

Modification

Course type: Advanced (for students who are familiar with the basics of formal semantics)

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Description:

This course aims to discuss the challenges that modification poses for semantic theory, especially with respect to compositionality and the ontology. We will talk about the semantic properties of different kinds of adjectives and adverbs, and will entertain a cross-categorical analogy between degrees and manners, which is one of the current hot topics of debate in semantics and philosophy of language.

Topics:

1. What is modification? Why is modification relevant for semantic theory? (Definition, criteria for classification, mapping with syntax).
2. Adjectives. Classification (intersective, subsective and non-subsective). Intersective analysis of apparently subsective adjectives (eventive adjectives, relational adjectives). Restrictive vs. non-restrictive modification, and the interfaces with syntax and pragmatics.
3. Adverbials. Classification according to their category (PPs, adverbs) and to their syntax-semantics properties (manner, degree, agent-oriented, evaluative, modal, speech act, etc.). What are they diagnostics of?
4. Degree. Gradable adjectives. Degree expressions. Vagueness. Grammatical vs. semantic gradability (gradability across categories).
5. Manner. The manner-clausal reading duality. Arguments for a semantic parallelism between degree and manner.

Optional preparatory reading:

McNally, L. (to appear). Modification. In M. Aloni & P. Dekker (eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Morzycki, M. (to appear). *Modification*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.