

## Introducing a Topic and Saying Something About It – The Semantic Effects of (Non)Embedded Topics (Cornelia Endriss)

In my talk, I will argue that topics have to take scope over the topic-comment structure embedding operator. If this operator is a speech act operator (such as silent *ASSERT*), this treatment leads to a separate topic introducing act (cf. the referring act of Searle, 1969 or the frame setting act of Jacobs, 1984). The consecutive update of the common ground with these two acts results in a possibly exceptional wide (= islandfree) scope reading of the topical constituent.

Topic-comment structures are usually seen as a root clause phenomenon. However, they can sometimes be embedded, as they can be used to structure the CP-complements of certain verbs. Again, the topic has to take scope over its embedding operator, which is the embedding CP-complement verb. In case the verb itself is in the scope of another operator, this results in a (possibly exceptional wide) intermediate scope reading (ISR) of the topical constituent.

This eventually explains the hitherto unexplained difference in availability and non-availability of (exceptional wide) intermediate scope readings.

- (1) a. *If a/some student in the syntax class cheats on the exam, every professor will be fired.*  
c. *Everyone of them suspected that a/some doctor from the hospital was a quack.*

As known from the literature, (1a) is only two-way ambiguous. It allows for an exceptional wide scope reading of the indefinite and a narrow scope reading. It does, however, not allow for an ISR, where the indefinite takes scope over the *If*-clause, but below the universal quantifier. (1b), on the other hand, does allow for such an ISR. This is so because (1b) contains the topic-comment structure embedding verb *suspect* whereas (1a) does not contain such a verb.

I will offer some speculations on the classification of the topic-comment structure embedding verbs, which seem to be closely related to the verbs that allow for subordinated verb-second clauses in German. Unsurprisingly, there is a further correspondence to the class of verbs that allow for overt topical *wa*-marking in Japanese (cf. Kuroda, 2005).

In the final part of my talk I will briefly discuss an application of this approach to the analysis of biscuit conditionals (2).

- (2) *If you are hungry, there are biscuits on the shelf.*

Under the assumption that the antecedent is topical (cf. Haimann, 1978), a biscuit conditional is analysed as resulting in the performance of two consecutive acts, namely a referential act introducing the topic situations mentioned in the antecedent and an assertion of the consequent. This explains the unconditional performance of the consequent speech act, which is characteristic for biscuit conditionals.