Locus Semantics: What We Learn from Sign Language for the Architecture of Meaning

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The traditional conception of meaning in truth-conditional semantics is centered around the types *e* for entities and *t* for truth values. In this talk, I suggest departing from this picture by completely removing type *e* from the ontology of semantic theory. Instead, language quantifies over and uses as basic denotations so-called *loci*. Hence the title: locus semantics. Loci, which are well known in sign language research as more or less concrete spatial representations, are generalized in locus semantics as abstract spatial representations of meanings, that is, abstract places at which entities are represented.

The talk shows some of the advantages of the approach in various domains, such as grammatical gender, agreement, cross-sentential anaphora, and discourse prominence. Locus semantics is related to dynamic semantics, but it is more radical in one respect and more conservative in another respect than dynamic semantics, as developed in Kamp 1981, Heim 1982, and later versions. It is more radical in that loci constitute a level of representation that is not itself truth-conditional and thus allows the representation of information that is often characterized as syntactic. It is more conservative in that it is fully compositional and essentially requires only minimal notational changes as compared to standard compositional theories, such as Heim and Kratzer 1998.