

NYU Semantics Group 11/13/24
Dan Lassiter (University of Edinburgh)

The temporary-context theory of conditionals

Abstract. In this talk I'll sketch a new, super-minimal theory of conditionals that I've been exploring, based on the notion of 'local contexts' employed in theories of presupposition (e.g., Heim 1983, Schlenker 2009). The idea is that conditional antecedents reset the local context and do nothing else. For indicative conditionals – my main focus in this talk – this means restricting the local context to worlds where the antecedent is true; otherwise, indicative conditionals are just ordinary factual claims. The goal is to derive the remaining features of conditionals from interactions with independently motivated phenomena: (a) assertion as restricted to the current context, (b) domain restriction as due to dependence of operator domains on local contexts, and generally mirroring presupposition projection, (c) probabilities of conditionals as due to conditionalization on the current context. Time permitting, I'll close with some still-half-baked thoughts about conjunctions, disjunctions, and embeddings of conditionals.
