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Z A S — Schützenstraße 18 — 10117 Berlin

Mgr. Marcela Bubelová

Koordinátorka akademických kvalifikací a VR FF UK
Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta
nám. Jana Palacha 1/2,
116 38 Praha 1
Tschechien

Leibniz-Zentrum
Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft

Prof. Dr. Manfred Krifka
krifka@zas.gwz-berlin.de
Tel +49(0)30 · 20192-400

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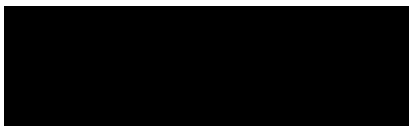
Report (Opponent Review) on Habilitation papers of Dr. Radek Šimík

Dear Committee,

Dr. Radek Šimík has submitted a cumulative *Habilitationsschrift* of nine articles around the topic of the relation between information structure and syntax. Most of the articles are co-authored, but Dr. Šimík expresses clearly that he was essentially involved in the work. I know him and his work well as a collaborator in the SFB on Information Structure and a colleague at Humboldt University, but there is conflict of interest.

After carefully reading or re-reading the submitted contributions, I can firmly state that the work of Dr. Radek Šimík very clearly fulfills the standards of a Habilitation. Dr. Šimík has shown to be extraordinarily able, both in his theoretical work and in the empirical methods he is using, to further our knowledge of language. The submitted work should be accepted for the further procedure. This judgement is motivated in detail below.

Yours sincerely,



In a comprehensive 50-page introduction, Dr. Šimík outlines his research program, which I find impressive and very coherent. It centers around the notion of Information Structure (incidentally a notion to which many Czech linguists, starting with Mathesius, have made importing and lasting contributions). Šimík focuses in particular on the relation between the various information-structural dimensions (focus, givenness, topics, reference) and their syntactic realization and semantic interpretation. The main point about the syntax-semantic interface is that this relation often is quite indirect. For example, there is no general access to the category of “focus” in syntax; rather, syntactic constructions like clefts mark more narrow semantic notions like exhaustivity, and various syntactic reorganizations are often not driven directly by these semantic or pragmatic effects but by the need of prosody to mark them by accent, or late or early position. These indirect ways of how information

structure interacts with syntax belong to a larger research program; Dr. Šimík contributes to that in essential ways by exploring their theoretical consequences, and by bringing interesting new evidence forward from a quite broad range of languages. The studies are absolutely first-rate, very competent both on the theoretical part and the empirical execution, with experimental and corpus-linguistic evidence that is secured by sound and well-understood statistical methods. Also, they are published in high-profile journals, including *Language*, or at important peer-reviewed conferences. Also, Dr. Šimík makes it clear that he had a dominant, or at least equal, amount of contribution in the co-authored papers.

The first two papers concern the effect of focus on two Bantu languages (this was part of a research project in the SFB on information structure, under the PI Malte Zimmermann). The short paper *Pronominal F-Markers in Basaá* (with T. Leffel and M. Wierzba) deals with focus marking in the Cameroonian Bantu language Basaá. This is remarkable because it involves a pronominal element that corresponds to the extracted focus at the extraction site (for ‘it was Lisuk who Konde met’ we have *Lisuk he-EXH [Konde met t]*), there is also an additive focus marker and a null contrastive topic marker that both need a resumptive pronoun in the position of *t*. Interesting points are: In constituent questions, which often are parallel to exhaustive focus construction, there are no pronominal elements. These facts are stated in terms of the focus theory of Kratzer (1991), according to which focus is represented by variables; it is argued that Basaá focus pronouns make this pronoun and the accompanying variable assignment overt. This is a great argument from an apparently exotic phenomenon to a particular theory of focus meaning, and it is argued very well. I should mention that the observation also fits into other theories of focus interpretation that imply movement (instead of Rooth’s mechanism). Some questions remain, though: Can trace *t* be in a syntactic island (presumably not) – but it is possible to bring about an apparent focus on a subconstituent of an island, such as ‘it was the letter that **Lisuk** wrote that Konde read’. Also, why do some clefts require a resumptive pronoun instead of a trace? Furthermore, constituent questions are often built similar to assertions with focus, but for Basaá one can see with coincidental examples that this is not the case in this language. But in general, this is a highly interesting paper.

The paper *The morphosyntax of exhaustive focus: A view from Awiing (Grassfields Bantu)* takes on focus marking in another Bantu language that is quite different from Basaá but equally interesting. The main discussion involves the particle *la*, which seems to right-attach to the focused item but turns out to occupy a fixed position marking exhaustivity, with the syntactic transformations achieving the various configurations the particle occurs in. Again, an understudied language provides highly interesting evidence for theories, in this case Horvath’s hypothesis that syntax does not mark information structure directly (but rather, exhaustivity) and Jacob’s hypothesis that there is a tendency that focus-sensitive expressions occur as close to their focus as possible. The article discusses focus constructions comprehensively, exhaustive and additive focus, including the remarkable fact that answerhood focus is not marked at all (perhaps prosodically, which is outside of the investigation). The proposed syntactic account is complex, but all steps are well motivated, and show us another way of how languages manage to express exhaustivity and additivity by lexical and structural means.

The second group of papers concerns the effect of givenness on syntax. I consider the paper *The role of givenness, presupposition and prosody in Czech word order: An experimental study* a major contribution to our understanding of how languages with a relatively free word order interact with givenness. Following the general line of Dr. Šimík's argumentation, the effect that givenness has on word order (scrambling) is indirect, mediated by late (right) stress assignment, in contrast to previous work by Ilona Kučerová, who assumes a givenness operator in syntax. In addition, a special effect of presupposition (referring) definites is identified. The argumentation is very clear, the contrary position is treated with great care, possible counterarguments are considered and discussed thoroughly, the planning, execution, evaluation and discussion of the experiments is done very well. Interesting questions remain. One (perhaps tangential) is: What about written language, which does not have prosody? We would have to assume that the "silent" prosody when reading is driving the ordering of constituents, but one might see a decoupling in written language. What about "weak" definites (cf. work by Florian Schwarz) that are not presuppositional or given, such as in English *They went to the movies* – is there anything in Czech that corresponds to them? The givenness account of Schwarzschild (cf. 6) is problematic when the antecedent is a question as in (8)/(9), as e.g. *Did you see any octopus?* does not imply the existence of an octopus (cf. also: *John said there is no octopus in this aquarium. But I saw an octopus (with an octopus) distressed* – also, no existence implication. Similar cases reappear later in the discussion for non-presupposition givenness. It seems that the semantic side of the broad notion of "givenness" is not yet sufficiently discussed; it presumably should involve things like givenness of concepts, a notion that is not covered by Schwarzschild's definition. But I stress that this is an excellent paper, especially in its formalization by optimality theory that allows for the modelling of counteracting constraints.

The paper *Expression of information structure in West Slavic* makes a similar point as the previous article, but includes a discussion of experiments on Slovak and Polish. Very interestingly, the paper shows that there are differences: In Czech, sentence accent placement (and hence word order satisfying the rule that given constituents should not be accented) is more rigid; this is less rigid in Slovak, and still less rigid in Polish. The article is also very detailed in outlining the history of prosody / word order research, and it is again very clearly argued. It would be interesting to see how German, also a scrambling language but with a different, verb-final base syntax, falls in this cline – presumably, sentence accent assignment is less rigid than in Polish. Also, Sorbian should prove to be an interesting Slavic language to study in this respect. In general, the methodology developed here could easily be extended to other languages which allow for scrambling-type reordering of constituents.

In *Stress shift, focus, and givenness* the authors investigate the interplay between the rule that avoids putting given constituents under stress, and that requires to put focused constituents under stress. With focus, a dimension that was rather excluded from the other papers is getting now full attention. The authors show in a carefully designed experiment that the focus rule is generally stronger, allowing for a shift of stress from the default final position. One corollary is that focus and givenness are independent from each other, and both needed (contra theories like Schwarzschild 1999 and Wagner 2012) – an assumption that I have argued for too, as well as Joachim Jacobs. The primacy of focus is also clear in cases in which the focused item itself is given, as in *Did you order pizza or pasta? – I ordered pizza.*

The last group of papers concerns the interpretation of definiteness. The article *Definiteness of bare NPs as a function of clausal position: A corpus study of Czech* investigates the interpretation of bare NPs as definite or indefinite dependent on the position. In particular, it shows that the common wisdom that initial NPs are definite, and final NPs likely indefinite in a corpus study of modern written Czech, does not get it right: The corpus study reveals that the hypothesis that bans initial indefinite NPs is most strongly supported. There does not seem a strong tendency of definites to occur at the beginning of the sentence, neither are they banned from occurring at the end. Furthermore, the position relative to the verb itself does not have this effect. The corpus study was carefully designed so that a plausible random sample was drawn, and possible confounds were identified.

In *Definiteness, uniqueness, and maximality in languages with and without articles* the authors argue that bare nouns in languages like Czech are not ambiguous between a definite and an indefinite interpretation into which they can be coerced (as in Chierchia 1998), but that they simply are underspecified, and compatible with either one interpretation from their grammar (while their syntactic position might shift them to a plausible definite or indefinite interpretation). This is reminiscent to the specific or non-specific interpretation of indefinite nominals in English like *a doctor*, as argued for by Kripke. This is shown by experiments comparing German article-marked definite and indefinite NPs vs. Russian bare NPs that show “correlates” of definiteness-indefiniteness marking. The experimental technique that is used is quite ingenious; the result is that the uniqueness and maximality meaning of definiteness is more clearly conveyed with German definite NPs than with Russian bare nouns that have correlates of definiteness markers. The article leaves future research with puzzling questions, in particular, which notions are behind the “definiteness intuitions” of bare NPs?

The paper *On pragmatic demonstratives: The case of pragmatic discourse anaphora in Czech* tackles an interesting phenomenon, the “pragmatic” use of demonstratives, which can be easily identified in English with names, as in *This Henry Kissinger is something!* Šimík argues that the Czech demonstrative, e.g. masculine *ten*, has this pragmatic function as well, beyond its discourse-anaphoric use. The pragmatic use is carefully introduced with examples. The proposal is highly intriguing – Šimík suggests that the demonstrative has a reading in which it establishes a relation between the demonstrative description and the entity referred to. I understand this as saying that it is crucial that the entity referred to has been mentioned before, and the reference is via this mentioning. This leads to an analysis in which the pragmatic use only involves the DEM part of the interpretation of the demonstratives, for which a reference to an utterance situation is stimulated. This gets the observations right. Two remarks: What is different between this pragmatic use and German determiners like *der erwähnte X* or English *said X*, as in *Said person has to appear in front of the court tomorrow*, which also refer to a conversational act but have a quite different interpretation. And, for me these uses can be expressed with an addressee-related possessive, as e.g. in (5): *I need to speak with your Jana*. or *I need to speak with our Jana* (where *our* has an exclusive interpretation). In any case, this paper points to a very interesting use of demonstratives!

In *Inherent vs. accidental uniqueness in bare and demonstrative nominals*, Šimík investigates the uses of the Czech demonstrative further and argues that in contrast to bare NPs in a definite interpretation,

demonstrative NPs express “accidental” uniqueness. This is modelled within situation semantics as providing alternative situations; the demonstrative (accidental uniqueness) is possible if there are alternative situations in which uniqueness is not satisfied. This observation is highly interesting; however, I think the idea of modal alternatives, which goes into the right direction, would still have to be spelled out and connected to current theorizing. What is interesting is that definite DPs that involve associative anaphora (bridging) appear not to be expressed with demonstratives.