Nominal Semantics: Personal and impersonal pronouns.
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Abstract

Personal pronouns, such as English *I*, *you*, *he*/*she*/*it*, as a traditional class share that they allow speakers to refer to individuals that are contextually given. However, closer investigation reveals that the members of this class do not behave uniformly. We find differences between 3rd person pronouns vs. 1st/2nd person pronouns in the type of context dependence, the type of plurality, as well as the possibilities regarding anaphoric uses and binding by quantifying expressions. Hence, the question arises whether personal pronouns should be analyzed as a uniform class semantically, or whether 3rd person pronouns and 1st/2nd person pronouns constitute two classes that are semantically distinct.

An answer to this question also has to take into account impersonal uses of 2nd (and 1st) person pronouns: German *du* and English *you* can also be used in sentences that express general statements about individuals. In that, they behave like impersonal pronouns, such as German *man* and English *one*. Impersonal pronouns differ semantically from referentially used 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person pronouns in that they intuitively contribute quantificational semantics. Furthermore, their behavior regarding anaphoric uses and binding differs from that of both 1st/2nd and 3rd person pronouns.

The goal of this course is to provide a more detailed discussion of personal pronouns and impersonal pronouns -- their semantics, pragmatics, and to some extent morpho-syntax -- than is provided in introductory semantics classes. We start out by discussing the semantics and pragmatics of 3rd person singular personal pronouns -- first in contrast to other individual-denoting expressions (e.g., definite descriptions, proper names) and then in contrast to 1st/2nd person singular personal pronouns. Then we take a look at how plurality differentiates 3rd person pronouns from 1st/2nd person pronouns. In the second half of the course, impersonal pronouns and their generic and existential uses are introduced. We compare impersonal pronouns to other nominal expressions in generic and episodic sentences, before comparing and contrasting the data with our results on personal pronouns. Lastly, the impersonal use of personal pronouns is introduced, which provides a final complication for potential unified analyses of personal pronouns.

The course presupposes some familiarity with truth-conditional formal semantics (e.g., Heim & Kratzer 1998 or similar), though all relevant concepts will be recapitulated/introduced in class. The course will focus mostly on German and English, although other languages will be touched upon, and students are encouraged to contribute data of languages that they are familiar with.