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School of Philosophy, Linguistics and Science Studies,
Department of Linguistics

THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

Thursday 25.11.2021

16:15-17:45

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Pronouns and Paranouns: A new pronominal typology

Greenberg's universal 42 states that all languages have pronominal categories involving at least three persons and two numbers. However, this characterization fails to capture the properties of so-called pronouns in languages that the World Atlas of Linguistic Structures characterizes as "avoiding pronouns for reasons of politeness", such as Japanese. We propose that these languages have a distinct category of nominals, which we call *paranouns*. Paranouns are unlike pronouns because they are not bundles of phi-features, and they are unlike nouns because their content is interactional in nature; that is to say, it consists of socio-linguistic information about the interactants and the relations between them. We show that the lack of phi features and interactional content follow from the proposal that paranouns associate with the *interactional structure*, a set of categories dominating the functional structure (i.e, the DP layer). We then extend this proposal to develop a novel analysis of formality distinctions in languages with pronouns. More specifically, we argue that the content of formal pronouns is first associated with functional structure, but then *recycled* in the interactional structure. This derivation ensures that the pronoun receives a marked interpretation with socio-linguistic consequences, while retaining its original phi feature specification.

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