

Semantics Group 4/25

Speaker: Ang Li

Title. Local Alternatives in Comparison

Abstract. This work proposes a novel semantic representation of comparative markers like "more" in English, arguing that they compare two alternatives of the same type on a specific dimension, unlike traditional accounts that treat comparatives as ordering degrees. I demonstrate that these alternatives are derived locally at the sub-clausal level through the scope-taking of the comparative marker. I show that this meaning is motivated by previously unexplained patterns in comparative anaphora, such as the awkwardness of "more" in sequences like "John didn't read five books. Mary read more." because there doesn't seem to be a relevant standard degree for it. Furthermore, this analysis offers an elegant explanation for the cross-linguistically widespread co-lexification between comparison, incrementality, and continuation (see Greenberg 2010, Thomas 2011, Thomas 2018). By establishing that comparative markers directly target and associate with alternatives at a local, syntactic level—rather than relying on contextual provision of alternatives as in focus semantics—this work bridges traditionally separate domains in formal semantics and provides new insights into the relationship between syntax and alternative computation.