

Proceedings of the XII International Bakhtin Conference  
Jyväskylä, Finland, 18–22 July, 2005

Edited by  
Mika Lähteenmäki, Hannele Dufva, Sirpa Leppänen & Piia Varis

© Department of Languages, University of Jyväskylä, Finland 2006

ISBN-10 951-39-2725-3  
ISBN-13 978-951-39-2725-7

# TOWARDS A DIALOGICAL LINGUISTICS

Per Linell

Linköping University, Sweden

## Abstract

Mainstream linguistics has always been relatively ‘monologic’ in nature. By contrast, a dialogical (‘dialogistic’) linguistics would systematically consider the subject’s relation to the other in interaction and in contexts. This article makes some suggestions concerning what such a linguistics could contain. Two phenomena are discussed in more detail: grammatical constructions with their outer syntax and lexical items with their meaning potentials. This is done with reference to Swedish data, in particular a grammatical construction called *x-and-x*, the syntax and semantics of which are explored.

## 1 Introduction

This article<sup>1</sup> is intended as a contribution to the theorising of linguistic praxis in communication and cognition, rather than to Bakhtinology, in the sense of studies of the life and work of Bakhtin and his circle. However, it will make consistent use of concepts that are dialogical in nature, and at least partially resonant with ideas from that circle. At the same time, it is a contribution to present-day ‘dialogical linguistics’.

The term ‘dialogical’ (or, if we are more pedantic: ‘dialogistic’) implies an emphasis on interaction and contexts, on language being used in situational and socio-cultural contexts, in interaction with others and with our physical and social surroundings. In delineating such an overall theoretical framework, I am rather ecumenical in my regard of many contemporary approaches to interaction and discourse as at least partly dialogical in orientation (Linell 1998: 50ff., 2005a, 2005b); examples are not only Bakhtin-inspired linguistics (for example Ducrot 1984; Salazar Orvig 1999, 2005), but also (variants of) conversation analysis, context-based discourse analysis, ethnography of speaking, social pragmatics, Goffman’s interactionism, discursive psychology, socio-cultural constructionism (for example Berger and Luckmann 1967) and social representations theory. However, most of these deal more with discourse than with language, and will therefore be backgrounded in this paper.

In dialogism, the relation to *the other*, in terms of responsivity, responsibility and addressivity, is fundamental. But language is also deeply implicated; dialogue consists in intra- and interpersonal communication *in and through language*, and other semiotic resources. Accordingly, language and dialogue are very closely related. Yet, despite the fact that linguists define their discipline as one which explores the nature of language, the traditions and mainstream theories of linguistics are not dialogical, interactional or contextual at all (Voloshinov 1973; Linell 2005a). Usually, they are strongly system-oriented. A

<sup>1</sup> This article is built upon a plenary lecture delivered at the XII International Bakhtin Conference, Jyväskylä, Finland, July 22, 2005.

dialogical linguistics would, by contrast, primarily be a theory of linguistic praxis, perhaps with special relevance for spoken interactional language.<sup>2</sup>

This article will have the following structure. First, I will briefly make a brief thumbnail sketch of some dominant traditions within mainstream linguistics (section 2). I will what the substantial, theoretical consequences of adopting dialogical insights could be for a usage-based (empirically oriented) linguistics (section 3). After that, I will proceed to a more specific part, in which I will focus on a couple of aspects of lexis and grammar, traditionally the core areas of linguistics, and provide some concrete illustrations of what a dialogical analysis might include (sections 4 and 5). I will end with some general conclusions (section 6).

## 2 The background: Monological linguistics

There is a relative consensus across disciplinary divisions that language contributes to many aspects of human life, and should be studied relative to problem areas such as the following:

1. *concept formation*, and its linguistic conventionalisation in terms of lexicalisation;
2. the formation of *complex signs*, in the syntactic configurations of meaningful (linguistic) resources;
3. the (partly) *digital organisation* of phonetic behaviour (segments and prosodies);
4. the pragmatic principles and practices organising communication and dialogue, and the *ability to infer from and recontextualise*, rather than being entirely dependent on, specific signals and contextual factors; here we also have the human narrative capacity, and the ability to adjust and conform to images of the self and others;
5. the transformative role on language, cognition and communication of *linguistic technologies*, notably writing and computer-borne media.

Present-day specialists on language will naturally differ in their relative weighting of these different domains, and in conceiving of their mutual relationships, but most would still, I believe, acknowledge their prime importance. Nonetheless, some domains – particularly (4) and (5) – have been largely ignored in mainstream linguistics, and the others have often been assigned quite narrow-minded interpretations. Mainstream linguistics is ‘monological’ (Linell 2005a) and belongs to the tradition of rationalism (or sometimes empiricism) and objectivism going all the way from Plato and Aristotle via, for example, Descartes and Frege to Chomsky.

Examples of monologism in linguistics can easily be multiplied. Here are some (cf. the numbering of points above):

---

<sup>2</sup> This emphasis on talk-in-interaction will mean that I will not comment here on the contribution of dialogism to the analysis of written texts.

1. The lexicon is conceived of as a fixed code, and lexical meanings only encode (fixed) sets of abstract semantic properties, decontextualising from most aspects of language as experienced in social life. This is linked to the notion of unitary languages (for example at the national level).
2. There is a strong tendency to posit linguistic expressions (words and syntax) as primary, and try to assign (or derive) linguistic functions and meanings to these forms. Language is described in terms of inventories of units and rules, especially compositional rules for how to build up larger units from smaller ones (compositionality, hegemony of constituent structure in syntax and, to some extent, in [structural] semantics). Sharp boundaries between lexis and grammar, between units and rules, have usually been set up.
3. Phonology has traditionally been segment-based, and has grossly underestimated the importance of prosodies.
4. The pragmatics of communication and cognition has often been relegated to other disciplines such as anthropology, social psychology and cognitive psychology, implying that pragmatics is not really part of language (or the system).
5. In theory, writing and written language have usually been treated as more or less trivial secondary representations. At the same time, however, theories and methods in traditional, structural and generative linguistics have been thoroughly dependent on models of written language (a ‘written-language bias’ in linguistics; Linell 2005a). This has generated a paradox in modern linguistics; spoken language is regarded as the primary form of language, yet it is studied by the use of theories and methods that are heavily biased towards written language.

### 3 Dialogical linguistics: Six general points

I will list six general characteristics of what I take to be a dialogical linguistics (note that these numbered paragraphs do *not* correspond to points 1-5 of the prior section):

#### 3.1 Praxis and the principle of double dialogicality

At one level, language consists of and lives through interactional structures and processes in situated use. But language must be seen as doubly dialogical, in terms of *situated interaction and situation-transcending practices*. When we think, act and communicate, we are always in one or the other particular situation; we can never be ‘not in a situation’. But situations are linked to each other, through our habits, experiences and memories, and what we do in specific situations is therefore also part of situation-transcending socio-cultural practices. The linguistic (and other semiotic) resources we rely on are paramount examples of such socially shared, situation-transcending belongings. Therefore, we need – in our analysis – both situation and tradition, both interaction and institution.

Language use, or ‘*linguaging*’, consists of the primary activities of cognising and communicating in and through linguistic resources. We must therefore give priority to the theory of *linguistic praxis* (language use, communication and cognition, ‘*parole*’) rather than to a theory of abstract units and system-internal rules (structure, ‘*langue*’). Users’

knowledge of language is *emergent* from praxis. Emergent regularities ('rules, constructions, analogies') cluster around different types of model utterances and utterance parts. Furthermore, linguistic knowledge is largely procedural, pertaining to methods of doing things in the world (§ 4 below). It is crucial that theories of praxis and linguistic knowledge be interpenetrating; we cannot develop one without the other. In Bakhtin's terms, we must do both 'linguistics' and 'meta-linguistics'<sup>3</sup> in tandem.

### 3.2 Dynamic construals in contexts and interaction

We must take our point of departure in *interaction*, sequences, activities and larger units, and in terms of *other-oriented (dialogical) inter-acts* rather than monological speech acts (Linell and Marková 1993). Situated meanings (interpretations) are to be seen as actions and *movements* (Salazar Orvig 1999); they are not driven by lexical semantics, i.e. they are not given beforehand as static, context-free meanings, nor are they entirely established by the local talk-in-interaction (Deppermann 2005). Rather, lexical meanings are potentials that combine with various contextual factors to produce situated interpretations. Contexts comprise linguistic co-texts, situations, knowledge about relevant communicative activity types (genres), topics and interlocutors, and so on. Situated sense-making always involves 'pragmatic inferencing'; they are the result of dynamic construals (Croft and Cruse 2004) of the interplay between meaning potentials and contextual dimensions.

Parties to communication engage in linguistic work and efforts for meaning, they monitor the processes of becoming (utterances-in-progress), and they position themselves with respect to the world, the other, the self, the discourse and its movements, the shifting attunements to the attunement of the other (Salazar Orvig 1999: 9).

### 3.3 Holism

The basic phenomena of language and linguistic practices are not primarily the traditional constituent types like morphemes, phrases and sentences (these are theoretical entities derived by abstraction), but holistic entities, such as communicative projects, episodes in discourse, communicative activity types, and 'social representations'.

In talk-in-interaction and texts, there are (more or less) coherent, sequentialised interactional structures, such as sequence types, (topical) episodes and activity phases which result from the accomplishment of *communicative projects* of varying extensions (Luckmann 1995). Communicative projects are typically collectively accomplished but with an asymmetric division of communicative labour (Linell and Luckmann 1991), and are nested within other (communicative or non-communicative) projects, etc. (Linell 1998: 11).

Discourses instantiate recurrent *communicative activity types* and communicative genres (Luckmann 2002). Individuals and communities of individuals differ in their communicative repertoires, i.e. the sets of different activities, genres and language games with which they are familiar.

We also need some notion of '*social representations*' (Moscovici 2000; Marková 2003) (or 'discourses' or 'orders of discourse' in a Foucauldian sense), which are bodies of partly systematised domain-specific knowledge and assumptions (especially of a common-sense type), belief systems, ideas and ideologies, attitudes and dispositions to act, ways of

---

3 In Todorov's (1984: 24) rendition, 'translinguistics'. Incidentally, seen from today's point-of-view, Bakhtin still sticks to a rather conservative view of the scope of 'linguistics'.

thinking and talking about specific issues (for example, topical domains such as opera, biotechnology, air pollution, AIDS/HIV, etc.). Social representations are part of our ‘*encyclopedic*’ *knowledge about the world*. This is intertwined with language, with our experience of using language in social life, something which many linguistic semanticists would now acknowledge (Fillmore 1985; Carston 2002: 321 et passim). Below I will suggest that the meaning potentials of linguistic expressions are used together with contextual resources, thus helping actors to make sense in situated discourse. Similarly, social representations are potentialities to evoke particular types of discourses, actions, attitudes etc.

### 3.4 Methods and potentialities

Linguistic resources are used in cognition and communication, in *interplay with contextual resources*. Linguistic items and processes are *methods* to accomplish actions, communicative projects, and to provide structure and meaning to utterances.

Linguistic entities are also to be seen as *potential(itie)s* (an idea going back at least to Wilhelm von Humboldt; for example Linell 2005a: 82). In subsequent sections of this article, I will focus on the two basic components of language: grammar and lexis, and more specifically, two particular kinds of linguistic resources, *grammatical constructions* and *lexical items*, and discuss their semantics in terms of *meaning potentials*. Meaning potentials are affordances for sense-making that are *relatively* stable, yet partly open, multiply determinable in context, and dynamically modifiable over sociohistorical time. Meanings are susceptible to contextual modifications, expansions and enrichments, in partly different ways in different dialogical situations and communicative genres. For Bakhtin too, “the language system is a potential that becomes realised in concrete utterances which utilise the meaning resources of a language” (Lähteenmäki 2003:26).

The meaning of an utterance (or text) is often partly open and multiply determinable in the moment of production (and/or reception). In general, utterance meaning cannot immediately be fully determined, neither language-internally (say, by a principle of compositionality) nor by pragmatic inferential principles (as they are usually conceived in ‘linguistic pragmatics’: maxims, conversational implicatures, or a general principle of relevance). The relevant situated interpretation(s) must instead be dialogically determined and accomplished through the interaction (Rommetveit 1974), including in particular the uptake of the utterance, by the parties to the communicative activity (or cognitive activity, as for example in text reading) (Linell 1998: 112ff.). Meaning determination is usually done only up to a point or to a degree that is sufficient for current communicative purposes (cf. Garfinkel 1967).

### 3.5 Heterogeneities and fuzzy areas

The holistic entities mentioned above (3.3) often have fuzzy boundaries, and they include internal inconsistencies and heterogeneities, for example, as regards heteroglossia in social languages (Wertsch 1991), and hybridity in communicative activity types. Also, the boundaries between lexical entries and grammatical constructions are fuzzy, at least in some areas.

### 3.6 The cultural construction of language in literacy and written culture

Literacy and written language have played an immense role in transforming cognition and communication (for example Olson 1994). Literacy was of course also necessary for linguistics to develop as a discipline. Linguists came to be engaged in devising written languages, in unifying and standardising national languages, and in theorising language. This in fact involved a large-scale transformation of living language, which occurs in cognitive and communicative practices, to a kind of fictive language, strongly influenced by man-made standards for written language.<sup>4</sup> This is what I earlier referred to as the ‘written language bias’ in the language sciences.

These dialogical points, including praxis-orientation, dynamics, holism, potentialities and heterogeneities, are bound partially to turn mainstream linguistics upside-down or inside-out. However, many linguists will undoubtedly claim that these points involve quite general and often fuzzy phenomena that could not be made precise and are not susceptible to formalisation. I am quite hopeful, though, that such objections can be rebutted (although I am not certain that formalisation is always a self-evident goal beyond questioning). Let me therefore try to become slightly more concrete in the remaining part of my text.

## 4 Grammatical constructions

In the following I will demonstrate a couple of examples of what a dialogical analysis might involve at a micro-level of linguistic detail. I will discuss a few aspects of lexis and grammar, that is, from the core areas of linguistics.<sup>5</sup> As my case-in-point, I shall use a rather special and limited grammatical construction in Swedish, commonly called *x-och-x* (‘*x-and-x*’). As it turns out, this phenomenon can be used here for two different purposes, namely, demonstrating some properties of grammatical constructions, and illustrating the dynamic construal of situated interpretations of a specific lexical item. Let me start with the former problem.

Grammatical constructions are abstractions from utterances or utterance types (Ono and Thompson 1995). They are relatively complex meaning-form configurations with their own meaning potentials (functional potentials<sup>6</sup>). Examples range from very common constructions such as subject-predicate, passive, *it*-cleft, to specific constructions such as the incredulity response construction (*what? me dance!?*), *do an X* (where *x* is a proper name, for example *do a Clinton*), various constructions that express affect (for example Wh + Pred (for example NP) + Subj + V: *what a fool I am!*), *x-och-x*, and countless others.

---

4 By ‘fictive language’, I am here alluding to the fact that grammars have usually not been based so much on real written language (generalisations over authentic texts), but rather on selected norms for what (well written) language should be like.

5 When dialogism has been applied to language, and linguists have done so only exceptionally, it has chiefly concerned levels and areas of language studies that have not been central to linguistics, such as polyvocality in discourse (Salazar Orvig 1999, 2005) and heteroglossia in communicative communities and in languages. In our group in Linköping, Sweden, we have been mainly occupied with communicative activities in professional-lay interaction, something which will also be ignored in this article.

6 The term ‘functional potential’ is sometimes used about the meaning potential (as understood in this article) of a grammatical construction (as opposed to a lexical item).

## 4.1 An example

Let us look at some examples of *x-och-x* in Swedish. In (1), the verb *flytta* ('move [house]') is the *x*, whereas *å* is the most frequent conversational form of *och* ('and') (see line 3):

(1) FLYTTA Å FLYTTA (SAM: V1: 989ff.) (there is ongoing talk about a German family that was forced to leave Finland after WW II)

1. G: sen så beslagtogs huse å (0.5) dom flytta tillbaka
2. ti (0.7) ti Hamburg (å)
3. M: nå flytta å flytta men ja menar va (.) fan kan du
4. göra

Approximate translation:

G: "then the house was confiscated and (0.5) they moved back to (0.7) to Hamburg (and)"

M: "well (*nå*), moved and moved but I mean what (.) the hell can you do"

In (2) and (3), *x* is *många* ('many') and *normal* ('normal'), respectively:

(2) (TemaK: B9:4:6, from the beginning of a talk at a maternity clinic; the doctor [D] asks the pregnant woman [W] about her experiences of being tape-recorded):

1. D: =du har haft många inspelade samtal eller--?
2. W: nja, många å många, men de e nära stycken
2. så de--

Approximate translation:

D: "you have had many conversations recorded, or..?"

R: "well (*nja*), many and many, but there are quite a few so that...".

(3) NORMAL Å NORMAL (Swedish Radio; a H[istorian] is being interviewed by an I[interviewer] on the topic of elite schools in Nazi Germany and their possible role in promoting Aryan elitism)

1. H: [...] eh (.) °ja° de va (.) delvis normal skolgång
2. men-eh (.) eller ja, normal å normal °men° (.)
3. >man ägnade mycke tid< åt fysisk fostran å gymnastik
4. å >sedan så småningom också< (.) militära övningar.
5. I: så man höll på å kasta handgranater å skjuta me gevärç

Approximate translation:

H: "ah well it was a partly normal schooling but ah or well, normal and normal but one devoted much time to physical education and exercises and then gradually also to military practices."

I: "so one was busy throwing hand-grenades and shooting with rifles?"

*x-och-x* (Lindström and Linell 2006), which is a formal idiom in the terminology of Fillmore et al. (1988), can only occur following an utterance that includes *x*. Thus, it is a *responsive*

construction in the strict sense; it has encoded a specific kind of dependence on a prior utterance. (Other constructions encode specific conditions on a possible next utterance, and are therefore projective in a corresponding sense; examples are many interrogatives.)

By means of *x-och-x*, the speaker comments on the situated use of a particular expression, in the case of (1): *flytta* ('move [house]'), and suggests that it is not quite situationally appropriate, although not completely misplaced either. There is no direct counterpart of *x-och-x* in English; in our example, we could render the meaning of 'moved and moved' in (1) approximately as 'moved?', it depends on what you mean by that'. In other words, what one does with *x-och-x* is to take an expression *x* from an immediately prior utterance, and then to place a reduplicated copy of it (*x och x*) in the pre-front field of a new turn or turn-constructional unit, and follow this up with an utterance, in which the situated appropriacy of *x* is negotiated. The source of *x* is usually in the interlocutor's prior contribution (as in [1] and [2]), but it can also be in the speaker's own utterance (as in [3]), in which case *x-och-x* is self-responsive.

Let me briefly consider what properties of *x-och-x* one might want to specify in a more precise analysis. I shall distinguish between formal-grammatical and semantic-pragmatic aspects. Among the former, I shall talk about conditions on the *internal* structure of the *x-och-x* segment, and conditions on 'outer syntax' (co-text) of three kinds: conditions on *antecedent* and *subsequent* contributions to discourse, and on *co-occurring* linguistic resources.

The primary *antecedent* condition is of course the following:

(i) If an expression *x* (a morphological form of a lexical item *x*) occurs in the preceding turn constructional unit (TCU) or turn, *x-och-x* may be used.

This rule articulates a necessary condition in the sense that *x-och-x* is an option if and only if *x* does occur in the discourse. However, (i) is not a sufficient condition (nor are the other conditions below sufficient); that is, if an expression *x* occurs in an utterance, it is of course *not* necessary to follow it up with *x-och-x*.

Other, non-obligatory but enabling conditions (conditions of possibility) are:

(ii) *x* is focally stressed in the prior (source) utterance;

(iii) *x* is rhematic in that utterance;

(iv) if *x-och-x* is other-responsive, the source utterance is interrogative.

In our example (1), (ii) and (iii) are satisfied, but not (iv). In (2), (iv) too is partially satisfied.

As regards the internal structure of the *x-och-x* segment, we might posit the following obligatory conditions:

(v) *x* in *x-och-x* is repeated (twice) in the same morphological form as in the source utterance;

(vi) *x-och-x* initiates a new turn or TCU; it usually occurs in the pre-front field;

(vii) both *x*'s (or at least the second one) are focally stressed;

(viii) the *x-och-x* segment is prosodically integrated with the following segment, that is, there is no pause or prosodic jump in between.

*Co-occurring constructions*: When a speaker chooses to use a certain linguistic resource, such as *x-och-x*, he or she will typically select other linguistic resources to accompany it ('co-selection'; Deppermann 2005). Thus, *x-och-x* is preferably 'constructed with' other resources:

(ix) *x-och-x* often co-occurs with distancing responsive particles (in the examples here: *nå*, *nja*) and concessive markers, especially in self-responsive cases (*eller* 'or' [for instance example (3): line 2], *i alla fall* 'anyway', etc.).

Moving on now to the *subsequent* contribution, we find:

(x) after the *x-och-x* segment, it is obligatory to proceed with an utterance that – for current communicative purposes – confirms (or foregrounds) some aspects of *x*'s meaning potential, and simultaneously cancels (or backgrounds) other aspects of *x*'s meaning potential.

Note that unlike the antecedent condition, this subsequent part is obligatorily present: no *x-och-x* without this kind of continuation. (This fact, together with condition (viii), may be taken as an argument for regarding this subsequent segment as part of the internal structure of the grammatical construction itself.)

The subsequent segment is closely related to the *semantic-pragmatic* functions; what *x-och-x* does is usually to problematise one (central) sub-sense of the meaning of *x*, and enhance another as situationally appropriate. One might say that the construction is a grammaticalised method of initiating a local meta-linguistic discussion and semantic analysis of the *situated* use of *x*, something which necessarily involves *x*'s *lexical* meaning. In fact, precisely this may be seen as the core of the construction's meaning. In our example (1), what is questioned is the appropriacy of using *flytta* ('move [house]') in a situation, when the people moving had no choice, while other aspects of the meaning potential are possibly supported (such as 'changing one's dwelling place').

#### 4.2 Generalising summary

I have drawn attention to at least five points in a dialogical (contextual, interactional) conception of a grammatical construction.

First, grammatical constructions are made to *fit into sequences* of real coherent sequences of sense-making in talk (or text). Contributions to interactions have backward- and forward-pointing (*responsive* vs. *projective*) properties. As a consequence, many grammatical constructions, i.e. the linguistic items themselves, have encoded special responsive and/or projective properties. (*x-och-x* is a case in point.) If we put it differently, grammatical constructions have an outside ('outer syntax'), not just an internal structure. The outer syntax may include three parts: antecedent, subsequent, and co-occurring structures. This general point implies that if we want to understand the structure and function of a construction, we cannot just analyse its internal composition, nor just consider it as an autonomous sentence out of context.

Secondly, and related to this, several linguistic resources are typically *co-selected* in discourse. Such resources will often mutually influence what aspects of their meaning potentials are reinforced in the situated utterance, "they reciprocally constrain and specify each other's local interpretation" (Deppermann 2005: 306). The preference for certain accompanying resources is arguably part of the construction as a whole.

Thirdly, grammatical constructions are concerned with actions and doings; they should be thought of in terms of *methods*, procedures or operations. Communicatively, they contribute to solving a communicative problem (*x-och-x* contributes to negotiating and determining a more precise, situated interpretation of *x*); they make a change, a 'difference that makes a difference', to the micro-situations in which they occur (Rommetveit 1974: *passim*: the dialogically constituted, temporarily and partially shared social world). For example, *x-och-x* often performs a kind of 'concessive repair' (cf. Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson 2005).

Linguistically, they are operations on form and meaning, operating on some linguistic material and returning something else. Hence, they have a structural, product-oriented

side too; they are oriented to producing utterances or utterance parts with a particular linguistic structure.

Fourth, a grammatical construction involves a *semantic operation*; in the case of *x-och-x*, it negotiates the meaning of *x*. I will say more about this in section 5.

Fifth, grammatical constructions are *used in local communicative projects* and are often *loosely coupled to communicative activity types*. Hence, they are part of larger wholes in this respect too.

All these points are included in what I would like to propose as a dialogical, i.e. contextual and interactional, and usage-based, approach to grammatical constructions.

## 5. Meaning potentials of lexical items

### 5.1 An example

We have just seen that the most salient feature of *x-och-x* is that it discusses the meaning of a specific lexical item, *x*, as applied to a specific context. In doing so, it exploits and negotiates parts of the meaning potential of this item. Thus, we are, one might say, faced with two kinds of interplay; the interaction between grammar (*x-och-x*) and lexis (*x*), and the local interplay between discourse and contexts.

In order to study how the meaning potential interacts with contextual conditions in more detail, Norén and Linell (2006) assembled a corpus of *x-och-x* usage events involving the same lexical item in Swedish, the word *ny* ('new'). These examples are drawn from the Internet, and thus originate in a written medium – though the texts are stylistically rather speech-like most of the time – and they have presumably most often been composed by single authors (thus, they represent mainly self-responsive uses of *x-och-x*).

Intuitively, Swedish *ny* or English *new* means something like 'has only existed for a short period of time'. However, in no way does this account fully for how the word can be used. Just to take one (made-up) example, if somebody says "I have a new favourite philosopher: Plato", clearly "new" is not meant to claim that Plato's work has been around only for a short time. Instead, the utterance is probably meant to tell that Plato is a recent revelation *for the speaker* in his or her present predicament. Moreover, this interpretation is contextually triggered, by the words in the co-text: "I have a favourite". The semantic aspect 'recently discovered by the speaker' is one of those which appeared in our study of *ny-och-ny* ('new-and-new') events.

However, it is hardly surprising that the core aspect 'short time of existence' plays a major role in the *x-och-x* events. Thus, in our first two examples, the authors question if the period of time that has elapsed since the first occurrence of the referent, is really short enough for it to be called *ny* ('new').

(4) *Hur som helst sitter jag här med mina nya snygga glasögon. Eller nya och nya, de har ju varit mina sedan den 8 mars.*

"Anyhow, here I am with my **new** posh glasses. Or **new and new**, they have been mine since the 8<sup>th</sup> of March." (Written on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August the same year.)

What the author of (4) calls into question is that more than five months may be too long for a pair of glasses to be called *new*. In example (5), where the referent is a language, the questioned time span is much longer.

(5) [Artikelrubrik:] *Esperanto – hela världens nya språk.*

[Kommentarinledning:] *Nya och nya, har väl funnits ett bra tag ändå. Mer än hundra år i alla fall.*

”[Headline:] Esperanto – the **new** language of the whole world.

[Comment:] **New and new**, has been around for quite a while, hasn’t it. More than a hundred years, anyhow.”

In (5), the second participant comments on the use of ‘new’ in the headline. He (or she) questions if a language, Esperanto that is a hundred years old, can really be referred to as *new*. As we can glean from (4) and (5), the problematisation of the core aspect is valid only for a certain class of referents.

In many examples in our corpus, the core aspect ‘short time of existence’ is cancelled in its absolute sense in favour of another aspect. I will give only one example here, illustrating a rather common case: a referent is not new in the basic chronological sense, but it is “new” for its owner:

(6) *...i min nya SAAB 9000...Eller ny och ny, för mig är den ju det, men det är en -88.*

”in my **new** SAAB 9000 [a car]... Or **new and new**, for me it is, but it is an –88 [year of manufacturing]”

In the remaining examples to be shown, other kinds of operations occur. The core aspect is either confirmed or denied, while different connotations are either backgrounded or foregrounded. We argue that the latter too can be viewed as aspects of the meaning potential.

In example (7), a city district, La Defense in Paris, has existed for quite a long time, but it is described as still developing:

(7) *La Defense [...] är en helt ny stadsdel konsekvent byggd i mycket modernistisk stil. Eller ny och ny, det är väl över 30 år sedan den började byggas, men är ändå i sin början. Det finns byggkranar lite överallt. Detta skall bli ett nytt Manhattan men med Fransk stil och klass.*

”La Defense [...] is a completely **new** district, consistently erected in a very modernistic style. Or **new and new**, it’s probably more than 30 years since they started to build it, but it is still developing. There are cranes everywhere. This area is supposed to become a new Manhattan, but with French style and identity.”

Thus, here the short time of existence is denied (or questioned) in favour of a connotational aspect of the meaning potential of ‘new’, the referent’s potential for development.

Example (8) is an ironic one: a new car is supposed to look fresh and to be in good condition; yet, it is actually 16 years old and not in a very good condition.

(8) *Jag skulle alltså vilja sälja min nästan **nya** Jeep Laredo pickup årsmodell -88. Ja **ny och ny**. Lite rost har den förstås. Sedan är den ju krockad och lite ramsned. Så **nya** bakdäck håller bara i 1000 mil. Men den är extrautrustad med radio som just nu är trasig men den går säkert att reparera.*

”[ironic] You see, I want to sell my almost **new** Jeep Laredo pickup -88. Well, **new and new**, it has some rust on it. And more, it is crashed and its frame is a bit askew/distorted. So new rear tyres will only stay in good condition for about 7 000 miles, or so. But it is extra equipped with a radio set, which, that is true, doesn’t work right now, but it is surely possible to repair it.”

The connotation of being fresh, in the sense of ‘not deteriorated’, is related to being new, and here this connotation is foregrounded.

Another example of the actualisation of a connotation, this time however a case of backgrounding, can be found in example (8):

(8) *Sidan uppdaterad. Med lite **nya** bilder [bild av skribenten med hår] ... **fast nya och nya**... Mina kära elever har ju rakat av mig allt hår sen dess så speciellt aktuella är de kanske inte.*

”Page updated. With some **new** pictures. [Pictures of the writer with hair.] ...but **new and new**. Since then, my dear students have shaved off all of my hair, so they are not really up to date.”

In (8), the ‘short time of existence’ of a couple of pictures is confirmed, but the writer obviously feels the need to disclaim the connotational meaning that often goes with new things: that they are also currently valid, or continuously updated. If this connotation is not true of the referents, they could not readily be called ‘new’. Here, this connotation of ‘currently valid’ is backgrounded.

In (9), finally, yet another kind of operation on the meaning potential is illustrated. A *pragmatic presupposition* that comes with *ny* is that the new referent is one in a series (for example ‘new wife’, ‘Happy New Year!’). Although its salience differs across contexts, our hypothesis is that this presupposition is always present.

(9) *I augusti tillträdde det en **ny** Generalsekreterare för Svenska Scoutrådet, Johan Strid. Eller **ny och ny**, det har aldrig funnits någon förut.*

”Last August a **new** secretary general of the Swedish Scout Council, Johan Strid, started his work. Or **new and new**, there has never been anyone before.”

In (9), the writer overtly cancels the presupposition, while confirming the ‘short time of existence’ for the secretary general.

Our corpus (Norén and Linell 2006) shows that the Swedish word *ny* can be used in situations where both some of its normal conceptual inferences, like ‘new to everyone’, ‘new in all contexts’, and some of its normal connotational meanings, like ‘updated’, ‘de-

veloping' or 'fresh', are either not suited to the situation, or – conversely – regarded as more relevant to it than the core meaning. Pragmatic presuppositions can also be cancelled. By these operations, the word can be dynamically adapted to new situations.

It should be pointed out that the ways in which *x-och-x* interacts semantically-pragmatically with *ny* are partly dependent on the affordances in the meaning potential of the class of words that *ny* belongs to. Other words behave in partly different ways, as Norén and Linell (ibid.) have shown.

The study of the exploitation of the meaning potential of 'new', or rather Swedish *ny*, has illustrated three kinds of phenomena in lexical pragmatics:

a) *Aspects of the meaning potentials*, which are of at least three kinds: conceptual aspects (of which some are core aspects), connotational aspects, presuppositional aspects. In the case of *ny* in *ny-och-ny* events, the conceptual aspect 'short time of existence' comes out as the core aspect. This is shown in two ways. First, it is always included in the operations that language users perform on the meaning potential of a word. Secondly, when two (or more) sense aspects are input to the operations, one of them is always the core aspect.

b) *Contextual resources interacting with potentials*: Such resources include linguistic resources that are locally present (such as grammatical constructions and other words, cf. co-selected resources), global topics, relevant communicative projects, communicative activity types (and text genres) (although these have not been highlighted in this section).

c) *Types of construals*, i.e. operations applied to potentials in the situated contexts problematisation (relativisation) (for example of core aspects), foregrounding and backgrounding, confirmation and cancellation (denial), mutual enhancing and contrasting<sup>7</sup>.

## 5.2 Some possible extensions

The reader may perhaps find my exemplary case rather special. But I would propose that the kind of dialogicality that has been illustrated surfaces everywhere, or at least here and there, in discourse. However, some of the processes are nicely materialised and crystallised in the *x-och-x* construction.

Nonetheless, I would like to generalise from this single example to some issues in current semantic and pragmatic theory (cf. Carston 2002, 2005). One issue is concerned with monosemy or polysemy (often understood as an issue of drawing the boundary between [lexical] semantics and pragmatics). On the one hand, a word, such as Swedish *ny* or English *new*, is intuitively perceived as one single word (with lexically more or less the same meaning) (cf. monosemy), but on the other hand, it is a fact that there is semantic variation across situations. Is this variation due to situated modulation (i.e. purely pragmatic enrichments), or is it present in the lexicalised (conventionalised) structure of the language in question (cf. polysemy)? This issue is usually treated in mainstream linguistics by arguing 'theoretically', using only autonomous and made-up sentences in (likewise made-up) imaginary contexts. Such treatments are bound to make the analysis 'monological' (i.e. monologicistic); they suffer from a lack of dialogical (i.e. contextual and interactional) data. We therefore need empirical data, based on language users' actions and interaction in authentic situated discourse, as in our (admittedly quite modest) example. (On the other hand, this argument is not meant to imply a wholesale rejection of the use of intuition and 'theoretical' argumentation; these are necessary, but mainly as supplements to usage-based methods.)

<sup>7</sup> Enhancing vs. contrasting are not so salient processes in our *x-och-x* events, but they can be observed in semantic glides and reversals within text sequences (Deppermann 2005).

In our analysis, *ny* appears as monosemous at one level. The varying meanings that we have found (sub-sense units with near-sense properties, Croft and Cruse 2004: 116) do not affect the importance of the core aspect. But the meaning potential seems to involve more than this core aspect. The other semantic aspects are not simply contextual modulations or purely occasional conceptualisations; they are types of situated interpretations that have become entrenched and conventionalised. Therefore, the theory of meaning potentials, in our version, does entail at least some degree of polysemy. We have demonstrated that ordinary language users, in their daily practices, display an ability to perform a kind of semantic analysis of the meaning (potential) of the lexical item as a resource in their language. They are aware of several distinct senses that may be actualised in a specific context. At the same time, the theory of meaning potentials does not force us to choose between monosemy and polysemy, and the issue therefore appears to be something of a theoretical ‘pseudo-problem’. There is a monosemous tendency (presence of a core aspect, or a set of such aspects) living alongside with a polysemous tendency (presence of other lexicalised sub-senses, which may be actualised/exploited in context, for example by being foregrounded or backgrounded). It should be added, though, that words with other kinds of semantics than *ny* may of course be polysemous in a more radical way.

Another classical issue is whether utterance understanding involves both ‘reflexive’ and ‘reflective’ processes of inferencing (Carston 2005). The former would be primary, in some ways reflex-like, unconscious, fast, automatic processes (the immediate understanding that appears ‘spontaneously’), the latter would be more consciously monitored and argued, making some aspects of logical inferencing overt and public. Some theories (Clark and Clark 1977; Recanati as discussed in Carston 2005) argue that these processes are distinct and sequentially ordered in time, one dealing with explicit content, the other with implicatures. A dialogical theory argues that the situated utterance understanding is responsive, preparing for a response that can be made overt in an immediate contribution to discourse. Our little study of *x-och-x* indicates what we intuitively know; language is both ‘reflexive’ and ‘reflective’ in Carston’s terms; an instance of *x-och-x* is an immediate response to the partial situated inappropriacy of *x*, but the obligatory subsequent segment displays aspects of reflective considerations.

## 6 Summary: Dialogical interdependencies

Lexical semantics is complex, and the analyses soon become quite technical. But I have tried to suggest some directions for a dialogical (lexical) semantics and pragmatics. According to this conception, lexical meanings are not fixed meanings (bundles of semantic features that are always relevant), nor are they simply unstructured sets of concrete, occasional sense types. They are dynamic potentials that are part of an open, yet relatively stable language. Speakers exploit these linguistic resources in their situated sense-making, in different ways, depending on the opportunities and constraints of contexts.

In general, dialogical theory highlights *interdependencies* in communication, cognition and semiotic practices. Some of these concern:

- the interaction between participants (selves and others, etc.);
- the interplay between particular acts and larger wholes (communicative projects, topics, communicative activities);
- the interplay between linguistic resources and contextual resources, between potentialities (meaning potentials) and dynamic, situated construals;
- the interplay between different co-selected linguistic resources;
- the interplay involved in types of cognitive-communicative operations: foregrounding vs. backgrounding, mutual enhancing (for example by means of co-selected resources) vs. contrasting, etc.;
- the interplay between lexicalised and grammaticalised meaning and encyclopedic knowledge.

These interdependencies are essential, and not phenomena that are only occasionally made relevant. However, the dialogical points are seldom properly honoured in mainstream linguistics. Bakhtin's (1981, quoted by Côté 2000: 38, n.8) words still hold true:

Dialogue is studied merely as a compositional form in the structuring of speech, but the internal dialogism of the word (which occurs in a monologic utterance as well as in a rejoinder), the dialogism that penetrates its entire structure, in all its semantic and expressive layers, is almost entirely ignored.

## References

- Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. *The dialogical imagination: Four essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Transl. C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: The University of Texas Press.
- Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. 1967 [1966]. *The social construction of reality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Carston, R. 2002. *Thoughts and utterances: The pragmatics of explicit communication*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Carston, R. 2005. Pragmatic inference – reflective or reflexive? Paper at 9th International Pragmatics Conference. Riva del Garda, Italy, 10-15 July, 2005.
- Clark, H. H. and Clark, E. 1977. *Psychology and language: An introduction to psycholinguistics*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Côté, J.-F. 2000. Bakhtin's dialogism reconsidered through Hegel's 'Monologism': The dialectical foundation of aesthetics and ideology in contemporary human sciences. In C. Brandist and G. Tihanov (eds.) *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and social theory*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 20-42.
- Couper-Kuhlen, E. and Thompson, S. A. 2005. A linguistic practice for retracting overstatements: 'Concessive repair'. In A. Hakulinen and M. Selting (eds.) *Syntax and lexis in conversation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 257-288.
- Croft, W. and Cruse, A. 2004. *Cognitive linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deppermann, A. 2005. Conversational interpretation of lexical items and conversational contrasting. In Hakulinen and Selting (eds.) *Syntax and lexis in conversation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 289-318.
- Ducrot, O. 1984. *Le dire et le dit*. Paris: Minuit.
- Fillmore, C. 1985. Frames and the semantics of understanding. *Quaderni di semantica* 6, 222-254.

- Fillmore, C., Kay, P. & O'Connor, M. C. 1988. Regularity and idiomaticity in grammatical constructions: The case of 'Let alone'. *Language* 64, 501-538.
- Garfinkel, H. 1967. *Studies in ethnomethodology*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- Lähteenmäki, M. 2003. On the interpretation of Baxtin's linguistic ideas: The problem of the texts from the 1950-60s. *Russian Linguistics* 27, 23-39.
- Lindström, J. and Linell, P. 2006. X-och-x som samtalspraktik och grammatisk konstruktion [X-and-x as a conversational practice and a grammatical construction]. Forthc. in E. Engdahl and A.- M. Londen (eds.) *Studier i svenskt samtalspråk, vol. 2*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Linell, P. 1998. *Approaching dialogue: Talk, interaction and contexts in dialogical perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Linell, P. 2005a. *The written language bias in linguistics: Its nature, origins and transformations*. London: Routledge.
- Linell, P. 2005b. Essentials of dialogism: Aspects and elements of a dialogical approach to language, communication and cognition.  
<http://www.tema.liu.se/tema-k/personal/perli/index.html>
- Linell, P. and Luckmann, T. 1991. Asymmetries in dialogue: Some conceptual preliminaries. In I. Marková and K. Foppa (eds.) *Asymmetries in dialogue*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1-20.
- Linell, P. and Marková, I. 1993. Acts in discourse: From monological speech acts to dialogical inter-acts. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 23, 173-195.
- Luckmann, T. 1995. Interaction planning and intersubjective adjustment of perspectives by communicative genres. In E. Goody (ed.) *Social intelligence and interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 175-186.
- Luckmann, T. 2002. On the methodology of (oral) genres. In P. Linell and K. Aronsson (eds.) *Jagen och rösterna: Goffman, Viveka och samtalet* [Selves and voices: Goffman, Viveka and dialogue]. Linköping: Department of Communication Studies, 319-337.
- Marková, I. 2003. *Dialogicality and social representations: The dynamics of mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moscovici, S. 2000. *Social representations: Explorations in social psychology*. Ed. G. Duveen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Norén, K. and Linell, P. 2006. Meaning potentials and the interaction between lexis and grammar: Some empirical substantiations. To be submitted for publication.
- Ono, T. and Thompson, S. A. 1995. What can conversation tell us about syntax? In P. Davis (ed.) *Descriptive and theoretical modes in alternative linguistics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 213-271.
- Rommetveit, R. 1974. *On message structure*. London: Wiley.
- Salazar Orvig, A. 1999. *Les mouvements du discours*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Salazar Orvig, A. 2005. Les facettes du dialogisme dans une discussion ordinaire. In P. P. Haillet et al. (eds.) *Regards sur l'héritage de Mikhail Bakhtine*. Amiens: Encrage.
- Todorov, T. 1984. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The dialogical principle*. Transl. W. Godzich. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Voloshinov, V. N. 1973 [1929]. *Marxism and the philosophy of language*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wertsch, J. 1991. *Voices of the mind*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.