

Yale Linguistics Colloquia Series, Fall 2006

Speaker: Sandra Chung, University of California, Santa Cruz
Title: Possessors and Definiteness Effects in Chamorro

Date: Monday, September 11, 2006
Location: TBA
Time: 4:00pm

Abstract:

Two types of definiteness effects have long been recognized in natural language and extensively studied in English: first, the requirement that pivots of existential sentences must be weak (see Milsark 1977 and many others); and second, the requirement that subjects of individual-level predicates must be strong (Postal 1969, Carlson 1980, Diesing 1992). It is perhaps less widely known that in English, the strength or weakness of a possessed DP is determined by the strength or weakness of the possessor (Woisetschlaeger 1983, Barker 2000, Rawlins 2006). What is the typological profile of this POSSESSOR DOMINANCE (PD)? And what can the phenomenon tell us about the ultimate account of the definiteness effects?

My talk addresses these questions through an investigation of Chamorro, an Austronesian language spoken in the Mariana Islands. I show that Chamorro has the same two types of definiteness effects as does English. But Chamorro differs from English in that the possessor and D not in complementary distribution within DP. Curiously, Chamorro does have PD -- but only for one of the definiteness effects, not the other. I show that the fine detail of this pattern argues against Diesing's syntactic account of the requirement that subjects of individual-level predicates must be strong. At the same time, it offers support for Ladusaw's (1994) attempt to derive this requirement from a semantics-pragmatics enriched by the Brentano-Marty-Kuroda theory of judgement types.

References:

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