

# 1st Lisbon Workshop on Semantics

Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon

6-7 October 2006

## Description

The Lisbon Workshops on Semantics provide a forum where some of the best work currently done in the field of semantics and adjacent fields is presented and discussed. By promoting scientific interaction among semanticists working from different perspectives and in different disciplines (Philosophy, Linguistics, etc.), the Lisbon Workshops on Semantics are expected to contribute to the development of new views and arguments on some important and perennial semantical issues. Among the topics that might be discussed are indexicality, the semantics of tense, truth-theoretic vs. use-based accounts of meaning, the semantics of attitude reports, the semantics of anaphora, the semantics of names and descriptions, the divide between pragmatics and semantics, the semantic role of speakers intentions, context and content, the semantics of quantification, rigidity, modality, the semantics of adjectives, theories of reference, the semantics of pronouns.

## Hosting Institutions

The Lisbon Workshops on Semantics are hosted by the *Instituto Filosófico de Pedro Hispano* (Peter of Spain Philosophy Institute), an institution based on the Department of Philosophy of the University of Lisbon. **Peter of Spain**, the Portuguese medieval logician and philosopher, was himself an influential semanticist in the Middle Ages, having developed a highly sophisticated theory of reference (*suppositio*) for general terms. The 1st Lisbon Workshop on Semantics is part of the Project on Content (POCI/FIL/55562/2004), a research project carried out at the Philosophy Centre of the University of Lisbon, funded by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, and coordinated by Adriana Silva Graça.

## Organization

The 1st Lisbon Workshop on Semantics is organized by **João Branquinho** (University of Lisbon) and **Jason Stanley** (Rutgers University).

## Venue

**Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa**, Alameda da Universidade, **Metro Station: Cidade Universitária**

**Room: Mattos Romão**, Department of Philosophy (1st floor: take the stairs immediately on your left as you enter the building)

## Speakers and Papers

- **Chris Barker**, New York University: *Semantic side effects, and how to spot them*
- **Abstract:** Medicines have an intended main effect and, usually, side effects. So too with natural language expressions. For statements, the main semantic effect is (roughly) their truth conditions. Side effects can include interaction with anaphoric relations, presupposition, focus, and (I will argue) quantification. I will offer a concrete theory of how expressions build and manipulate their semantic context that distinguishes main effects from side effects in a principled way. The main test case will be a puzzle due to Caroline Heycock: as is well known, "the person every man loves the most is his mother" has an interpretation on which "is" equates functions. It can be glossed as "[the function f such that every man loves the person f(x)] is [the mother-of function]". But "his mother is his friend" does not have a parallel functional reading, that is, it cannot mean "the mother-of function is the friend-of function" (instead, the pronouns must be deictic). Apparently, sometimes the copula can equate functions, and sometimes it cannot. Resolving the puzzle depends on understanding the circumstances under which a side effect such as quantificational binding can be re-packaged as a main effect.
- **António Branco**, University of Lisbon, and **Francisco Costa**, University of Lisbon: *Computational Semantics*
- **Abstract:** Progress on the research on the formal semantics of natural language relies crucially on the computation of semantic representations: Because such representations became so complex that relying only on the traditional pencil and paper approach imposes a limit to the verification of empirical predictions following from proposed analysis; Because individual

theoretical accounts are becoming so focused on specific phenomena that its coherent integration needs to be secured; Because, if semantics is to be seriously brought into the scope of the cognitive science endeavor, the computation of meaning has to be proven to be much more than a unsubstantiated assumption; Because formal semantics may contribute to better human language technology and to the leveraging of the semantic web. In this presentation, we report on how these aspects are addressed in the work being carried out in our lab on the development of grammars for the deep linguistic processing, in the scope of a broad international cooperative initiative.

- **João Branquinho**, University of Lisbon: *On the persistence and re-expression of indexical belief*
- **Abstract:** This talk deals with the conditions under which indexical beliefs, especially beliefs expressed by perceptual demonstratives ('this'), spatial indexicals ('here'), and temporal indexicals ('today'), can be retained and re-expressed as time goes by. One of the key issues in the area is this. If one holds an indexical belief by asserting or accepting a sentence containing one of these terms on a given occasion, then what sentence or sentences should one assert or accept on a later occasion in order to preserve the original belief. I critically examine David Kaplan's and Gareth Evans's views on the issue and propose an account of persistence on which the notion of a memory demonstrative, a demonstrative typically linked to a memory image of a past object (an object which is no longer perceptually available), plays a central role."
- **Paul Elbourne**, University of London: *The Existence Entailments of Definite Descriptions: A Response to Neale*
- **Abstract:** Contrary to a claim made by Neale in the 2005 Russell centenary edition of *Mind*, the readings available to sentences containing definite descriptions embedded under certain propositional attitude verbs and other operators do pose a significant problem for the Russellian theory of definite descriptions.
- **Delia Graff Fara**, Princeton University: *"The customer is always right"*
- **Abstract:** In this talk I explain how, on a semantic view that treats descriptions invariably as being predicates (i.e., of type  $\langle e,t \rangle$ ), one can deal, by using the device of nominal restriction, with the interaction of definites with adverbs of quantification, in those cases, such as in "the customer is always right", where one intuitively feels that there is quantification over situations.
- **Jeffrey King**, University of Southern California: *The Nature and Structure of Content*
- **Abstract:** Many philosophers believe in propositions. Most of those who do have become convinced that propositions must be structured entities with constituents. Such propositions are often called structured propositions. Structured propositions must have something that binds together their constituents and imposes structure on the proposition. Even advocates of structured propositions have not been very forthcoming about what it is that does this. I sketch an account of what it is that binds together the constituents of structured propositions. I show that on the resulting account, given minimal assumptions propositions exist and that the account sheds light on how it is that propositions represent the world as being a certain way.
- **Nikola Kompa**, University of Münster: *Metasemantics*
- **Abstract:** One of the heavy workers in contemporary philosophy of language is, no doubt, context. We speak of context as fixing the reference of non-uniquely referring expressions, as assigning values to indexicals, as disambiguating ambiguous expressions or as completing what seems to be otherwise incomplete expressions. This heavy-duty conception of context is pretty much en vogue in the current debate. But we tend to forget that all this is figurative speech. If we would like to speak 'literally' instead, what would we say? In the paper, I will try to sketch an answer to that question. To that end, I will first look at the various roles context is supposed to play in linguistic interpretation and on the respective conceptions of context. In a second step, some minimalist proposals on how semantic content draws on context will be briefly discussed. Since I take all those views to suffer from the same inadequacy, I will, in a last step, outline and defend an alternative account by reviving a somewhat neglected distinction due to David Kaplan between semantics and metasemantics.
- **Peter Ludlow**, University of Michigan: *Indexical Sense*
- **Abstract:** Fregean theories of indexical content like Evans' have been criticized by Kaplan, Perry and others for their failure to account for cases like Rip van Winkle (who slept 20 years without realizing it). Before sleeping, Rip has a thought which he expresses as 'today is a fine day'. Afterwards, Rip has no corresponding indexical expression via which he can track his thought ('yesterday' won't do). I entertain a proposal due to Branquinho in which the tracking is mediated via memory, and offer that an extension to cases of third person reports of thought contents is possible if we follow Larson and Ludlow (1993) and develop a systematic theory

(involving a dynamic lexicon) of the ways in which diverse linguistic expressions can express the very same sense.

- **Adriana Silva Graça**, University of Lisbon: *About Speakers Intentions*
- **Abstract:** In this paper I will propose a criterion for the semantic relevance of speakers' linguistic intentions. The main reason for its proposal stem from the need to distinguish the speakers' intentions involved in the uses of sentences containing singular indexical terms (namely, singular demonstratives) from the intentions involved in the uses of sentences containing singular definite descriptions (when the description is used referentially). The proposed criterion will arguably do the job well -- other proposals available in the literature fail in this respect. I will begin by laying down the background philosophical problem from which the issue of the semantic relevance of speakers' linguistic intentions has arisen. In the background problem, I see two main controversial topics one can distinctively identify, and I take that the solution for the second one lies upon the solution given to the first. As to the first topic, I will establish that we cannot legitimately infer the semantic content of a sentence (relative to a certain context of use) on the basis of the proposition that may be asserted by the speaker (using the sentence in the relevant context). As to the second, I will then propose the criterion mentioned above, in the light of which we will be able to account for the intuitive evidence that the speakers' intentions involved in the uses of the two kinds of sentences at issue are, in a certain sense, of a different kind.
- **Pedro Santos**, University of Algarve: *Conditionals in context*
- **Abstract:** Conditionals have frequently been described as context-sensitive and their truth-conditional content is often believed to be determined by contextual factors such as the speaker's communicative intentions (among others). Thus two speakers may, on one given occasion, utter conditionals with the same antecedent and contradictory consequents without it being the case that at least one of them is wrong, or has said something unwarranted. Interestingly, and contrary to what a number of semanticists believe, counterfactuals and indicatives seem to behave in essentially the same way in this respect (in particular, Jackson's views on this matter will be discussed). The extent to which this is a factor in blurring the borderline between semantics and pragmatics on the one hand and literal and implicated content on the other, will also be addressed.
- **Jason Stanley**, Rutgers University: *The Average American*
- **Abstract:** Sometimes, apparently referential phrases occur in non-negated true sentences, yet we would be loath to admit the existence of the corresponding entities. One recently discussed example involves uses of "average" as in "The average American has 2.3 children". This sentence appears to be perfectly true, yet there is no average American thing in the world. Chomsky has claimed that this shows that referentiality, as philosophers think of it, is irrelevant to semantic theorizing. In this paper, I review the recent literature in semantics on the proper account of noun phrases such as "The average American", and suggest a novel account.
- **Zoltán Gendler Szabó**, Yale University: *Events in the Making*
- **Abstract:** The paper discusses the semantics of the progressive aspect and defends a revised version of Parsons' approach. The revisions come in response to three charges: (i) that Parsons's account fails to predict the entailment of progressive sentences by their perfective counterparts, (ii) that it incorrectly entails the existence of the direct object of the progressive verb, and (iii) that it neglects the perspective-dependence of the progressive.

## Schedule

**Duration of the talks:** 40 minutes, followed by a discussion period of 20 minutes

### Friday 6 October

**09:00 - 10:00** João Branquinho: *On the persistence and re-expression of indexical belief*

**10:00 - 11:00** Jeffrey King: *The Nature and Structure of Content*

**11:00 - 11:30** Coffee Break (Room 2.13. For speakers only)

**11:30 - 12:30** Chris Barker: *Semantic side effects, and how to spot them*

**12:30 - 13:30** Jason Stanley: *The Average American*

**Lunch** (Room 2.13. For speakers only)

**15:00 - 16:00** Pedro Santos: *Conditionals in context*

**16:00 - 17:00** Paul Elbourne: *The Existence Entailments of Definite Descriptions: A Response to Neale*

**17:00 - 17:30 Coffee Break** (Room 2.13. For speakers only)

**17:30 - 18:30 Nikola Kompa: *Metasemantics***

**18:30 - 19:30 António Branco and Francisco Costa: *Computational Semantics***

**21:00 Conference Dinner at *Solar dos Presuntos*** (Rua das Portas de Stº Antão, 150; near the Lavra funicular). **Meeting Point:** main entrance to the conference building at **20:00**. For speakers only)

**Saturday 7 October**

**08:30 - 09:30 Adriana Silva Graça: *About Speakers Intentions***

**09:30 - 10:30 Zoltán Gendler Szabó: *Events in the Making***

**10:30 - 11:00 Coffee Break** (Room 2.13. For speakers only)

**11:00 - 12:00 Delia Graff Fara: *"The customer is always right"***

**12:00 - 13:00 Peter Ludlow: *Indexical Sense***

**Lunch** (Room 2.13. For speakers only)