

Mismatches in Information Structure

Workshop to be proposed for the 57th Annual Meeting of the *Societas Linguistica Europaea*, University of Helsinki, 21–24 August 2024 (<https://societaslinguistica.eu/sle2024/>)

Organizers:

[Silvio Cruschina](#) (University of Helsinki) and [Michael Yoshitaka Erlewine](#) (National University of Singapore & Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, University of Helsinki)

Contact: silvio.cruschina@helsinki.fi, michaelyoshitaka.erlewine@helsinki.fi

Call deadline: 10 November 2023

Call for abstracts

We invite abstracts for a workshop on Mismatches in Information Structure, to be held as part of the 57th Annual Meeting of the *Societas Linguistica Europaea*, hosted by the University of Helsinki, 21–24 August 2024. Preliminary abstracts of 300 words must be received by 10 November 2023, to be included in the workshop proposal. See submission instructions below.

Workshop description

Information structure concerns how linguistic expressions are organized in consideration of the interlocutors' mental representation of the discourse and their communicative intent (see, e.g., Halliday 1967, Chafe 1976, Prince 1981, Lambrecht 1994, Krifka 2008). Language users employ various morphosyntactic and prosodic/phonological strategies to convey information in an appropriate manner for the given conversational situation, reflecting a sensitivity to information-structural notions such as focus and topic, among others.

Consider the notion of focus. From a semantic viewpoint, “focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions” (Krifka 2007: 18). Pragmatically, it corresponds to the constituent of the sentence to which the speaker intends to direct attention (Erteschik-Shir 1997), and may reflect the organization of questions in the discourse (Roberts 1996, Beaver & Clark 2008). Although, focus is associated with prosodic prominence in many languages (Truckenbrodt 1995, Truckenbrodt 1999, Ladd 1996, Zubizarreta 1998), this is not always the case (see e.g. Büring 2010). Indeed, focus can also be marked through specialized morphology or syntax (see e.g. Rizzi 1997, É. Kiss 1998, Belletti 2004), exclusively in addition to or prosodic marking.

The linguistic marking of topic may also affect the grammatical properties of a sentence at different levels. Topic is generally defined in terms of ‘aboutness’ and/or ‘givenness’, expressing what the sentence is about (Reinhart 1982), and/or information that is typically ‘old’, that is, accessible to the interlocutors or at least inferable from the context (Gundel 1988, Lambrecht 1994). Topic may also be marked morphologically with special morphemes or grammatical particles, or it can be syntactically displaced in a dedicated position, typically at the beginning of the sentence. Several studies have moreover shown that the actual prosodic, syntactic or even morphological properties of topic and focus depend on the specific type of focus or topic (see, e.g., Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007, Büring 2016, Bianchi, Bocci & Cruschina 2016, Cruschina 2021a,b, 2022).

Linguistic strategies for encoding particular information structural notions sometimes exhibit mismatches, especially at the interfaces between different modules of grammar. For instance, a particular constituent that serves semantically and pragmatically as the focus or topic may nonetheless not bear the expected prosodic, morphological, or syntactic reflex in a given language or in a specific environment. The possibility and shape of such mismatches may inform the linguistic architecture that allows for apparent grammatical reference to information-structural notions.

The aim of the proposed workshop is to bring together linguists working on mismatches in information structure. The questions addressed in the workshop include, but are not limited to:

- What sorts of mismatches are attested between prosody, morphosyntax, semantics, and discourse, in individual languages or cross-linguistically?
- Are some apparent information-structural mismatches in fact best described as not involving a mismatch, through improved empirical description and/or revised theoretical notions? (See e.g. Krifka 1998.)
- What sorts of grammatical processes and pressures can impede an expected information-structural expression?
- When and how do utterances violate a language’s information-structural defaults (e.g. expected topic–comment structure, given–new partition, default prosody)?
- How cross-linguistically uniform are the semantics and pragmatics of particular information-structural devices?
- How do information-structural notions such as topic and focus line up with other, overlapping notions such as given, new, contrast, and surprise (mirativity)?
- What do information-structural devices and their mismatches teach us about the cognitive representation of discourse and mental states? (See e.g. Roberts 1992, Büring 2003, Beaver & Clark 2008.)
- How do language users resolve potential ambiguities and mismatches in information structure in interaction and/or in on-line processing?
- How do child and adult grammars differ in their use and interpretation of information-structural strategies? (See e.g. Crain et al 1992.) How are such strategies and their attested mismatches learned?
- Are there typological generalizations regarding the shapes and sorts of attested information-structural mismatches? What do such generalizations teach us about the architecture of grammar? (See e.g. Büring 2009, 2015, Branen & Erlewine 2023.)

A discussion of the unexpected mismatches in information structure will shed light not only on the specific contexts in which these mismatches are found, but also on the general status and role of information structure in the architecture of the grammar. Empirically, information structure has established itself as an autonomous field of study, but the theoretical question is still open of whether or not information structure counts as an independent domain of analysis at the ‘interface’ between grammar and discourse. Mismatches and unexpected patterns can be viewed as ‘anomalies’ that are hard to explain, but at the same time they can also be key to the theoretical development and understanding of the notion of information structure itself.

Submission instructions

We invite submissions for 20-minute talks that contribute to the description, discussion, and analysis of information-structure mismatches in any language or in a comparative perspective. Preliminary abstracts (**300 words**, as DOC file) should be sent to the workshop organizers (silvio.cruschina@helsinki.fi, michaelyoshitaka.erlewine@helsinki.fi) by **10 November 2023**. If the workshop proposal is successful, prospective presenters will be asked to submit a 500 word abstract directly to SLE by 15 January 2024.

References and other relevant work

- Aboh, Enoch Oladé. 2007. Focused versus non-focused wh-phrases. In Enoch Oladé Aboh, Katharina Hartmann & Malte Zimmermann (eds), *Focus Strategies in African Languages: The Interaction of Focus and Grammar in Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic*, 287–314. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Arregi, Karlos. 2016. Focus projection theories. In Caroline Féry and Shinichiro Ishihara (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Information Structure*, 185–202. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Assmann, Muriel, Büring, Daniel, Jordanoska, Izabela & Max Prüller. 2023. Towards a theory of morphosyntactic focus marking. *Natural Language & Linguist Theory*. Online first article.
- Beaver, David Ian, and Brady Clark. 2008. *Sense and sensitivity: How focus determines meaning*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Belletti, Adriana. 2004. Aspects of the low IP area. In Luigi Rizzi (ed.), *The Structure of CP and IP. The Cartography of Syntactic Structures, Vol. 2*, 16–51. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Benincà, Paola & Cecilia Poletto. 2004. Topic, focus and V2: defining the CP sublayers. In Luigi Rizzi (ed.), *The Structure of IP and CP. The Cartography of Syntactic Structures, Vol. 2*, 52–75. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bianchi, Valentina, Giuliano Bocci & Silvio Cruschina. 2016. Focus fronting, unexpectedness, and evaluative implicatures. *Semantics and Pragmatics* 9(3): 1–54.
- Bocci, Giuliano. 2013. *The Syntax-Prosody Interface from a Cartographic Perspective: Evidence from Italian*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Bocci, Giuliano, Valentina Bianchi & Silvio Cruschina. 2021. Focus in wh-questions. Evidence from Italian. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 39(2): 405–455.
- Borreguero Zuloaga, Margarita. 2016. Elementi anaforici e frasi scisse nei testi giornalistici contemporanei. In Giovanni Ruffino (ed), *La lingua variabile nei testi letterari, artistici e funzionali contemporanei (1915–2014): analisi, interpretazione, traduzione*, 529–542. Firenze: Franco Cesati.
- Branan, Kenyon & Erlewine, Michael Yoshitaka. 2023. Anti-pied-piping. *Language* 99: 603–653.
- Büring, Daniel. 1997. *The 59th Street Bridge Accent*. London: Routledge.
- Büring, Daniel. 2003. On D-trees, beans, and b-accent. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 26: 511–545.
- Büring, Daniel. 2009. Towards a typology of focus realization. In Malte Zimmermann & Caroline Féry (eds), *Information Structure: Theoretical, Typological, and Experimental Perspectives*, 177–205. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Büring, Daniel. 2015. Unalternative semantics. In *Proceedings of SALT 25*, ed. Sarah D’Antonio, Mary Moroney, and Carol-Rose Little, 550–575.
- Büring, Daniel. 2016. (Contrastive) Topic. In Caroline Féry & Shin Ishihara (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Information Structure*, 64–85. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chafe, Wallace. 1976. Givenness, contrastiveness, definiteness, subjects, topics, and point of view. In Charles N. Li (ed.), *Subject and Topic*, 25–55. New York: Academic Press.
- Constant, Noah. 2014. *Contrastive topic: Meanings and realizations*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts at Amherst.
- Crain, Stephen, William Philip, Kenneth Drozd, Tom Roeper, and Kazumi Matsuoka. 1992. Only in child language. Paper presented at BUCLD 17.
- Cruschina, Silvio. 2021a. The greater the contrast, the greater the potential: On the effects of focus in syntax. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 6(1): 3: 1–30.
- Cruschina, Silvio. 2021b. Topicalization in the Romance languages. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, 1–29. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Cruschina, Silvio. 2022. Focus and Focus Structures in the Romance Languages. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1–48.
- De Cesare, Anna-Maria, Garassino, Davide, Agar Marco, Rocío, Albom, Ana & Doriana Cimmino. 2016. *Sintassi marcata dell'italiano contemporaneo in prospettiva contrastiva con il francese, lo spagnolo, il tedesco e l'inglese. Uno studio basato sulla scrittura dei quotidiani online*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- É. Kiss, Katalin. 1998. Identificational Focus versus Information Focus. *Language* 74: 245–273.
- Fanselow, Gisbert & Denisa Lenertová. 2011. Left peripheral focus: mismatches between syntax and information structure. *Natural Language & Linguist Theory* 29: 169–209.
- Frascarelli, Mara & Roland Hinterhölzl. 2007. Types of topics in German and Italian. In Kerstin Schwabe & Susanne Winkler (eds), *On Information Structure, Meaning and Form*, 87–116. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Garassino, Davide. 2022. Translation as a source of pragmatic interference? An empirical investigation of French and Italian cleft sentences. In Davide Garassino & Daniel Jacob (eds), *When Data Challenges Theory. Unexpected and Paradoxical Evidence in Information Structure*, 271–303. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Garassino, Davide & Jacob, Daniel. 2018. Polarity Focus and non-canonical syntax in Italian, French and Spanish. Clitic left dislocation and *si che / si que*-constructions. In Christine Dimroth & Stefan Sudhoff (eds), *The Grammatical Realization of Polarity Contrast. Theoretical, Empirical, and Typological Approaches*, 227–254. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Gundel, Jeanette K. 1988. *The Role of Topic and Comment in Linguistic Theory*. New York: Garland.
- Halliday, Michael. 1967. Notes on transitivity and theme in English, Part II. *Journal of Linguistics* 3. 199–244.
- Hartmann, Katharina & Malte Zimmermann. 2007. In place – out of place? Focus in Hausa. Kerstin Schwabe & Susanne Winkler (eds), *On Information Structure, Meaning and Form*, 365–405. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Karssenbergh, Lena & Lahousse, Karen. 2018. The information structure of French *il y a* & *c'est* clefts: A corpus-based analysis. *Linguistics* 56(3): 513–548.
- Kratzer, Angelika & Selkirk, Elisabeth. 2020. Deconstructing information structure. *Glossa* 5(1): 113, 1–53.
- Krifka, Manfred. 2008. Basic Notions of Information Structure. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 55: 243–276.
- Ladd, D. Robert. 1996. *Intonational Phonology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lambrecht, Knud & Laura A. Michaelis. 1998. Sentence accent in information questions: Default and projection. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 21: 477–544.
- Lambrecht, Knud. 1994. *Information Structure and Sentence Form: Topic, focus, and the mental representation of discourse referents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leonetti, Manuel & N. Victoria Escandell Vidal. 2009. Fronting and verum focus in Spanish. In Andreas Dufter & Daniel Jacob (eds), *Focus and Background in Romance Languages* 155–204. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Prince, Ellen. 1981. Towards a taxonomy of given–new information. In Peter Cole (ed.), *Radical Pragmatics*, 223–255. New York: Academic Press.
- Reinhart, Tania. 1982. Pragmatics and linguistics: An analysis of sentence topics. *Philosophica* 27: 53–94.
- Rialland, Annie & Stéphane Robert. 2001. The intonational system of Wolof. *Linguistics* 39: 893–939.
- Rizzi, Luigi. 1997. The fine structure of the left periphery. In Liliane Haegeman (ed.), *Elements of Grammar. Handbook in Generative Syntax*, 281–337. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

- Roberts, Craige. 1996. Information structure in discourse: Towards an integrated formal theory of pragmatics. In *Papers in semantics*, ed. Jae-Hak Yoon and Andreas Kathol. OSU Working Papers in Linguistics.
- Roggia, Carlo Enrico. 2009. *Le frasi scisse in italiano. Struttura informativa e funzioni discorsive*. Geneva: Slatkine.
- Truckenbrodt, Hubert. 1995. *Phonological phrases: Their relation to syntax, focus, and prominence*. Doctoral dissertation, MIT.
- Truckenbrodt, Hubert. 1999. On the relation between syntactic phrases and phonological phrases. *Linguistic Inquiry* 30: 219–255.
- Zerbian, Sabine. 2007. Investigating prosodic focus marking in Northern Sotho. In Enoch Oladé Aboh, Katharina Hartmann & Malte Zimmermann (eds), *Focus Strategies in African Languages: The Interaction of Focus and Grammar in Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic*, 55–82. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Zubizarreta, María-Luisa. 1998. *Prosody, Focus and Word Order*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.