
Tue Trinh
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

The syntax of rising declaratives

Thursday, 08.03.2012, 11.30-12.00

AG 14, Information structure in non-assertive speech acts

Rising declaratives, i.e. sentences that have the surface structure of declaratives, but are pronounced with a rising pitch contour, have been shown to differ from both interrogatives and declaratives with a falling pitch contour in their pragmatic effects (cf. Gunlogson 2003; Safarova 2005, 2007; Truckenbrodt 2006). In this talk, I present additional observations in support of this conclusion and propose an analysis of rising declaratives, which takes the rising intonation to determine the resolution of a variable in the syntactically represented speech act projection. The pragmatic effects associated with rising declaratives are shown to follow from this minimal assumption and independently motivated tenets of speech act theory. The proposal is thus reminiscent of an old approach to speech acts: the Performative Hypothesis (Sadock 1974). I suggest a way to overcome difficulties which are faced by this approach and which have been considered decisive arguments against it (cf. Gazdar 1979). Finally, I discuss a class of Vietnamese sentences whose usage is similar to that of rising declaratives in English and whose syntax mirrors the analysis I proposed for the latter in a more transparent manner.

References

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- Safarova, Marie (2005): The semantics of rising intonation in interrogatives and declaratives. In: *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 9*: 355–369.
- Truckenbrodt, Hubert. 2006. On the semantic motivation of syntactic verb movement to C in German. In: *Theoretical Linguistics* 32, 257–306.