

Flat expressions reveal entity-event (a)symmetries

Uta Reinöhl, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg

In this talk I will argue that "flat" expressions – i.e. constructions combining content words of the same word class – reveal much about the semantic structures and information-structural uses of entities in contrast to events. While there is a long and rich research tradition of studying (more) hierarchical phrases from a cross-categorical perspective, e.g. in generalizations over NP, VP and other phrasal structures in X-bar-theoretic accounts, there has been little theorizing of cross-categorical symmetries and asymmetries between less hierarchically organized expression types. Such flat(ter) expressions include serial verb constructions but also nominal expressions of the type found in many Australian languages or early Indo-European languages, where "nominals" rather than "nouns" and "adjectives" combine into complex expressions. Based on a corpus of four unrelated and regionally unconnected languages – Kera'a (Trans-Himalayan), Woi (Austronesian), Warlpiri (Pama-Nyungan) and Vedic Sanskrit (Indo-European), I will argue that the realization of flat expressions attests to greater synchronic functional motivation relative to the more sedimented patterns of (more) hierarchical expression types. On a more overarching level, these findings yield novel insights into possible mappings between lexical semantics and information structure, on the one hand, and morpho-syntax, on the other.