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# Sociocognitive Pragmatics

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## 28.1 Introduction

The sociocognitive approach (SCA) is an alternative to the two main lines of pragmatics research: linguistic-philosophical pragmatics and sociocultural-interactional pragmatics. What is common in these three lines of thinking is that they all originate from the Gricean pragmatics but they represent three different perspectives on it (cf. Horn and Kecskes 2013). Linguistic-philosophical pragmatics seeks to investigate speaker meaning within an utterance-based framework focusing mainly on linguistic constraints on language use. Socio-cultural interactional pragmatics, which is basically the main theoretical frame for sociopragmatics, maintains that pragmatics should include research into social and cultural constraints on language use as well. The sociocognitive approach (SCA) to pragmatics initiated by Kecskes (2008, 2010, 2014) integrates the pragmatic view of cooperation and the cognitive view of egocentrism and emphasizes that both cooperation and egocentrism are manifested in all phases of communication, albeit to varying extents.

Sociopragmatics is a subdiscipline of pragmatics while the sociocognitive approach to pragmatics is a third theoretical perspective in addition to linguistic-philosophical pragmatics and sociocultural-interactional pragmatics. Culpepper in Chapter 2 underlines that sociopragmatics is on the more social side of pragmatics, standing in contrast to the more linguistic side. This view puts more emphasis on the societal factors of pragmatics than on the linguistic and cognitive individual factors. This is where there is a basic difference between SCA and sociopragmatics. SCA places equal importance on the social and cognitive individual factors in pragmatics. The basic element of Gricean pragmatics is cooperation which represents the social side of communication. SCA emphasizes that individually privatized social experience that, most of the time, subconsciously motivates intention and communicative action is as important as the effect of the socio-cultural environment and social factors in which the interaction takes place. SCA claims that while (social)

cooperation is an intention-directed practice that is governed by relevance, (individual) egocentrism is an attention-oriented trait dominated by salience which is a semiotic notion that refers to the relative importance or prominence of information and signs. SCA pulls together these seemingly antagonistic factors (cooperation and egocentrism) to explain production and comprehension in the communicative process.

What is especially important for the SCA is the interplay of three types of knowledge in meaning construction and comprehension: *collective prior knowledge, individual prior knowledge and actual situationally co-created knowledge* (Kecskes 2008, 2010, 2014). What is co-constructed and co-developed in practice contains prior social and material experience of the individual and the given speech community as well as situationally, socially constructed knowledge. Both sides are equally important. Practice can hardly work without the presence of relevant cultural mental models with which people process the observed practice, or which they use to actually create practice. Even when we pass along simple routines by sharing them in practice (e.g. how to use a razor or make coffee) we rely on the presence of a large amount of pre-existing knowledge. Social practices are conventionalized routines that may develop into expectations and norms. They are shared and conventional ways of doing social things in talk, such as the way transactions are completed in a store, phone calls are closed or servers take an order in a restaurant.

The social character of communication and knowledge transfer should not put community-of-practice theory at odds with individualistic approaches to knowledge. After all, social practices pass 'through the heads of people, and it is such heads that do the feeling, perceiving, thinking, and the like' (Bunge 1996:303). While communities of practice exist, members of those communities may still interpret shared practices differently. This is a key issue to understand what communication is all about. Collective knowledge exists but it is interpreted, "privatized" (subjectivized) differently by each individual (see Kecskes 2008, 2014). Collective cultural models are distributed to individuals in a privatized way. In order for members to share the meaning of a particular practice a huge amount of shared knowledge must already be present to assure common ground. Pragmatic theories have tried to describe the relationship of the individual and social factors by putting specific emphasis on the idealized social side, and focusing on cooperation, rapport and politeness.

In the following sections I will first discuss the idealized view of communication. Then I will analyse how communication is understood in the sociocognitive approach. Intention and salience are in the focus of Section 28.4. The final sections examine the effect of context and common ground.

## 28.2 The Idealized View of Communication in Pragmatics

Grice did in pragmatics what Chomsky did in linguistics but, of course from a different perspective and with a different goal in mind. While Chomsky focused on the linguistic system, Grice focused on language use. What is

common in their approach is the idealization of a knowledge system (Chomsky) and the systematization of a usage system (Grice). Grice developed an idealized description of communication in order for us to better understand what actually happens when human beings communicate. That was an important step forward in the field of pragmatics. Science requires idealizations. For example, physicists or chemists often work with ideal models of reality that abstract from the existence of friction. Basically this kind of abstraction also happens when we analyse the semantics-pragmatics division. Carnap (1942) was quite specific about the relationship of the two by saying: "If in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker, or, to put it in more general terms, to the user of a language, then we assign it to the field of pragmatics.... If we abstract from the user of the language and analyze only the expressions and their designata, we are in the field of semantics" (Carnap 1942: 9). Carnap's approach clearly handles semantics as an abstraction of pragmatics because it is said to abstract away from the specific aspects of concrete discourse situations in which utterances are used. The theory of meaning, both in philosophy and linguistics, is no different. Basically all work in the theory of meaning presupposes an idealized model, which we can call the standard model. In that model various idealizations have been made to focus attention on the most central aspects of linguistic communication. So there is nothing wrong with idealization. But we should know that what happens in real life is not the idealized version of communication. The question is: can we offer something beyond just criticizing the ideal view? Can we offer an alternative approach or theory that absorbs and can explain "messy" communication too? Well, there have been attempts to that extent.

In a paper from 2010 I argued that recent research in pragmatics and related fields shows two dominant tendencies: an idealistic approach to communication and context-centredness. According to views dominated by these tendencies (RT and Neo-Griceans), communication is supposed to be a smooth process that is constituted by recipient design and intention recognition (e.g. Clark 1996; Grice 1989; Sperber and Wilson 1995; Capone 2020). The speaker's knowledge involves constructing a model of the hearer's knowledge relevant to the given situational context; conversely, the hearer's knowledge includes constructing a model of the speaker's knowledge relevant to the given situational context. The focus in this line of research is on the "positive" features of communication: cooperation, rapport, politeness.[1] The emphasis on the decisive role of context, socio-cultural factors and cooperation is overwhelming, while the role of the individual's prior experience, existing knowledge and egocentrism is almost completely ignored, although these two sides are not mutually exclusive.

The idealistic view on communication and the over-emphasis placed on context-dependency give a lopsided perspective on interactions by focusing

[1] Positive in a sense that ensures smooth communication and mutual understanding.

mainly on the positive features of the process. But, in fact, communication is more like a trial-and-error, try-and-try-again, process that is co-constructed by the participants. It appears to be a non-summative and emergent interactional achievement (Arundale 1999, 2008; Mey 2001; Kecskes and Mey 2008). Consequently, due attention should be paid to the less positive aspects of communication including breakdowns, misunderstandings, struggles and language-based aggression – features which are not unique, but seem to be as common in communication as are cooperation and politeness.

Similar criticism of idealized communication has been formulated by Beaver and Stanley (forthcoming) and Stanley (2018) but from a different perspective. In their co-authored work Beaver and Stanley isolated five idealizations (cooperativity, rationality, intentionality, alignment, propositionality) that are made by the vast majority of work in the theory of meaning, and argued that these idealizations are scientifically problematic and politically flawed. Stanley uses the critique of the standard model to develop a new programme for the theory of meaning, one that places at the centre of inquiry into linguistic communication precisely the features of communication (such as impoliteness, misunderstandings) that the idealizations of the standard model seem to almost deliberately occlude. Political discourse is the main focus of Beaver's and Stanley's programme.

What is common in Beaver and Stanley's and Kecskes' approach described above is that they both emphasize that the idealized Gricean theory cannot explain the messy reality of communication. However, while Beaver and Stanley make an attempt to change the Gricean approach and develop a new theory of "messy communication", SCA acknowledges the need for the ideal theory that provides us with a basic understanding of the communicative process. SCA uses the Gricean theory as a starting and reference point to describe and better understand what actually happens in communicative encounters. It has been developing an approach that does not want to be the counterpart of the ideal theory of communication. Rather it offers a theoretical frame that considers ideal and messy not like a dichotomy but a continuum with two hypothetical ends incorporating not only the Gricean theory but also the criticism of the Gricean approach by cognitive psychologists such as Barr and Keysar (2005), Giora (2003), Gibbs and Colston (2012) and Keysar (2007). These scholars claimed that speakers and hearers commonly violate their mutual knowledge when they produce and understand language. Their behaviour is called "egocentric" because it is rooted in the speakers' or hearers' own knowledge instead of in mutual knowledge. Other studies in cognitive psychology (e.g. Keysar and Bly 1995; Giora 2003; Keysar 2007), have shown that speakers and hearers are egocentric to a surprising degree, and that individual, egocentric endeavours of interlocutors play a much more decisive role, especially in the initial stages of production and comprehension than is envisioned by current pragmatic theories. This egocentric behaviour is rooted in speakers' and hearers' reliance more on their own knowledge than on mutual

knowledge. People turn out to be poor estimators of what others know. Speakers usually underestimate the ambiguity and overestimate the effectiveness of their utterances (Keysar and Henly 2002).

Findings about the egocentric approach of interlocutors to communication have also been confirmed by Giora's (1997, 2003) Graded Salience Hypothesis and Kecskes' (2003, 2008) dynamic model of meaning. Interlocutors seem to consider their conversational experience more important than prevailing norms of informativeness. Giora's (2003) main argument is that knowledge of salient meanings plays a primary role in the process of using and comprehending language. She claimed that "privileged meanings, meanings foremost on our mind, affect comprehension and production primarily, regardless of context or literality" (Giora 2003: 103). Kecskes' (2008) dynamic model of meaning also emphasizes that what the speaker says relies on prior conversational experience, as reflected in lexical choices in production. Conversely, how the hearer understands what is said in the actual situational context depends on her prior conversational experience with the lexical items used in the speaker's utterances.

Cognitive psychologists claim that cooperation, relevance, and reliance on possible mutual knowledge come into play only after the speaker's egocentrism is satisfied and the hearer's egocentric, most salient interpretation is processed. Barr and Keysar (2005) argued that mutual knowledge is most likely implemented as a mechanism for detecting and correcting errors, rather than as an intrinsic, routine process of the language processor.

The studies mentioned above and many others (e.g. Giora 2003; Arundale 1999, 2008; Scheppers 2004) warrant some revision of traditional pragmatic theories on cooperation and common ground. However, a call for revision of the ideal abstraction should not mean its absolute denial as we already argued above. If we compare the pragmatic ideal version and the cognitive coordination approach, we may discover that these two approaches are not contradictory but complementary to each other. The ideal abstraction adopts a top-down approach, and produces a theoretical construct of pragmatic tenets that warrant successful communication in all cases. In contrast, the cognitive coordination view adopts a bottom-up approach which provides empirical evidence that supports a systematic interpretation of miscommunication. From a dialectical perspective cooperation and egocentrism are not conflicting, and the a priori mental state versus post facto emergence of common ground may converge to a set of integrated background knowledge for the interlocutors to rely on in pursuit of relatively smooth communication. So far no research has yet made an attempt to combine the two, at least to our knowledge.

Therefore, the aim of SCA is to eliminate the ostensible conflicts between common ground notions as held by the two different views, and propose an approach that integrates their considerations into a holistic concept that envisions a dialectical relationship between intention and attention in the construal of communication.

## 28.3 Communication in the Sociocognitive Approach

The sociocognitive approach (Kecskes 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014; Kecskes and Zhang 2009) emphasizes the complex role of socio-cultural and private mental models, explains how these are applied categorically and/or reflectively by individuals in response to socio-cultural environmental feedback mechanisms, and describes how this leads to and explains different meaning outcomes and knowledge transfer. In meaning construction and comprehension individuals rely both on pre-existing encyclopaedic knowledge and knowledge created (emergent) in the process of interaction.

SCA is based on two important claims. First, speaker and hearer are equal participants in the communicative process. They both produce and comprehend, while relying on their most accessible and salient knowledge both in production and comprehension. They are not different people when they produce language and interpret language. They are the same person with the same mind-set, knowledge and skills. However, their goals and functions are different when acting as a speaker or as a hearer. Interlocutors should be considered as "complete" individuals with various cognitive states, with different commitments and with different interests and agenda. *One of the main differences between current pragmatic theories and SCA is that there is no "impoverished" speaker meaning in SCA.* The speaker utterance is a full proposition with pragmatic features reflecting the speaker's intention and preferences and expressing the speaker's commitment and egocentrism (in the cognitive sense). The proposition expressed is "underspecified" only from the hearer's perspective but not from the speaker's perspective.

Second, communication is a dynamic process, in which individuals are not only constrained by societal conditions but they also shape them at the same time. As a consequence, communication is characterized by the interplay of two sets of traits that are inseparable, mutually supportive, and interactive:

| *Individual traits:* | *Social traits:* |
|---|---|
| prior experience | actual situational experience |
| salience | relevance |
| egocentrism | cooperation |
| attention | intention |

Individual traits (prior experience ➔ salience ➔ egocentrism ➔ attention) interact with societal traits (actual situational experience ➔ relevance ➔ cooperation ➔ intention). Each trait is the consequence of the other. Prior experience results in salience which leads to egocentrism that drives attention. Intention is a cooperation-directed practice that is governed by relevance which (partly) depends on actual situational experience. In the SCA communication is considered the result of the interplay of intention and attention motivated by socio-cultural background that is

privatized individually by interlocutors. The socio-cultural background is composed of environment (actual situational context in which the communication occurs), the encyclopaedic knowledge of interlocutors deriving from their "prior experience", tied to the linguistic expressions they use, and their "current experience", in which those expressions create and convey meaning. In communication we demonstrate the combination of our two sides. On the one hand we cooperate by generating and formulating intention that is relevant to the given actual situational context. At the same time our egocentrism (prior experience) activates the most salient information to our attention in the construction (speaker) and comprehension (hearer) of utterances.

A pivotal element of SCA is *privatalization* (making something private, subjectivize something). Privatalization is the process through which the interlocutor "individualizes" the collective. S/he blends his/her prior experience with the actual situational (current) experience, and makes an individual understanding of collective experience. This approach is supported by the Durkheimian thought according to which cultural norms and models gain individual interpretation in concrete social actions and events (Durkheim 1982).

Before describing the main tenets of SCA we have to make a clear distinction between SCA and Van Dijk's understanding of the sociocognitive view in language use. A major difference is that SCA is an extended utterance-centred pragmatic view while Van Dijk's approach is a discursive view on communication. Van Dijk (2008)argues in his theory it is not the social situation that influences (or is influenced by) discourse, but the way the participants define the situation. He goes further and claims that contexts are not some kind of objective conditions or direct cause, but rather (inter)subjective constructs designed and ongoingly updated in interaction by participants as members of groups and communities (Van Dijk 2008: 56). In Van Dijk's approach, everything is co-constructed by participants in the socio-cultural environment (context). Emphasis is placed on how meaning is co-constructed in the communicative process, but what is somewhat neglected is the "baggage" that the participants bring into the process based on their previous experience. SCA adopts a more dialectical perspective by considering communication a dynamic process in which individuals are not only constrained by societal conditions, but they also shape them at the same time. They rely not only on what they co-construct synchronically in the communicative process, but also on what is subconsciously motivated by their prior experience. It is very important for us to realize that there are social conditions and constraints (contexts) which have some objectivity from the perspective of individuals. So it is not that everything is always co-constructed in the actual situational context as claimed in Van Dijk's approach. Of course, there may always be slight differences in how individuals process those relatively objective societal factors based on their prior experience. *In SCA blending is considered the main*

*driving force of interactions which is more than just a process of co-constructing*. It is combining the interlocutors' prior experience with the actual situational experience which creates a blend that is more than just a merger. In blending, the constituent parts are both distinguishable and indistinguishable from one another when needed. Blending incorporates the dynamic interplay of crossing (parts are distinguishable) and merging (parts are indistinguishable). Depending on the dynamic moves in the communicative process, either crossing or merging becomes dominant to some extent.

Now we will need to examine the main tenets of SCA that concern intention, salience, context and common ground.

## 28.4 Intention and Salience

### 28.4.1 Types of Intention

In the SCA the interplay of the cooperation-directed intention and the egocentrism governed attention is the main driving force in meaning production and comprehension. Cooperation means that attention is paid to others' intention. Attention is driven by individual egocentrism that is the result of salience.

Successful communication requires communicators to recognize that others' perspectives may differ from their own and that others may not always know what they mean (cf. Keysar and Henly 2002). As previously argued, the pragmatic view is concerned about intention while the cognitive view is more about attention. But in current pragmatic theories there is no explicit explanation of the relations between the two. Relevance Theory defines relevance with respect to the effects of both attention and intention, but does not distinguish these two effects and never clarifies their relations explicitly. RT theoreticians claim that "an input (a sight, a sound, an utterance, a memory) is relevant to an individual when it connects with background information he has available to yield conclusions that matter to him" (Wilson and Sperber 2004: 608). SCA not only considers the centrality of intention in conversation, but also takes into account the dynamic process in which the intention can be an emergent effect of the conversation. So intention, on the one hand can be private, individual, pre-planned and a precursor to action, or somewhat abruptly planned or unplanned, or emergent, ad hoc generated in the course of communication. Here, it should be underlined that we are not talking about a trichotomy. Rather, *a priori intention, salience-charged intention* and *emergent intention* are three sides of the same phenomenon that may receive different emphasis at different points in the communicative process. When a conversation is started, the private and pre-planned nature of intention may be dominant, or a subconscious, salience-charged intention may occur. However, in the course of conversation the emergent and social nature of intention may come to the fore. These three sides of intention are always present; the

question is only *to what extent* they are present at any given moment of the communicative process.

Intention with its three faces in SCA is more complicated than it is described in current pragmatic theories. From the speaker's perspective, intention is something that s/he bears in mind prior to the utterance, or something that is just abruptly formulated, usually subconsciously as a result of salience effect. Or alternatively, it is generated and/or co-constructed in the course of conversation and expressed in the form of utterances. From the hearer's or analyst's perspective, intention is something that is processed by the hearer simultaneously with the utterance, or after it has been completed.

Emergent intention is co-constructed by the participants in the dynamic flow of conversation. This dynamism is reflected in emerging utterances: they may be interrupted and started again. It is not only the context, but also the dynamism of the conversational flow and the process of formulating an utterance that likewise affect and change the intention. The following exchange between several international students demonstrates this point.

(1) HKM: Hong Kong Male, CZM: Chinese Male, TYF: Turkish Female; GMF: German Female; BIF: Bolivian Female

HKM: Do you think it's . . . it's kind of difficult for you to make friends here with Americans?
CZM: Hmm.
HKM: . . . enerally, you know . . .
BSF: Yeah.
HKM: . . . or it's more directly than it is in China . . .
TYF: Yeah.
HKM: . . . in Singapore or that . . . it's more difficult . . . What do you think so?
Why it's more difficult?
GMF: I am maybe, thinking, it's because . . . I don't know . . .
CZM: I would say the culture issue is the most thing. Because, you know,
the background is different and errh . . . even the value is maybe different.
BIF: Yeah. But we have a lot of friends from other countries.
CZM: Aha.
BIF: and we . . . we really met with each other . . .
BNF: Yeah.
BIF: . . . we aren't from Americans, I don't know why.
CZM: Oh.
BSF: The Americans all the times[2] I guess would know how are you but they
don't really want to know how you are.
CZM: Yeah.
BIF: Yeah. Yeah.

HKM starts the conversation with a *pre-planned intention* to talk about how to make friends here with Americans. When he sees that the exchange takes off with difficulties a *salience-triggered intention* leads to an utterance "or it's more directly than it is in China". with the goal to provoke responses. CZM's intention is to explain the issue with cultural differences. BIF's *emergent intention* is triggered by CZM's utterance. She wants to say that they (the international students) have many friends who are not Americans. In the course of this short encounter we have examples for each of the three types of intentions.

As we saw above SCA adds a *third type of intention* in between a priori intention and emergent intention: *salience-charged intention*. How does that differ from the other two? As we discussed earlier salience leads to egocentrism that drives attention which refers to those cognitive resources available to interlocutors that make communication a conscious action. When intention is formed, expressed and interpreted in the process of communication, attention contributes to the various stages of the process in varying degrees. Three factors affect the salience of knowledge and ease of attentional processing in all stages: (1) interlocutors' knowledge based on prior experience; (2) frequency, familiarity, or conventionality of knowledge tied to the situation; and (3) the interlocutors' mental state and/or the availability of attentional resources. Based on these three factors, the knowledge most salient to the interlocutors in a particular situation is the information that is included in their knowledge base, is pertinent to the current situation, and is processed by the necessary attentional resources. No matter what mental state the interlocutors are in, and at which stage of the communication they are operating, the most salient knowledge will be available as a result of the interplay of these three factors.

A priori intention and emergent intention are somewhat controlled by the interlocutor. However, salience-charged intention is not necessarily. It is mostly subconscious and automatic, and can take the place of either of the other two intentions as we saw in example (1) where HKM referred to direct friend-making that was triggered by actual situational relevance and relied on prior pertinent information. Salience-charged intention means that interlocutors act under the influence of the most salient information that comes to their mind in the given actual situational context.

### 28.4.2 Linguistic Salience: Inter-label Hierarchy and Intra-label Hierarchy

Now we need to discuss how salience affects linguistic production and comprehension. The focus of SCA on the interlocutor as a speaker-hearer results in a claim according to which there is a difference in salience effect between scenarios when the interlocutor acts as speaker and when s/he acts as hearer (Kecskes 2008: 401). When a lexical unit (labelled for private

context) is used by a speaker to produce an utterance, private contexts (prior experience of the speaker) attached to this lexical expression are activated top-down in a hierarchical order by salience. For the speaker, there is primarily an inter-label hierarchy (which item to select out of all possible), while for the hearer intra-label hierarchy (which out of all possible interpretations of the particular lexical item) hits first. The inter-label hierarchy operates in the first phase of production, when a speaker looks for words to express her/his intention. As a first step, s/he has to select words or expressions from a group of possibilities in order to express his/her communicative intention. This selection goes consciously or subconsciously. These words or expressions constitute a hierarchy from the best fit to those less suited to the idea s/he is trying to express. To explain how this works we will analyse an excerpt from a movie.

(2) This is an excerpt from the film "Coogan's Bluff"
(A man and a young woman are sitting in a restaurant after meal. The woman stands up and with a short move reaches for her purse.)
W: I have to be going.
M: (seeing that she reaches for her purse) What are you doing?
W: Dutch.
M: You are a girl, aren't you?
W: There have been rumors to that effect.
M: Sit back and act like one.
W: Oh, is that the way girls act in Arizona?

When the girl wants to leave she says "I have to be going". She has had a number of choices (inter-label hierarchy) to express the same meaning: "I must go now", "it's time to go", "I have to leave" etc. There does not seem to be any particular reason for her to use "I have to be going". This is what has come to her mind first out of all possible choices.

When she wants to pay the man expresses his objection with asking "what are you doing?" This hardly looks like salience effect. The man knew exactly what he wanted to say and how he wanted to say it. The girl perfectly understands what the man is referring to, so she tells him "Dutch", which means she wishes to pay for her share of the bill. Again, this does not look like salience effect rather a well-planned expression from the girl. The man has no difficulty in processing the expression although "Dutch" could mean a number of different things (language, people of the Netherlands). "To split the expense" is not very high on the intra-label hierarchy list. This is why it is important that salience effect and contextual effect run parallel as the Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora 1997) says. A less salient meaning gets the right interpretation because of the contextual force.

The man indicates his dislike in a very indirect but still expressive way: "You are a girl, aren't you?" The inter-label hierarchy is governed in this instance by a well-planned recipient design. The girl's response shows that

she follows where the man is getting to. Then the man hints at what he expects the girl to do "Sit back and act like one". The intra-label hierarchy helps the girl identify the figurative meaning of "sit back" which means that he does not want her to pay the bill. This inductively developed sequence in the segment is a good example for elaborated recipient design where nothing is said directly, still there is no misunderstanding because the speaker adequately alerts the hearer to what he means.

### 28.4.3 Shaping Speaker's Utterance

As discussed earlier, recipient design in current pragmatic theories and conversational analysis, according to which the speaker constructs a model of the hearer's knowledge relevant to the given situational context, is considered too idealistic in SCA. Everyday communication appears to be a mixture of consciously designed and subconsciously, automatically and ad hoc generated utterances. The cognitive approach is not quite right when it claims that the initial planning of utterances ignores common ground, and that messages are adapted to addressees only when adjustments are required (Horton and Keysar 1996; Keysar et al. 1998). According to SCA what really happens is that there are usually both conscious planning and/or subconscious formulating in communicative encounters. Fitting words into actual situational contexts speakers are driven not only by the intent (conscious) that the hearer recognize what is meant as intended by the speaker (cooperation), but also by speaker individual salience that affects production subconsciously (egocentrism). However, the two factors affect the communicative process to a varying degree. The interplay of these social (recipient design) and individual (salience) factors shapes the communicative process. This can be demonstrated through the following two excerpts. In (3) I am going to use an excerpt from Sacks but I have no intention to compare SCA to conversational analysis. I just want to demonstrate how recipient design works.

(3) Sacks (1992: II: 147)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ann: | I'm reading one of uh Harold Sherman's books. |
| 2 | Bea: | Mm hm, |
| 3 | Ann: | I think we read one, one time, about life after death'r |
| 4 | | something. |
| 5 | Bea: | Mm hm, |
| 6 | Ann: | And uh, this is How Tuh Make uh ESP Work For You. |
| 7 | Bea: | Mm hm, |
| 8 | Ann: | And it's excellent. |
| 9 | Bea: | Well, when you get through [with it |
| 10 | Ann: | [And he talks about- |

According to the recipient design view, in order to succeed speakers must correctly express intended illocutionary acts by using appropriate words,

and make their attempt in an adequate context. In this process speakers relate propositional contents to the world (actual situational context; audience) with the intention of establishing a correspondence between words and things from a certain direction of fit. This is what happened in the Sacks example (3). The description is a well-built inductive sequence by Ann. However, excerpt (4) from the movie "Angel Eyes" demonstrates an entirely different process which is a deductively built-up sequence (used in Kecskes 2017).

(4) (A policewoman in uniform is driving the car, and the man sitting beside her is starring at her)
PW: What?
M: I was trying to picture you without your clothes on.
PW: Excuse me?
M: Oh no, I did not mean like that. I am trying to picture your without your uniform.
PW: Okaay?
M: I mean, on your day off, you know, in regular clothes.

Here we see a deductive sequences where the speaker has something on his/her mind, and this intention is formulated abruptly, rather carelessly without specific planning, as seems to be the case in example (4). This excerpt demonstrates salience effect and supports the claim of cognitive psychologists according to which the initial planning of utterances ignores common ground (egocentric approach), and messages are adapted to addressees only when adjustments are required (Horton and Keysar 1996; Keysar and Henly 2002). It looks like *recipient design* usually requires an inductive process that is carefully planned, while *salience effect* generally appears in the form of a deductive process that may contain repairs and adjustments.

Let us return to example (4) and explore how salience effect works. Why were the man's first two attempts unsuccessful in the conversation? Subconscious salience affected how the man formulated his intention. As a result, the word selection was wrong. Why was word selection wrong? Because it was not directed by recipient design but was prompted by salience. "I was trying to picture you without your clothes on". Is this what the speaker wanted to say and mean? Yes, this is exactly what he wanted to mean but not necessarily what he wanted to say. Wording, i.e. expressing intention in words is a tricky thing. Conceptualization is one thing, wording is another and meaning is a third one. There is no one-to-one relationship between any of the three.

Salience effect may result in subconscious, automatic formulation of intention that prompts expressions that are unwanted, uncontrolled and unfit for the actual situational context. This, of course, does not mean that salience effect always results in problematic utterances. Most of the time

subconscious, automatic reactions prompt perfectly fine utterances. However, this was not the case in example (4) where prior context (sexual connotation encoded in the used expressions) cancelled the selective role of actual situational context. This leads us to the issue of context that has a unique interpretation in SCA.

## 28.5 Contextual Effects on Meaning

There are several different definitions of "context". What is common in these definitions is that they usually refer to the actual situational context of the linguistic sign(s) or utterance. Goodwin and Duranti (1992) argued that in semiotics, linguistics, sociology and anthropology, context usually refers to those objects or entities which surround a focal event, in these disciplines typically a communicative event, of some kind. Context is "a frame that surrounds the event and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation". According to George Yule (1996: 128), 'context' is "the physical environment in which a word is used". Most definitions stick to framing context as the actual situational background. Leech (1983: 13) argued that context refers to "any background knowledge assumed to be shared by speaker and hearer and which contributes to his interpretation of what speaker means by a given utterance". However, this is just one side of context. I usually refer to this side of context as "actual situational context" (Kecskes 2008, 2014) that combines linguistic and extra-linguistic factors in a given situational frame. My problem with this definition is that it refers only to "actual situational context" and there is no mention about "prior context", which is an important notion in SCA.

SCA claims that context is a dynamic construct that appears in different forms in language use both as a repository and/or trigger of knowledge. Consequently, it plays both a selective and a constitutive role. Several current theories of meaning (e.g. Coulson 2000; Croft 2000; Evans 2006) argue that meaning construction is primarily dependent on what I call actual situational context. SCA, however, points out that the meaning values of linguistic expressions, encapsulating prior contexts of experience, play as important a role in meaning construction and comprehension as actual situational context. *What SCA attempts to do is to bring together individual cognition with situated cognition.* This view recognizes the importance of an individual's background and biases (often prompted by prior contexts, prior experience) in information processing (Finkelstein et al. 2008; Starbuck and Milliken 1988), but at the same time it also suggests that the context in which individuals are situated is equally strong enough to direct attention and shape interpretation (Elsbach et al. 2005; Ocasio 1997). In other words, the context in which individuals are located has a major effect on what they notice and interpret as well as the actions they take. Based on this view *SCA emphasizes that there are two sides of context: prior context and actual situational context.* Prior context is a repository of prior contextual experiences of

individuals. Prior context makes things/information salient in a communicative encounter and actual situational context makes things/information relevant. Our experience is developed through the regularity of recurrent and similar situations which we tend to identify with given contexts and frames. The standard (prior recurring) context can be defined as a regular situation that we have repeated experience with, and about which we have expectations as to what will or will not happen, and on which we rely to understand and predict how the world around us works. Gumperz (1982: 138) says that utterances somehow carry with them their own context or project a context. Justifying Gumperz's stance, Levinson (2003) claimed that the message versus context opposition is misleading because the message can carry with it or forecast the context. Prior, reoccurring context may cancel the selective role of actual situational context. We can demonstrate this through an example taken from Culpeper (2009).

(5) Culpeper: Example 3: Creative deviation from the default context (cf. "mock impoliteness")
(Lawrence Dallaglio, former England Rugby captain, describing the very close family he grew up in)
"As Francesca and John left the house, she came back to give Mum a kiss and they said goodbye in the way they often did. "Bye, you bitch", Francesca said. "Get out of here, go on, you bitch", replied Mum. (It's in the Blood: My life, 2007)".

Culpeper explained that the reason why the conversation between the mother and daughter does not hurt either of them is due to the context ("mock impoliteness"), meaning "actual situational context". However, a closer look at the example reveals that actual situational context plays hardly any role here. The real defining element is the strong effect of prior context, prior experience that overrides actual situational context: "they said goodbye in the way they often did". Reoccurring context, frequent use may neutralize the impolite conceptual load attached to expressions. This is exactly what happens here.

Context represents two sides of world knowledge: one that is already "encoded" with different strength in our mind (prior context) as declarative knowledge and the other (actual situational context) that is out there in the world occurring in situated conversational events (see Kecskes 2008). These two sides of world knowledge are interwoven and inseparable. Actual situational context is viewed through prior context, and vice versa, prior context is viewed through actual situational context when communication occurs. Their encounter creates a unique blend of knowledge that supports interpretation of linguistic signs and utterances. According to this approach, meaning is the result of the interplay of prior experience and current, actual situational experience. Prior experience that becomes declarative knowledge is tied to the meaning values of lexical units constituting utterances produced by interlocutors, while current experience is

represented in the actual situational context (procedural knowledge) in which communication takes place, and which is interpreted (often differently) by interlocutors. Meaning formally expressed in the utterance is co-constructed "online" as a result of the interaction and mutual influence of the private contexts represented in the language of interlocutors and the actual situational context interpreted by interlocutors.

Now that we have discussed the two sides of context we should examine how this relates to common ground that basically unites salience with contextual relevance.

## 28.6 Common Ground

### 28.6.1 What Is Common Ground in SCA?

Common ground refers to the 'sum of all the information that people assume they share' (Clark 2009: 116) that may include worldviews, shared values, beliefs and situational context. Much of the success of natural language interaction is caused by the participants' mutual understanding of the circumstances surrounding the communication. The new element that SCA brings into the understanding of common ground is *emergent common ground.* In the SCA common ground is directly related to prior context (core common ground) and actual situational context (emergent common ground). The question is how much of this common ground is the result of prior experience (core) and how much of it is emergent, growing out of actual situational experience.

People usually infer "common ground" from their past conversations, their immediate surroundings and their shared cultural background and experience. In the SCA we distinguish between three components of the common ground: information that the participants share, understanding the situational context and relationships between the participants – knowledge about each other and trust and their mutual experience of the interaction. Similar prior contexts, prior experience and similar understanding of the actual situational context will build common ground. It is important to note that *we should not equate prior context with core common ground.* Prior context is a privatized understanding, privatized knowledge of the individual based on his/her prior experience. Common ground is assumed shared knowledge. Individual prior context is a part of core common ground that is assumed to be shared by interlocutors. The same way emergent common ground is that part of actual situational context that is assumed to be understood similarly by interlocutors in a given situation.

Clark et al (1983: 246) defined common ground as follows: "The speaker designs his utterance in such a way that he has good reason to believe that the addressees can readily and uniquely compute what he meant on the basis of the utterance along with the rest of their common ground". This means that the speaker assumes or estimates the common ground between speaker

and hearer with respect to the utterance. Assumed common ground from the speaker's perspective is based on an assessment of the hearer's competence to understand the utterance. Common ground makes it possible for speakers to be economical in wording utterances in a given speech community.

Research in intercultural pragmatics (e.g. Kecskes 2014, 2019; Liu and You 2019; García-Gómez 2020), and the application of Kecskes' sociocognitive approach (e.g. Mildorf 2013; Macagno and Capone 2017; Macagno 2018) with its emphasis on emergent common ground, calls attention to the fact that current pragmatic theories (e.g. Stalnaker 2002; Clark and Brennan 1991; Clark 1996) may not be able to describe common ground in all its complexity because they usually consider much of common ground as the result of prior experience and pay less attention to the emergent side of common ground. In the meantime current cognitive research (e.g. Barr and Keysar 2005; Colston and Katz 2005) may have overestimated the egocentric behaviour of the dyads and argued for the dynamic emergent property of common ground while devaluing the overall significance of cooperation in the process of verbal communication and the prior experience-based side of common ground. The SCA attempts to eliminate this conflict and proposes to combine the two views into an integrated concept of common ground, in which both core common ground (assumed shared knowledge, a priori mental representation) and emergent common ground (emergent participant resource, post facto emergence through use) converge to construct a socio-cultural background for communication.

Both cognitive and pragmatic considerations described above are central to common ground. While attention (through salience, which is the cause for interlocutors' egocentrism) explains why emergent property unfolds, intention (through relevance, which is expressed in cooperation) explains why presumed shared knowledge is needed. Based on this way of thinking, in SCA common ground is perceived as an effort to merge the mental representation of shared knowledge that is present as declarative memory that we can activate, shared knowledge that we can seek, and rapport, as well as knowledge that we can create and co-construct in the communicative process. The core components (shared based on the knowledge of target language, let it be either L1 or L2) and emergent components join in the construction of common ground in all stages, although they may contribute to the construction process in different ways, in various degree, and in different phases of the communicative process as demonstrated by studies based on the application of SCA (e.g. Mildorf 2013; Macagno and Capone 2017; Macagno 2018; La Mantia 2018).

### 28.6.2 Nature and Dynamism of Common Ground

Core common ground is something like collective salience, a repertoire of knowledge that can be assumed to be shared among individuals of a speech community independent of the situational circumstances, such as when

and where the conversation occurs or between whom it occurs. In contrast, emergent common ground is knowledge that is aroused, co-constructed and/or involved as shared enterprises in the particular situational context that pertains to the interlocutors exclusively. This contingent circumstance draws attention of the interlocutors to the same entities or states and, with the formation of particular intentions therein, activates some of their prior individual experiences that join in this intention-directed action.

Core common ground is a general assumption in two ways. First, although core common ground is relatively static and shared among people, it usually changes diachronically. During a certain period, say a couple of years, we may safely assume that interlocutors have access to relatively similar common knowledge because components of core common ground in a given speech community won't change dramatically. However, in the long run it definitely will change. People's social life, both material and spiritual, will experience some changes over a long period of time, and as a consequence their core common ground will also be changed. For instance:

(6) (At the check-out desk in a department store: the customer is about to pay)
Sales associate: Credit or debit?
Customer: Debit.

It is part of core common ground what the terms "credit" and "debit" refer to. No more words are need. However, 30 years ago that conversation would not have made much sense since credit and debit cards did not exist as a part of core common ground.

Second, core common ground may also vary among different groups of individuals within a speech community. Types of shared knowledge may be determined by different factors such as geography, life style, educational, financial and racial factors. This fact may restrain the accessibility of certain elements of core common ground to particular groups only within that speech community.

Emergent common ground is assumptive in that it is contingent on the actual situational context, which reflects a synchronic change between common grounds in different situations. However, emergent common ground is not only new shared knowledge created in the course of communication but also the use and modification of shared prior knowledge or experience. There is a dialectical relationship between core common ground and emergent common ground. The core part may affect the formation of the emergent part in that it partly restricts the way the latter occurs. In many cases the emergent part may partly originate in instances of information that are predictable in the core part. On the other hand, the emergent part may contribute to the core part in that the contingent emergent part in a frequent ritual occurrence potentially becomes public disposition that belongs to the core part. In other words, core common ground and emergent common ground are

two different components of assumed common ground, which are interconnected and inseparable.

In SCA there are three different ways intention and attention affect the construction of common ground in the process of communication (Kecskes and Zhang 2009). One is when the interlocutors activate mental representations of shared information that they already have as in example (7).

(7) (Co-workers in the office talking about vacation)
Jim: Where will you leave Rex while you are away?
Bill: Oh, he will be OK with our neighbors.

Both Jim and Bill know that they are talking about Bill's dog, Rex. Since this information is available to both, no more wording is needed.

The second way of constructing common ground is that interlocutors seek information that potentially facilitates communication as mutual knowledge. Before the speaker makes the seeking effort, the piece of information is not salient in the hearer as background underlying the upcoming conversation as in example (8).

(8)
Sally: How are you planning to get to Hilton Head?
Emma: Well, John has made the old Volvo ready.
Sally: Oh, you still have that one.

Both Sally and Emma know what "old Volvo" refers to. However, its relevance had to be put forth in the given situation.

The third contribution to common ground is when the speaker brings in her private knowledge and makes it a part of CG. The speaker has some private information that she knows is non-accessible to the hearer. She adopts it as common ground in the belief that it facilitates the conversation and that the hearer will accept it willingly. Example (9) demonstrates this case.

(9) (Andy is having his second date with Ashley in a restaurant.)
Andy: Ashley, would you be interested in coming with me to the office party on Saturday evening?
Ashley: I am sorry, I cannot. I will need to pick up my sister at the airport.
Andy: Oh, I did not know that you have a sister.

Since that was their second date Andy did not seem to know much about Ashley. She did not find it important so far to mention to Andy that she has a sister. That was her private matter. However, the situation made it necessary to make this private information part of common ground.

## 28.7 Summary and Future Research

SCA offers an alternative approach to communication. It does not idealize the communicative process, but rather makes an attempt to describe it

with its ups and downs. SCA claims that individual egocentrism is just as part of human rationality as socially based cooperation is. It takes into account both the societal and individual factors in communication and considers interlocutors social beings searching for meaning with individual minds embedded in a socio-cultural collectivity.

The central idea in SCA is that there is a dialectical relationship between prior experience and actual situational experience that affect how meaning is created and interpreted. Prior experience results in salience which leads to egocentrism that drives attention. Intention is a cooperation-directed practice that is governed by relevance which (partly) depends on actual situational context.[2] As a result relatively static elements blend with ad hoc generated elements in meaning production and comprehension. Collective salience – emergent situational salience, a priori intention – emergent intention, and core common ground and emergent common ground are all essential elements of the dynamism of communication. But they function not as dichotomies. Rather they operate like continuums with constant movements between the two hypothetical ends of those continuums resulting in both positive and negative effects in dynamic communication such as cooperation – egocentrism, politeness – impoliteness, understanding – non-understanding, rapport – disaffection etc. One of the major projects of SCA within the confines of sociopragmatics should be the experimental and corpus-based investigation of the interplay of dynamic elements of communication such as collective salience and emergent situational salience or prior intention and emergent intention.

SCA considers assumed common ground a central factor of communication that pulls together the other crucial factors; intention, salience and context. The approach offers a transparent description of sources and components of common ground, and the specific manners in which they join to influence the process of communication. In the dynamic creation and constant updating of CG speakers are considered as "complete" individuals with different possible cognitive status, evaluating the emerging interaction through their own perspective. Constructing CG occurs within the interplay of intention and attention, and in turn the interplay of the two concepts is enacted on the socio-cultural background constructed by common ground. In this sense CG plays not only a regulative but also a constitutive role in communication. The approach of SCA to common ground has been in the centre of several studies in health communication (e.g. Biggi 2016; Rossi 2016), and dialogue research (e.g. Mildorf 2013; Macagno and Biggi 2017). Researchers focus on the interplay of core CG and emergent CG in different social interactions. This line of research feeds into and broadens the scope of sociopragmatics.

SCA as a theoretical frame has been playing a growing role in different branches of pragmatics research in general and sociopragmatics in

[2] Actual situational context makes things, events, pieces of knowledge, information, etc. relevant.

particular. Researchers apply SCA not only as a theoretical underpinning of their work but also develop it further by modifying or clarifying some of its tenets or claims. Several studies have focused on the interpretation of context and the dynamic model of meaning in the SCA (e.g. Romero-Trillo and Maguire 2011; Mildorf 2013; Moss 2013; Wojtaszek 2016), and intercultural communication (e.g. Kecskes 2014; Liu and You 2019). Khatib and Shakouri (2013) used SCA to explain certain processes in language acquisition. Some theoretical papers on issues like meaning argumentation, presupposition, and miscommunication also relied on SCA as theoretical support (e.g. Gil 2019; La Mantia 2018; Macagno and Capone 2017; Macagno 2018; Rossi 2016; Capone 2020; Martin de la Rosa and Romero 2019). These studies all underline the potential of SCA to explain important phenomena and processes in communication. However, the theory is still under development and needs further improvement.

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