Bettina Gruber

The Spatiotemporal Dimensions of Person

A Morphosyntactic Account of Indexical Pronouns

This dissertation is concerned with the deictic and grammatical category person and its associated linguistic expressions: indexical, i.e. first and second person, pronouns. Under the hypothesis that sentence meaning is computed from how words and their associated lexical information combine with each other, indexical pronouns present an interesting challenge: their actual referent can only be determined once interpreted with respect to the utterance context they are being used in. Formulated within the Chomskyan framework of generative syntax, this thesis develops a novel approach to the relationship between the morphosyntactic content, the interpretational ranges, and the associated crosslinguistic variation of these pronouns. Primarily based on data from Dutch, English, German (Indoeuropean), and Blackfoot (Algonquian), the main conclusion of this thesis is that person is derivative of spatiotemporal information: Firstly, temporal information plays a crucial role in its interpretation. Secondly, spatial information contributes the necessary contextual anchoring. Empirically, this dissertation draws on data from the domains of genericity, possession, tense, and modality. On the basis of this evidence it is shown that the spatiotemporal information underlying indexical pronouns is also encoded morphosyntactically. From a broader perspective, this dissertation addresses questions concerning the relation between context and syntax, morphology and syntax, as well as syntax and semantics.

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