



Der Sonderforschungsbereich 991 "Die Struktur von Repräsentationen in Sprache, Kognition und Wissenschaft" lädt herzlich ein zum Vortrag von

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Donnerstag, 26.06.2014
12:30 – 14:00 Uhr
22.01.2C

Plural quantification, maximality and compositionality - a modular approach

I will start with a puzzle regarding the semantics of modified numerals such as 'fewer than three', 'between five and eight', 'exactly/approximately four', etc. The puzzle is this: on the basis of their behavior in distributive environments, one is led to include in the semantics of such items a 'maximality' component. For instance, the sentence 'Fewer than five guests came to the party' can be paraphrased as "the *largest group* of guests who came has cardinality less than five, if such a group exists". However, in other environments, the maximality component is absent. For instance, on its cumulative reading, a sentence such as "fewer than 10 chickens managed to lay more than 100 eggs - these chickens are really quite prolific!" does not entail that the *largest* group of chickens that managed to lay (between them) more than 100 eggs has cardinality fewer than 10. Rather, it simply means that one can find a group of fewer than 10 chickens who, between them, laid more than 100 eggs (which is fully compatible with there being a larger group of chickens that have laid, between them, more than 100 eggs). After having reviewed various conceivable ways of giving unified lexical entries to these items, I will conclude that there is no simple compositional solution to this puzzle. I will propose an alternative view where the maximality component, when present, comes from an independent mechanism, but where some general economy constraints force this mechanism to be used when a modified indefinite occurs in certain environments. I will show that this perspective allows for a new perspective on a number of problems pertaining to the meaning of words like 'exactly' and 'approximately'. Time permitting, I will explore how similar ideas can be applied to the semantics and pragmatics of cumulative sentences more generally.

Studierende und andere Interessierte sind herzlich willkommen.