

The construction of meaning

Introduction to formal semantics: extensional part

7,5 hp

Department of Philosophy

Stockholm University

Fall 2013

Description: The course gives a first introduction to the aims, methods, and results of formal semantics, also called model-theoretic or truth-conditional semantics. The aim is to familiarize the student with the idea of a compositional semantics, the basic tools currently used in this enterprise, some main insights obtained, as well as some challenges remaining. This course deals with the extensional part of semantics, thus leaving aside things like intensional verbs and attitude verbs, tense, modality, possible worlds, etc. (planned to be treated in a follow-up course). The intended audience is students in philosophy and linguistics, and in general anyone interested in the semantics of natural languages.

Prerequisites: Some acquaintance with the language of first-order logic. Otherwise, no specific background in philosophy, linguistics, or logic is required: we start at an elementary level and the tools needed will be introduced as we go along.

Level: Basic or advanced, depending on background.

Language: If required, the course will be given in English. In any case, the literature, and most of the linguistic examples discussed, are in English.

Literature:

References

- [1] Kathrin Glüer. *Donald Davidson. A Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2011.
- [2] Irene Heim and Angelika Kratzer. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1998.
- [3] Pauline Jacobson. The syntax/semantics interface: compositionality issues. In Nick Bezhanishvili and et al., editors, *Logic, Language, and Computation: 8th International Tbilisi Symposium*, pages 249–270. Springer (LNCS), Berlin, 2011.

- [4] Peter Pagin and Dag Westerståhl. Compositionality I: Definitions and variants. *Philosophy Compass*, 5(3):250–264, 2010.
- [5] Dag Westerståhl. Generalized quantifiers: linguistics meets model theory. In Maria Aloni and Paul Dekker, editors, *Cambridge Handbook of Formal Semantics*. Cambridge University Press, 2013. To appear.

Plan:

1. *Introduction*: Overview of formal semantics starting from Frege and Russell (in particular Russell’s account of definite descriptions and other noun phrases in ‘On denoting’ (1905)) via the generative paradigm in linguistics to Montague’s (and others’) work in the late 60’s.
2. *Compositionality*: History, background, formulation, and discussion of the idea of compositional semantics, using [4].
3. *Formats of semantic theory*: Algebraic and truth theoretic. Utdrag ur [1].
4. *Formats of semantic theory*: Logical form and type theory.
5. *Selected issues in formal semantics*: We use [2], chapters 1–7, as our textbook. In parallel, we (sometimes) contrast their account with Montague’s original approach and (often) with more recent accounts in terms of type-shifting rules, as in [3], rather than recourse to Logical Forms. Among topics we (hope to) touch on are:
 - introduction of basic tools like syntactic categories, syntax trees, interpretations, lambda abstraction, variable assignments, type theory;
 - interpretation of noun phrases;
 - generalized quantifiers; see also [5];
 - presupposition;
 - relative clauses;
 - transitive verbs;
 - Boolean structure across different categories;
 - noun phrases in object position;
 - binding and anaphora (if there is time).

Examination: Individual home assignments.

Schedule: TBW

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