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DISCOURSE CONNECTIVITY
AND CONSTRAINTS ON RELEVANCE
IN SISSALA

by

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Abstract

This thesis is intended, on the one hand, as a contribution to the semantic and pragmatic analysis of a particular unstudied language - Sissala, and on the other, as an illustration of the role that relevance theory can play in guiding and constraining such an analysis.

In the first two chapters, I discuss a variety of approaches to the analysis of discourse, and argue that, in the current state of knowledge, relevance theory offers the only possibility of a genuinely explanatory account. In the remainder of the thesis, I look at a variety of semantic and pragmatic phenomena, and try to show not only that they can be insightfully analysed in terms of relevance theory, but also that their analysis has interesting implications for the theory I have used.

The phenomena I examine include the following:

- the interpretive use marker ré, and its connections with direct and indirect speech, 'hearsay' phenomena, expressions of propositional attitude and figurative speech;
- the particles má 'also', 'indeed', 'after all', and sté 'so', and their function as 'constraints on relevance' in the sense of Blakemore (1987); the relation between má in Sissala and the particle auch 'also' in German, and their implications for particle typology;
- the particle baa 'still', 'again', 'in addition', and its implications for the distinction between truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional phenomena;
- the contribution to sentence processing of a variety of specific and non-specific defining devices in Sissala;
- the quantifier wuu 'all', 'every', 'each', 'any', 'whole', and its implications for the distinction between semantic ambiguity and vagueness;
- the three different forms of 'and' in Sissala and their implications for the analysis of stylistic effects.