Meeting description

A great number of formal linguistic means (morphological, syntactic or prosodic) can be used to express the information structural partition between the focus and the background of a sentence. In (1), for example, the position of the sentence's main stress indicates which constituent is the focus of the sentence: *John* in (a), *bought* in (b).

(1) a. JOHN bought the apartment.
    b. John BOUGHT the apartment

Under closer scrutiny, many of the formal means that are usually interpreted as encoding focus turn out to have other functions as well. A well-known example is that of French clefts, which can serve to narrowly focus the clefted constituent (*Jean* in (2a)), but which are not limited to this function: *ainsi* in (2b) is not clefted to be the focus, but to create cohesion with the preceding context (cf. Dufter, 2007 on this function of French clefts).

(2) a. *C'est Jean qui parle allemand.*
    it is Jean who speaks German
    'Jean is the one who speaks German.'
    b. *C'est ainsi que mon père continue d'être présent dans mon existence.*
    it is like this that my father continues to be present in my existence
    'In this way my father continues to be present in my existence.'
    (Eribon, 2009; Frantext)

Another example is the particle *mǝ(r)* in Tundra Yukaghir (Matić & Nikolaeva, 2014). In (3a) this marker triggers the interpretation of verb focus. However, this interpretation is not available in (3b).

3 a. *
    EX=go-PF.NEUT.INTR.3SG
    'He left/ He did leave.'
    b. *Ta-ŋ ileŋ mǝ=pöčeseč,
    DIST-ATTR reindeer EX=let.go.PF.NEUT.INTR.1PL
    *mǝ=neme we:-rələk.*
    EX=what do-SS.CVB.PF
    'We let that reindeer go, after we did something (to it).'
    (Matić, forthc.)
Different accounts of the data in (3) can be found in the literature: Maslova (2003) argues that \( m_{(r)l} = \) is a dedicated focus marker; Matić (forthc.) analyses the particle as an existential quantifier, which under certain circumstances triggers a focus interpretation. The difference between the two analyses may point to a difference in the general understanding of focus: as a linguistic category that is encoded by a specific marker or as the result of pragmatic inference. We will not take a stand on this issue, but refer to formal means such as the cleft in (2) and the particle in (3) as *polyfunctional*. This use of the term polyfunctional is supposed to be compatible with both accounts of the data in (3), i.e. both views on the status of focus as a grammatical category or an extra-linguistic notion.

The aim of this workshop is to investigate the polyfunctionality of linguistic means associated with focus from different perspectives. Topics to be addressed include (but are not limited to) the following issues:

- Patterns of polyfunctionality
  Which are the additional functions expressed by linguistic means associated with focus? Are these functions part of the semantics of the respective linguistic means or the result of pragmatic inference? Are there recurring patterns of polyfunctionality, i.e. recurring combinations of focus with certain other functions?

  Contrast, exhaustivity/exclusivity and polarity are interpretations which are frequently connected to focus, in the sense that they are expressed or triggered by the same formal means (for example a pitch accent; cf. e.g. Bolinger, 1961). These functions have frequently been subsumed under a general notion of focus. In our workshop we would like to discuss cases that go beyond these well-known and frequently discussed patterns. Such cases are the French cleft as illustrated in (2), the Tundra Yukaghir example of a morphological marker in (3) and the following examples.

  In Arabic varieties, there are a number of discourse particles with modal functions that have been analyzed as focus markers (Ouhalla, 1997) or as serving a dual function, viz. focus and modality (El Zarka, 2012). Another example is constituent fronting in Spanish where the sentence's main stress does not fall on the fronted constituent. Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti (2014) analyze this construction as triggering an interpretation of *verum focus*, but also note that irony is particularly salient in this construction. The combination of *verum focus* and *irony* is another example of the type of polyfunctionality we are interested in.

- Polyfunctionality and types of linguistic means
  Is there a relationship between different patterns of polyfunctionality and the formal types of linguistic means associated with focus? I.e., are there patterns that we typically find associated with a certain linguistic level to the exclusion of the others (e.g. with prosodic, but not with morphological or syntactic means)?
  One might expect that re-orderings which place a constituent closer to the preceding context are especially apt to establish textual cohesion, cf. clefts in (2). On the other hand, modality is probably more likely to be expressed by morphological means.
Polyfunctionality and the categorial status of focus
In the literature on information structure there is an ongoing debate whether focus is an integral part of grammar or rather belongs to pragmatics. Based on data as in (2) and (3) above, the claim that focus is a universal linguistic category has recently been called into question (Zimmermann & Onea, 2011; Matić & Wedgwood, 2013).
To what extent can the analysis of polyfunctional patterns contribute to this ongoing debate? We assume that the analysis of polyfunctionality can shed light on the language-specific and cross-linguistic/universal status of focus. Can polyfunctionality be considered as a counter-argument against focus as a (universal) linguistic category? Can, on the other hand, the one-to-one mapping between a linguistic form and a focus interpretation be considered as evidence for focus as a linguistic category in this specific language?

References