Georg-August-Universität Göttingen · Seminar für Slavische Philologie

Kolloquium zur Slavistischen Linguistik

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Even smaller than itself: Czech ‘sebemenší’, NPI licensing, and scalar particles

According to the classical generalisation, Negative Polarity Items (NPI) are licensed in downward-entailing (DE) environments – Ladusaw (1979). However, it has been known for nearly as long that some non-monotonic (NM) environments allow NPI licensing as well. Two recent experimental studies by Horovská & Dočekal (2025) and Dočekal & Horovská (2026) confirm that NM NPI licensing is also possible in Czech – of the adnominal NPI *sebemenší* (`even the smallest’). However, multiple formal approaches can account for NPIs in NM contexts. In this talk, I will report on the two mentioned experiments, but furthermore, argue that the unique structure of *sebemenší* among NPIs and its unique NPIhood among its fellow *sebe*-modifiers should be considered (such as *sebevětší,* `even the biggest’). With respect to these facts, having *sebemenší* be licensed by the EVEN operator as per Lahiri (1998), Crnič (2014) can explain not just its acceptability in NM contexts, but also the distributional constraints of the *sebe*-modifiers with non-NPI semantics.