DISENTANGLING TOPICALITY EFFECTS

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The concept of the proposition-level TOPIC is central to multiple areas of linguistic theory and analysis, but remains largely controversial regarding its definition and the range of the phenomena to which it applies. In the common pre-theoretical view, topicality is a property of information that specifies the settings and the referents required for the interpretation of the primary message conveyed by a sentence. Among the most generally accepted theoretical definition is the aboutness understanding, which describes TOPIC as the referent the proposition is about (following Strawson 1964; Reinhart 1981; Gundel 1988; Lambrecht 1994). Other definitions opt for different analytical levels and core properties - TOPIC being defined, for example, among many others, as a context displacer for the illocutionary force (following Hockett 1958), as an interpretative framework for the proposition (following Haiman 1978), as a carrier of discourse salience (following Givón 1983).

Often, the boundaries of this category, regardless the definition adopted, are too broad for the study of linguistic phenomena. For example, in grammar, topicality is commonly associated with a large set of prototypical cross-linguistically recurrent constructions: constituent order with a clause-initial position, Left Dislocation and Hanging Topic structures, *as for*-type markers, wh-clefts and topical particles. However, in the empirical description of data, the usage of the concept does not provide sufficient resolution for language-specific research and for comparative analysis. In fact, it is commonly acknowledged that topicality encompasses a cluster of factors (Jacobs 2001), thus, the application of a unified concept to a large set of heterogenous morphosyntactic constructions must be questioned (Gómez-González 1997). These concerns can recall the recent discussions on the conceptual and operational drawbacks of universally defined linguistic categories (Haspelmath 2010; Bickel 2015). However, since TOPIC is assumed to be a category of communication and cognitive processing (and not a grammatical category), disentangling this concept can potentially suggest the need for a different, multifactorial model of communication as outlined below.

This workshop aims at disentangling topicality effects, focusing on the description of phenomena of natural discourse and spontaneous interaction. Our purpose is to create a fruitful dialogue between scholars from different theoretical and methodological backgrounds, in order to examine the range of phenomena commonly dubbed "topical", as well as discuss whether and to what extent the traditional concept of TOPIC is theoretically and empirically relevant for the study of spoken and written discourse.

In this respect, a promising path of research has been traced from interactional, corpus-based approaches, aiming at providing fine-grained – and often cross-linguistic – descriptions of phenomena which have been described under the too broad concept(s) of TOPIC. Examination of specific constructions traditionally associated with topicality reveals indeed a panoply of factors that contribute directly to the process of dynamic information structuring, producing aboutness and framing effects only epiphenomenally. For instance, experimental studies by Tomlin (1997; cf. also Myachykov et al. 2018) suggest that attention plays a direct role in the choice of syntactic structure in English, with no need for a postulation of an intervening pragmatic layer of topicality. Numerous studies of natural interaction question topicality-oriented analyses of common "topical" structures. For example, Left Dislocation (LD) constructions have been found to be triggered by a variety of specific interaction-managing and production related factors, such as incremental utterance

production, turn-taking, local attention alignment, resonance of available material, and textual prominence. (Pekarek-Doehler et al. 2015; Ozerov forthcoming; Cimmino forthcoming). These studies may suggest that an apparent aboutness-effect is not a primitive factor, but a retrospective, potentially epiphenomenal overgeneralization of the specific and diverse local discourse moves performed by the speakers. In this case, the identified specific factors can be modelled as guiding the interlocutors directly in the dynamic process of utterance production and interpretation (Ozerov 2021).

We invite submissions for papers aiming at describing effects associated with topicality, teasing them apart from syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic components in the description of discourse level phenomena. Every discourse phenomenon related to the concept of TOPIC can be the object of study and it can be approached from every theoretical and methodological angle. Submissions to the workshop may include, but need not be limited to the following theoretical and empirical issues:

- Theoretical discussion of discourse phenomena associated with topicality and possible alternative conceptual categories for their description;
- Theoretical discussion on the place/benefit/evidence for a unified view of the diverse topicality-like phenomena;
- Possible fruitful operationalization of the concept of TOPIC for language-specific or comparative studies;
- Language-specific and comparative studies of linguistic phenomena associated with topicality-like effects, combined with the examination of the factors triggering these effects;
- Crosslinguistic variation in the identification/description of topicality-like effects;
- Cross-linguistic variation in the assignment of topical-like effects in parallel contexts.

As we wish this workshop to be a free and fruitful forum of discussion, each paper needs to describe the definitions of the discussed categories in terms understandable also to other theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, methods adopted in the operational application of the concept of TOPIC in corpora or experiment must be clearly described. Papers taking a theoretical approach must also hint to empirical case-studies, and, in turn, empirical case-studies must also clearly state their theoretical contribution. Both intra-linguistic and cross-linguistic studies are welcome.

Please send your non-anonymous 300 words abstracts to Doriana Cimmino (dcimmino@unisa.it) and Pavel Ozerov (pozerov@uni-muenster.de) by 15 November 2021. The convenors will select the papers to include in the workshop proposal and notify the authors by 20 November 2021. The notification of acceptance of the workshop will be communicated by SLE conference organizers by 15 December 2021.

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