

## **Experiment – Cajas**

*Description:* the participants try to guess the content of several cardboard boxes without opening them, discussing and negotiating until they reach a consensus on what is inside.

*Objectives:* to elicit linguistic means for marking evidentiality, epistemic modality and information structure in semi-spontaneous discourses. Because the finishing condition for the game is that the speakers have to find a mutually agreed-upon solution, the experiment lends itself very well for studying the conversational negotiation of informational content and its integration into a projected space of shared and cooperatively derived knowledge (*common ground*, cf. Krifka 2007).

### **Participants**

*Speakers:* 2

*Researchers:* 2 (“technician” + “moderator”)

### **Materials and preparation**

*Boxes:* three medium-sized cardboard boxes that can be closed completely

*Objects serving as content for the boxes:* various different objects are needed that comply with the following restrictions: 1) they fit completely into the box when it is closed; 2) amongst each other, they must differ in their weight, their tactile attributes, the sounds they make when moved around, their dimensions, their general nature; 3) they shouldn't be entirely remote from the daily life of the speakers; 4) it should be at least possible to determine (guess) their identity in the game, while they are inside the closed box, within 3-10 minutes. Only one object per box. The total number of objects should be at least twice that of the number of boxes (i.e. at least six, if you have three boxes), so that sufficient options are available to choose from for doing the game both in the indigenous language and the contact language, and using each object only once. Just to give an example of what range of objects can be used, these are the ones we used ourselves: a bag of dry corn seeds, a wooden toy lizard, a bunch of keys, a mobile phone, a roll of toilet paper and a remote-controlled toy car.

### **How to do it**

For each session of the game in each language, the researchers choose three of the objects and put them inside three different boxes. The boxes must close completely and securely, so that they won't open by accident during the game. The moderator presents the first box to the speakers and explains to them that they will have to guess its contents together. They are allowed to handle the box in whichever way they see fit, as long as they don't damage or open it: they can hold it in their hands, move it around, turn it over and around, shake it and listen to what moves inside it, weigh it by holding it in their hands, smell it, and so on. They are both allowed to handle the box at liberty. Based on the sensory impressions they gain from handling the box thus, they will have to guess what the identity of the thing inside is and propose solutions to each other. They are allowed sufficient time to discuss, argue, try to convince each other at length and re-handle the boxes time and again, until they reach a conclusion as to its contents that they both agree upon. It's important to clarify to them that they can only win or lose together, that it isn't a game of one against the other. If after some time they cannot reach any agreement or do not know how to go on, the moderator may help them by giving a bit of advice about how they might proceed or with some similar small intervention. Only once they have reached a consensus, the moderator declares the game finished and opens the box or lets them open it so they can see whether they guessed correctly. Afterwards, the game is repeated with the second and third box. Everything is recorded, from the beginning when the game is explained until the end of the discussions that often will follow after the last box has been opened.

CAREFUL: for the recording it is of course very important that the speakers speak as little as possible while shaking the boxes because the noise that makes will ruin any possibility of acoustical analysis or sometimes even just understanding of what is being said in that part of the recording. The moderator should tell the speakers not to speak at the same time as handling the boxes and may also remind them of that when they appear to have forgotten it during the game.

## References

Krifka, Manfred. 2007. Basic Notions of Information Structure. In Caroline Féry, Gisbert Fanselow & Manfred Krifka (eds.), *Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure: The notions of information structure* (Working Papers of the SFB 632 Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure 6), 13–56. Potsdam: Universitäts-Verlag.