

Jürgen Pafel

## Meaning and linguistic competence

### **Ziele des Programms**

There are two main questions in the research programme I propose:

- (i) What does the syntax/semantics-relation look like in a grammar where the syntactic and the semantic structure are two autonomous levels of linguistic representation with correspondence relations constituting the interface between them. In such a grammar the structure which is the input to semantic interpretation has specific semantic features, categories and structures and thus differs from any variety of Logical Form conceived as a syntactic level of representation.
- (ii) What is the nature of well-formedness and semantic intuitions and what is their role in linguistic competence?

### **Forschungsschwerpunkte**

#### Meaning and Structure

As a result of investigating the theoretical consequences of the regularities of quantifier interaction, I came to the view that we should conceive syntactic and semantic structures as two autonomous levels of linguistic representation with correspondence relations constituting the interface between them. If one takes this view, it becomes of great importance to disentangle what belongs to syntax, to semantics and to the relation between the two. Theoretically and methodologically, this means keeping pure syntactic, pure semantic and interface argumentation strictly apart from one another.

From the syntactic point of view, it is phrase structure, case and empty elements which are crucial for the question of how syntactic structures look like. From the semantic point of view, it is predicate-argument structure, modification, reference, quantification and binding which are crucial for the question of how semantic structures look like. And from the interface point of view, the relation between syntactic and semantic valency and the regularities of binding and control are, among others, crucial areas of research.

Here the main focus is on semantic structures and their relations to syntactic structures. Among others, the following questions will be raised: Do we need an

event argument in predicate-argument structure? Does it make sense to distinguish between logical subject and logical object? Does the fundamental semantic distinction between referential and quantificational expressions have a counterpart in syntax? To what extent is unaccusativity as well as binding a semantic and/or a syntactic phenomenon?

### Meaning and Interpretation

It is a striking fact that, in linguistics, linguistic intuitions only play a role in methodological contexts (can they be reliably used as a data source?). There is hardly any research on the question of what linguistic intuition means to linguistic competence. This is a serious blind spot in linguistic theory. Considering the role of linguistic intuitions, I came to the conclusion that linguistic intuition is constitutive for linguistic competence. Without semantic intuitions, for instance, it makes no sense to say that we express our thoughts in speaking, that we understand each other and communicate with each other. If that is true, semantic intuitions are fundamental to semantics. And it is crucial to understand the nature of semantic intuitions.

Among others, the following questions are to be investigated: Can the reliability of linguistic intuitions be based on their being constitutive for linguistic competence and on their playing a causal role in language production and perception? What is the relation between semantic intuitions, intentionality and the propositional content of utterances, i.e., what is the specific content of semantic intuitions? What is the relation between semantic and rational intuitions (as discussed in philosophy)?

### **Stand der Forschung**

As for the syntax/semantic relation, the main stream in generative grammar conceives the structure which is the input of semantic interpretation as a syntactic level of representation, i.e., as some variety of Logical Form. However, there is a qualified minority insisting that semantic structures have a nature of their own – see Hans Kamp and his school featuring DRS and Ray Jackendoff featuring conceptual structures, among others.

As for the nature of linguistic intuitions, there has hardly been any work done in linguistics, but there is a new interest in philosophy to come to terms with intuitions, which is relevant at least for the nature of semantic intuitions.

## **Eigene Vorarbeiten**

*Skopus und logische Struktur. Studien zum Quantorenskopos im Deutschen.*  
Arbeitspapiere des Sonderforschungsbereichs 340 Bericht Nr. 129, 1998.

*Was sind und wie erhebt man semantische Daten? Einige Vorklärungen.* In: Wiltrud Mihatsch and Reinhild Steinberg (eds.), *Lexical Data and Universals of Semantic Change*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg. 2004.

*Sprachgefühl und Sprachkompetenz. Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Sprache, Bedeutung und Bewusstsein.* In: Violetta Waibel und Véronique Zanetti (Hrsg.), *Anatomie der Subjektivität. Bewusstsein, Selbstbewusstsein und Selbstgefühl*. Suhrkamp 2005.

(zusammen mit Pawel Karnowski)

*Wie anders sind Eigennamen? Zwei Theorien der Syntax und Semantik von Eigennamen im Vergleich.* To appear in »Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft«.

*Quantifier Scope in German. An Investigation into the Relation between Syntax and Semantics.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins. To appear 2005.

## **Themen geplanter Dissertationsprojekte**

Definite descriptions between reference and quantification

Syntax and semantics of possessive constructions in German

Semantic similarities between noun phrases and sentences

Binding and control in German

The nature of semantic argumenthood. The relation between semantic intuitions and necessity

Semantic intuitions and intentionality

## **Verzahnung des Projekts innerhalb des Kollegs**

- Alexiadou (argument structure, unaccusativity, noun phrases)
- Kamp (lexical semantics)
- Reyle (anaphora)
- Schütze (quantifier scope, symbolic/numerical models)
- Stein (argument structure)