

Summary

This book explores a structure of discourse which works at the basis of monolingual, bilingual and intercultural discourse with typologically different languages as well: The ‚ensuring of (mutual) understanding‘ (‚verständnissicherndes Handeln‘) among the participants of a communication. ‚Understanding‘ (‚Verstehen‘) (chapter 4.3 for a detailed analysis) is seen here as the result of the ‚reception process‘ (‚Rezeption‘) of any speech action. The ‚reception process‘ encompasses different stages within which the hearer co-reconstructs the speaker’s plan and tries to meet especially the illocutionary point of the action (Rehbein 1977, Ehlich 1979, Ehlich and Rehbein 1986). ‚Ensuring of understanding‘ itself is a complex linguistic action that aims to recover problems occurring at different stages of the reception process. Its main domain of discourse is ‚formal cooperation‘ (s. Ehlich 1987 for a discussion of this term).

‚Ensuring of understanding‘ is modelled here on a discourse analytical approach: It is assumed that there is one common communicative deep structure underlying different linguistic realizations which is to be reconstructed empirically through the analysis of authentic discourses. Instances of it in German and Japanese are comparable on the basis of the deep structure analyzed (s. chapter 1 for an introduction to the topic and chapter 2–3 for methodological issues of the analysis).

In chapter 4 the main focus is on the relation between ‚ensuring of understanding‘ and ‚repair‘ on the one hand (chapter 4.1) and ‚processes specifically aiming at mutual understanding‘ (‚spezifische Verständigungsprozesse‘) on the other (chapter 4.2). Different patterns of speech actions, such as ‚redrafting‘ (‚Umformulieren‘) and ‚elucidating‘ (‚Erläutern‘) are integrated to form a complex ensemble structure of ‚ensuring of understanding‘. Four processes specifically aiming at mutual understanding are differentiated, namely: (a) ‚speaker-hearer-control‘, (b) ‚checking of understanding‘, (c) ‚ensuring of understanding‘ and (d) ‚correction of understanding‘.

In chapter 5 ‚ensuring of understanding‘ is reconstructed as a specific form of (complex) speech action. It is categorized as an ‚auxiliary device‘ (‚Hilfsverfahren‘) (Rehbein 2001) of the following kind: If the processing of a pattern of speech action is blocked by a reception problem, it serves to de-block the processing of the pattern by recovering the reception problem (chapter 5.1).

The basic structure of ‚ensuring of understanding‘ resembles the structure of ‚effective reasoning‘ (‚Begründen‘) (Ehlich and Rehbein 1986, Redder 1990). But whereas in ‚effective reasoning‘ the ‚motivation‘ (‚Motivation‘) and the ‚goal‘ (‚Ziel‘) in the ‚pre-history‘ (‚Vorgeschichte‘) of the planning process on the speaker’s side has to be clarified, in ‚ensuring of understanding‘ only perceptive problems occurring in the reception process are repaired. Accordingly, the common action system of speaker and hearer is not as severely affected in the case of ‚ensuring of understanding‘ as in the case of ‚effective reasoning‘ (chapter 5.2).

The reconstruction of the actional structure consists of the following interactional positions: ,exothesis of plan disruption‘ (,Planstörungsexothese‘), ,request for repair‘ (,Bearbeitungsanforderung‘), ,repeating‘ (,Repetieren‘), ,redrafting ensuring understanding‘ (,verständnissicherndes Umformulieren‘), ,elucidation ensuring understanding‘ (,verständnissicherndes Erläutern‘), ,ascertaining‘ (,Sich-Vergewissern‘), and ,exothesis of understanding‘ (,Verstehensexothese‘). Collectively, these speech actions serve the specific purpose of ,ensuring of understanding‘ (chapter 5.3 – chapter 5.5).

In chapter 6 problems of ,ensuring of understanding‘ in intercultural/foreign-language communication and language-specific characteristics of German and Japanese realization forms are analyzed using the reconstructed actional structure. The imperfect conditions for mutual understanding which exist between native and non-native speakers also have a negative effect on the process of ,ensuring of understanding‘ itself: The auxiliary device is recursively/iteratively passed, thus leading to the non-native speaker’s loss of action focus. This tendency may be reinforced by inappropriate actions as for example (normative) ,corrections‘ of mistakes realized inbetween. Especially relevant to ,ensuring of understanding‘ in intercultural/foreign-language communication is ,ascertaining‘ if used by the native speaker, because the non-native speaker often has difficulties in carrying out repair actions (chapter 6.1). This is due to language-specific characteristics: The use of accentuating repetitions for distinguishing homophones in Japanese, also the way word-order is reorganized by ,redrafting‘ (emptying of the middle field, postposing in German versus supplements and simplifying of embedding/framing constructions in Japanese), and the way the propositional part of the utterance is embedded in ,elucidating‘ and ,ascertaining‘ (preposed matrix constructions like „ich meine, (dass)“ („I think that“) or „das heisst, (dass)“ („this means that“) in German versus postposed quotative constructions like „to iu“ (quotative and „say“) plus the formal noun „koto“ („fact“) or nominalization by „no“ in Japanese)(chapter 6.2).

Finally, in chapter 7 it is argued that ,repetition‘ can be the realization form of different types of speech action depending on its prosodic realization, on the underlying mental processes, and on the context of action. It is shown that the speech action underlying a ,repetition‘ therefore, cannot always be considered as a part of ,ensuring of understanding‘ or a part of the ,processes specifically aiming at mutual understanding‘. Within the frame of ,ensuring of understanding‘, ,repeating‘ (,Repetieren‘), ,confirming‘ (,Bestätigen‘), ,ascertaining‘ (,Sich-Vergewissern‘), ,request for repair‘ (,Bearbeitungsanforderung‘) and ,exothesis of plan disruption‘ (,Planstörungsexothese‘) can all be realized as ,repetitions‘.