

WEEK 2

Andrzej Wiśniewski

Chair of Logic and Cognitive Science
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
Poland
Andrzej.Wisniewski@amu.edu.pl

Jonathan Ginzburg

UFR Études anglophones
Université Paris-Diderot Paris 7
yonatan.ginzburg@univ-paris-diderot.fr

Title of the course: *Semantics of Questions and Dialogues*

Section: Language and logic

Level: Introductory

Content of the course:

Although questions play important role in communication as well as in cognitive activities, they attract less attention of logicians and (computational) linguists than it might be expected. Moreover, both communities seem unaware (with notable exceptions, of course) that much work has been done in the area of formal analysis of questions and questioning. The aim of our course is to present some important developments in the field.

The course starts with a general overview of the most developed, recent theories of questions and answers. Then a certain general setting will be used in order to characterize, int.al., kinds of answers to questions, types of presuppositions, and some normative concepts pertaining to questions. Next, the issue of question raising will be addressed and conceptual foundations of Inferential Erotetic Logic (IEL for short) will be discussed. IEL focuses its attention on erotetic inferences, that is, roughly, inferences which have questions as 'conclusions'. Some of these inferences are intuitively valid; it will be shown how IEL explicates the relevant concept(s) of validity. A separate lecture will be devoted to Erotetic Search Scenarios, a conceptual tool developed within IEL. It will be shown how this concept can be applied, first, in the area of problem- solving, and second, in modeling cooperative answering as well as the phenomenon of answering by means of questions. Finally, we will consider how reasoning about questions allows to model metacommunicative interaction, most specifically the process of repair (clarification questions, self-correction, hesitation).

Tentative outline

Lecture 1. (Andrzej Wiśniewski and Jonathan Ginzburg)

An overview of current approaches to the semantics of questions: reductionistic theories, non-reductionistic approaches, ways of assigning answers to questions, predicates selecting questions and their semantic properties.

Lecture 2: (Andrzej Wiśniewski)

Basic semantic concepts pertaining to questions in view of Minimal Erotetic Semantics: kinds of answers, presuppositions, soundness, relative soundness, informativeness, normal questions, regular questions, proper questions.

Lecture 3. (Andrzej Wiśniewski)

Question raising viewed semantically: evocation of questions, erotetic implication. Erotetic inferences and conditions of their validity.

Lecture 4. (Andrzej Wiśniewski)

Erotetic Search Scenarios (ESS). Applications of ESS in the areas of: (a) problem-solving in general; (b) question answering.

Lecture 5. (Jonathan Ginzburg)

Basic notion of coherence for dialogue in KoS. Clarification questions, corrections, and self-repair. A general definition of relevance.

References

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Wiśniewski, A., Answering by Means of Questions in View of Inferential Erotetic Logic, in: *Logic, Reasoning and Rationality*, Springer, 2012, to appear.

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Prerequisites

Basic knowledge of logic and formal linguistics.