
A cross-linguistic study on Topic within the framework of the language into Act Theory

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This paper aims to show how: (i) Utterances and information units can be parsed through prosodic criteria, and (ii) Topic function, defined with functional, prosodic and distributional criteria, can be consistently identified and compared across languages, namely, Italian (IT), Brazilian Portuguese (BP) and American English (AE). For cross-linguistic comparison we selected language samples of approximately 30.000 words and 20 texts. The IT sample is derived from the C-ORAL-ROM (Cresti & Moneglia 2005), the BP sample is derived from C-ORAL-BRASIL (Raso & Mello 2012) and the AE sample comes from a re-segmentation of parts of the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (Du Bois et al 2005). Prosodic boundaries signal the segmentation of spontaneous speech into tone units and utterances (the minimal stretch of speech that is autonomously interpretable both pragmatically and prosodically in discourse). Each tone unit correlates with one Information Unit (IU). IUs are identified through three criteria: function, prosodic profile and distribution (Cresti 2000; Moneglia & Raso 2014). The cross-linguistic analysis shows that the concept of Topic applied in the study is consistent across different languages. That is, TOP IUs were identified in the 3 samples using the same operational criteria described by Cavalcante (2016).

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AG2