

Exercises due on: Wednesday, May 25, 10:00 AM (before class)

Semantic Theory 2021: Exercise sheet 4

Exercise 1

The following sentence (1) is syntactically ambiguous between the two readings indicated in (1a) and (1b), due to the notorious “modifier attachment ambiguity”. The syntactic ambiguity induces a semantic ambiguity.

(1) President Biden called a senator in Washington DC.

a. [S [S [S President Biden [VP call- [NP a senator]]] [PP in Washington DC]] PAST]

b. [S [S President Biden [VP call- [NP a [N' senator [PP in Washington DC]]]]] PAST]

- a. Represent the two readings as predicate-logic formulas, using an event-semantic analysis of the verb “call” (type: $\langle e, \langle e, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$). Give informal paraphrases of the two readings.
- b. Derive the semantic representations of these readings compositionally using beta-reduction. Explicitly describe the logical form (function-argument order) that you assume. Use the following lexical semantics for the syntactic units:

- President Biden $\mapsto b' :: e$
- Washington DC $\mapsto w' :: e$
- call- $\mapsto \lambda Q \lambda x \lambda e. Q(\lambda y. \text{call}^*(y)(x)(e)) :: \langle \langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle, \langle e, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle \rangle$
- senator $\mapsto s' :: \langle e, t \rangle$
- in $\mapsto \lambda z \lambda F \lambda v. \text{in}'(z)(v) \wedge F(v) :: \langle e, \langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle \rangle$
- PAST $\mapsto \lambda E. \exists e (E(e) \wedge e < e_u) :: \langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$

Note that the lambda expression for “call” reflects the type-raised version that takes a quantified expression (type: $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$) as its first argument. For simplicity, we assume that the subject (second argument) of “call” and the internal argument of the preposition “in” are type e expressions (denoting standard objects). The indefinite article is translated as usual (see slides week 3). The lambda variables F and v in the translation of the preposition are of the general kind, ranging over standard predicates/entities as well as event predicates/entities.

Exercise 2

As we discussed, we can extend models containing event structure with the notion of time. This can be done by extending the model structures with an asymmetrical relation over events (representing temporal precedence), and incorporating a constant representing the utterance event; the resulting model structure is shown below:

$M = \langle U, E, <, e_u, V \rangle$, with:

- $U \cap E = \emptyset$
- $< \subseteq E \times E$ is an asymmetric relation (temporal precedence)
- $e_u \in E$ is the utterance event
- V is an interpretation function like in standard FOL

One of the limitations of this model is that it does not formally capture the duration of events, which means that it cannot formalize the temporal event structure represented in the following sentence:

(2) Although Mary started running shortly after John, she ran twice as long.

Try to come up with a model structure that can formalize the temporal structure of sentence (2). Provide the formal details of the model, as well as the formula representing the meaning of sentence (2). Describe in one or two sentences the implications of your solution on the level of representation (logical syntax) and interpretation (model structure). What are the advantages, disadvantages and/or limitations of your model?