

Recent explanations of universals of the logical vocabulary:
the case for communicative efficiency

Anna Szabolcsi, Nov. 3, 2023

We regularly engage in theoretically inspired work on a variety of languages. But how important is cross-linguistic research for *general* theoretical purposes? Szabolcsi (2023) highlights a small selection of cases where cross-linguistic insights have been important to big questions in the theory of semantics and the syntax/semantics interface: (i) the role and representation of Speaker and Addressee in the grammar; (ii) mismatches between form and interpretation motivating high-placed silent operators for functional elements; and (iii) the explanation of semantic universals, including universals pertaining to inventories, in terms of learnability and the trade-off between informativeness and complexity. The talk will focus on the very last of these, based on Denić, Steinert-Threlkeld & Szymanik (2020) and Uegaki (2022), hoping to lead to a conversation.

Denić, Steinert-Threlkeld & Szymanik (2020), Complexity/informativeness trade-off in the domain of indefinite pronouns. SALT 30: 166-184.

Szabolcsi (2023), Cross-linguistic insights in the theory of semantics and its interface with syntax. To appear in Theoretical Linguistics 50. <https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/006992>

Uegaki (2022), The informativeness/complexity trade-off in the domain of Boolean connectives. Linguistic Inquiry https://doi.org/10.1162/ling_a_00461