

Einladung zu einem Vortrag

On the presuppositional requirements of alternative questions and the consequences for other types of questions and assertions

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In this talk I will propose a new semantic analysis of alternative questions such as *Did JOHN or MARY attend the party?*, where capital letters indicate focal stress. Such questions strongly suggest that the speaker expects exactly one of the alternatives to be true – that is, that either John attended the party, or that Mary did, but not both. Drawing on novel data from Polish I will show that such questions should be viewed as disjunctions of polar questions. In addition, I will review data from other languages to bolster this view. The analysis is based on the following ingredients: (i) a modest modification of Karttunen’s semantics for polar questions, (ii) mutually exclusive focus on the disjuncts, (iii) a Strong Kleene semantics for disjunction. I will argue that the particular semantics adopted derives the special meaning component of alternative questions discussed above as presuppositions.

In the remainder of the talk I will discuss a number of consequences of this analysis. First, the analysis forces on me the view that the particular intonational pattern found with alternative semantics is an indication of wide scope of the coordinator. I will support this with data apart from questions. In particular, exhaustive inferences of disjunctions in assertions with that intonational pattern will have to be reevaluated. Second, I will discuss the consequences of the proposed modification of Karttunen’s semantics for wh-questions. Once a particular wh-semantics has been adopted – again, very close to Karttunen’s original insights – I will evaluate the predictions made regarding the presuppositions of such questions. Third, if time permits I will briefly relate the emerging picture to theories of presupposition projection based on a Strong Kleene semantics more generally and try to determine what the predictions of the current view are with respect to the projection of presuppositions from within questions.

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18.30 Uhr

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