

The Department of Linguistics
is pleased to present

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speaking on

Even in presupposition denials

Monday, January 14, 2019

2:30 PM

Location: HUM 2 - Room 259

Abstract:

This talk will explore a puzzle about *even* and its crosslinguistic kin. *Even*-like items in several languages are subject to a surprising restriction when they appear in declarative sentences that deny presuppositions: these items are only acceptable in presupposition denials that contain negation, as shown in (1) for English.

1. A: Did Kenji bring his wife to the picnic? (Presupposes: Kenji has a wife, i.e., is married)
B: He isn't even married!
B': #He's even unmarried/a bachelor!

I show that the contrast between sentences like (1B) and (1B') is not straightforwardly reducible to independent properties of *even* or of presupposition denial, but instead reflects something about how *even* and presupposition denial interact. I propose a solution to the puzzle that makes crucial use of i) the additive presupposition of *even*, ii) presuppositions triggered within the salient focus alternatives, and iii) an independently motivated mechanism for denying presuppositions under negation. The additive presupposition of *even* is controversial; I argue that the evidence used to challenge its presence does not show what it is claimed to show. I explore crosslinguistic predictions of the proposed analysis and discuss what the puzzle can teach us about focus-sensitive operators, presuppositions, and focus alternatives in discourse.