

Manfred Krifka (Conditional assertion in commitment space semantics)

Abstract: There are two fundamentally different ways to understand conditional clauses: as assertions of conditional propositions (it is asserted that if p, then q), or as conditional assertions of propositions (if p, then it q is asserted). The first approach is prominent in linguistic semantics (Stalnaker, Lewis, Kratzer, von Stechow), and sophisticated theories have been developed to represent their meaning compositionally. But there are compelling arguments for the second (e.g., Dudman, Barker, Edgington; also Stalnaker, 2009), like the constraints for embedding conditionals under negation and disjunction, or the existence of non-assertive conditionals. In this talk I will propose an analysis of conditionals within dynamic semantics (cf. Heim, Veltman, Kaufmann, Starr for such approaches), in particular within the framework of Commitment Space Semantics (Cohen & Krifka 2014, Krifka 2015). CSS has a notion of common ground (called commitment space) that does not only assume a body of shared information, but also has a projective component indicating the various ways how the common ground may develop in the future. An indicative conditional does not affect the currently shared information in the narrow sense, but also its future development; the assertion of the conditional if p then q changes a commitment space so that whenever p holds in future developments, q is asserted. I will show that this modelling of conditionals predicts that conditionals cannot be negated or disjoined in a straightforward way, and that it allows for non-assertive conditionals, like conditional questions. I will also discuss counterfactual conditionals and argue that their “fake” past tense (Iatridou) can be understood as the process of going back to a hypothetical past information state in which the protasis p could still be consistently assumed.