

**Functions of repetition in the discourse of elderly speakers:
The role of prosody and gesture**

Cognitively speaking, repetition can work as a facilitator for both the planning and the understanding of spoken language. It can work as a cohesive and interactive device or, at a higher-level function of discourse, to engage in interaction by creating interpersonal involvement: repetition always conveys altered meaning, as it has to be re-interpreted by the interlocutor “in light of the accretion, juxtaposition, or expansion” (Tannen 2007: 62). Repetition is thus useful for the building of shared representation and organization of discourse, especially in the elderly’s speech where it may serve as a glue to engage in social interaction (Davis & Maclagan 2014).

In this line, the aim of our talk is to determine whether self-repetitions fulfill a specific function in the elderly’s discourse. To reach this goal, corpus-based analyses will be carried out based on multimodal (audio and video) data taken from CLARe’s corpora (Corpora for Language and Aging Research) consisting of face-to-face conversations in French, between a young adult and a very old speaker.

First, we will give an overview of the types of verbatim self-repetitions (affirmation/negation, false starts, word retrieval, anaphors, intensifiers/mitigators), comparing older and younger people’s speech (CLARe corpora vs. C-ORAL-ROM and VALIBEL corpora).

We will then have a closer look at the role of prosody in the discourse of elderly speakers (LangAge/CLARe corpus). It has been evidenced that prosody plays an important role for the interpretation of repetitions (Couper-Kuhlen 1996; Curl, Local & Walker 2006). While this was examined for dialogues, we will focus here on monological sequences of verbatim self-repetitions with a personal meaning (e.g., *et qu’on avait faim \ et qu’on avait faim* \ ‘we suffered from hunger’). The phonetic-prosodic analysis shows that there are minimal differences in the original and the repeated elements, which leads us to argue that the repetitions reinforce the position of the speaker, instead of contributing to the (dialogical) discursive flow of the interaction.

Next, the multimodal approach will explore the function of repetition in gestures (CorpAGEst/CLARe corpus). In line with form-based approaches to gesture (Müller, Bressemer & Ladewig 2013), relations that exist between speech and nonverbal resources (including hand gestures, facial displays, gaze, head, and shoulders) will be investigated. We will highlight recurrent cases combining repeated word-sequences and clusters of nonverbal parameters (e.g., *l’amour* ‘love’ [gaze towards the interlocutor, eyebrows raising, wide opening of the eyes] / *en un mot l’amour surtout* ‘in one word love above all’ [repeated head turns] / *l’amour* ‘love’ [repeated head turns, head leaning]). The focus will thus be on self-repetitions that have an expressive or a self-adapting function (Ekman & Friesen 1972: 382), which are linked to the affective and intimate component of communication.

Such prosodic and gestural phenomena, which contribute to the subjective expression of the self and to the speaker’s stance taking in discourse (Du Bois 2007) will give new insight in the way elderly people actually engage in dialogues in a context-sensitive manner.

References

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