Speaking and listening in face-to-face multichannel communication

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Although language production and comprehension are parts of one and the same linguistic capacity, they have been studied separately for a long time. A key issue in modern (psycho)linguistic research is how the two processes are related, or whether transitions from thought to language and vice versa are accomplished by a single or two separate systems. Instead of traditional accounts that adopt the “cognitive sandwich” perspective, Pickering & Garrod (2013) proposed an integrated theory of production and comprehension. Recent work on the functional neuroanatomy of language also suggests that the brain areas involved in language processing are mostly the same for speaking and listening (Menenti et al. 2011).

In line with these studies we explore the production-comprehension relationships on the basis of our new resource “Russian Pear Chats and Stories” (Kibrik 2018). In communication, interlocutors combine verbal structure, prosody, eye gaze, as well as facial, head, hand and torso gestures to produce integrated multichannel discourse. All of these communication channels are employed simultaneously and in conjunction with each other (Kress 2002; Kibrik 2010; Müller et al. eds. 2014). Moreover, during the process of face-to-face communication, each interlocutor performs the roles of speaker and listener simultaneously. For example, a speaker, while producing speech at a given moment, simultaneously monitors the listener’s kinetic behavior (nods, gaze, manual gestures). Communicative actions of the interlocutors thus form a complex and heterogeneous network that necessarily must be credited a capability to involve simultaneous and multidirectional thought exchange.

The evidence of the multichannel resource suggests a cognitive architecture that integrates language production and comprehension.

Keywords: multichannel communication, production, comprehension.