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Workshop title

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Information structure at the interfaces

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Organizers

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Workshop description

The study of how information is organized and conveyed in linguistic utterances and texts has fascinated linguists at least since the time of the Prague Linguistic Circle in the 1920s (see Mathesius 1929). While much of the relevant research has strived to define constructs such as *theme* and *rheme*, or *topic* and *focus* (Mathesius 1929, Chafe 1987, Givón 1976, Frascarelli & Hinterhölz 2007, etc.), other scholarship has investigated how these constructs are encoded in grammar. To give but one example of the latter type of pursuit, Lambrecht's (1994: 222) influential notion of *focus structure* is defined as "the conventional association of a focus meaning with a sentence form". The important insight behind this notion is that, in a given language, sentences may be structured in different ways depending on whether they include presupposed information, alongside the assertion, and also in accordance with which syntactic components of the sentence are asserted.

The study of the relation between focus meanings and sentence forms raises a number of interesting challenges. It is by no means the case that all languages differentiate the assertion from the presupposition in syntax. As is well known, prosody also plays a relevant role, and the study of the respective roles of syntax and prosody in the encoding of information constitutes a thriving domain of investigation. Morphology can also signal the role of a constituent in information structure (Van Valin 2014). Even when information structure is encoded in syntax, it is not necessarily organized in terms of relations between syntactic arguments and predicates. Rather, there are focus structure types in which all the information overtly encoded in syntax is asserted: the syntactic constituent that spells out the only thematic argument of the verb fails to behave as a canonical subject and would instead appear to behave as part of the verb phrase - or the predicate - in syntax (Zeller 2013, Bentley 2016).

The above issues unequivocally suggest that information structure is an *interface* phenomenon, in that it has a bearing on every level of linguistic analysis (phonology, thematic structure, syntax, morphology, etc.) and the levels affected interact in non-trivial ways. In recent years, there has been increasing interest in grammatical interfaces (Ramchand/Reiss 2007, Jackendoff 2010, Sorace 2011, Fischer & Gabriel 2016, among others). Different frameworks have formalized interfaces in various ways, and there is no consensus on how many interfaces there are, or how they should be represented in the architecture of grammar.

The framework which one of the workshop organizers is the initiator and principal representative of, Role and Reference Grammar (Foley & Van Valin 1984, Van Valin & LaPolla 1997, Van Valin 2005), is a parallel architecture theory (Jackendoff 2002, 2010); it

has a set of rules, called the *linking algorithm*, which relates semantics to syntax, in linguistic production, and syntax to semantics, in linguistic comprehension. Discourse is assumed to play a role at every stage in the linking: from the choice of predicators in the lexical inventory to the assignment of grammatical relations to predicate arguments, their morpho-syntactic realization in syntax, and so on, up to the realization of syntactic structure in prosody, which is the final stage in linguistic production. There is, thus, an inbuilt mechanism in this framework to deal with information structure at the interface with the other levels of analysis.

In this workshop we propose to investigate information structure as an interface phenomenon with a view to enhancing the current understanding of the relevant levels of linguistic analysis and how they interact with each other. Ultimately, we hope to make a contribution not only to the study of information structure *per se*, but also to the broader understanding of its role in the architecture of grammar.

The scope of the workshop will include, but not be limited to, the following key questions:

- ARE THERE ANY GENERAL LINGUISTIC PROPERTIES WHICH FAVOUR OR INHIBIT THE ENCODING OF INFORMATION IN PROSODY OR SYNTAX?

Crosslinguistic evidence suggests that some languages with relatively rigid word order, for example English, tend to rely on prosody for the encoding of focus. Languages which, in addition, have strict rules on the syntactic position of focus, for example French, resort to strategies such as clefting and passivization to avoid the violation of these rules (Vallduví 1991, 1992, Ladd 1996, Van Valin 1999, Bentley 2008). In some African tone languages, as well as the Amazonian language Karitiâna (Everett 2008), prosody plays little or no role in expressing information structure, a job mostly left to syntax and morphology. We welcome any contributions which concern the interaction of information structure with prosody and syntax, addressing the question spelled out above.

- WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MORPHOLOGY IN THE ENCODING OF INFORMATION STRUCTURE?

African languages can mark focus with loss of canonical verb agreement, loss of case and affixes on the verb to indicate focus on one of the arguments (Kalinowski 2015). The impoverishment of verb-argument agreement is also known to indicate focus in Arabic (Hoyt 2000) and Romance (Bentley 2016). We welcome contributions which shed light on the discourse-morphology interface and aim to ascertain if there are any general linguistic properties which favour the morphological expression of information structure.

- HOW DOES INFORMATION STRUCTURE INTERFACE WITH LEXICAL-SEMANTIC STRUCTURE?

There is a considerable body of evidence suggesting that copulas and informationally-light verbs are readily admitted in broad focus (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995, Marten & Van der Wal 2014, Bentley 2016). Among other predicates, telic ones (achievements and accomplishments) fair better than non-telic ones in this type of focus structure. Some scholars have tried to explain these findings in terms of the requirement of a silent or *stage* topic in broad focus (Erteschik–Shir 1997). However, there is no agreement on whether this silent topic is a thematic argument of the predicate, say the silent event argument of stage-level states or a locative argument of telic verbs of directed motion, or, alternatively, it is contextually added (Benincà 1988, Bianchi 1993, Pinto 1997, Tortora 1997, 2014 Corr 2016). As for other interactions between lexical semantics and information structure, it has been

observed that relatively non-eventive readings of verbs with non-controlling actors allow information structure patterns that the same verbs with an eventive reading and a controlling actor do not allow. We welcome contributions on any aspect of the information structure – lexical semantic structure interplay.

- ARE THERE ANY CROSS-LINGUISTIC REGULARITIES OR CONSTRAINTS ON THE INTERFACE BETWEEN FOCUS TYPES AND ARGUMENT REALIZATION?

It would be important to ascertain how widespread argument *integration* is in broad focus. This is the strategy of cognitive and communicative economy whereby "[…] the whole syntagm is introduced as one unit of information, 'integrating' its parts into one 'globally new' unit" (Fuchs 1980: 449; see also Lambrecht 2000, Sasse 2006, Zeller 2013, Bentley 2016). The crosslinguistic analysis of constructions that only occur in broad focus (e.g., existentials) may help us to address this question.

- WHAT INTERFACES ARE INVOLVED IN THE ENCODING OF INFORMATION STRUCTURE IN SIGNED LANGUAGES?

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We welcome contributions from all frameworks and approaches, including synchronic, diachronic, data-driven, typological and language specific.

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