Thursday Interdisciplinary Colloquium
Fall 2015-Winter 2016
Thursdays, 16:15-17:45, Webb 103

14.01.16

Daniel Margulis
MIT

***Expletive Negation and* only**

Contrary to the natural assumption that negative morphemes bring about truth-condition reversal, Hebrew sentential negation does not always make the expected contribution to meaning, just like other instances of *expletive negation* crosslinguistically.

Hebrew expletive negation is found in *until*-clauses (1) and free (headless) relative clauses (2).

(1) yoni yaSan ad Se- ha-Sxenim **lo** hidliku muzika
Yoni slept until that the-neighbors neg lit music
'Yoni was asleep until the neighbors turned on some music.'

(2) mi Se **lo** yaSav b-a- xacer kibel ugiya
who that neg sat in-the-yard received cookie
'Whoever was sitting in the yard got a cookie.'

In this talk I discuss the interpretational effects of expletive negation in such cases, and argue that the *until* data should be understood as an obligatory scalar implicature, arising due to an association between expletive negation and a covert *only*.

Why should the negative morpheme participating in expletive negation carry the meaning of *only*? I follow von Fintel & Iatridou's (2007) decompositional analysis of *only*, according to which *only* has two components: negation and an exceptive. They provide further support to their analysis from the fact that some languages express the meaning of *only* by exactly such means (e.g., French *ne...que* and Greek *dhen...para*).

Under this view, the status of expletive negation is simply that of any ordinary negation, and the only special property of expletive negation constructions is that they contain a covert exceptive head.

I provide further support for the current proposal from (i) the observation that expletive negation cannot license negative concord, (ii) the observation that an overt *only* cannot accompany expletive negation, and (iii) the generalization that to be expletive, negation must be structurally high.

Finally, I will mention a direction in which the proposal might be extended to the free relatives data.

07.01.16

Shoval Sadde
Tel Aviv University

What's Difficult About the Interpretation of Disjunctions (in Light of Scalar Implicatures)

Disjunctive sentences can be under-informative, for various reasons. A different type under-informative sentence is exemplified in "some giraffes have long necks." Speakers tend to interpret this sentence as a scalar implicature, according to which it is not true that all giraffes have long necks, rendering the sentence false.

As intuitive as this may sound, recent years' psycholinguistic studies have shown that:

a. By default, children accept sentences with "some" to be true when describing an "all"-situation.
b. Children also accept "A or B" as truthful describing an "A and B" situation.
c. In adults, response times for "some giraffes" sentences are higher than for equivalent sentences which do not involve such reasoning, e.g., "all giraffes have long necks."
d. When they have limited response time, adults tend to accept "some giraffes" sentences as true, despite their being under-informative.

In this talk I will discuss the option of a unified account for the behavior of adults under time pressure and children, according to which access to the stronger lexical item for the sake of scalar implicature computation is costly. I will introduce a study I have conducted to test this hypothesis, examining adults' interpretation of atomic and embedded disjunctions under time pressure.

24.12.15

Ifat Stern
Tel Aviv University

Syncretism in Modern Hebrew: A Study of Word Recognition and Lexical Storage

Most, if not all natural languages deviate from an ideal morpho-syntactic system, where there is one-to-one correspondence between function and form and every cell in the paradigm has a unique form, corresponding to a unique bundle of morpho-syntactic feature values. One type of deviation is known as syncretism, where a single form in the paradigm serves two or more morpho-syntactic functions (e.g., Hebrew *tedaber* 'you ms.sg. / she will talk').

The talk will examine two cases of syncretism in Hebrew, aiming to define the type of relation holding between the syncretic forms within each paradigm. For this purpose, I will present the results of an experimental study.

I will further ask what can be learned from these syncretic relations about the organization of morphological features and feature values in the lexicon and about their hierarchy and markedness relations.

The talk will be delivered in Hebrew.

17.12.15

Mira Ariel
Tel Aviv University
Variable Discourse Prominences for Various Pragmatic Inferences

Pragmatic inferences are essential to understanding speakers' communicative intentions.

Grice (1989) and many semanticists and pragmatists classify as some kind of implicature any interpretation not considered part of the core linguistic meaning. But haven't implicatures been asked to do too much? Conventional implicatures are better analyzed as linguistic meanings (Blakemore, 1987), and Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) have removed Explicated inferences (ones contributing to the propositional content) from the class of conversational implicatures.

I will argue that the remaining "conversational implicatures" (PCI) are still not homogenous, each carrying a different degree of discourse prominence. Privileged Interactional Interpretation (Strong) implicatures are almost as discourse-prominent as Explicatures (and linguistic meanings). Other conversational implicatures are not even speaker-intended (Background assumptions and Truth-Compatible Inferences, TCIs).

10.12.15

Michael Becker
Stony Brook University
Acquiring and Learning Irregular Plural Morphology in Brazilian Portuguese

How do children acquire irregular morphology, and how does a theoretical model trace the acquisition trajectory and arrive at the adult state?

I will attempt to answer these questions using a test case from Brazilian Portuguese. In this language, [w]-final nouns are pluralized either faithfully (e.g. [kakaw ~ kakaws] "cocoa") or with fronting of the glide (e.g. [kanaw ~ kanajs] "channel"). When choosing a plural for a nonce word, adults are equally sensitive to prosodic and segmental cues; children are only sensitive to prosodic cues. I will propose an analysis that learns directly from the surface forms that are available to the language user, and show that it improves when segmental cues are enhanced, and token frequency is ignored.

03.12.15

Andreas Haida
LLCC, Hebrew University

On Deriving the Intermediately Exhaustive Reading of* Wh*-Complements

The sentence in (i) has a reading on which it licenses the inferences in (ii-a) and (b) (Groenendjik & Stokhof 1982, 1984).

(i) John predicted who came.

(ii) (a) Mary came & John predicted who came.
=> John predicted that Mary came.
(b) Mary didn't come & John predicted who came.
=> John predicted that Mary didn't come.

The reading that entails (ii-a) and (b) is called the strongly exhaustive (SE) reading of (i). A reading on which (i) entailed (ii-b) but not (ii-a) is called the weakly exhaustive (WE) reading (which is unattested).

Besides the SE reading, (i) can also receive an Intermediately Exhaustive (IE) reading (Spector 2005, 2006, Klinedinst & Rothschild 2011, Cremers & Chemla 2014, Uegaki 2015). On this reading, (i) does not have the inference in (ii-b) but the weaker inference in (iii).

(iii) Mary didn't come & John predicted who came.
=> John didn't predict that Mary came. (IE inference)

Klinedinst & Rothschild (2011) derive the IE reading of (i) from the WE reading by matrix exhaustification over answer alternatives. This analysis would make the wrong prediction for sentences in which the embedding predicate is factive. Applied to the sentence in (iv), the analysis would lead to problem P1 and P2 in (v):

(iv) John knows who came.

(v) Mary didn't come & John knows who came.
P1. An unattested presupposition failure is derived:
(a) #John doesn't know that Mary came.
P2. An attested entailment is not derived:
(b) John doesn't believe that Mary came.

Uegaki (2015) proposes to account for (v-b) and the lack of (v-a) by stipulation: the lexical properties of "know" lead to the observed entailment and the absence of a presupposition failure.

I will show that the IE inference of (iv) can be derived in the same way as the IE inference of (i). In both cases, the IE inference is a scalar inference of the WE reading. It emerges from the exclusion of the SE reading, where the SE reading of (iv) is derived by an answer operator that takes the factive presupposition of "know" into account.

26.11.15

Maayan Keshev
Tel Aviv University

Active Dependency Formation in Islands: First and Last Resorts

Psycholinguistic studies have shown that the online formation of filler-gap dependencies is both active and sensitive to syntactic island constraints. Previous studies have assumed that confronted with islands, the syntactic parser has two options: early, ungrammatical resolution of the dependency inside the island and late, grammatical (though costly) resolution outside it. However, in some languages and structures, resumptive pronouns (RP) and parasitic gaps (PG) can be used to alleviate island violations, and thus might provide an early, grammatical resort. We report the results of self-paced reading experiments using different island structures in Hebrew (a grammaticized resumption language). Results suggest that active dependency formation is attempted in islands which RPs and/or PGs ameliorate, but not in those where these are ungrammatical. Implications for the processing of filler-gap dependencies, islands and resumption are discussed.

19.11.15

Brian Buccola
McGill University and LLCC Hebrew University

Modified and Unmodified Numerals: Lessons from Genericity

The goal of this talk is twofold: (i) to show that standard analyses of modified and unmodified numerals lead to several interesting problems when those expressions occur in generically interpreted sentences, and (ii) to argue that the proper solution to these problems involves viewing maximality as an optional semantic component that is separate from the semantic contribution of numeral modifiers like "fewer than" – a decomposition already proposed for independent reasons by Spector (2014). [The latter portion of this talk builds on recent joint work with Benjamin Spector.].

12.11.15

Angelika Kratzer
University of Massachusetts

Attitude Ascriptions and Speech Reports:
A Requiem for Sentential Complements

Attitude ascriptions and speech reports have a special place in Cognitive Science. 'Recursion hunters' (The New York Times, March 21, 2012) try to track them down in every human language, looking for evidence for complex syntax. Developmental psychologists consider them milestones in the cognitive development of children. Philosophers have linked them to ambiguities that don't seem to exist anywhere else. What is it that makes attitude ascriptions and speech reports stand out? Why are they so hard to acquire? And where do those curious ambiguities come from?

If there is anything that makes sentences like (1) or (2) special, it's probably not the matrix verbs or the embedded clauses all by themselves.

(1) Mo thinks these are turnips.

(2) But Bo says they are parsnips.

A better bet is that what's special about (1) or (2) is the way matrix verbs and embedded clauses connect up with each other. Current linguistic theory has trivialized this connection: embedded clauses like those in (1) and (2) are commonly taken to be arguments of the matrix verb. They are said to literally be their direct objects. Questioning and moving away from this assumption will pave the way towards explaining some puzzling facts about apparent embedded 'complements' in natural languages. More importantly, this (at first glance radical) step will uncover a surprisingly rich and varied toolkit of techniques that natural languages use to build attitude ascriptions and speech reports.

05.11.15

Daphna Heller
University of Toronto

What Visual Memory Can Tell Us about the Context:
The Case of Modification

Modifiers, such as adjectives (e.g., "the open cage") or prepositional phrases (e.g., "the cage with the bunny"), are normally used when the context contains more than one object from one nominal category (e.g., in a situation with two cages). In this paper, we test the idea that modifiers provide information not only about the referent itself (i.e., the object being described), but also about the unmentioned object from the same nominal category (the "contrast", for short). To test this idea, we developed a new experimental procedure that combines a linguistic and a non-linguistic task. First, participants produced spontaneous instructions for their addressee to select an image out of an array. Then, they had to perform a (surprise) recognition memory task which tested how well they remembered unmentioned images they saw during the production phase. Interestingly, results reveal that visual memory of the unmentioned contrasts is affected by the semantic content of the modifiers used, even though these descriptions were used to describe another image. We discuss the

implications for the interplay between visual attention and linguistic representations.

29.10.15

Lior Laks
Bar-Ilan University

Hebrew Agent Nouns: Competing Patterns and Doublets Formation

This talk examines the formation of Hebrew agent nouns (ANs) and their relation to the verbal system. I examine the criteria for selecting morphological patterns as well as cases of variation. I argue that pattern selection is to a great extent predictable based on morphological relations between the verb and the derived AN. In addition, semantic transparency in compound formation triggers morphological change where ANs take an additional form. The study highlights the importance of morphological and semantic transparency in word formation and its implications for morphological competition.