

Super Linguistics and Super Pragmatics

Thursday 23 May

Uni Bastions, room B101, 10h15-11h45, University of Geneva

Convener: Jacques Moeschler, University of Geneva

Short presentations (10 minutes)

Julien Musolino

Rutgers University

The Curse of the Carl Sagan Effect

In these remarks, I will follow up on Jacques's timely discussion of ethical questions as they pertain to the responsibility of intellectuals and I will briefly discuss a curious feature of academic culture that I call "The curse of the Carl Sagan effect". On the one hand, academic institutions, professional societies, and funding agencies make it clear that engaging with the general public is an important part of their mission, and they explicitly encourage scientists to do so. On the other hand, scientists who engage in public outreach find that, by and large, their efforts are not rewarded by their institutions. Compounding the problem is the lingering perception within academia that scientists who perform outreach activities are of a lesser caliber than those who keep their nose closer to the grindstone and worry exclusively about the pursuit of new knowledge. However, this perception is false, as has been demonstrated by a number of empirical studies. All this suggests that it is time for academic institutions to start acting on their professed aspirations, help dispel old myths with fresh information, and begin devising ways to reward scientists who dare to make themselves heard beyond the confines of the ivory tower.

David Blunier¹, Sacha Bourgeois-Gironde², Alda Mari² and David Nicolas²

1: Université de Genève, 2: Institut Jean Nicod CNRS/ENS/EHESS/PSL

At the frontier of behavior and language: the case of ambiguity aversion under subjunctive belief descriptions

There is a new interest at the frontiers of economics and linguistics for the interactions between language and behavior. Our work explores an aspect of this boundary, by addressing the question of the impact of language on the so-called "ambiguity aversion", i.e. the phenomenon whereby individuals making decisions in situations of uncertainty privilege scenarios in which probabilities are known (risk) over those in which they are not (ambiguity), even though the absence of information on probabilities should not induce behavioral preferences.

We will present an experiment using Italian data in which our subjects had to choose between a risky option and an ambiguous one. The choice is mediated by linguistic information about an hypothetical third person

containing belief statements in the indicative or in the subjunctive. We found that, when the subjunctive is used in these choice reports, the third-person attribution of a preference for risk is lowered. This experimental result suggests that, for Italian speakers, indicative and subjunctive moods impact the (description of) behavioral preferences for risk thus more generally leading to the hypothesis that linguistic information can influence (the representation of) default behaviors.

Constant Bonard

Department of Philosophy, University of Geneva

The Extended Gricean Model of Communication

It has become standard to assume that the code model accounts for non-ostensive communication and the inferential model accounts for ostensive communication. However, I show that there are cases of non-ostensive communication that require a version of the inferential model. Since all existing versions require ostensive signals, I introduce the extended Gricean model.

Daniel Dukes^{1,2,3}, Tim Wharton⁴, Constant Bonard³, Steve Oswald² and David Sander^{3,5}

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Theories of emotion and relevance

The concept of relevance plays an important role in a variety of different disciplines, a number of which can be found in the interdisciplinary field of affective science. In psychology, for example, while there is still considerable disagreement about how best to define emotion, there nonetheless appears to be some consensus that in order for a particular object or event to elicit an emotional episode, that object or event needs to be, in some sense of the word, relevant to the person in whom that episode is elicited. This notion of relevance in affective science is semantically close to constructs such as ‘significant’, ‘important’, ‘valuable’ or ‘impactful’. But while relevance theory in pragmatics has remained relatively immune to the notion of relevance developed in the affective sciences, the latter have remained immune to the theory of relevance developed in the former. In this presentation we will suggest areas in which we think theories of emotion and relevance can inform each other, thereby implicitly issuing a challenge to researchers in linguistic pragmatics.

Louis de Saussure

University of Geneva and Neuchâtel

French devoir in past conditional utterances and pragmatic counterfactuality

French necessity verb *devoir*, contrary to English *must*, has full conjugation. In particular, it fits with past conditional tense, in which case it usually - but only usually - conveys counterfactuality. A sentence like ‘Pierre aurait dû être surpris’ (lit. Pierre must-PastCond be surprised, roughly ‘Pierre should have been surprised’) conveys the notion that Pierre has not been surprised. This is surprising first because there is an epistemic flavor to the French and yet epistemic mood should not be able to scope over past time (Gosselin 2010 ; Mari 2010, 2013 ; Stowell 2004 ; Hacquard 2006 ; Laca 2012 ; etc.). This is even more surprising because neither *devoir* nor the past conditional in themselves trigger a counterfactual interpretation, only their combination does. In this talk I suggest that counterfactuality emerges in such utterances pragmatically as a result not of an epistemic but of a future-time auxiliary reading of *devoir*.