Theme 3: Social Meaning & Semantics/Pragmatics of Harmful Speech

Thursday, 18 February 2021

13:55-14:00 Welcome
14:00-15:00 Elin McCready: Invoking Gender (11pm JPS)
              10 min break
15:10-16:10 Julia Zakkou: "Real" and "True"
              10 min break
16:20-17:20 David Pietraszewski: Understanding oppressive speech through the lens of humans’ evolved coalitional psychology
              10 min break
17:30-18:30 Eric Swanson: If You See Something, Say Something: On the Dynamics of Deniable Possibility Raising (11:30 am EST)
              10 min break
18:40-19:40 Robin Jeshion: What’s Wrong with Slurs (9:40 am PST)
19:40-20:40 Optional round-table discussion

Friday, 19 February 2021

13:55-14:00 Welcome
14:00-15:00 Uli Sauerland: The division of socio-emotive and logical meaning from the meaning first perspective
              10 min break
15:10-16:10 Anton Benz: Precision and Vagueness: Social meaning in Bayesian games
              10 min break
16:20-17:20 Michael Franke: Modeling manipulative language use
              10 min break
17:30-18:30 Roland Mühlenbernd: Politeness and Reputation
              10 min break
18:40-19:40 Justin Khoo: Speaker meaning, social meaning, and textual interpretation
              (12:40 pm EST)
19:40-20:40 Optional round-table discussion
**Invoking Gender**  
Elin McCready (Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo)  
2 pm CET — 11:00 pm JST

This talk considers the meaning and use of terms which make reference to gender. Such reference can be treated as invocational, and functioning to call up, reinforce and impose gendered norms. The talk discusses the mechanism, content and effects of gendered invocations.

"Real” and "True”  
Julia Zakkou (Bielefeld University)  
3:10 pm CET

TBA

**Understanding oppressive speech through the lens of humans’ evolved coalitional psychology**  
David Pietraszewski (Max Planck Institute, Berlin)  
4:20 pm CET

Humans have an evolved psychology that operates with great precision but without our conscious awareness. This talk will explore how the basic information-processing requirements of one such element of our evolved psychology—our ability to represent and keep track of group relationships—provides novel insights into what, precisely, hateful and oppressive speech is doing to the minds of the sender, receiver, and bystanders. The pragmatics of oppressive speech, in other words, are a window into how our minds represent group conflict, and vice a versa.

**If You See Something, Say Something: On the Dynamics of Deniable Possibility Raising**  
Eric Swanson (University of Michigan)  
5:30 pm CET — 11:30 am EST

Many speech acts raise the possibility that p in ways that are compatible with straightforwardly denying that p, for example by asserting that not p. This paper describes the dynamics of such speech acts and develops hypotheses about their social and political import.

**What’s Wrong with Slurs?**  
Robin Jeshion (University of Southern California)  
6:40 pm CET — 9:40 am PST

While many forms of speech harm and oppress, speech acts with weaponized uses of slurs are frequently singled out for special, deeper social censure. This paper aims to illuminate why this is so by revealing how one central wrong in such acts structurally parallels one of the deepest moral wrongs in interrogational torture.
The division of socio-emotive and logical meaning from the meaning first perspective
ULI SAUERLAND (ZAS Berlin)
2:00 pm CET


Precision and Vagueness: Social meaning in Bayesian games
ANTON BENZ (ZAS Berlin)
3:10 pm CET

Modeling manipulative language use
MICHAEL FRANKE (Osnabrück University)
4:20 pm CET

Linguistic theories of language use have focused very strongly on cooperative exchange of useful information. This neglects the fact that language is often used to manipulate opinions of an audience in subtle ways. We therefore propose an extension of recently popular probabilistic pragmatic models, couched in the Rational Speech Act framework, to also include an argumentative dimension. Drawing on earlier work on argumentative language use (Ducrot, 1973; Anscombe & Ducrot, 1983; Merin, 1999), we integrate a notion of argument strength derived from statistical measures of observational evidence into a model of the speaker’s utterance choice. We report on novel empirical data from two production-related studies. We conclude that speakers are willing and able to engage in manipulative language use and that the probabilistic formalization of argumentative strength entertained here offers potential new insights into utterance choice.

Politeness and Reputation
ROLAND MÜHLENBERND (ZAS Berlin)
5:30 pm CET

Politeness in conversation is a fascinating aspect of human interaction that directly interfaces language use and human social behavior more generally. We show how game theory, as a higher-order theory of behavior, can provide the tools to understand and model polite behavior. We model and study how the polite communications of thanking and apologizing impact two different types of an agent’s social image: perceived warmth and perceived competence. Our analysis shows that in a society of agents who value status-related traits over reciprocity-related traits, both the less and the more polite strategies are maintained in cycles of cultural-evolutionary change.

Speaker meaning, social meaning, and textual interpretation
JUSTIN KHOO (MIT)
6:40 pm CET — 12:40 pm EST
Words have meanings, and we can mean things by using them. But, in addition, actions and statuses have meanings too, in virtue of shared tacit assumptions. These social meanings shape our choices and can be oppressive, even in the absence of explicit speech. Philosophers have wondered about the prospects of analyzing social meaning as a species of Gricean speaker meaning, which is closely related to intentionalist theories of textual interpretation. I argue for an alternative view in which social meaning arises out of a web of shared associations, which may be non-intentionally signalled and only implicitly recognized. I then explore how interpretive discourse may both bring to light and create social meanings.