

GSAS WORKSHOPS
Harvard Linguistics Circle presents:

Speaker: Ivano Caponigro (UC San Diego)

Time: Monday, May 21, 11:00 - 12:30 p.m.

Location: Boylston Hall 303

Title: Montague's turn towards natural language

Abstract:

In the early 60s, Richard Montague (1930-1971) still believed that: “[The] systematic exploration of the English language, indeed of what might be called the ‘logic of ordinary English’, [...] would be either extremely laborious or impossible. In any case, the authors of the present book would not find it rewarding.” Just a few years later, he radically changed his mind: “There is philosophic interest in attempting to analyze ordinary English” and “I reject the contention that an important theoretical difference exists between formal and natural languages.” At the very same time – not by chance – Montague changed his beliefs in what should be the adequate framework for philosophy: from “set theory with individuals and the possible addition of empirical predicates” to higher-order “intensional logic.” These changes coincide with the beginning of Montague’s seminal work on natural language semantics that culminated with the last three papers he published before his sudden and violent death. In this talk, I will examine these changes with the goal of gaining some understanding about what motivated them and what light these motivations may shed on Montague’s subsequent work on natural language. This investigation will be framed as part of a much broader ongoing project of an intellectual and personal biography of Montague.