responding before the question is uttered. The Hypothetical proposition reflecting the speaker's assumption does its job; just like in extract (1), it elicits a response, by which the Hypothetical–Real schema emerges. Here it is interlinked with the schema of Evaluation–Evaluation, and combines with some specification of the contextually Unspecific and Specific.

Winter (1992 and elsewhere) and Hoey (1983) identify a semantic relationship between textual elements which they label the Unspecific–Specific or the General–Particular pattern, respectively. Probing such textual units Hoey (ibid.) distinguishes between two varieties: Preview–Detail and Generalization–Example, and points out that in their identification the context plays a crucial role. Specification is a commonly occurring cognitive process in spoken discourse, too (see Deli 2004; 2006, Herczeg-Deli 2009a; 2009b). After Winter I tag the cognitive relationship between two discourse units in which the second gives details about the local interpretation of the first the contextually Unspecific–Specific schema.

Table 2 below is meant to display the lexical cues of the cognitive schemas that are identifiable in the two moves of exchange (2):

MOVES	HYPOTHETICAL	EVALUATION	REAL
Initiation:	*when **you think*** ***should** have* *it **would** look* ***if** it printed...with a [zed]* *...with an [ess]*	*it is **quite important*** ***a universal style*** ***a bit silly***	
Response:	***I think***	***more important*** *a **good, recognizable** voice*	UNSPECIFIC *a **good, clear doorstep** English* SPECIFIC *the language of the people the language the people spoke themselves*

Table 2. The conceptual map of exchange (2)

As can be worked out from this conceptual map, for his response the second speaker interprets the first speaker's Hypothetical Evaluation as an Elicitation for Evaluation, of which the cue concept is his expectation of *a universal style* in newspapers. B's Evaluation (*more important,*) realizes the act of Correction, a variant of Rejection. His evaluative concept *a good, recognizable voice* does not refer to some absolute value, and, aware of this he gives a local interpretation. What he calls a *recognizable voice* is specified with a metaphorical expression: *doorstep English*, and to ensure the appropriate interpretation of what he is trying to communicate he clarifies the meaning: *the language of the people, the language the people spoke themselves.* In the current context both the contextually Unspecific concept and its Specification describe the Real situation as a necessary counterpoint to what speaker A assumed in his Hypothetical proposition.

The discourse attributes of the extract are in some respect similar to those of the first one above. The difference is in the emergence of the Unspecific–Specific schema in the second speaker's move here:

Participant roles:	Host = interviewer (A)	Guest = interviewee (B)
Contextually assumed intentions:	Seeking information/ confirmation	Giving information
Discourse moves:	Initiation	Response
Discourse functions of utterances:	Elicitation	Giving information/ confirmation
Cognitive operations:	Assumption	Rejection (by Correction)
Emerging discourse schemas:	Hypothetical — Evaluation —	Real Evaluation Unspecific—Specific

Table 3. The discourse attributes of exchange (2)

In the following discourse John Dunn's special guest is Mike Batt, one of Britain's best-known songwriters, composers and recording artists:

(3)   A1: *...Now, how did you choose the tracks?*
  B1: *Just by discussion, really. There were some # tracks which Justin said [ə] I'd like to do these, and some which I said # and there often were # songs which # meant something to us personally, there might be songs which # one of us # would think 't would be nice to do this in a particular way having decided that we would do it with an orchestra and a valco. # And [ə] # so we just [ə] [ə] [ə] did this by discussion, I mean with this sort of # rang each other every night until one of us thought of another one. Everything.*

A2: *Could [əv] ended up with a very large album.*
B2: *Yeah, we could [əv] done about ten albums, actually.*

In move A2 the speaker makes a realistic inference based partly on the details of what B tells him about his and his colleague's approach to their preparation for their new record, partly on his original knowledge about his guest. The inference is realized in a Hypothetical unit, whose modal value is signalled by the irrealis *could [əv]*. The communicative value of the utterance, A's intention, is interpreted by speaker B as need for confirmation and/or for further information. Response B2 starts with *Yeah*, which, on the surface, sounds like confirmation, i.e. like acceptance of A's assumed proposition as true. In fact, it is followed by the correction of A's hypothesis: *about ten albums, actually*, which assigns B's utterance the function of Rejection. This meaning is emphasized by the attitudinal adverbial *actually*. In this context *yeah* means *no*; it is not an integral part of the correction; it is said to indicate that the speaker understands his partner's meaning. Its function is, very plausibly, back-channelling.

This discourse extract can also be analysed as an example of how vagueness is interpreted in certain local contexts of natural conversation. The concept of *a very large album* is rather vague in itself; its meaning is relative to contextual knowledge about the world of music. The meaning of the noun phrase *about ten albums* is similarly far from exact. For all this, its vagueness is not an obstacle to a plausible inference about the speaker's intention. In this context the expression becomes relevant through its implicature: many more than enough for one large album. On the whole, in move B2 the speaker adds some clue for further inference: they had many more songs on the list than what appeared on the record. The exchange (A2–B2) shows the Hypothetical–Hypothetical schema emerging.

5 Conclusions

In this paper my goal was to give evidence of how the interpretation of the global and the local factors of the context contribute to the participants' behaviour in their verbal interactions, as well as how the cognitive properties of discourse can be analysed. It has been demonstrated that the lexical signals of some cognitive factors of communication can be recognized through such discourse attributes as participant roles, contextually assumed intentions, discourse moves, the assumed functions of utterances and discourse schemas emerging in the communication. The investigation of the mental components of natural discourse via linguistic traces within the frames of Relevance Theory can also provide an explanation for how verbal interactions are controlled by such contextual factors as discourse schemata.

Abbreviations and symbols used in the discourse extracts

A:	speaker A's move
~A:	speaker's move is continued
B:	speaker B's move
B bch:	speaker is back-channelling
# :	a short pause
│ │	parallel speech

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