



First announcement

The Communication of Certainty and Uncertainty. Linguistic, Psychological, Philosophical aspects.

3 -5 October 2012

University of Macerata, Italy

The International Conference "The Communication of Certainty and Uncertainty. Linguistic, Psychological, Philosophical aspects" will be hosted by the University of Macerata.

The University of Macerata, located in Marche region, in central Italy, near the Adriatic sea, was founded in 1290 and it is one of the most ancient Italian Universities.

Call for papers

Deadline for abstract submission: 30 April 2012

Conference Topics and Aims

The Certainty or Uncertainty of a piece of information communicated by a speaker/writer plays a significant role both in building knowledge or beliefs in the interlocutor's mind and in choosing the appropriate linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour during and after verbal interactions.

The Conference focuses on how speakers and writers express their individual degrees of Certainty or Uncertainty towards the piece of information they are giving hearers/readers during the communicative process, i.e. at the time when (= Now) and in the place where (= Here) communication occurs. This topic may be related, more or less directly, to what in the linguistic literature is called *epistemicity* and *evidentiality*.

Epistemicity may refer to the *speaker's attitude* regarding the *reliability* of the information, the *judgment of the likelihood* of the proposition, the *commitment to the truth* of the message.

At the communicative level, i.e. in the Here and Now of communication, the above mentioned definitions can all be reconceptualized in terms of the labels "Certainty" and "Uncertainty", in the sense that when I say, for example, *Certainly Peter is at home*, I communicate that it is certain for me, i.e. I am certain, that the piece of information p (= *Peter is at home*) is true, i. e. I'm saying that I evaluate p as true. *Uncertainty* means that, when I tell you, for example, *Perhaps Peter is at home*, I am saying that I do not know whether p is true or false, therefore I communicate p as uncertain, i.e. I tell you that I am not certain towards the truth of p.

Evidentiality usually refers to the linguistic markers that reveal the *source of information* communicated by a speaker, namely how s/he gains access to that information.

If I say, for example, *I see that Peter is at home*, I explicitly communicate the information source; though in the utterance there is no epistemic marker, the evidential verb *I see* is enough to indirectly communicate certainty.

Certainty/Uncertainty is very different from *Truth/Falsehood*: in ordinary discourse the latter usually has to do with the result of a comparison between what a speaker says and the state of affairs s/he refers to: for example, when I say *Peter is at home*, normally for both speaker and hearer the piece of information p is evaluated as true if Peter really is at home, i.e. if the utterance corresponds to the communicated state of affairs; if not, it is evaluated as false. Yet, in both cases (p is true / p is false), in the Here and Now of communication p is *communicated as if it were true*, i.e. *as certain*, through its declarative structure in the present indicative, which can be assigned the status of a morphosyntactic marker of Certainty. We want to stress that, in this example, I

communicate Certainty also when I intentionally tell you a lie or when, subsequently to the Here and Now of communication, p might turn out to be false.

In general, as a hearer, in order to know whether the piece of information that a speaker is giving to me is true or false, I need further and successive proof (when that piece of information is really new for me). In order to know whether the piece of information is communicated as certain or uncertain, I need no further and successive proof: Certainty and Uncertainty are already *encoded* in the communication, i.e. Certainty and Uncertainty are *intrinsic* features of communication, in the sense that they cannot not be communicated.

The Conference topic can be approached from different perspectives and in different - European and non European - languages.

Proposals are invited for papers mainly on linguistic, psychological and philosophical aspects of the communication of Certainty and Uncertainty. The Conference aims to be interdisciplinary and therefore welcomes proposals from scholars from different areas.

Proposals may be related to written and spoken discourse and to non-verbal communication (for example academic discourse, counselling, informal conversations, literature, media discourse, mediation, psychotherapeutic discourse, signs languages, etc.). We are particularly interested in studying the communication of Certainty and Uncertainty in dialogue (since this research field has been less investigated by scholars interested in evidentiality and epistemicity); we are interested in how it evolves during the interactional sequences between at least two interlocutors, how an interlocutor switches from Certainty to Uncertainty and vice-versa, how a content communicated as Certain or Uncertain is disrupted or argued, negotiated and co-constructed by the interlocutors. This may also be approached from a non-verbal communication standpoint.

Possible related topics

The subject of the conference is open to contributions that deal with the communication of Certainty and Uncertainty. A list of possible topics includes, but is not limited to:

- Lexical and morphosyntactic markers of evidentiality and epistemicity;
- Decision making;
- Deceptive communication;
- Humour;
- Counterfactual thought;
- Knowledge and Beliefs;
- Probability, Possibility, Reliability, Likelihood, Plausibility;
- Language and Cognition;
- Language acquisition and development;
- Foreign language learning;
- Translation;
- Institutional and non institutional discourse;
- Conversation Analysis;
- Non-verbal components of communication;
- Sign languages;
- Text analysis (literary, political, journalistic, scientific etc.);
- Mitigation and hedging;
- Politeness;
- Speech Acts;
- Modals verbs;
- Temporal dimensions and verbal tenses;
- Verbal moods;
- Epistemic future;
- Types of sentences (declarative, interrogative, imperative, if clauses etc.);
- Awareness, Emotion and Memory;

- Language and Power;
- Political Discourse;
- Argumentation and Persuasion;
- Media Communication;
- Computer Mediated Communication;
- Scientific communication and writing;
- Biomedical communication;
- Artificial Intelligence;
- Embodied agents.

Invited plenary speakers

The programme will include at least 3 invited plenary speakers

- 1. Jan Nuyts** (University of Antwerp, Belgium)
- 2. Franz Hundsnurscher** (University of Münster, Germany)
- 3. Werner Abraham** (University of Wien, Austria)

For further information (submission form, registration fees etc.) please go to the website

<http://www.unimc.it/cuc>