

Discourse phenomena in typological perspective

Alessandra Barotto & Simone Mattioli
(University of Bologna)

Keywords: linguistic typology, discourse phenomena, information structure, connectives, repetition

It is a well-established idea in functional-typological approaches that grammar is shaped by ‘discourse use’ (cf. Givón 1979, Du Bois 1985, Bybee and Beckner 2010, Diessel 2019). Generally speaking, discourse and grammar tend to be considered as two strictly intertwined domains (cf. Ariel 2009, Mithun 2015 among others, and the notion of *emergent grammar* in Hopper 1987), in the sense that discourse can be seen as the result of grammar usage in particular contexts, and, vice versa, grammar can be said to reflect discourse (“Usage feeds into the creation of grammar just as much as grammar determines the shape of usage” Bybee 2006: 730). This means that both phenomena that typically occur in oral speech as well as more grammatical phenomena (i.e. morphological and syntactic) should be of great interest for typology. However, typological studies have always focused more on grammatical phenomena, considering them as the *natural* field of investigation of typology. As a consequence, less attention has been paid to the typological investigation of discourse phenomena (see, as an example, the phenomena investigated in the WALs’s chapters).

With the term ‘discourse phenomena’, we mean linguistic elements and constructions that typically occur in oral speech and help to manage the organization, flow and outcome of communication (cf. Schiffrin 1987, Du Bois 2003). These phenomena are generally considered as the natural field of investigation of pragmatics, semantics, and discourse analysis. They range from connectives and information managing structures (e.g. topic shift strategies or introduction of new reference) to interjections and discourse markers (e.g. reformulation and exemplification markers). As already noted, indeed, systematic typological cross-linguistic investigations on discourse phenomena are relatively rare. Some exceptions are, for instance, Givón ed. (1983) and Lambrecht (1994) respectively on topic continuity and information structure in general; Brown and Levinson (1987) on politeness strategies; Ameka (1992) on interjections, Dingemanse (2012) on ideophones and Lahaussis and Treis (2019) on both interjections and ideophones; Mauri and Sansò (2018) on general extenders and non-exhaustive constructions; and Guérin ed. (2019) on bridging constructions. These preliminary works represent a pivotal starting point for a broader discussion, and, at the same time, they also confirm that typological investigation of this kind of phenomena is viable.

The rarity of systematic typological studies on these issues goes hand in hand with a scarcity of detailed accounts in descriptive grammars, in a circular loop that provides a critical challenge for the cross-linguistic investigation of this kind of phenomena. This empirical problem results in the need for mixed methodologies, providing evidence coming from different types of data, such as corpora, grammars, and behavioral experiments.

This workshop aims at investigating discourse phenomena in typological perspective, that is, adopting the methods and instruments of typology. Our purpose is to create a forum in order to discuss the theoretical relevance of discourse phenomena for typology and, vice-versa, how a typological approach can be useful to provide new insights on the study of these phenomena. At the

same time, we also aim at giving an account of discourse phenomena that usually are not described in the literature in typologically interesting languages.

The workshop addresses the following topics:

- i) cross-linguistic analyses, synchronically and diachronically oriented, on one or more discourse phenomena;
- ii) methodological proposals on how to collect, examine and compare cross-linguistic data on discourse phenomena, as well as methods to extract data on this kind of phenomena from both grammatical descriptions and corpora of specific languages;
- iii) language-specific (synchronic and/or diachronic) investigations that follow a typological approach and may raise issues that are relevant for the broad cross-linguistic picture;
- iv) studies investigating the correlation between discourse phenomena and typological features;
- v) studies addressing patterns of re-analysis or functional extension of grammatical elements towards discourse motivated functions (e.g. politeness, emphasis, etc.).

Possible phenomena to be investigated include:

- Discourse connectives
- Discourse markers
- Interjections and ideophones
- Repetitive patterns
- List constructions
- General extenders
- Intentional vagueness and non-exhaustivity
- Information structure management (e.g. topic shift, introduction of new reference, focus)
- Politeness strategies

References

- Ameika, Felix (1992), Interjections. The universal yet neglected part of speech, *Journal of Pragmatics* 18(2-3), 101–118.
- Ariel, Mira (2009), Discourse, grammar, discourse, *Discourse Studies* 11(1), 5–36.
- Bybee, Joan L. (2006), From usage to grammar: The mind's response to repetition, *Language* 82(4), 711–733.
- Bybee, Joan L. and Clay Beckner (2010), Usage-based theory, in B. Heine and H. Narrog (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Analysis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 827–855.
- Brown, Penelope and Stephen Levinson (1987), *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Diessel, Holger (2019), *The Grammar Network. How Linguistic Structure Is Shaped by Language Use*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dingemanse, Mark (2012), Advances in the cross-linguistic study of ideophones, *Language and Linguistics Compass* 6. 654–672.

- Du Bois, John W. (1985), Competing motivations, in J. Haiman (ed.), *Iconicity in Syntax*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 343–365.
- Du Bois, John W. (2003), Discourse and grammar, in M. Tomasello (ed.), *The New Psychology of Language: Cognitive and Functional Approaches to Language Structure*, vol. 2, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 47–87.
- Givón, Talmy (1979), *On Understanding Grammar*, New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Givón, Talmy (ed.) (1983), *Topic Continuity in Discourse: A Quantitative Cross-Language Study*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Guérin, Valérie (ed.) (2019), *Bridging Constructions*, Berlin: Language Science Press.
- Hopper, Paul (1987), Emergent grammar, in J. Aske, N. Beery, L. Michaelis and H. Filip (eds.), *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society: General Session and Parasession on Grammar and Cognition*, Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Linguistics Society, University of California, 139–157.
- Lahaussois, Aimée and Yvonne Treis (2019), *Ideophones and Interjections*, Workshop at SLE2019 Conference, University of Leipzig, Leipzig (Germany).
- Lambrecht, Knud (1994), *Information Structure and Sentence Form*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mauri, Caterina and Andrea Sansò (2018), Linguistic strategies for ad hoc categorization: theoretical assessment and cross-linguistic variation, *Folia Linguistica Historica* 39(1), 1–35.
- Mithun, Marianne (2015), Discourse and grammar, in D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton and D. Schiffrin (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, 2nd Ed., Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 11–41.
- Schiffrin, Deborah (1987), *Discourse Markers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.