

Rachel Rudolph

Differences of Taste: Analyzing Phenomenal and Non-phenomenal Appearance Sentences

ABSTRACT

In theoretical work about the language of personal taste, the canonical example is the simple predicate 'tasty' (Lasersohn 2005, Stephenson 2007, MacFarlane 2014, among many others). In English, we can also express the same positive gustatory evaluation with the complex expression 'taste good'. But there is a challenge for an analysis of 'taste good': While it can be used equivalently with 'tasty', it need not be (for instance, imagine it used by someone who can identify good wines by taste but doesn't enjoy them). This kind of two-faced behavior systematically arises with complex sensory-evaluative predicates, including those with other appearance verbs, such as 'look splendid' and 'sound nice'. In this talk, I examine two strategies for capturing these different uses: one that posits an ambiguity in appearance verbs, and one that does not. The former is in line with an approach to 'look'-statements prominent in work on philosophy of perception following Chisholm 1957 and Jackson 1977, and I consider how the motivation given in that tradition carries over to the present context. I then show how the data used to support the verbal ambiguity approach can equally be captured on the second strategy, which appeals only to independently-motivated flexibility in adjective meaning. I'll then discuss some considerations that are relevant for choosing between the two options.

Shane Steinert-Threlkend

Unnatural Language Semantics

ABSTRACT

Unnatural language semantics is the study of the meaning of words and expressions in languages that are very unlike natural languages. In this talk, I will present several case studies about how unnatural language semantics can inform us about the structure of natural languages. In particular, I will explain and present several case studies of two methods of explaining semantic universals (shared properties of meaning across the languages of the world): one arguing that such universals arise due to learnability, and another due to optimally trading-off the competing pressures of simplicity and informativeness. The talk will conclude with some discussion about the relative merits of the two explanations, and other avenues where unnatural language semantics can be helpful.

Daniel Drucker

Affective Attitude Semantics

ABSTRACT

There's a view of the semantics of propositional attitude verbs that I take to be fairly orthodox, what I call "attitudinal modalism", according to which propositional attitude verbs have lexical entries structurally like the ones modals have. While this view has some real attractions, including that it unites apparently distinct sources of intensionality, I present a number of reasons to reject it. The most important of these comes from the role that affect plays in the non-doxastic propositional attitudes; inattention to this has, I think, led a number of philosophers and semanticists to confuse the *truth conditions* of a non-doxastic propositional attitude ascription with the typical rational grounds of these attitudes. One possible reason this point has been missed is that it's really difficult to say *how* affect can be incorporated into the semantics of these expressions, and indeed whether or not it ultimately even should be. I'll explore these issues and tentatively suggest a way forward on incorporating affect.

DATE AND TIME

14/15 June 2021

9 AM 15 June Melbourne
7 PM 14 June New York

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