



Department of
Linguistics and Modern Languages
語言學及現代語言系

Dynamic Semantics of Chinese Discourse

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Date: November 17, 2020 (Tuesday)
Time: 4:30pm - 6:15pm (Hong Kong Time, UTC +8)
***Seminar will be conducted via ZOOM**

Registration Deadline:
12:00nn of 15 November 2020 (Sunday) – Hong Kong Time
The Zoom Meeting details will be provided on 16 November 2020



Prior registration is required

Abstract

Formal semantics develops on the basis of logic and mathematics. These origins influence the development of formal semantics, and thus scholars have been trying to provide a complete system for natural languages. But natural languages are difficult to mold into a complete system, as languages reflect our thoughts, which are constantly changing in response to the context. Dynamic semantics is one of the challenges to provide a model for how we interpret a sentence in the discourse. In this talk, I show the application of dynamic semantics on the interpretation of interrogative sentences. First, I introduce the classic theory of interrogatives, i.e., partition semantics. Partition semantics regards that an interrogative divides the possible worlds in accordance with its possible answers. I show examples from Mandarin Chinese and point out that partition semantics can account for the most of the interrogatives in Mandarin Chinese, but is not sufficient to capture all of them. Interrogatives such as *ma*-questions and alternative questions are difficult to be defined. Second, I apply dynamic semantics to account for these interrogatives. File change semantics is one of the classic theories of dynamic semantics, and the recent development on the analysis of conditional questions shows a strong implication on the new treatment of interrogatives. I argue that both the static model of interrogatives and the dynamic model of conditional questions are necessary to understand the semantics of interrogatives.

Speaker

Satomi Ito is a Professor in Faculty of Core Research at Ochanomizu University. She received her PhD in Human and Environmental Studies specializing in Linguistics in 2004. Her research interests lie primarily in Formal Semantics and Prosody-Semantic interface. She has worked on a variety of research topics in Mandarin Chinese, such as mass-count distinction, adverbial modification, disjunctive questions, interrogative particles and intervention effects. She is the author of *Gendai Chugokugo-ni mirareru tansu/hukusu/sitsuryo-no gainen* (On the notion of single/plural/mass in Mandarin Chinese, Kohbun, Tokyo, 2005) and she published research papers in journals such as *Dangdai Yuyanxue* (Modern Linguistics), *Chugoku Gogaku* (Chinese Linguistics), *Bulletin of the Sinological Society Ochanomizu University* and *Ochanomizu University Studies in Arts and Culture*. Her interests also cover Chinese as a second language. She edited a text book for elementary Mandarin Chinese, *Lili-to hanasoo* (Let's talk with Li Li!) in 2018.

All are Welcome

Enquiries
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