

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND ITS USE

Information structure: An introduction

Radek Šimík



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

INFORMATION STRUCTURE AS PART OF PRAGMATICS

Aspects of language use

- private, social, communication
- requests and achieving extra-linguistic goals
- exchanging information by semantic and pragmatic means
 - We are cooperative (Gricean maxims).
 - We pay attention to what our conversation partner knows, wants to achieve, wishes, etc. (pragmatic presuppositions)
 - **New:** A part of cooperative linguistic behavior is **structuring/packaging information** in an appropriate way, so that it fits the current discourse

QUESTIONS FOR THIS SET OF LECTURES

- What concepts are needed for the understanding of information structuring of utterances?
- How are these pragmatic categories realized linguistically?
- Is information structure realized primarily syntactically (by means of word order) or prosodically (by means of sentence stress)?
- A more detailed look at the notion of givenness; experimental evidence from Slavic languages

HOW IS INFORMATION STRUCTURED?

Given before new

Place given constituents before new ones.

That languages observe this principle or perhaps “maxim” has been observed for a long time: Weil 1844[1887], Ammann 1925–28, Behaghel 1930, Mathesius 1939, etc.

HOW IS INFORMATION STRUCTURED?

Given before new

Place given constituents before new ones.

That languages observe this principle or perhaps “maxim” has been observed for a long time: Weil 1844[1887], Ammann 1925–28, Behaghel 1930, Mathesius 1939, etc.

- What does it mean to be a given or new constituent?
- How is the pragmatics of givenness and newness mapped on form?
- What other notions are needed for a proper understanding of information structure?

HOW IS INFORMATION STRUCTURED?

Given before new

Place given constituents before new ones.

That languages observe this principle or perhaps “maxim” has been observed for a long time: Weil 1844[1887], Ammann 1925–28, Behaghel 1930, Mathesius 1939, etc.

- What does it mean to be a given or new constituent?
 - Different kinds of givenness;
 - some easier to define and manipulate than others.
- How is the pragmatics of givenness and newness mapped on form?

- What other notions are needed for a proper understanding of information structure?

HOW IS INFORMATION STRUCTURED?

Given before new

Place given constituents before new ones.

That languages observe this principle or perhaps “maxim” has been observed for a long time: Weil 1844[1887], Ammann 1925–28, Behaghel 1930, Mathesius 1939, etc.

- What does it mean to be a given or new constituent?
 - Different kinds of givenness;
 - some easier to define and manipulate than others.
- How is the pragmatics of givenness and newness mapped on form?
 - Direct relation to word order
 - Indirect – via prosody
- What other notions are needed for a proper understanding of information structure?

HOW IS INFORMATION STRUCTURED?

Given before new

Place given constituents before new ones.

That languages observe this principle or perhaps “maxim” has been observed for a long time: Weil 1844[1887], Ammann 1925–28, Behaghel 1930, Mathesius 1939, etc.

- What does it mean to be a given or new constituent?
 - Different kinds of givenness;
 - some easier to define and manipulate than others.
- How is the pragmatics of givenness and newness mapped on form?
 - Direct relation to word order
 - Indirect – via prosody
- What other notions are needed for a proper understanding of information structure?
 - focus, topic, contrast, ...

READING AND WATCHING TIPS

Krifka, Manfred. 2007. Basic notions of information structure. In Caroline Féry, Gisbert Fanselow, and Manfred Krifka (eds.), *Working Papers of the SFB632: Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure 6: The notions of information structure*, 13–55. University of Potsdam.
<https://www.sfb632.uni-potsdam.de/images/isis/isiso6.pdf> [also published as Krifka 2008]

YouTube video:

- The Ling Space on information structure:
<https://youtu.be/gZ6o8yFvJYI>

REFERENCES

Ammann, Hermann. 1925–28. *Die menschliche Rede: Sprachphilosophische Untersuchungen*. Moritz Schauenburg.

Behaghel, Otto. 1930. Von deutscher Wortstellung. *Zeitschrift für Deutschkunde* 44. 81–89.

Krifka, Manfred. 2007. Basic notions of information structure. In Caroline Féry, Gisbert Fanselow & Manfred Krifka (eds.), *Working Papers of the SFB632: Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure 6: The notions of information structure*, 13–55. Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam. <https://www.sfb632.uni-potsdam.de/images/isis/isiso6.pdf>.

Krifka, Manfred. 2008. Basic notions of information structure. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 55(3-4). 243–276. <https://doi.org/10.1556/ALing.55.2008.3-4.2>.

Mathesius, Vilém. 1939. O tak zvaném aktuálním členění věty. *Slovo a slovesnost* 5(4). 171–174. <http://sas.ujc.cas.cz/archiv.php?lang=en&art=308>.

Weil, Henri. 1844. *De l'ordre des mots dans les langues anciennes comparées aux langues modernes*. Paris: Didier Érudition.

Weil, Henri. 1887. *The order of words in the ancient languages compared with that of the modern languages*. Boston.