

SLE Workshop: *Beyond Information Structure*

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Growing cross-linguistic evidence suggests the necessity of a shift in the functional approach to Information Structure (IS) along the same theoretical lines that recently re-shaped a number of domains of linguistic inquiry. Such shifts have taken place in the study of word classes (Haspelmath 2012) and grammatical relations (Bickel 2011). Modern approaches dispense with the postulation of universal categories and the exploration of their cross-linguistic expression. Instead, they replace this method with detailed studies of language-specific phenomena and their ensuing classification and comparison. In the case of IS the typological outcome of such a shift will result in the radical departure from the assumed universality of the IS categories.

Traditionally, theoretical approaches to IS define a set of pragmatic-semantic categories and explore how these categories are expressed cross-linguistically (e.g. Rooth 1992, Lambrecht 1994). The conceptual necessity of these categories is claimed to be rooted in the basic principles of communication and information-processing, such as e.g. the need for a cognitive index to store a proposition ('topic' in Vallduví's (1992) approach), or the importance of update (a central feature of 'focus' in Lambrecht 1994).

However, a growing number of empirical language-specific studies attempting to analyse presumable IS-marking devices discover their diverse primitive functions, which have no direct relationship to presumed IS categories. In addition to giving a better account of the basic function, usage, and distribution of these devices, this research also sheds light on the actual origin of "information structural" phenomena. They show how diverse primitive functions can interact with the context, rendering sets of interpretations related to such concepts as "aboutness", "contrast", "unexpectedness", etc., that are typically used to characterise IS notions.

Matić and Wedgwood (2013) provide extensive argumentation for this shift and mention a number of case studies which demonstrate the heterogeneity of some *prima facie* IS markers. For instance, the Quechua particle *-mi* had previously been analysed as a marker of narrow focus (Muysken 1995, Sanchez 2010). However, although this characterisation is applicable within the limited set of IS tests, it fails to address the full span of functions of the particle. Its analysis along the lines of evidentiality (Faller 2002: 150) or as an "interactional device [of] persuasive intention" (Behrens 2012: 209) both provides a unified account for its functions and traces the interactional source of a presumable "focal" effect, which arises in certain contexts. In another case, the apparent contrastivity of the Even suffix *-d(A)mAr* turns out to stem from its lexical meaning, which indicates that the denoted noun is included in a set of relevant concepts. As such, it can occur with contrastive referents, but also e.g. with kinship terms which represent sets like {father, child} (Matić and Wedgwood 2013:152). In yet another similar case, stand-alone nominalised sentences in Burmese, previously argued to be "cleft-sentences" (Simpson 2008, Hole and Zimmermann 2013), are used to communicate speaker's emotions, narrator's personal comments, visualise storyteller's memories and – more broadly – impart emotional involvement of the speaker (Ozerov 2015). As such, they are also used in the context of contradiction, correction, or an opinionated selection from a set of alternatives – typical instances of focus elicitation.

In fact, after decades of cross-linguistic studies of IS, hardly any example of a purely IS device has been identified. Even the very prototypical case of an IS construction – cleft-sentences in English – turns out to represent a rather different phenomenon upon closer examination. It is only the studies of its interactional discourse functions that were able to give a coherent account of its distribution ('state-making device' Delin and Oberlander 1995, 'inquiry terminating construction' Velleman et al. 2012), which also explains its typical focal interpretation.

Thus, it is repeatedly found that IS accounts of presumable IS devices are insufficient: the IS analysis alone can hardly ever explain the full set of functions of apparently relevant markers. Moreover, it does not predict the idiosyncratic list of precise IS features pertinent to each particular marker. Coherent full-scale analyses show that primitive functions of these markers lie beyond IS, while IS-interpretations often turn out to be particular usages of their primitive functions.

This implies that only a coherent cross-linguistic study of relevant language-specific categories would be able to shed light on the way IS-interpretations appear as a result of the interaction of a basic function of diverse devices with the context. It will have to describe and explain how interactional categories, stance, intersubjective alignment, particular discourse structuring and lexical devices produce dynamic structuring of information in the course of communication. Moreover, this research perspective strongly appeals to the identification, description and analysis of currently poorly understood categories from the field of interaction.

Only when these categories are properly described and compared will we be able to produce generalisations regarding their natures. As a result of this process, we may end up with a modified version of typological categories that would resemble IS-primitives. However, it is not impossible that the outcome will be radically different. For instance, an apparent typology of "verum focus" (He did go!) demonstrates that in this context Albanian uses admirative verbal forms, while Quechua employs the abovementioned evidential-persuasive particle *mi* (Behrens 2012:231); Burmese creates the required effect by stance marking (Ozerov 2015:261-293). Hence, what starts out as a typological study of a "focus"-construction, ends up representing a typology of interactional, persuasive-contradictive techniques.

We invite abstracts of empirical and theoretical studies that deal with the abovementioned topics, such as:

- empirical studies of language-specific IS-like devices that investigate their overall function and discuss the nature and origin of their IS-functions
- theoretical and empirical studies that investigate the relation between IS and the fields of interaction, cognition, discourse-structure
- comparative studies of IS-related devices with detailed accounts of their precise functional similarities and differences
- theoretical studies that critically discuss the proposed framework and its relation to currently established theories of IS
- theoretical studies of broader IS-like phenomena ("emphasis", "attention", "aboutness") in discourse and their marking
- empirical studies of particular strategies, functions and marking employed in discourse in the contexts of "IS-tests", e.g. answers to content questions, corrections, frame-setting etc.

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