

Center for Cognitive Science

University at Buffalo, State University of New York

Spring 2001 Colloquia

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Wednesday, January 31, 2001
2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
280 Park Hall, North Campus

“What's "in" a Word?”

Recent work on the lexicon has stressed how much the syntactic context in which a word occurs is determined by its meaning and that words pattern into word classes on the basis of their meaning. This research suggests that if you know the meaning of a word, you can predict to a large measure the kind of sentences it occurs in. Taking this result as a point of departure, the first part of this talk will discuss how we can use the fact that lexical meaning determines syntactic context of occurrence to infer the structure of the semantic information encoded in words. In particular, my own research suggests that the semantic information included in verbs has two parts, a relational component (which covers notions like possession, causality, having a mental representation...) and a modal component (which covers notions like negation, necessity, and time). In the second part of this talk, I will investigate an unanswered question of the recent research on the relationship between syntax and semantics, namely how we can determine the semantic information included in lexical entries. I will hypothesize that two criteria affect the inclusion of participant information in lexical entries: (1) Whether participant information is obligatory and (2) Whether participant information is specific to a restricted set of verbs. I will present the result of several experiments which draw on a comprehensive survey of the English verbal lexicon.

Everyone is welcome!
Refreshments will be served.