

Workshop "Meaning beyond truth-conditions: Practical meaning, Prejudice and Language"

Workshop overview

This is the first installment of a series of workshops on meaning--its nature, representation and interfaces--jointly organized by linguists at Leibniz-ZAS and philosophers of language at the Humboldt University, Berlin. The first theme will explore the representation of meaning and its interface with phenomena that arguably transcend the limits of truth-conditional theories. Carlotta Pavese (Duke University) will present a theory of practical meaning that explores the interface between meaning and motor commands, and Frank Veltman (ILLC, University of Amsterdam) will present an account of prejudice and generics that motivates a dynamic, non-truth conditional account of meaning.

Date: Thursday, 20 April 2017

Location: Humboldt University, Berlin, Dorotheenstr. 24, Room 1.505

Program

16:30–17:45 Carlotta Pavese
A Theory of Practical Meaning

This essay is divided into two parts. In the first part, I introduce the idea of practical meaning by looking at a certain kind of procedural systems — *the motor system* — that play a central role in computational explanations of motor behavior. I argue that in order to give a satisfactory account of the content of the representations computed by motor systems (motor commands), we need to appeal to a distinctively practical kind of meaning. Defending the explanatory relevance of semantic properties in a computational explanation of motor behavior, my argument concludes that practical meanings play a central role in an adequate psychological theory of motor skill. In the second part of this essay, I generalize and clarify the notion of practical meaning, and I defend the intelligibility of practical meanings against an important objection.

17:45–18:15 COFFEE BREAK

18:15–20:00 Frank Veltman
The Language of Prejudice

Stereotyping is a long standing research topic in social psychology and anthropology. But these are not the only disciplines to study this phenomenon; there is also a lot to say about it from a linguistic, logical and a methodological point of view.

Logically, a prejudice like 'Dutchmen are stingy' behaves as a default rule, a rule with exceptions. Given this, just pointing out that there are many counterexamples will not make people change their mind. The question is: what will?

To answer this question, one has to get to grips with the meaning of generic sentences. This can best be done in a framework in which the meaning of a sentence is not equated with its truth conditions but with its (potential) impact on the intentional state of an addressee.

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