

The Role of Expletive and Empty Determiners in Predicting Cross-linguistic Variation
Veneeta Dayal
Rutgers University

It is fairly common practice to posit empty determiners to explain restricted distribution of bare NP's in languages, just as it is common practice to explain unexpected semantic behavior of overt determiners by treating them as semantically vacuous. In this talk, I look at Italian kind terms, which have overt definite determiners. These have sometimes been considered expletive on analogy with English bare plurals. But there is a well-known problem with this view, namely the inability of the Italian definite determiner to have existential readings of the kind readily available to English bare plurals. I also look at Italian bare plurals, which have been treated as covert indefinites. The inability of the Italian bare plural to occur in subject position is generally attributed to the need for syntactic licensing of the null existential, possible in object but not subject position. The problem with this approach is that the ban on bare plurals in subject position is not absolute. Suitably modified bare plurals do occur felicitously in subject position. In this talk I see whether it is possible to do away with empty and expletive determiners and still preserve the ability to predict cross-linguistic patterns linking syntactic form and interpretive behavior.