

How to build common ground, one syntactic layer at a time

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In this talk I will explore grammatical means dedicated to establishing common ground. Following Wiltschko (to appear), I assume that the syntactic spine typically assumed to generate propositional structure is extended to include layers of structure that serve to regulate language in interaction: the interactional spine hypothesis. Specifically, there are two layers of structure: an articulated grounding layer which comes in two guises: one speaker-oriented, the other addressee-oriented. They serve to encode whether the propositional content is in the speaker's ground and/or in the addressee's ground. The second layer on the interactional spine, the response layer, serves to encode whether the utterance is in the response set, which, roughly, corresponds to the table in Farkas' model of conversations. When it is addressee-oriented, it defines an initiating move, when it is speaker-oriented it defines a reacting move.

In Wiltschko (to appear) I present evidence for the interactional spine based on two empirical domains: the system of confirmationals (sentence-final particles such as *huh*) and the system of response markers. I show that these sets of particles are remarkably similar in ways that indicate the workings of the spine. In this talk, I present new evidence for the interactional spine based on two sentence-initial particles found in Austrian German: *geh* and *ma*. I show that these particles are used as response markers and indicate the epistemic status of the speaker towards the target of response. While *ma* is strictly speaker-oriented, indicating the speaker's surprise, *geh* is speaker- and addressee-oriented indicating that the speaker's epistemic state diverges from that of the addressee.

I explore the distribution and interpretation of these sentence-initial particles and I show how they differ from the sentence-internal discourse particles of German (*ja, doch, eh, leicht*). While the latter also express epistemic stance and are also either speaker- or addressee-oriented, they nevertheless differ from their sentence-initial counterparts. The sentence-internal particles mark the epistemic stance towards the host proposition, the sentence-initial particles mark the epistemic stance towards the target of response. Thus, I argue that the grammar of interactional language provides us with a rich system of marking how knowledge and belief enter into our mental worlds so as to allow speakers to synchronize their minds and build common ground.

References

Wiltschko, Martina. to appear. *The grammar of interactional language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.