Lit review work 1

Chris Potts, Ling 230b: Advanced semantics and pragmatics, Fall 2022

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1   Your task

The task for this initial project-related assignment is to create a bibliography of 12 items (papers, books, etc.) from a coherent part of the semantics literature. For each, provide 1–3 sentences about what its main claims seem to be, what theoretical approach it takes, and what role it plays in the literature.

You do not *need* to have read the work to include it in the bibliography at this stage. In fact, I am assuming that you will not have read most or all of the things you find. For now, you just need to learn enough to write a few sentences. The spirit of this is that you're on an initial fact-finding mission, seeking to find out what's our there in a particular space. If you like, you can include more than 12 works.

2   My example

To give you a sense for my expectations, I've done this for the topic of interrogative semantics, based on the things I cited in the 'Interrogative semantics' handout. My selection starts to head in the direction of Questions Under Discussion as an important idea for discourse and pragmatics.

(1)   Hamblin 1976: One of the first formal treatments of questions as sets of propositions. Embedded in Montague Grammar. Seems like the default view people think of when they think of theories of questions.

(2)   Karttunen 1977: Another foundational treatment of questions as sets of propositions, also embedded in Montague Grammar. Offers an extensive defense of studying embedded interrogatives to help distinguish semantics from pragmatics. Subtly different from Hamblin 1976 in ways that need to be investigated.

(3)   Groenendijk & Stokhof 1984: A co-authored thesis! Developed the partition semantics in detail, from the perspective of semantics as well as pragmatics (especially answerhood and contextual entailment).

(4)   Groenendijk & Stokhof 1989: Another presentation of the partition semantics, but focused on reasoning with interrogative denotations, and on compositional aspects like coordination and multiple constituent questions.

(5)   Krifka 2001: A defense of the added power of structured meanings, beyond what's possible in proposition-set approaches. The arguments range from basic answerhood stuff (fragment answers, the status of "yes" and "no", etc.) to challenging issues involving multiple constituent questions.

(6)   Groenendijk & Roelofsen 2009: One of the foundational formal (but still linguistic) papers on inquisitive semantics, which is related to the partition semantics but which extends inquisitive notions to other sentence types, especially disjunction.

(7)   Groenendijk 1999: A dynamic semantics in which questions and assertions have the same kind of update, allowing for an interesting simulation of "Twenty Questions" like dialogues. The semantics is related to, but turns out to be different from, the partition semantics of Groenendijk & Stokhof 1982. Also noteworthy because it overlays atop the semantics a pragmatics game with its own Gricean "rules". Thus, it can be seen as a version of Question Under Discussion theory. There's brief discussion of presupposition too (see Roberts 1996 for more).

(8)   Ginzburg 1996: A very early proposal for thinking about Questions Under Discussion as important for guiding both context dependent semantic phenomena as well as real interaction among real people. Somewhat related to the Game of Interrogation from Groenendijk 1999 but with more attention to the complexities of interaction in natural language.

(9)   Roberts 1996: Another ground-breaking early proposal for thinking about Questions Under Discussion. Focused on answerhood conditions, focus, and presuppositions. Full formal dynamic theory with data structures for keeping track of questions posed as well as information as it accumulates dynamically.

(10)   van Rooy 2003: Connects questions and other phenomena to decision problems, arguing that both denotations (especially, the restrictions on interrogative phrases) and answerhood conditions are related to the decision problem faced by the interlocutors. Dense but full of rich ideas. Establishes a correspondence between questions and utility functions.

(11)   Goodman & Lassiter 2015: Not about questions per se, but still deeply related to Questions Under Discussion, in that it offers a probabilistic framework for how questions (as partitions) can guide pragmatic language understanding. Lots of potential for experimental and computational extensions.

(12)   Rojas-Esponda 2015: A very original Stanford thesis using Questions Under Discussion, in the sense of Ginzburg 1996 and Roberts 1996, to analyze discourse particles in German (as well as topics like focus and basic conversational interactions).

References

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