

Discourse particles and information structure

Thematic Session – SLE 2018, Tallinn

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The relevance of information structure (IS) for the syntax and pragmatics 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 (hence also the label sentence particle or sentential particle) 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; *μὴν* (« 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, semantics and pragmatics of discourse particles.

Contributions may address single-language phenomena or favour a cross-linguistic perspective. All theoretical frameworks are admissible. Contributions should be submitted before January 15th on the EasyChair page of the conference.

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