

Call for abstracts

Workshop proposal for the 51st Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea (SLE), Tallinn, 29 Aug – 1 Sept 2018

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The semantics and pragmatics of apprehensive markers in a cross-linguistic perspective

Presumably speakers of all languages have strategies at their disposal to communicate warnings, as in (1), or threats. Warnings typically alert the addressee to a potential, but undesirable event which can be avoided by appropriate action, and at the same time perform a directive illocutionary act with the aim to bring about this action (Carstens 2002; Dominicy and Franken 2002; Searle 1969: 67).

(1) (Get down from up there!) *You **might** fall!*

However, languages differ in whether or not they possess grammatical markers which are specialised for just this communicative task. For example, the English modal auxiliary *might* in combination with a non-past verb form has a broad meaning of future possibility which is not restricted to undesirable possibilities; the undesirability of the consequence (e.g. in (1), falling can lead to injury) is merely implied.

In contrast, many languages possess a dedicated grammatical item to encode a future possibility deemed by the speaker to be undesirable for the addressee, such as the particle *ngaja* in Ngarinyman, a Ngumpin-Yapa language of Australia, shown in (2). As one would expect, warnings are the typical pragmatic context for markers of this type.

(2) **ngaja**=nggu bayalany dawujbany-du=ma!
APPR=you(OBJ) bite:PRS perch-ERG=TOP

(A: 'I will bathe here') – B: '(watch out), a perch (fish sp.) might bite you!'

(fieldwork Schultze-Berndt)

Grammatical elements with meanings of this type have been labelled with a number of terms including “apprehensive”, “admonitive”, “evitative” or “timitive” in linguistic descriptions. In this workshop we will focus on markers (e.g. modals or particles) at the level of the main clause, of the type illustrated in (2). However, clauses with apprehensive markers are generally pragmatically dependent in that they are employed as justifications for a directive or an expression of (non-)intention, as pointed out in many language-specific descriptions, very explicitly so by François (2003: 304–310). For example, the implicit directive associated with the utterance in (2) is ‘Don’t bathe there’ or ‘Be careful when you bathe there’. Main clause apprehensive markers are therefore

semantically and functionally, and possibly diachronically, related to subordinate clause markers expressing a negative purpose, i.e. the state of affairs to be avoided by the action encoded by the main clause, like the (archaic) *lest* in English.

Although main clause apprehensive markers figure in numerous language-specific descriptions – for example of languages from the Australian, Papuan, South Pacific, and Amazonian areas – there exist very few works that address the phenomenon from a cross-linguistic perspective (Dobrushina 2006; Lichtenberk 1995; Pakendorf and Schalley 2007; Vuillermet to appear). Apprehensive markers only receive passing mention – if at all – in works on modality or speech acts from a typological-functional perspective (Bybee et al. 1994: 211; König and Siemund 2007; Palmer 2001 [1994]: 22) and have been largely ignored in the formal semantic literature on modality.

A closer look at European languages reveals that dedicated apprehensive markers may actually exist, at least in colloquial language, but have, likewise, largely escaped the attention of language specialists. Examples are markers originating from temporal connectives (‘afterwards’, ‘soon’) which have taken on an apprehensive function in German (3) and Dutch (Boogaart 2009). Similar apprehensive markers originating from a temporal connective are found in the English-based Kriol of Northern Australia and several other languages (Angelo and Schultze-Berndt 2017).

- (3) Ich glaube, ich nehmelieber nicht am Gewinn-spiel teil.
I think:PRS I take rather NEG P:DEF win-game part
Nachher gewinne ich noch
Later/APPR win:PRS I PARTICLE
und kann das CL Finale nicht zu Hause schauen.
and can DEFCL final NEG at home watch
‘I think I’d rather not participate in this lottery. I **might** win [a trip] and would not be able to watch the Champions League final at home.’

(<http://www.hifi-forum.de/viewthread-144-7707-4.html>)

The connective *nachher* in German (when unstressed) is unambiguously apprehensive, i.e. it cannot be employed to describe a potential outcome that is judged as positive or desirable by the speaker. For example, a corpus search together with the lexical item for ‘win’ exclusively returned examples like (4), where the winning is presented as an undesirable result. Judging from a survey of reference and teaching grammars of German, this secondary function of the temporal connective has gone largely unnoticed, possibly due to the lack of awareness of the cross-linguistic category.

The aim of this workshop is to bring together scholars from different subfields of linguistics and working within a variety of theoretical frameworks, to shed light on the elusive category of apprehensives and apprehensive strategies. We invite abstracts addressing one or more of the following questions from the perspectives of language-

specific analysis, corpus linguistics, typological comparison, semantics and pragmatics, acquisition, or grammaticalisation.

- a) What is the precise semantic characterisation and pragmatic function of grammaticalised apprehensive markers in the individual language(s) considered? Are there several markers in a single language, e.g. in precautionary and preventive function (Lichtenberk 1995; Vuillermet 2013, to appear)? What apprehensive “strategies” – i.e. ways of expressing warnings or threats – can be identified in languages without fully grammaticalised markers?
- b) What is the place of apprehensive markers/strategies in the systems of modality and mood of the languages concerned? What are the semantic contrasts involved? Do they co-occur with particular modal or mood markers, or are they markers of modality or mood themselves?
- c) What parameters can serve to describe cross-linguistic variation between markers in this domain?
- d) How is the pragmatic import of apprehensive markers conveyed in second language teaching and translating/interpreting?
- e) What are the diachronic origins of grammaticalised apprehensive markers? What light do apprehensive strategies (weakly grammaticalised or multifunctional markers) shed on the semantics of the apprehensive category, and the pragmatic conditions that give rise to such markers?
- f) What is the status of apprehensive utterances in speech act theories and in discussions of the relationship between modality/mood and speech acts? What is their relation to directives?
- g) Does the prevalence of apprehensive markers or strategies reflect cultural preferences, e.g. for indirectness of expressing directives/order (by spelling out potential negative consequences of non-adherence)? How are such markers employed in the socialisation of children?

Potential participants are invited to contact the workshop organisers with an expression of interest as soon as possible, by emailing

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The final date for the submission of an abstract for a 20-minute presentation (up to 300 words, exclusive of references) is Friday, 10 November 2017. Submission at this stage is non-anonymous, by email to the workshop organisers.

Notification of inclusion of the abstract in the workshop proposal is by 15 November 2017.

Notification of acceptance/rejection of the workshop proposal by the SLE organisers is by 15 December.

If the proposal is successful all participants will need to submit a full abstract by the regular SLE conference deadline of 15 January 2018.

For further information on the conference, see <http://sle2018.eu/>.

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