

A3: The logical type of non-declarative sentences

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Since linguistic content mediates between syntactic structure and speech act, semantics plays an important role within the general theory of sentence types. Although there is large agreement that every sentence type corresponds to a specific type of denotation (or logical type), it is highly disputed which type of denotation must be assumed for which type of sentence. It is precisely this question that forms the focus of Project #7.

In logical semantics, meanings are analyzed in terms of sentence meanings, which are in turn identified with truth conditions. This strategy had originally been developed for declarative sentences and does not smoothly transfer to other sentence types, for which quite a number of different types of meanings have been proposed. Interrogatives, clearly the best-understood non-declarative sentence types within formal semantics, are a case in point. The analyses proposed in the literature diverge immensely as to the logical type they assign to them. In particular, different theories assume quite different kinds of denotations or contents of a *wh*-question like:

(1) Who's got a ticket?

Here is a selection of meaning candidates according to various semantic theories:

- Properties – so that (1) coincides in content with the predicate *has a ticket*.
- Explicit performative propositions: (1) would accordingly coincide in content with the declarative sentence *I ask you who has got a ticket*.
- Speech act types: (1) would thus denote the act of asking who has got a ticket.
- Sets of answer-contents: the content of (1) may be assumed to consist of the contents of all possible answers (or of all true answers; or of all true answers and the negations of all false answers) of the form *NN's got a ticket*.
- Epistemic valuations: (1) would accordingly denote a function that maps each individual to a value indicating what is known about his or her having a ticket

This variety of denotational types, which is partly due to differences in data accounted for, becomes more puzzling, once the semantic perspective on interrogatives is widened to also include *yes/no* questions. A similarly kind of theoretical variation can be found within other sentence types, and imperative sentences in particular.

Within this project existing alternative theories of the semantics of sentence types are compared, evaluated and, if need be, further developed – with a focus on the match between sentence type and semantic type. The project goal is approached from two angles. On the one hand, individual *grammatical phenomena* are investigated that appear particularly promising for the development of a semantic theory of sentence types. On the other hand, the functional, or pragmatic, *usability* of various denotation types is tested. Magda Schwager's dissertation, originating within the context of this project, has investigated the hitherto little understood type of imperative sentences under precisely these aspects.