We invite submission of abstracts up to 300 words (references not included) for the following workshop. Please send your abstracts in Word and PDF format to the workshop organisers (caroline.gentens@kuleuven.be, linwmg@cc.au.dk, stef.spronck@helsinki.fi) by **13 November, 2024**.

The workshop is proposed for SLE2025:

Date: 26 August 2025 to 29 August 2025
Location: Bordeaux, France
Web Site: https://societaslinguistica.eu/sle2025/workshop-proposals/

If the workshop is accepted (notification of acceptance will follow around 15 December), authors will be invited to submit a 500-word abstract before 15 January 2025, which will be reviewed by the SLE scientific committee.

Workshop on Mistaken beliefs

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Keywords

mistaken beliefs; semantics; pragmatics; typology; grammatical analysis

Description

The primary aim of this workshop is to explore the range of ways in which the fact that a belief is mistaken – as in e.g. *the boy mistakenly believes that the turtle is dead* – can be expressed and/or coded in a language and cross-linguistically. These modes of expression are interesting because (among other things) they simultaneously provide a dual modal perspective on a proposition: they represent it as someone's belief whilst simultaneously asserting its falsity. They are, however, almost invisible in the general and theoretical linguistic literature, though they have been extensively described – albeit usually in a very coarse-grained fashion – in Amazonian and Australian descriptive traditions. Grammars of many languages of these regions contain discussion of the means of expressing mistaken beliefs (see Spronck and Vuillermet 2019 and McGregor 2024 for references). In a number of languages from these areas there is a grammaticalized means of expression of mistaken belief by means of an enclitic (more rarely, suffix) or particle, as shown by the following examples:

Mparntwe Arrernte (Pama-Nyungan, Australia)
(1) *arlenge-nge aherre-**kathene** ayenge itirre-ke arleye-rle*
     far-ABL   kangaroo-**MB**   1SG:NOM think-PC emu-FOC
     'Hey! From afar I thought it was a kangaroo, but it turns out that it's an emu.' (Wilkins 1989: 421)

Ese Ejja (Pano-Takanan, Bolivia/Peru)
(2) *Anowii wowi-ani, y   owaya a-ka-ani   ekwikia=**poso***
     bird.sp whistle-PRS and 3ERG   do-3A-PRS devil=**MB**
     'The little bird whistles, and they think (wrongly) it is the devil.' (Vuillermet 2018)

Also quite widely attested is expression by means of a complement construction involving a verb of speech or thought or a specific verb of mistaken thought, possibly along with the mistaken belief enclitic or particle, as shown by example **Error! Reference source not found.**. There are a range of other modes of expression that are variants on these two major themes.

Djambarrpuyngu (Pama-Nyungan, Australia)

(3) *ga nganapurr-nydja   nguli* **birrka'yu**-*n* **yanbi** *nguli mārr   galki,*
      and 1PL-PROM   HAB   **think**-1   **MB**   HAB somewhat near
      wānga yan   barrku warray
      place EMP far   in:fact
      'We thought wrongly that the place was quite close but it was far off.' (Wilkinson 1991: 686)

Expression by a complement construction seems to be the predominant one in languages of Asia, based on a very small sample of languages in McGregor (2022), and Europe. For instance, Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, China) employs a complement construction with matrix verb 以为 *yǐ wéi* 'think mistakenly'. The situation in Africa, northern America and sign languages seems largely unchartered.

Not all languages, it seems, have a means of explicitly marking a belief as mistaken. For instance, in Reta (Alor-Pantar, Indonesia) employs the generic verb *boo* (*hula*) 'say, think, want', which is used in ordinary reported speech and thought constructions (Willemsen 2021: 183); the mistaken belief interpretation can emerge as a pragmatic implicature. Moreover, in many (all?) languages with means of explicitly marking mistaken beliefs an ordinary thought complement can implicate that the thought or belief is mistaken: e.g. in English, where one might say *the boy believes that the turtle is dead (though it is really alive)*. This raises the question of how the two modes of expression contrast.

As indicated above, few treatments of mistaken belief expressions in particular languages discuss the expressions in depth. The Amazonian and Australian descriptions are typically silent on the grammatical analysis of the expressions, on the question of how the mistaken belief expressions are best parsed and on their status as distinct constructions, though both Spronck and Vuillermet (2019) and McGregor (2024) make some suggestions. There are also rather few discussions of the motivations and/or discourse uses of mistaken belief expressions – when and why someone might wish to specify a proposition as a mistaken belief. An exception is Wilkins (1989: 409) who documents use of the mistaken belief construction in Mparntwe Arrernte in criticisms and complaints, as illustrated in (4). What other discourse uses might mistaken belief expressions have in a language?

Mparntwe Arrernte

(4) *tyew-atye-***kathene***   ayenge   **itirre**-*ke*
      friend-1SG.POS-**MB**   1SG.NOM   **think**-PC
      'I thought you were my friend.' (But you can't be since a friend would give me money.)

Diachronic issues are also of great interest, including how mistaken belief constructions (in languages that have distinct constructions) may have grammaticalised. For instance, there is evidence that in some languages the expression may have arisen from a factive *know*-construction (e.g. Australian languages Nyulnyul and Yidiny), and in some languages from an expression of likeness or similarity.

Relevant questions that could be addressed in contributions to this workshop include (but are not limited to) the following:

1. What modes of expression are available in a particular language for the expression of mistaken beliefs? If there are several, how do they differ in meaning and/or use?

2. In languages with a specific construction type encoding mistaken belief, what grammatical structures are involved in the construction type(s)?
3. What meanings are associated with expressions of mistaken beliefs in the target language? Are there instances in which the mistaken belief meaning seems not to be present: for example, can the proposition expressed actually be true (in the speaker's opinion)? If so, how can these exceptions be accounted for?
4. What parameters are relevant to the typology of mistaken belief expressions in the languages of a particular family or geographical region?
5. How might expressions and/or constructions of mistaken belief have arisen? Is there evidence of how they might have grammaticalised?
6. How can formal and/or functional models of modality account for the existence of expressions of mistaken beliefs?
7. How are expressions of mistaken belief processed by language users and how are they learnt by children? Does the presence of a grammatical mode of expressing mistaken belief in a language confer an advantage to children in solving false belief tasks (as might be expected from Matsui *et al*. 2009)?

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