Seminar

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Channels of Meaning

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In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
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ABOUT ELIZABETH COPPOCK

Elizabeth Coppock received her Ph.D. in Linguistics from Stanford University in 2009, and became Docent of General Linguistics in 2013 at the University of Gothenburg, where she is currently affiliated. Prior to this, she held research and teaching positions at Lund University and Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf. Her work is primarily in the subfield of semantics and pragmatics, and thus deals with linguistic meaning in its various forms. Her recent work has mainly addressed issues related to presupposition (what is taken for granted) and focus (what answers the current question under discussion) through the study of phenomena such as definiteness-marking strategies in various languages, exclusives like 'only', and other focus-related phenomena and their interaction.

Her most important publications to date include 'The Objective Conjugation in Hungarian: Agreement without Phi-Features', co-authored with Stephen Wechsler and published in *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* (2012); 'A Semantic Solution to the Problem of Hungarian Object Agreement', published in *Natural Language Semantics* (2013); 'Principles of the Exclusive Muddle', co-authored with David Beaver and published in the *Journal of Semantics*; and 'Raising and Resolving Issues with Scalar Modifiers', co-authored with Thomas Brochhagen and published in *Semantics and Pragmatics* (2013).

As a researcher at scas, she will carry out a project entitled 'Channels of Meaning: How Information Can Be Expressed Without Being Said'. The aim is to categorize the various 'channels' through which meaning can be expressed in language (such as presupposition and implicature) using as a starting point the relationship between questions and presuppositions, the nature of subjective expressions of opinion and the meaning of words like 'ouch' and 'goodbye'.

ABSTRACT

When a person speaks, he or she directly implies certain things, and other things are implied more indirectly. Continuing this metaphor, meaning flows through various direct and indirect 'channels'. This talk will begin with an introduction to channels of meaning, illustrating some of the diagnostics that can be used to distinguish among for example entailment, presupposition, and implicature. Studying channels of meaning, it will be shown, is a practical way of addressing the question of how language is related to logic, or put differently, what the logic of language is. "What logic?" someone might ask, if he or she sympathizes with scholars like P. F. Strawson who famously wrote that "natural language has no exact logic". It will be shown that this sort of skepticism has had a productive impact on theorizing about the logic of language, forcing formal semanticists to develop ever more refined analytical models, leading to a better understanding of the logic of language. Presupposition and indexicality are two clear examples of areas where this has occurred. Strawson's quip was in the context of the debate about definite descriptions, and his defense of a presuppositional analysis was the catalyst for three-valued and dynamic logics. Kaplan's analysis of indexicals like "I", "you", "here", and "now", on which context is added as a parameter of evaluation, showed that there could be a logic with indexicals, contrary to the prevailing understanding. As he later (1999) says, this system "could be seen as the scientific realization of a Strawsonian semantics of use". An uplifting precedent!

In the second part of the talk, I will discuss ways in which Kaplan's contributions paved the way for subsequent developments in theorizing about the relationship between language and logic, and my own current work along this line. The context parameter can be utilized to give a semantics for expressives like "ouch" and "oops", and other expressions come with usage conditions. Kaplan's method of adding a parameter has been extended by scholars proposing to add a "judge" parameter

of evaluation, in order to deal with predicates of personal taste such as "delicious". I have argued in other work that this is not the right approach for predicates of personal taste, but I claim that it is the right approach to account for so-called 'egophoricity' (pronouns referring to 'self') in languages like Kathmandu Newari, which displays an interesting phenomenon called "interrogative flip", where first person declaratives behave like second person interrogatives. The picture that emerges, then, is one on which presupposition, indexicality, subjectivity, and egophoricity are four distinct phenomena, each working through a different channel.