ABSTRACT
The aim of this talk is to gain a better understanding of structural sources of *external arguments* (EA), interpreted as Agents, Causes (Causers) or Instruments. Kratzer (1994) and much subsequent work revive the External Subject Hypothesis, standard until late 80s. This line of research analyses EAs as arguments of Voice, a functional category which selects a (decomposed) VP.

There are three issues, central to this debate, that I will address in this talk.

- What is the structural origin of EAs?
- Do EAs constitute a homogenous syntactic class? Are Causes, Agents, (Instruments) not only semantically but syntactically distinct arguments as well?
- Are EAs thematically licensed in the same fashion universally? If the mechanism is subject to parametrisation what are the consequences of the differential treatment of EAs cross-linguistically?

The answer to the last question is generally affirmative, very much in the spirit of the universal principles of theta-assignment, (Baker (1997)’s UTAH).

While I believe that EAs are *generally* introduced as arguments of Voice, I will propose that EAs are *sometimes* introduced as the highest argument in the verb template (decomposed VP). This takes place in ergative languages, when Voice is absent. I will demonstrate that introducing EAs VP-internally severely reduces their interpretation—external arguments of simple causative verbs in ergative systems cannot be understood as Causes.