

## **Discourse particles and information structure**

### **Thematic Session proposal – SLE Conference 2018, Tallinn.**

The relevance of information structure (IS) for the syntax and semantics of discourse particles has been demonstrated for many types of discourse particles in many different languages. The aim of this workshop proposal is to tackle this issue in the light of newer developments in the research on the interplay between IS and the use of discourse particles in a number of languages.

We use the concept of “discourse particles” as a theory-neutral cover term for all sorts of particles usually taking sentential scope and marking phenomena such as stance, speech act specification, Common Ground management or discourse structuration (see Fischer 2006).

Among discourse particles, Germanic “modal particles” have been very extensively studied. In German, modal particles such as *ja*, *doch* or *schon* are used to indicate whether the content of the utterance is part of the conversational Common Ground and in what way the utterance matches intersubjective expectations. It has been pointed out that their position in the clause is chiefly determined by the theme-rheme structure of the VP, modal particles being located between theme and rheme (Hentschel 1986, Abraham 1991). Furthermore, in recent years, there has also been some speculation on possible links between modal particles and other IS parameters such focus, especially Verum focus, and theticity (see Abraham 2017 for both, Müller 2014 for a general discussion about IS parameters in the syntax of German modal particles and Vallduví & Vilkuna 1998 resp. Krifka 2006 for an overview of the notions of information structure).

However, in a language like Japanese it is often assumed that the work done by modal particles in German is effected by sentence-final particles (Endo 2007, 2012). Nevertheless, the issue of theticity plays a major role in the licensing of non-final particles such as *wa* and *ga*, which are usually interpreted in terms of topicality (discussion in Kuroda 2005). The comparison between both languages could thus lead to a reassessment of the relationship between theticity, IS and modal particles.

In a contrastive study on the anticipation of hearer reactions (a phenomenon the author calls *Abtönung*, a term coined by Weydt 1969), Waltereit (2006) discusses the functional equivalence between German modal particles and some of the usual suspects in IS research, such as right dislocation in Italian and prosodic topicalisation in French.

In Ancient Greek, several discourse particles seem to have focus-sensitive usages as well: *δή* (« now, in truth, verily ») can be used both as a sentential particle, for instance to mark an unexpected entailment, and in association with a constituent under contrast; *μήν* (« verily, truly ») can be used at the sentence level and have a contrastive value (see Thijs 2017).

In Slavic, Bonnot & Bottineau (2012) have shown that the Russian conditional (Irrealis) particle *by* is sensitive to the focus/background distinction. On the other hand, the Russian particle *to*, even though it seems to be specialized for the marking of topicality, also exhibits modal values (Bonnot 1990, 2015). We welcome all proposals addressing the relevance of IS categories (such as theticity, focus, topicality or the theme-rheme

distinction) for the analysis of the syntax and semantics of discourse particles.

Contributions may address single-language phenomena or favour a cross-linguistic perspective. All theoretical frameworks are admissible.

Please submit your proposal before November 5th to: [pymodicom.ling@yahoo.fr](mailto:pymodicom.ling@yahoo.fr) and [olivier-duplatre@wanadoo.fr](mailto:olivier-duplatre@wanadoo.fr).

## REFERENCES

- Abraham, Werner. 1991. The grammaticization of the German modal particles. Traugott, Elisabeth C. & Bernd Heine (eds.), *Approaches to grammaticalization II: Types of grammatical markers*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 331-380.
- Abraham, Werner. 2017. Modal particles and Verum focus: new corollaries. Fedriani, Chiara & Andrea Sanso (eds.), *Pragmatic markers, discourse markers and modal particles: New perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 171-202.
- Bonnot, Christine. 1990. La particule *to* et la polémique cachée en russe moderne : à propos du statut énonciatif du thème. *Revue des études slaves* 62/1. 67-75.
- Bonnot, Christine. 2015. Deixis, intersubjectivité et thématisation. La particule énonciative *-to* en russe contemporain. *Faits de Langues* 45. 11-34.
- Bonnot, Christine & Tatiana Bottineau. 2012. Lorsque la marque du conditionnel est une particule mobile : le cas du russe. *Faits de Langue* 40. 189-196.
- Endo, Yoshio. 2007. *Locality and information structure. A cartographic approach to Japanese*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Endo, Yoshio. 2012. Illocutionary force and modal particles in the syntax of Japanese. Abraham, Werner & Elisabeth Leiss (eds.), *Modality and Theory of Mind elements across languages*. Berlin: De Gruyter. 405-424.
- Fischer, Kerstin. 2006. Towards an understanding of the spectrum of approaches to discourse particles: introduction to the volume. Fischer, Kerstin (ed.), *Approaches to discourse particles*. Amsterdam : Elsevier. 1-20.
- Hentschel, E. 1986. *Funktion und Geschichte deutscher Partikeln*. Ja, doch, halt und eben. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Krifka, Manfred. 2006. Basic notions of information structure. Fery, Caroline & Manfred Krifka (eds.), *Interdisciplinary Studies of Information Structure* 6. Potsdam.
- Kuroda, Sige-Yuki. 2005. Focusing on the matter of topic : a study of *wa* and *ga* in Japanese. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 14. 1-58.
- Müller, Sonja. 2014. *Modalpartikeln*. Heidelberg : Winter Verlag.
- Thijs, Kees. 2017. The Attic particle  $\mu\eta\iota$  : intersubjectivity, contrast and polysemy. *Journal of Greek linguistics* 17. 73-112.
- Vallduví Enric & Maria Vilkuña. 1998. On Rheme and Kontrast. Culicover, Peter & Louise McNally (eds.), *The Limits of Syntax*. New-York: Academic Press. 79-108.
- Waltereit, Richard. 2006. *Abtönung : Zur Pragmatik und historischen Semantik von Modalpartikeln und ihren funktionalen Äquivalenten in romanischen Sprachen*. Tübingen : Niemeyer.
- Weydt, Harald. 1969. *Abtönungspartikel: die deutschen Modalwörter und ihre französischen Entsprechungen*. Bad Homburg: Gehlen.