

Call for papers

Information Structure and Subordination South America and Beyond

Nijmegen, 27-28 April

In the past decades, the key notions of information structure, such as topic, focus, presupposition, assertion, contrast, etc., have become omnipresent in the linguistic literature, and information structure itself one of the central topics in linguistic theory and description (e.g. Jackendoff 1972, Dik 1989, Lambrecht 1994, É. Kiss 1995, Van Valin & LaPolla 1997, Erteschik-Shir 2007). The information structure research, however, has been marked by two major limitations. First, with the notable exception of African linguistics (e.g. Watters 1979, Hyman & Watters 1984, Saeed 1985, Aboh et al. 2007, Fiedler & Schwarz 2010), most of the descriptive and theoretical work on information structure has focused on familiar European and a couple of well studied non-European languages, and the typological literature on the topic is scarce (e.g. Givón 1983a, É. Kiss 1998, Van Valin 1999, Drubig 2003). Second, apart from the lively discussions on English clefts and on the presupposedness of certain types of embedded clauses, the phenomena studied under the label of information structure were more often than not restricted to the domain of the simple clause (though see, e.g., Haiman 1978, Steedman 2000, Van Valin 2005, Palmer 2009). Subordination, which has been a central topic for linguistic theory for a long time, has been extensively dealt with in terms of (morpho)syntactic structure, so that there is a good deal of information on cross-linguistic variation of subordinate clauses (see e.g. Lehmann 1988, Van Valin & LaPolla 1997, Noonan 2007). The pragmatic side of subordination in general and its role in information structure in particular, has received much less attention (though see e.g. Givón 1983b, Cristofaro 2003, Longacre 2007), which is all the more surprising in view of the fact that the main functional load of subordinate structures is to stratify information conveyed by the sentence, i.e. to render the information structure transparent.

A similar disproportion is observable in the booming area of the study of South American languages: vast resources of new linguistic data that are being uncovered have - probably due to the polysynthetic character of most South-American languages - strongly leaned towards morphologically based description, with syntax, semantics, and discourse structure lagging behind.

The purpose of the workshop is therefore to try and fill in these empirical gaps by soliciting contributions on interaction of information structure and subordinate constructions in less studied languages, both in South America and elsewhere, and on typological and theoretical aspects of this interaction.

We use the terms 'subordination' and 'information structure' in a broad sense. Thus, subordination is used to denote any asymmetrical relation between at least two elements that denote states of affairs, or events, within one sentence. Asymmetry is taken to be a multi-factorial phenomenon, potentially involving syntax, morphology, semantics and pragmatics, but not necessarily all of them. In this way, we intend to discuss, apart from 'classic' subordination (embedding), constructions like cosubordinate clauses, nominalized verbs or clauses, participial constructions, adjoined adverbial or relative clauses, etc. In a similar vein, 'information structure' is meant to cover not only the notions of topic and focus, but all

grammatically relevant phenomena that have to do with the speaker's assumptions about the interlocutor's state of mind and knowledge, from topic-focus articulation proper to reference tracking, anaphora resolution, ellipsis, etc.

We suggest a number of topics, but note that the workshop is by no means restricted to these.

- Information structure marking within subordinate clauses
- The order of main and subordinate clause in relation to information structure
- The type of information found in subordinate clauses
- Tail-head linkage
- Switch-reference and discourse structuring
- Subordinate clauses and reference tracking
- Backgrounding and foregrounding and subordination

The workshop, organized by the research group Languages in Contact (Radboud University Nijmegen) and the Syntax, Typology, and Information Structure Group (MPI for Psycholinguistics Nijmegen) will be hosted by the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

Abstracts are invited for talks and posters on the information structure and subordination in the languages of South America and elsewhere. Abstracts (for talks and posters) should be submitted to IS.workshop.2011@mpi.nl. Abstracts should be in PDF format, with all non-standard fonts embedded. They should not exceed 2 pages, including data and references. Since abstracts should be anonymous, please provide your personal data (name and affiliation), together with the title of the abstract, in the body of the e-mail.

Limited funding is available to subsidise travel costs for international participants. Please explain in a short paragraph your reasons for applying for travel assistance. The deadline and notification date for travel assistance awards are the same as those for the abstracts.

Deadline for Receipt of Abstracts: January 31st, 2011

Notification of acceptance will be by email no later than February 15th, 2011.

Date of the workshop: 27.-28.04.2011

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