Universiteit Leiden

Proposal Title

Investigating the interface of cognition and emotion: a Dutch-Japanese comparative semantic/pragmatic perspective

Applicants
Eligible proposals must have at least two applicants from Humanities, preferably from two different institutes.

Supervisor Name	Institute
Prof. dr. Marina Terkourafi	LUCL
Dr. Wataru Uegaki	LUCL / LIAS

Project description
Provide a brief description of the project (max. 300 words)

Imagine that you are offered cookies out of a plate with the words "You can have some cookies." How many should you take? One? Two? Can you take them all? The answer can depend on the emotive valence of the conversation you are having. In our research using a crowd-sourced sample of North American English respondents (Terkourafi & Weissman, under review), participants tended to interpret "some" as 'potentially all' when the speaker was expressing solidarity and approval (e.g., a mother rewarding the kids for playing quietly on their own) and as meaning 'less than all' when the speaker was seen as distancing themselves from the listener (e.g., a mother irritated with the kids who have been pestering her for cookies). These results support the conclusion that emotional valence (positive vs. negative) plays an important role in utterance interpretation (cf. Kousta et al. 2009), in this case interacting with, and shaping the outcome of, cognitive processes such as the inference from the scalar expression "some" to 'potentially all' or 'less than all' (see also Bonnefon et al. 2009). However, currently available empirical evidence leaves open the cross-linguistic validity of this hypothesis and hence the possibility to construct a more general theory about the interface of cognition and emotion in this respect. To address this question, we propose to conduct a cross-linguistic study of scalar expressions in Dutch and in Japanese, in which we will systematically vary both the types of linguistic elements inviting scalar interpretations and the situational conditions under which they do so.

Dutch and Japanese are two languages with different sets of scalar expressions and opposite interactional orientations (individualism vs. collectivism), which are expected to interface differently with (positive vs. negative) emotional valence. Moreover, since Japanese offers a distinct set of scalar expressions (e.g., two-way distinction in the disjunction ('or') particles: *ka* and *ya*) from Dutch and English, it presents an interesting test case for a general theory of the relationship between scalar inference and emotion. We will use the methods of experimental pragmatics to design a survey that will investigate the intuitions of native

speakers of Dutch and of Japanese regarding the interpretation of several scalar terms in a variety of contexts such as those described above. Materials preparation will involve identifying ecologically valid, cross-culturally appropriate situations in Dutch and in Japanese and writing short contexts in which to embed the target expressions in each language. This research will not only contribute to our understanding of how emotive aspects of the situation can regulate the informational content of utterances but also yield new data and insights into a pair of languages previously unexplored in this respect.

Works cited:

Bonnefon, Jean-François, Feeney, Aidan and Gaëlle Villejoubert (2009) When some is actually all: Scalar inferences in face-threatening contexts. *Cognition* 112: 2, 249-258.

Kousta, Stavroula-Thaleia, Vinson David and Gabriella, Vigliocco (2009) Emotion words, regardless of polarity, have a processing advantage over neutral words. *Cognition* 112: 473–481.

Terkourafi, Marina and Ben Weissman (under review) New insights into the interface of politeness and face. *Cognition*.

Research Trainee Profile
Each proposal requests two Research Trainees. Describe the general tasks of the research trainees, whether they need any preliminary knowledge (regarding the topic and/or research methods) and which skills the research trainees should have. Also specify which type of students are eligible to apply (Ba, Ma, ResMa).

The Research Trainees will be primarily responsible for preparing and norming the experimental materials as well as recruiting subjects and running the experiments. Eligible applicants should have native or near-native knowledge of at least one of the target languages and basic knowledge of linguistics. Applications by both BA and MA/ResMA students are welcome. Applicants at the MA or ResMA level should preferably have taken a course in Pragmatics offered by the Department of Linguistics (Pragmatics and Grammar or equivalent). Some knowledge of statistics and experience with statistical software packages such as R is a plus.

Collaboration
If applicable: Describe how your research improves collaboration and cross-pollination between the disciplines involved (max. 300 words)

Existing research has largely assumed that scalar interpretations are triggered in a uniform way across languages and cultures. However, the interplay of the inferential patterns and emotion discovered in our preliminary study (Terkourafi & Weissman, under review) suggests that language-specific factors (lexical semantic properties of the expressions investigated) may play a significant role in triggering different inferential mechanisms under different context conditions. The proposed project is thus a comparative semantic and pragmatic study into the relation between inference and emotional aspects of the situational context. Semantic-pragmatic research is increasingly important internationally, but this is rarely done from a comparative perspective, which can only be collaboratively pursued.

For the purposes of this project, the expertise in Japanese linguistics available at LIAS will be crucial for developing suitable experimental materials as well as in interpreting the results vis-à-vis theories about the fine-grained lexical semantics of the expressions involved. LUCL will provide expertise regarding the experimental protocol and integrating the results into the overarching theoretical picture. This includes designing the experiments in a way suitable for cross-linguistic comparison, and interpreting the results in terms of a general theory about the relationship between scalar inference and emotion.

The proposed project will offer trainees a unique opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the field of experimental pragmatics, an exciting new field lying at the intersection of theoretical pragmatics and experimental psychology. It will further serve to spearhead experimental pragmatic research in Leiden, making use of our combined research expertise and the research facilities available here.

Deliverables
Enumerate intended project results: papers, research proposals or otherwise. (max 200 words)

Results will be written up in the form of an article submitted to a peer reviewed journal in which the research trainees will be included as co-authors. Since this is innovative research, it will raise many new questions, not only at the level of semantics and pragmatics but also at the psycholinguistic level. If, as we expect, our results point in the direction of different inferential mechanisms being activated by the use of scalar expressions in the different context conditions investigated, further experimentation using online techniques (eye-tracking, ERP) will be warranted to clarify the type of inferential processes involved.

The results of the current project will therefore furnish the springboard for a doctoral or post-doctoral proposal on this topic, which will be submitted to funding schemes such as the NWO PhD in the Humanities or ERC MCSA Independent Fellowship.

Other suitable platforms for follow-up funding include the NWO Vrije Competitie (or similar NWO follow-up scheme), an ERC starting grant and other interdisciplinary grants (as announced).

Planning
Provide a breakdown of the project into phases with tentative timing (max 150 words)

Months 1-2: Literature review, design of experimental stimuli
Month 3: Stimuli norming
Months 4-5: Running of experiments
Months 6-8: Data analysis, interpretation and results write-up

Student Application
Provide information on how to apply e.g. required documents for application (resume, motivation letter etc.) and an email address where student applications should be sent to.

Interested students should send an academic resume, indicating relevant courses they have taken, as well as a motivation paragraph (max 100 words) to m.terkourafi@hum.leidenuniv.nl.