Semantics & Pragmatics: The Inquisitive Turn

intro

www.illc.uva.nl/inquisitive-semantics

Jeroen Groenendijk
September 8, 2010

The Inquisitive Turn

- Title of our research project funded in the NWO-free competition program, that has just started. Subtitle:

- A new perspective on semantics, logic and pragmatics

- Next to myself, Floris Roelofsen works as a postdoc in the project, and Morgan Mameni and Matthijs Westera as PhD students

---

Position Course

- MA in Philosophy

  - Philosophy of Language

- MSc in Logic

  - Logic and Philosophy

  - Logic and Language

    - Elective course

Nature of the course

- Get acquainted with more empirical linguistic and formal logical side of philosophy of language

- Ideally: for a large part a research colloquium

- Connected with current research in the new NWO-project: The Inquisitive Turn

---

History of the course

- I think the course runs for the sixth year at the UvA

- Since it relates to current research it is different every year, with chaos being a constant factor

- I taught a similar course at NYU spring 2009 and at the ESSLLI-summer school in 2008

- Last semester Floris gave a related course at UMass, Amherst

---

Effects of the course

- Especially in the last couple of years, when inquisitive semantics got more worked out and established, the course inspired several students in writing their thesis or other paper (partially) on inquisitive semantics, or to do projects/tutorials based on it

- Kata Balogh (PhD), Salvador Mascarenhas, Chris Brumwell, Inés Crespo, Ivano Ciardelli, Martin Aher, Jon Shaheen (MA), Irma Cornelisse (BA), Sam van Gool (MA-project), Sterre Leufkens (Ma-tutorial)

Prerequisites

- Some logic

  and

- Some philosophy of language

  or

- Some linguistics

Backgrounds

- Your backgrounds will differ

- The course and the assignments take that into account

- You have to take it into account as well!

Main field and topics

- Logical semantics and pragmatics

  - Semantics/pragmatics interface

- Questions and answers

  - My own research theme since 80's (G&S thesis '84). Also a theme in our research group in the ILLC

- Discourse/Dialogue coherence

Framework

- Natural language semantics
  - Logical approach, in the tradition of Montague Grammar
- Dynamic semantics/update semantics
  - Meaning as context change potential
    - versus meaning as truth-conditional (propositional) content

What's New

- Inquisitive semantics
- No strict division between informative sentences (indicatives) and inquisitive sentences (interrogatives)
- Meaning is informative + inquisitive content
- Further extension: attentive content (might)

Why study Questions?

- To address philosophical scepsis about logical approach to language (e.g. Wittgenstein PU)
  - Standard logic, and logical semantics deals with truth, validity, propositional content
- Many uses of language are not descriptive, assertoric, are outside reach of logical semantics
  - Show this not to be the case

Another reason

My own original motivation:

- Formalization of Gricean pragmatics
  - One of Grice' Maxims: Be relevant!
  - Stick to the topic, the issue of the conversation
    - Relate this to question-answers
    - Make a logic of questions and answers

My basic position

- Interrogative sentences (questions) have their own specific kind of semantic content (dynamically: specific kind of context change)
  - Contra: reduce interrogatives to indicatives (or imperatives)
  - Also contra: difference is pragmatic rather than semantic (speech act theory)

The logic of questions

- Questions have their own logic
  - Entailment relations between questions
  - Answerhood is a logical relation between interrogatives and indicatives
- Adding questions leads to new perspectives on logic

Logic and discourse

- Discourse - sequence of sentences
- You can look upon standard logic as judging whether a piece of argumentation is correct (valid)
- Adding questions as a topic, you can judge the correctness of discourses from the viewpoint of informativeness and relatedness

Gricean Pragmatics

Grice, Logic and conversation (1975)
Gamut 1 ch 6: Pragmatics: meaning and usage

- Notion of Conversational Implicature
- Related to Principle of Cooperation Conversational Maxims (Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner)
- Certain conclusions you draw are based on the assumption that the principle is followed

Semantics and Pragmatics
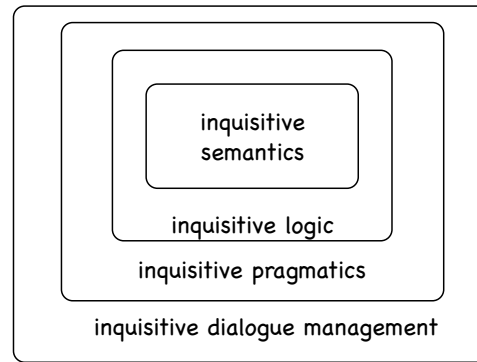standard picture, division of labour

- Semantics deals with logical implication
- Pragmatics with implicatures
  - Within theory of meaning, semantics takes care of truthconditional aspects
  - Pragmatics deals with other aspects of meaning, related to use

Inquisitive Semantics

- Alternative (dynamic) notion of meaning
  - Information and issues side by side
- Alternative ideas about logic
  - Compliance, relatedness as central notion
- Alternative ideas about pragmatics

- inquisitive semantics
- inquisitive logic
- inquisitive pragmatics
- inquisitive dialogue management

An Educational Problem

- Inquisitive semantics is a new framework
- While being persistent in its basic goals and features, the underlying semantic system has run through different subsequent stages
- Right now Floris Roelofsen and I are working on `third generation' inquisitive semantics
- What to expose you students to?

Three generations of InqSem

- First generation: Inquisitive pair-semantics
  - It was called Inquisitive Semantics until General Inquisitive Semantics (sets instead of pairs) turned up, now called:
- Second generation: Conservative inquisitive semantics
  - It is now called like that because:
- Third generation: Radical inquisitive semantics

Lots of work

- At each previous stage, lots of work has been done by several people on:
  - Motivating the semantics
  - The pragmatics it gives rise to
  - The logic behind it
  - Building a dialogue management system on the basis of it

More work

- At each new stage of the semantics, the logic has to be adapted, and the pragmatics, and the dialogue management system
- And on these additional features, each new semantic stage will lack behind on the previous one
- And the way in which things on top of the semantics are implemented may change radically as well

---

Current situation

- Radical inquisitive semantics:
  - Motivates the semantics better than any previous stage
  - Hardly any logical investigations yet
  - Floris and I just started to work on the pragmatics

Current situation

- Conservative inquisitive semantics
  - Logical features have been studied in detail (Ciardelli and Roelofsen)
  - Pragmatics well documented (Groenendijk and Roelofsen)
  - Extensions designed beyond propositional logic (Ciardelli, van Gool, Groenendijk, Roelofsen)
  - Nothing much on dialogue management

Current situation

- Pair semantics reasonably well-motivated Groenendijk, Mascarenhas)
- Logic studied in detail (Mascarenhas, Sano)
- Pragmatics also, but not well-documented (Groenendijk)
- Dialogue management has been worked out (Groenendijk) and applied to analysis of focus (Balogh)

Educational problem revisited

- We don't want to expose you to all subsequent versions of the semantics

- We do want to make you acquainted with the semantics, pragmatics, and the treatment of dialogue (and to a lesser extent with purely logical matters)

- The middle road is to start out from the second generation: conservative inquisitive semantics, but not wait too long in giving you an idea about the most recent developments