

First things first: subjects or adverbials?

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The way language users construct their sentences is the result of the complex interplay between syntax, pragmatics and processing factors. These patterns, as well as the available discourse alternatives, may differ from one language to another. This talk looks into this intricate interaction by studying the way language users fill their sentence-initial position in two complementary communicative tasks in which various pieces of information have to be structured. We first of all present the results of an oral picture description task in which we compare the content of the clause-initial position of Dutch and Marathi speakers. These two languages are typologically very distinct, but offer similar possibilities with respect to information structure (but with different grammatical tools?). The patterns for both languages will be compared with the existing observations made for L1 English speakers. Afterwards, we will elaborate the picture for Dutch by also examining the sentence-initial position in utterances produced in an oral story-retelling task.