

The Baltic International Yearbook of  
Cognition, Logic and Communication

October 2011      Volume 6: *Formal Semantics and Pragmatics:  
Discourse, Context, and Models*  
pages 1-4      DOI: 10.4148/biyclc.v6i0.1561

MICHAEL GLANZBERG, BARBARA H. PARTEE,  
AND JURĠIS ŠKILTERS

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

The papers published in this volume were presented at the 6th International Symposium of Cognition, Logic and Communication, entitled 'Formal Semantics and Pragmatics: Discourse, Context, and Models', taking place at the University of Latvia, Riga, initially scheduled for April 2010. Due to chaos in air traffic caused by the Eyjafjallajökull volcano that spring, we had to postpone the event to late autumn. (There was a mini-symposium in spring where some of the speakers who had managed to come to Riga despite the volcanic ash participated, including B. Partee, P. Dekker, A. Sevi, and N. Allott. Partee and Dekker also graciously presented a series of lectures on formal semantics and dynamic semantics.) We are pleased that after the delay, a very exciting Symposium was held in November 2010.

The main title for our Symposium was 'Formal Semantics and Pragmatics'. For many, this title will indicate a familiar set of topics (as indeed it was meant to), but perhaps a brief comment on our choice is in order. Semantics can simply enough be defined as the study of meaning in language. And yet, such a topic enjoys an embarrassment of riches in what might fall under it. Many if not all the traditions in the study of language have had something to say about meaning. So have many traditions in philosophy, and in psychology, and in the wider world of the cognitive sciences. The label 'formal' can be seen as singling out one important topic within these: the one whose development Partee reviews in her contribution to this Symposium. As

she discusses, this field emerged from the combination of two traditions, one in philosophy, marked by an interest in concepts like truth and reference, and by the use of the tools and techniques of formal logic; the other in linguistics in the generative tradition pioneered by Chomsky, marked by an interest in linguistic competence as an aspect of human psychology, as well as by a set of techniques for describing the grammar of natural language.

Since it emerged in the 1970s, formal semantics has flourished. At the same time, there remain some lively philosophical and foundational debates about its nature, and its prospects. For instance, as discussed by Partee in work in the late 70s and subsequently, the Montaguean and Chomskian traditions that have merged in the practice of contemporary formal semantics emerge from different views of the place of mathematics and of psychology in the enterprise. Balancing the abstract and mathematical aspects of a formal science with its empirical content remains an important issue, both for empirically focused and foundationally minded researchers. As cognitive science has developed since the 1970s, the relation of semantics proper (as a sub-field of generative linguistics) to the wider study of our conceptual resources has become increasingly important and increasingly contentious. The resurgence of neo-Whorfian views within the psychology community in recent years marks one aspect of this, as discussed by Pelletier's contribution to this volume. We believe the papers collected here reflect both the impressive development of formal semantics, and the diversity of issues and viewpoints that surround it. We hope that they offer a good snapshot of some of the important developments in the field, where it stands as an ongoing body of research, and how its foundational significance may be understood.

As logical and linguistic methods merged to form the field of formal semantics, the contribution of context to determining what meaning an utterance of a sentence expresses has been an important issue. It was among the topics addressed by the seminal papers in the 1970s that marked the emergence of the discipline, and has continued to be a key aspect of the field. In common parlance, the study of these contributions of context is labeled 'pragmatics'. The precise demarcation of semantics from pragmatics has long been a contentious foundational problem of its own—one that has been especially important in some re-

cent work in the philosophy of language. As with semantics proper, we see both a lively ongoing foundational and philosophical discussion of the nature of pragmatics and its place in the study of language, and an ever-increasing body of results encompassing both semantics and pragmatics employing various extensions of the tools of formal semantics. We thus found ‘formal semantics and pragmatics’ to label a natural set of topics around which a symposium could be built. It is our hope that the papers collected here reflect the richness of contemporary formal semantics and pragmatics, both as a developed body of results in linguistics, as a focal point for foundational and philosophical studies of meaning, and as a key tool for the wider study of meaning in the cognitive sciences. We intended our Symposium to further the on-going discussion between linguists, philosophers and cognitive scientists on the variety of topics related to formal semantics and formal pragmatics, and we hope the papers collected here illustrate some aspects of that discussion, and help to advance it.

The papers collected here include most of the invited presentations from the Symposium. (K. von Fintel and T. Gillies, Z. Szabó and J. Schaffer, and M. Glanzberg were unable to include their presentations in this volume.) They also include a selection of the many fine contributed papers that made the Symposium so lively. The papers cover a wide range of issues. The empirical phenomena that are analyzed include mass terms and classifiers, modals and aspectual verbs, pronouns, superlative quantifiers (like *at most three*) and superlative adjectival constructions, and focus and the semantics and pragmatics of *only*. Data came from languages including American Sign Language, Chinese, Dutch, English, French Sign Language, Guaraní (Tupí-Guaraní), Modern Hebrew, and Shupamem (Grassfield Bantu). Philosophical issues addressed include the nature of meaning and the place of truth conditional or inferential roles theories in semantics, the success of formally oriented theories like Dynamic Predicate Logic, and the status of linguistic determinism and the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis. Formal techniques relied upon include type theory, Boolean algebra, dynamic logic, and models of discourse. The connections between semantics and pragmatics are explored with specific attention to speech acts and discourse congruence. Connections are also explored between semantics and syntax, and semantics and accent placement. Finally, Partee

presents a review of some of the early history of formal semantics, based on personal experience and other sources, including interviews and archival work.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our thanks to everybody who has helped to realize this event and volume.

At the University of Latvia, we are grateful for the support of the Rector, Prof. Mārcis Auziņš, the Dean of Social Sciences, Prof. Juris Rozenvalds, the Head of Communication Studies’ Department, Prof. Inta Briķe, and the Director of Advanced Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Nils Muižnieks, Ph.D.

We would also like to thank our local organizers, first and foremost, Kristine Ante, and furthermore Linda Apse, Signe Cāne, Armands Leimanis, Signe Mežinska, Jānis Pencis, and Katrīna Smoļska. Many thanks also to the Executive Director of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Dr. Gita Blaua. Andrew Spear contributed skillful editing assistance, as did Signe Cāne with the layout of this volume. We would also like to express our thanks to everybody who helped us and supported us in spring 2010, especially the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga and Rector Dr. Anders Paalzow and Vice-Rector Dr. Diāna Pauna.

Finally, many thanks to the reviewers who assisted the editors with this volume, including Avery Andrews, Kent Bach, David Beaver, Christopher Gauker, Kenny Easwaran, Kai von Fintel, Per Anker Jensen, Nirit Kadmon, Manfred Krifka, Peter Ludlow, Marcin Morzycki, Reinhard Muskens, Chris Potts, James Pustejovsky, Adam Sennet, Chung-Chieh Shan, Eric Swanson, and Anna Szabolcsi. Thanks also to Robert J. Stainton for being a part of program committee.

Publication of the Yearbook is partly supported by the European Regional Development Fund, Project No. 2010/0202/2DP/2.1.1.2.0/10/APIA/VIAA/013 “Support for the international cooperation projects and other international cooperation activities in research and technology at the University of Latvia.”