Testing the implicature approach to Sequence of Tense
(joint work with Agata Renans)

In English, past tense stative clauses embedded under a past-marked attitude verb can receive two possible interpretations, differing on whether the state of the complement is understood to hold before, (1a), or at the matrix evaluation time, (1b).

(1) Eric thought that Kalina was sick. PAST-UNDER-PAST
   a. Eric’s thought: “Kalina was sick” BACKWARD-SHIFTED
   b. Eric’s thought: “Kalina is sick” SIMULTANEOUS

As is well known, the availability of the simultaneous reading in (1b) – also called ‘Sequence of Tense’ (SOT) – is subject to cross-linguistic variation (Ogihara & Sharvit 2012, a.o). Non-SOT-languages, like for instance Japanese or Polish, only allow for the backward-shifted interpretation (Boškovic 2012, Sharvit 2014, a.o.). The unavailability of the simultaneous reading has been recently analysed as arising from a ‘cessation’ implicature associated with Past tense (Altshuler 2016, Altshuler & Schwarz-schild 2013). We tested the predictions of this implicature approach by investigating the Polish-equivalent of sentences like (1) in Upward Entailing (UE) and Downward Entailing (DE) contexts, comparing their potential cessation implicature to the exclusive implicature of disjunction. In our results, we found that the latter was endorsed more often in UE than in DE contexts, as expected, while the cessation implicature was endorsed overall very little, with no difference across contexts. The disanalogy between the disjunction and the temporal cases, and the insensitivity of the latter to monotonicity, is a challenge for the implicature approach. The results are instead in line with alternative structural approaches, which expect no similarity between SOT phenomena and implicatures (Ogihara 1995, 1996, Kusumoto 1999, 2005, a.o.)