ZEFIS

EINLADUNG ZUM KOLLOQUIUM

Prof. Dr. Walter Bisang
(Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz)

**Complexity between Explicitness and Economy —
Overt vs. Hidden Complexity**

Most approaches define complexity in terms of overt marking either with regard to the number of categorical distinctions or rules that operate in a certain domain of grammar (McWhorter 2001, Dahl 2004, Sinnemäki 2011) or with regard to the recursive application of syntactic properties (Hauser, Chomsky & Fitch 2002, Givón & Shibatani 2009). But this is not the whole story. There is also a hidden side to complexity (Bisang 2009). If grammatical structures are the result of the competing motivations of explicitness vs. economy (Haiman 1983), overt complexity can be seen as a reflection of explicitness, while hidden complexity stands for economy and pragmatic inference. In languages with a high degree of hidden complexity, markers of central grammatical categories are not obligatory. As a consequence, these categories have to be pragmatically inferred if they are omitted and one and the same surface structure may be subject to various syntactic analyses.

The present paper will argue that Chinese (and other East and mainland Southeast Asian languages) are characterized by a particularly high degree of hidden complexity. Even in the case of Creole languages, there is a large number that shows lower degrees of hidden complexity, depending on the superstrate and substrate languages involved. This will be discussed with data on (i) radical pro-drop, (ii) coreference relations in relative clauses and (iii) clause combining from Chinese, Creoles and West African languages. The paper will conclude with the claim that there are two types of diachronic maturation processes—an explicitness-oriented type as described by Dahl (2004) and a pragmatics-oriented type that can be observed in Chinese and many other languages of East and mainland Southeast Asia.

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Prof. Dr. Monika Rathert & Prof. Dr. Jarek Krajewski

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