The semantics of provisional, temporal anaphors and cataphors

AG2

Daniel Altshuler
Hampshire College
daltshul@gmail.com

Dag Trygve Truslew Haug
University of Oslo
d.t.t.haug@ifikk.uio.no

Intro: A holistic theory of discourse interpretation should provide: (i) a way of segmenting discourse units (DUs) and (ii) relating them, as well as (iii) a semantics for both the linguistic expressions making up the DUs and their relations. Ever since Hobbs (1979), anaphora resolution has been a key guide for what (i)-(iii) should be like. For example, SDRT addresses many of the challenges imposed by (i)-(iii) by modeling anaphoric dependencies. The goal of this talk is to investigate an outstanding issue noted by Asher and Lascarides (2003): given a discourse context C and two DUs π_1, π_2 to be related by a relation R, it may be that C makes $R(\pi_1, \pi_2)$ the most plausible inference, but an extension of C may make it more plausible that a distinct $R'(\pi_1, \pi_2)$ is preferred. That is, inferring relations between DUs is non-monotonic. And since these relations entail temporal constraints, anaphoric connections between eventualities often undergo revision. This is especially apparent in the French novella, Sylvie, where, famously, the reader chooses a resolution strategy that she later finds to be wrong. Modeling this revision is both complicated and important. The complication can be summed up as follows: What semantics should we posit for temporal anaphors and cataphors found in Sylvie such that we could model their resolution as being provisional? This question is important because it is at the heart of (iii). To the best of our knowledge, however, it has not been addressed. The goal of the talk is to provide an answer. We adopt SDRT for analyzing the discourse structure of the key passages in Sylvie and extend Haug's (2014) PCDRT to deal with the temporal anaphors and cataphors. While our analysis is a long shot from what the systematic analysis of texts like Sylvie requires, we nevertheless motivate a future project to merge SDRT and PCDRT, which would enrich our understanding of how (iii) relates to (i) and (ii).

References: • Asher, N. & Lascarides, A. (2003): *Logics of conversation* • Hobbs, J. (1979), Coherence and coreference. *Cognitive Science* 3, 67–90. • Haug, D. (2014), Partial dynamic semantics for anaphora: Compositionality with syntactic coindexation. *Journal of Semantics* 31, 457–511.