

Verb phrase semantics: Varieties of event reference and event description.

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Abstract

The literature on the semantics of verb phrases (including, of course, verbs themselves) has yielded important insights into how we structure events through language, how languages express the relations between events and their participants, and how verb and verb phrase semantics vary typology, among other questions. However, challenges remain, including how to handle verbal polysemy, especially “figurative” and idiomatic uses of verbs, and how best to capture certain sorts of cross-linguistic variation in verb and verb phrase semantics. In this course we will take a fresh look at some of these challenges, from a semantic perspective that distinguishes the analysis of event reference from that of event description. The goal is to provide a richer range of theoretical tools with which to analyze verb and verb phrase semantics, and to inspire rigorous investigation into lesser studied empirical phenomena, particularly those where linguistic creativity is highly salient.