Experiment – Map Task

Description: the speakers have an interaction that simulates the giving and receiving of directions: one of them has a map in which a path is drawn between a number of objects, while the other has a similar map in which no path has been drawn. The person with the path explains to their interlocutor how to draw the correct path on their own map, from start to finish. In actual fact, the maps don't show exactly the same objects, but the speakers do not know this. The maps differ with regards to some of the objects serving as reference points, so that conflicts will ensue that the speakers have to resolve by communicating.

Objectives: to elicit spontaneous discourse containing linguistic resources used for the disambiguation of reference, for contrast and correction of assertions, for clarification and other questions, as well as for the expression of insistence and other aspects of discourse and information structure.

Participants

Speakers: 2

Researchers: 2 ("technician" + "moderator")

Materials and preparation

Materials: Two versions of the same map, on which a number of objects serving as reference points can be found (the pictures of the objects are the same as the ones used in "Picture naming" and "Memory", chosen in accordance with the the metrical control). The objects are distributed on the map in such a way that several different paths between/around them can be drawn. Version A of the map has such a path drawn like a large arrow: the path begins at the base of the arrow and ends at its tip. Version B of the map has no such path drawn on it. The maps also differ with regards to the position of some (but not all) of the objects that are on them (some of the objects of map A aren't on map B (or vice versa), or have changed their position). It's important that the path on map A leads by some of the objects that change position on map B. For an example of a pair of maps, see Figure 1.

The maps can be handled across sessions in two ways. The first option is to use new copies of maps A and B every time (on normal paper in A4 size or larger) and provide a pencil and eraser to the speaker with map B, so that they can draw and correct paths on their map. In this case, new copies are needed each time so that no markings remain on the map from previous sessions. The second option is to laminate a single set of maps and use semi-permanent markers to draw on them. In this way they may be re-used across sessions. **How to do it:**

The moderator explains the rules of the game to the speakers, as well as their different roles, and makes sure that they understood everything before starting: each speaker gets a version of the map, and they are not allowed to have a look at the other speaker's. The speaker with the path on their map has to explain to the other how to get from start (the base of the arrow) to finish (the tip of the arrow). The directions must be detailed (proceeding in short movements), using the objects on the map as reference points, and given using only spoken language, without showing the path on the map with pointing gestures or in any other way. The speaker with map B will draw the path on their map as indicated by the other speaker and ask questions whenever problems arise or when they didn't understand the directions well. It might be helpful to suggest to the speakers that they imagine themselves in a similar real life situation. It is important not to mention that the maps are not identical. Only in this way can we make sure that the kind of conflicts arise that must be resolved with the sort of communication that we are aiming to elicit with this experiment. Once the speakers are sure to have understood how to play, they may begin. While the speakers are playing, the

moderator just has to take care that they play by the rules. The task is over once the speaker with map B has reached the finishing point of the path on their map. Everything is recorded, from beginning to end.
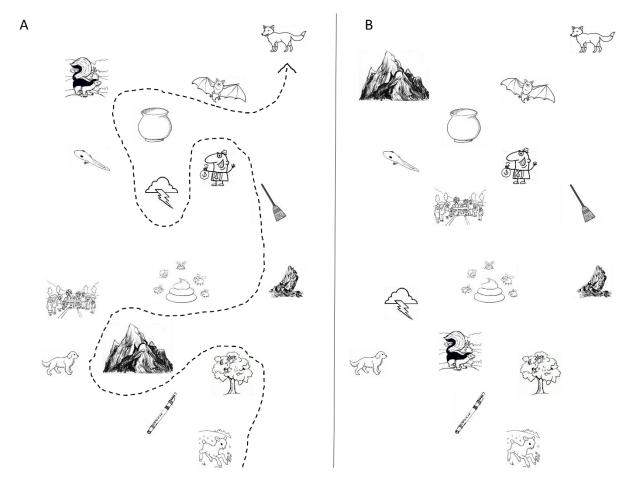

Figure 1: The two versions of an example map. Version A has a path in the form on an arrow (beginning beside the lamb and finishing at the fox), which map B doesn't have. The maps differ with regards to the positions of the skunk and the mountain, as well as of the funeral and the lightning cloud.

References/further reading:

Anderson, Anne H., Miles Bader, Ellen Gurman Bard, Elizabeth Boyle, Gwyneth Doherty, Simon Garrod, Stephen Isard, Jacqueline Kowtko, Jan McAllister, Jim Miller, Catherine Sotillo, Henry S. Thompson & Regina Weinert. 1991. The Hcrc Map Task Corpus. Language and Speech 34(4). 351–366.