



Department of
Linguistics and Modern Languages
語言學及現代語言系

What Language in Interaction Can Tell Us About the Relation Between Language, Thought and Communication

Linguistics Seminars

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Date: September 15, 2020 (Tuesday)
Time: 4:30pm - 6:15pm
Venue: *Seminar will be conducted via ZOOM

Registration Deadline:
12:00nn of 13 September 2020 (Sunday) – Hong Kong Time
The Zoom Meeting details will be provided on 14 September 2020



Prior registration is required

Abstract

Humans communicate thoughts through language. The question regarding the relation between thought, language and communication is ancient: Is language primarily a tool for thought or for communication? In this project, I explore this question by investigating the linguistic properties of i(nteractional) language (e.g., discourse markers and intonational tunes). i-language facilitates communication by managing common ground between interlocutors and regulating turn-taking. It differs from referential language (r-language), which contributes to the configuration of thoughts. Traditionally it has been r-language which served as the target of investigation for linguistic theorizing about the relation between language, thought and communication. I propose that i-language and r-language are both part of the universal blue-print that makes up our language faculty and that they share a formal architecture (i.e., they are both part of UG). I refer to this as the Interactional Spine Hypothesis (ISH). I present evidence for the ISH based on an exploration of the range and limits of language variation. I further show that the ISH sheds new light on language acquisition as well as the language of people with clinical profiles (Alzheimers, Aphasia, Autism Spectrum and Schizophrenia). In as much as the ISH is on the right track, then it follows that thought and communication are on equal footing and one cannot have priority over the other. The distinction between language, thought, and communication implodes.

Speaker

Martina Wiltschko is an ICREA research Professor at UPF. Previously she held a position of Professor of Linguistics at UBC. Her research is concerned with the range and limit of language variation. She has conducted fieldwork on several First Nations Languages of North America and has extensively published on syntax and its interfaces with morphology, semantics and pragmatics. She is the author of the Cambridge University Press monograph "The Universal Structure of Categories. Towards a formal typology." The universal spine is an attempt to reconcile the diversity in grammatical categories with the assumption of a universal grammar. In her most recent monograph ("The grammar of interactional language") to appear with Cambridge University Press, she extends the universal spine to include layers of structure that regulate the expression of interactional language.

All are Welcome

Enquiries
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