

Talks of SFB632

Project: A3

Speaker:

Marie Safarova (University of Amsterdam)

Time: Monday, 12.12.05, 17:00

Place:

University of Potsdam, Golm, Room 24.075

Title:

Questions and Intonation in American English

Abstract:

The first part of the talk will focus on identification of questions (especially, polar questions) in conversational corpora, normally the first step in a corpus study of question intonation.

Given the lack of consensus in the literature on what constitutes the correct procedure, one way to resolve the issue is to turn to speakers' intuitions. However, results of an experimental task show that native speakers understand the term in significantly different ways, confounding, e.g. the core pragmatic effect of interrogatives (seeking an evaluative response from the listener) with the general effect of response-seeking utterances (including imperatives, expressions of epistemic uncertainty and acknowledgment elicitation).

In the second part of the talk, intonational contours associated with evaluative response-seeking utterances are analyzed semantically. Based on experimental evidence, as well as observations found in the literature, it will be argued that the use of these contours (described as 'rising' by Gunlogson (2001)) can be captured in a uniform manner if we assume that they express epistemic uncertainty, formally translated as the test operator in update semantics. Their frequent conversational effect (that of eliciting a response from the addressee) is then mainly due to Grice's maxims, here translated into formal language.