Against the Optionality Criterion for Pragmatic Modulation

When: Tuesday 2\textsuperscript{nd} September, 4:00-5:00pm
Where: N76 (Campus Heart) – Room 1.04

The purpose of this talk is to show that the notion of pragmatic modulation as defined by Contextualism (cf. Recanati 2004, 2010) rests on a mistaken view about the langue / parole distinction.

Contextualism differs from Indexicalism in that it posits two types of pragmatic operations to get the truth-conditional content of an utterance.

(1) a. Indexicalism: linguistic meaning $\rightarrow$ saturation $\rightarrow$ truth-conditional content

b. Contextualism: linguistic meaning $\rightarrow$ saturation + pragmatic modulation $\rightarrow$ truth-conditional content.

Saturation and pragmatic modulation are distinguished by the Optionality Criterion given in (2).

(2) The provision of an implicit element E is optional in order for the utterance to have a truth-conditional content. $\Leftrightarrow$ E is provided through pragmatic modulation (and not through saturation).

According to this criterion, when \textit{He sang} is interpreted as “Paul sang in Paris”, the specification of the singer results from saturation, while that of the location results from pragmatic modulation. The criterion in (2), however, does not work well unless the notion of optionality is precisely defined. For example, \textit{He sang} entails “He sang \textit{somewhere}”. Is the location provided through saturation or pragmatic modulation? The dispute is far from settled.

I will argue that the dispute is based on a mistaken view about langue / parole dichotomy. The notion of pragmatic modulation (as well as saturation applied to a hidden variable) appears only after different interpretations (“Paul sang \{φ / in Paris / somewhere\}”) given to an utterance (\textit{He sang}) are compared with each other. The common denominator of these interpretations (at the level of the parole) is then reinterpreted as the proposition literally expressed by the sentence (at the level of the langue). Only in this context of reinterpretation are various mechanisms conceived to account for the gap between the langue and the parole. The adequacy of the reinterpretation, however, has not been fully established.