Effects of repairing illegal argument structures

15:00 – 16:00: Patrick Brandt, IDS Mannheim, brandt@ids-mannheim.de and Petra Schumacher, University of Cologne, petra.schumacher@uni-koeln.de

Recently, the idea that certain argument structure configurations violate conditions of the interface and are therefore in need of repair before interpretation has lead to exciting new perspectives on some long standing problems; e.g., Schäfer 2013 argues for passives of reflexive verbs that case and binding conflicts are repaired syntactically by means of a special, last resort agreement relation. Regarding the semantics/ pragmatics side of the interface, Schumacher 2015 presents evidence from event-related brain potentials that the processing of argument structures involving 'privative' adjectives like *fake* exerts a cost that is due plausibly to 'shifting' the reference of the full NP beyond the denotation of the head noun, cf. (2)

(2) Geart is a tall Dutch professor.   →   Geart is a professor.
    Geart is a fake professor.   →   Geart is not a professor.

Schumacher's experimental results suggest that the generation and ensuing repair of „illegal" argument structures may provide for particular sound-meaning pairings that would not be available modulo particular interface repair strategies. Further exploring this option theoretically as well as experimentally, the talk discusses whether – and how – surprising meaning aspects of certain argument structure configurations – in particular, modal interpretations of superficially reflexive mediopassives or of excessive structures – can similarly be attributed to special repair operations at the interface that lead to an interpretive shift of certain meaning components (cf. Brandt 2009).

(3) Der Text liest sich   nicht gut.   (~ man *kann* den Text nicht gut lesen)
    the text reads SICH not   well   (~ one *can* not read the text well)
(4) Der Text ist zu lang.   (~ der Text ist länger als er sein *soll*)
    the text is too long   (~ the text is longer than it *should* be)

From a theoretical perspective, the effects of repairs of *prima facie* unusable argument structures may provide an alternative to the postulation of construction meaning (Goldberg 1995) or to the stipulation of empty structure that is typically held responsible for unexpected meaning aspects in the generative camp (e.g., Bhatt 2006). We thus hope to contribute to making an empirical case against closing the analytical record on certain recalcitrant structures too early by retreating to descriptive as opposed to explanatory instruments in grammatical analysis.

References: Bhatt 2006: *Covert Modality in Non-finite Contexts*. Berlin: de Gruyter. Brandt 2009: Generische Möglichkeit in Medialkonstruktionen. In: W. Abraham und E. Leiss: *Modalität*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 79-100.   Goldberg, A. 1995: *Constructions. A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Schäfer, F. 2013: Passives of reflexive verbs: The repair of a Principle A violation. In: P. Brandt & E. Fuß (eds.): *Repairs. The added value of being wrong*. Berlin: de Gruyter. Schumacher, P. (2015): Processing vagueness: The online comprehension of adjective-noun combinations. Paper presented at the workshop *Gradability, Scale Structure, and Vagueness: Experimental Perspectives*. Center for Social Sciences and Humanities, Madrid.