

Linguistics Seminar Series on

“Natural Language Quantification – Compositionality in Quantifier Phrases and Quantifier Words”

Lecture 1: Three Classes of Quantifier Phrases

Professor Anna Szabolcsi
New York University

Date: October 16, 2012 (Tuesday)

Time: 4:30pm – 6:15pm

Venue: LSK LT2 (Lee Shau Kee Building), Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

According to the classical view (Montague 1974, May 1985) and its refinement in Generalized Quantifier Theory, all quantifier phrases are built in the same uniform manner, from a possibly quite complex determiner expression and a restrictor expression, and their scope is computed in the same uniform manner.

The classical view predicts that the scope behavior of quantifier phrases is uniform, and that differences in the syntactic composition of determiner expressions does not matter as long as they have the same truth-conditional content. It turns out that these predictions are not borne out.

I take up some of the empirical issues that have redrawn the map in recent decades, as laid out in Szabolcsi (2010). Drawing on Beghelli & Stowell (1997), Reinhart (1997), Szabolcsi (1997), Lin (1998), and Stanley & Szabo (2000) I show that unbounded existential scope and clause-bounded distributive scope need to be distinguished for both unmodified indefinites of the ‘some book, two books’ type and for universals of the ‘every book’ type. I introduce the formalization of existential scope behavior using possibly skolemized choice functions that are either existentially closed or contextually given. Distributive scope behavior can be formalized using a silent ‘each’ operator on the predicate or a functional head Dist. Drawing on Hackl (2000, 2009), Geurts & Nouwen (2007), Lidz et al. (2011), I review linguistic and processing evidence that differences in the syntactic composition of modified numerals (‘more/fewer than n’, ‘at most/at least n’, ‘most of the n’) are significant, even when they do not distinguish truth conditions. I motivate a split-scope degree-quantificational analysis of comparative quantifiers.

ALL ARE WELCOME

This seminar series is supported by the Postgraduate Students Conference/Seminar Grant of the Research Grants Council, Hong Kong.

Organizer:



LAL CUHK
語言獲得實驗室

Language Acquisition Laboratory
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
Chinese University of Hong Kong

香港中文大學語言學及現代語言系語言獲得實驗室

Linguistics Seminar Series on

“Natural Language Quantification – Compositionality in Quantifier Phrases and Quantifier Words”

Lecture 2: Indefinites and Universals Decomposed

Professor Anna Szabolcsi
New York University

Date: October 17, 2012 (Wednesday)

Time: 4:30pm – 6:15pm

Venue: LSK LT2 (Lee Shau Kee Building), Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Various recent theories of morphology and syntax have converged on the view that there is no demarcation line corresponding to the word level. But formal semantic analyses often take words to be minimal building blocks for the purposes of compositionality.

In the domain of quantification, the cross-linguistically most interesting challenge to the word-based view comes from a small set of particles that participate in building quantifiers of the ‘anybody, somebody’ and ‘everybody’ type on the one hand, and serve as connectives, additive and scalar particles, question markers, and existential verbs on the other.

In the spirit of extending compositionality below the word level, I examine Japanese *ka* and *mo*, Sinhala *də*, Chinese *dou*, and Hungarian *vala/vagy*, *mind*, and *is* as examples of the phenomenon. Are the meanings of these particles highly regular across the varied environments, or are they lexicalized with a variety of different meanings that bear a family resemblance? If they have unitary meanings, are they aided by different silent elements in their different occurrences? Rather than making sweeping generalizations, I strive to keep track and make sense of how the behavior of the particles varies across languages. I will raise analytical possibilities using Boolean semantics, building among others on Gil (1995), Haspelmath (1997), the semantics of alternatives (Kratzer & Shimoyama 2002, Yatsushiro 2009, Slade 2011), and issue-raising (Roelofsen 2012).

ALL ARE WELCOME

This seminar series is supported by the Postgraduate Students Conference/Seminar Grant of the Research Grants Council, Hong Kong.

Organizer:



LAL CUHK
語言獲得實驗室

Language Acquisition Laboratory
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
Chinese University of Hong Kong

香港中文大學語言學及現代語言系語言獲得實驗室

Linguistics Seminar Series on

“Natural Language Quantification – Compositionality in Quantifier Phrases and Quantifier Words”

Lecture 3: Comparatives and Superlatives Decomposed

Professor Anna Szabolcsi
New York University

Date: October 18, 2012 (Thursday)

Time: 4:30pm – 6:15pm

Venue: LSK LT2 (Lee Shau Kee Building), Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

As a rule of thumb, formal semantic analyses often take words to be minimal building blocks for the purposes of compositionality; but there have been interesting precedents for setting word boundaries aside. The poster child for this approach has been the amount superlative *most*. It has been argued (Heim 1985, Szabolcsi 1986) that *most* is not a compositional primitive; it contains a proper superlative morpheme that takes DP-internal scope on the so-called absolute reading and sentential scope on the so-called relative, or comparative, reading.

I argue that further benefits can be reaped by pursuing the same approach even more vigorously.

Based on cross-linguistic evidence from suppletive morphology, Bobaljik (2012) hypothesizes that the representation of the superlative properly contains that of the comparative. I show that building the semantics in two steps, i.e. as $[[[d\text{-many}] \text{ comparative}] \text{ superlative}]$, sheds new light on why there are two robustly different intuitions about the semantics of so-called relative superlatives in the literature. The debate concerns what comparison is made in sentences like *Who climbed the most/fewest mountains?* On one analysis (Heim 2000, Hackl 2009), climbers are compared with respect to achievements. On another analysis (Farkas & Kiss 2000, Sharvit & Stateva 2002, Krasikova 2011), numbers of mountains are compared. I argue that there are two distinct comparative constructions out of which superlatives are built, and the two analyses correlate with this duality. The results are truth-conditionally equivalent, but they are not equivalent morpho-syntactically, and they are not equal in offering an insight into why a superficially definite noun phrase notoriously patterns with indefinites. Furthermore, if the hypothesis of Interface Transparency is correct, they predict different processing strategies.

ALL ARE WELCOME

This seminar series is supported by the Postgraduate Students Conference/Seminar Grant of the Research Grants Council, Hong Kong.

Organizer:



LAL CUHK
語言獲得實驗室

Language Acquisition Laboratory
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
Chinese University of Hong Kong

香港中文大學語言學及現代語言系語言獲得實驗室