Inquisitive Semantics

intro

www.illc.uva.nl/inquisitive-semantics

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September 7, 2011

Today

- General intro to the course
- A first impression of Inquisitive Semantics

The Inquisitive Turn

- Title of our research project funded by the NWO-free competition program, that has started about a year ago. Subtitle:
  - A new perspective on semantics, logic and pragmatics
- Next to myself, Floris Roelofsen works as a postdoc in the project, and Matthijs Westera and Marlies Paenen as PhD students

Additional project

- Recently Floris received an NWO VENI grant for a new but related project:
  - Interpreting Questions - A finegrained compositional semantics

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 NWO-projects: The Inquisitive Turn and Interpreting Questions

History of the course

- The course runs for the 7th year at the UvA

- Since it relates to current research it is different every year

- I taught a similar course at NYU in 2009 and at ESSLLI 2008; mini-course: Osnabrück 2011

- In 2010 Floris gave a related course at UMass, Amherst; minicourses: San Diego and Göttingen 2011

- Together: ESSLLI 2011

Effects of the course

- 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, Kelly Veenboer, Noortje Venhuizen (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

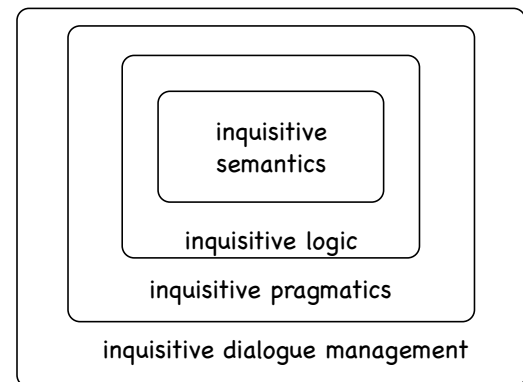- Semantics deals with logical implication

- 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

Rough Program

- Introduce you to the most basic system of
  inquisitive semantics for propositional logic

  - philosophical, logical, linquistic aspects

- Introduce you to several extensions that are
  under construction

  - open issues, further developments

- Discuss linguistic applications

Assignments and grading

- Midterm paper (30%)

  - 5-10 pages

- Presentation (20%)

  - on paper in progress

- Final paper (50%)

  - 10-20 pages