

AG 13: “[...] von endlichen Mitteln einen unendlichen Gebrauch machen” – Recursion as a Central Issue in Recent Linguistics

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Since Chomsky referred to Humboldt when thinking about the ‘creative aspect of language use’ as a human-specific capacity and describing it by using recursive function theory, recursion is a prominent issue in linguistics. Recently, Hauser et al. (2002) argue that only syntactic recursion belongs to what they call FLN (Faculty of Language – Narrow Sense), i. e. that only this feature of the human language faculty is both human- and language-specific. Consequently, Hauser et al. are challenged by findings of cross linguistic fieldwork (Everett), by comparative psychology (Gentner et al.), and by a vast amount of literature describing similar kinds of recursion in other cognitive domains than language (e. g. Jackendoff & Lehrdahl).

Our workshop aims at recursion within grammatical theory as connected to cross linguistics and language acquisition studies. Moreover, we are interested in neurobiological research localizing aspects of syntactic recursion in neural tissue, e. g. the processing of long-distance dependencies (Friederici et al.). Beside these ‘biolinguistic’ aspects, recursion is also addressed by accounts describing language qua communication and not qua internal computational system (Tomasello). Accordingly, recursive structures of theory of mind, especially of shared intentionality, and their implications for linguistic pragmatics are also of great interest.

As the workshop aims at approaching the issue multidimensionally, it invites all researchers wondering – like Humboldt – about this gift of nature “von endlichen Mitteln einen unendlichen Gebrauch [zu] machen”.

References

Hauser, Marc D., Noam Chomsky & W. Tecumseh Fitch (2002). The faculty of language: What is it, who has it, and how did it evolve? *Science* 298: 1569-1579.