

Universals Workshop

Judith Tonhauser – University of Stuttgart

Friday, April 23 from 12:00 pm – 1:30 pm

Title: Projection variability in English and Paraguayan Guaraní

Abstract: Projective content is utterance content that speakers may be committed to even when the content occurs embedded under negation or in a polar question. Presuppositions and conventional implicatures are well-known projective contents (e.g., Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet 1990, Potts 2005). For instance, the content of the complement (CC) of “know” in (1) is taken to be projective content (specifically, a presupposition) because speakers are typically taken to be committed to the truth of the CC, that it’s raining, not just when uttering the affirmative matrix sentence in (1a), but also when uttering the question in (1b) or the negated sentence in (1c). (1) a. Kim knows that it’s raining. b. Does Kim know that it’s raining? c. Kim doesn’t know that it’s raining. By contrast, the CC of “think” in (2) is not projective because speakers are not typically taken to be committed to the truth of the CC, regardless of whether the speaker utters (2a), (2b), or (2c). (2) a. Kim thinks that it’s raining. b. Does Kim think that it’s raining? c. Kim doesn’t think that it’s raining. In this talk, I draw on the results of a series of empirical investigations of projective content in English and Paraguayan Guaraní to show that projection is not a binary property of utterance content, but rather a gradient one; that is, utterance content doesn’t just project or not, but there is gradience in the projection of utterance content (Tonhauser, Beaver, and Degen 2018, Tonhauser 2020, Tonhauser & Degen under review, Degen & Tonhauser ms). These results have implications for projection analyses in that such analyses not only have to predict the gradient nature of projection, but they also have to predict cross-linguistic similarities in projection variability. Empirical investigations of projection reveal by-item and by-participant variability regardless of the investigative mode (e.g., one-on-one elicitation with relatively few native speakers, web-based judgment collections with hundreds of participants). I will reflect on how such variability impacts research on projection, but also research on meaning more generally. *References:* Chierchia, Gennaro, and Sally McConnell-Ginet. 1990. *Meaning and grammar*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Degen, Judith and Judith Tonhauser. ms. Prior probability predicts projection. Potts, Christopher. 2005. *The logic of conventional implicatures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Tonhauser, Judith. 2020. Projection variability in Paraguayan Guaraní. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 38: 1263–1302. Tonhauser, Judith, David Beaver, and Judith Degen. 2018. How projective is projective content? Gradience in projectivity and at-issueness. *Journal of Semantics* 35: 495-542. Tonhauser, Judith and Judith Degen. under review. Are there factive predicates? An empirical investigation. <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/005360>