



Vortrag im Rahmen des Linguistischen Kolloquiums

24. November 2009

Scott Grimm
(ZAS Berlin)

Number marking and individuation: a view from Dagaare

The count/mass distinction is often related to a notion of individuation, designating a conceptual divide between objects (individuated and count) and substances (non-individuated and mass). In English, and many other languages, the count/mass divide aligns clearly with the capacity to accept plural marking. Here I present recent results from fieldwork I conducted on a radically different system - the inverse number marking system of Dagaare (Gur; Niger-Congo), wherein a single morpheme -ri sometimes marks the plural interpretation and sometimes the singular, depending on the noun. The Dagaare terms for 'child' and 'seed' exemplify the paradigm:

'child' : bie (sing) / biiri (plural)

'seed' : biri (sing) / bie (plural)

Systematic evaluation of the lexicon of Dagaare reveals that these markedness patterns in the count domain correlate to semantic distinctions of levels of individuation. In particular, the more likely the entity is to be viewed as individuated, the more likely the singular will be unmarked and -ri will mark the plural, while the more likely the entity is to be viewed as coming in groups or non-individuated, the more likely the plural will be unmarked and -ri will mark the singular. These data contribute evidence that the influence of individuation as an organizing principle extends beyond the count/mass distinction and that the semantics associated with lexical items are relevant to number marking generally.

I also consider cross-linguistic correlates to the unmarked plural in Dagaare which surface in an array of language types, including token frequency in English.

**Ort: Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften,
Invalidenstr. 118, Raum 117**

Zeit: 16:15 Uhr

Alle Interessierten sind herzlich eingeladen!