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**Friday, November 11, 3:30
Boylston Hall 105**

Title: Two switches in the theory of counterfactuals: A study of truth conditionality and minimal change

Based on a crowdsourced truth-value judgment experiment, we provide empirical evidence challenging two classical views in semantics, and we develop a novel account of counterfactuals that combines ideas from inquisitive semantics and causal reasoning. First, we show that two truth-conditionally equivalent clauses can make different semantic contributions when embedded in a counterfactual antecedent. Assuming compositionality, this means that the meaning of these clauses is not fully determined by their truth conditions. This finding has a clear explanation in inquisitive semantics: truth-conditionally equivalent clauses may be associated with different propositional alternatives, each of which counts as a separate counterfactual assumption. Second, we show that our results contradict the common idea that the interpretation of a counterfactual involves minimizing change with respect to the actual state of affairs. Building on techniques from causal reasoning, we propose to replace the idea of minimal change by a distinction between foreground and background for a given counterfactual assumption: the background is held fixed in the counterfactual situation, while the foreground can be varied without any minimality constraint. (Joint work with Ivano Ciardelli and Linmin Zhang)