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Title:

Intonation and Epistemic Bias

Abstract:

There is increasing interest in formalizing a theory of conventional discourse effects that derives associations between clause types and illocutionary force compositionally (see e.g. the Inquisitive Semantics literature, especially Farkas & Roelofsen). There is also growing consensus that analyzing the meanings of intonational tunes requires formalization in terms of conventional discourse effects (see e.g. Gunlogson 2008, Malamud & Stephenson 2015, Jeong 2018). But analyses of intonational meaning within contemporary frameworks for analyzing conventional discourse effects have generally comprised steps backward with respect to the project of compositionally deriving those discourse effects, stipulating construction-specific effects for tune-clause type pairs rather than seeking to derive these effects from compositional interactions between the contribution of clause typing to conventional discourse effects and the contribution of intonational tunes to conventional discourse effects. In this talk, I focus on the case study of rising declaratives. The sticking point that has led to the stipulation of construction-specific discourse effects for rising declaratives is that they are accompanied by inferences of epistemic bias that aren't present in other uses of rising intonation, e.g. polar questions. In this talk, I show how we can give a compositional account of rising declaratives that contains no construction-specific stipulations, in spite of the construction-specific epistemic inferences associated with rising declaratives. I assume that conventional discourse effects give rise to additional inferences in context, guided by pragmatic assumptions, just as the conventional semantic values of sentences do (Grice 1975). I propose some candidate pragmatic assumptions for conventional discourse effects, and show how they can derive the epistemic bias inferences associated with rising declaratives without necessitating the stipulation of those effects into the specification of the conventional update that rising declaratives carry out, allowing for a more unified and explanatory account of the contribution of intonational tunes across clause types.