Abstract

According to prevalent textbooks, the principal objective of semantic theory is to determine the extensions of (arbitrary) linguistic expressions, thereby relying on a modified version (EC) of the principle (C) of compositionality:

(EC) Whenever possible, the extension of a complex expressions is derived by combining the extensions of its immediate parts.

(C) The meaning of a complex expressions derives from combining the meanings of its immediate parts.

Compositionality as such is usually motivated by learnability considerations: according to (C), a finite stock of lexical and functional meanings suffices to determine the meanings of all expressions. Yet given that the extensions of linguistic expressions are rarely known to the speakers, their compositional behavior is not immediately relevant to learnability. This talk explores the tension between (C) and (ED) by comparing several variants of the very notion of extension and how they relate to other semantic values (intension, character, etc.).