Adjuncts as (separate) discourse units: a QUD-based account

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In QUD-based approaches to information structure, several types of (nominal) modifiers have been characterized as providing non at-issue (NAI) material, in particular nominal modifiers, such as adnominal appositions, non-restrictive relative clauses and parentheticals. In our talk, we will broaden the empirical domain and take a closer look at the information structural properties of other types of adjuncts under the QUD perspective. We will provide authentica data containing sentential and adverbial modifiers, such as temporal, spatial, or manner prepositional phrases, as well as different types of adverbial clauses.

Our analysis relies on the discourse-analytic approach of Riester, Brunetti, and De Kuthy (2018), which identifies the (generally implicit, sometimes explicit) Question Under Discussion preceding each utterance of a text employing explicit pragmatic principles. This approach provides a way of precisely deriving the QUD and the information structure of utterances in a wide range of corpus data.

Our corpus data show that in many cases adverbial modifiers provide, similar to the above mentioned nominal modifiers, optional material with respect to the QUD. We will, however, argue that they do not exhibit typical characteristics of NAI expressions. Instead, we provide a range of corpus data showing that such adverbial adjuncts answer a separate QUD that advances the discourse and should thus be part of the overall discourse structure. In such cases, these adjuncts should be treated as separate discourse units with their own information structure. The embedding utterance can thus be characterized as an utterance with several at-issue parts answering different QUDs.

References

Riester, A., L. Brunetti & K. De Kuthy (2018). Annotation Guidelines for Questions under Discussion and Information Structure. In E. Adamou, K. Haude, & M. Vanhove (eds.), *Information structure in lesser-described languages: Studies in prosody and syntax*, John Benjamins, Studies in Language Companion Series.