

Call for papers – Workshop participation – WS Abstract:

‘Thetic- vs. Categorical: Distinctions and commonalities.’

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

The workshop aims at closely investigating *thetic* vs. *categorical* sentence types and their relation between meaning and form well as their distributional behavior in sundry languages. The thetic-categorical distinction relates to the notions of *simple* and *double judgment* introduced by the 19th century logicians Brentano and Marty. Simple and double judgment play a role in predication logic. Pertinent sentence types have occasionally been in the center of attention by linguists trying to relate them to modern and better studied notions (analytic vs. synthetic, individual vs. stage level, habitual, generic, a.s by Sasse, Ladusaw, Kuroda, Maienborn, Leiss, among others). Respective sentence types like German *Es sind/gibt/hat KÜHE im Garten* ‘There are COWS in the garden’ – *AUFtritt MACBETH* (with stage location) ‘Enters Macbeth’ have in common that they are used as text starters. By common definition, true text starters are sentences that do not presuppose a precontext, nor are they part of coherent dialogues (Harweg 1968). In more syntactic terms, the sentential prefield (SpecCP) hosting topical material remains empty. By contrast, the very same sentences lose their text-incipient status as soon as, e.g. in German and Dutch, a modal discourse particle/MP (or, more generally, an attitudinal operator) is selected. See the stage direction *AUFtritt eben_{MP} MACBETH*. A major constraint for thetic sentences is that in German (and Dutch), MPs as well as other origo indexations cannot appear. Compare [COMMON GROUND/ TOPIC ABOUT *Es sind eben Kühe auf unserem Rasen* ‘There are cows on our lawn right now/as you know’ as opposed to [EXCLANATIVE *Es sind (*eben) Kühe auf unserem Rasen*] ‘There are cows on our lawn, surprise/dismay’. Notice the latter with its non-at issue mirative speech act status.

INTRODUCING DISCUSSION AND AIMS

The recent decades are marked with a considerable reticence with respect to the study of the encoding of theticity. In languages such as German and Japanese, a sentence with attitudinal adverbials and similar modal and speech act/origo indexations cannot be used as a stage direction for a drama script since the German modal particle *eben* entails a common discourse ground with a topic(-about) that the communicators had reached before. The two types of sentences, those with and without a precontext, run under the terminology of *categorical sentence* (with a topic) vs. *thetic sentence* (no topic, true text starters). As to these, Kuroda has claimed that Japanese has morphological means to unambiguously distinguish thetic from categorical sentences: thetics are marked by the suffix *-ga* for indefinite nominative DP, whereas the suffix for categorical status is *-wa*, which is also used to mark topicality (in the sense of the discourse opposition *thema-rhema*). German, in contrast to Japanese, has no morphological means to signal discourse status or theticity.

Other sentential types, however, seem to be subject to similar constraints, and relations to the thetic-categorical distinction have been drawn, among which with similar oppositional pairs. The WS pursues the following issues, among others:

1. Following Ladusaw, Milsark, Carlson, Maienborn, and others, it is tempting to compare the categorical-thetic distinction with concepts such as *thema-rhema*, individual level-stage level predicates, synthetic-analytic, weak-strong quantization, mereological homogeneity-inhomogeneity and other relations. However, it is far from clear to what extent these categories cover the range and distributional sensitivity of thetics vs. categoricals.
2. It seems that, given the discursive distinction in the following sentences, Kuroda’s topicality generalization has to be replaced by a common ground criterion. A striking example appears in the following context: Father tries to decide which of his two kids, Kai and Momo, did wrong. A: *Kai-ga warui* gives no room for further discussion. Father has come to the conclusion that Kai did wrong. B: *Kai-wa warui*, however, signals that the decision has not been taken yet there being room for further negotiation. In modern conceptualizations, the common ground for A, which collects speaker’s and addressee’s knowledge-about, the topic under discussion has led to a definite result, whereas that for B has not yet reached a result

and is in need of further checking out motivations and details of information. Notice that the Japanese nominative suffix *-ga* allows for thetic implementation, while *-wa* excludes thetic status as it presupposes a topic-about and a common ground status still to be negotiated.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Our call for papers is directed to those who pursue the topic along lines of the WS goals as sketched above. Empirical material covering non-European languages is highly welcome. Please approach the organizer or anyone of the program committee and, preferably, send along a (preliminary version of your) short abstract describing your contribution.

Organizer

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Program committee

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Calender

November 5, 2017: Deadline for the submission of the short abstract. Abstracts will be evaluated by the convenors, and selected abstracts will accompany the workshop proposal. We will notify you of inclusion in the workshop proposal when we submit it on November 15th.