

Cognition and Conversation: Evidence from Russian  
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Conversational data provide important insights into the cognitive processes of language production, perception, and processing. In the present paper I argue that conversations are structured around cognitive principles of coherence which are reflected in the linguistic encoding of information status and discourse structure. This is explicated by an analysis of Russian conversation, with attention to the interrelations between knowledge, information status and discourse structures. The focus of the analysis is narrative structures embedded in ongoing, unplanned, spontaneous conversation and, within those narratives, the structure of what have been called *dialogue episodes* or *dialogue paragraphs* (Longacre 1996) and the use of verbs of communication and reported speech to introduce dialogue episodes. The present study focuses on the transfer of knowledge through reported speech, with the speaker reporting such knowledge and transferring it to the addressee(s). These serve important pragmatic functions in creating *informational terrains* (Heritage 2005) and establishing discourse structure in the form of turn-taking boundaries. Experiments such as Garfinkel (1967) have shown that the information which a speech participant is held accountable for is a condition in understanding turn-taking structures by the interlocutors. In a related vein Heritage (2005) demonstrates how conversation participants report and track information and changes in information status, and knowledge about information, in ongoing conversation.

Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) propose a model of such mental representations that consists of both macro- and micro-level structures which reflect local and global organization. There is ample evidence that speech participants are aware of such discourse structures and use them in language processing. A number of studies have focused on the importance of the speaker's awareness of cognitive constraints in discourse processing for the addressee by signaling discourse units and prompting information retrieval (e.g. Chafe 1994; Tomlin 1987). Psychological studies in memory recall have shown that episodes are construed by listeners/readers as "chunks" or integral units (Black and Bower 1979; Glenn 1978; Mandler and Goodman 1982).

Despite broad agreement on the importance of discourse structures in cognitive processing, it remains unclear how these structures are to be defined. Discourse units such as paragraph or episode are defined either typographically, with reference to a printed text, or thematically, with often circular definitions of episode boundaries and discourse-level topic. By taking a cognitive approach to discourse organization which is grounded in unambiguous turn structure, the present study aims to add to our understanding of the structure of these units and their mental representations.

Data are taken from my own field recordings, from the National Corpus of the Russian Language (<http://www.ruscorpora.ru>), and from radio broadcasts on *Радиостанция «Эхо Москвы»* (<http://echo.msk.ru>).

#### References

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