The semantics-pragmatics interface: how it works, why we need it, and where it is

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During the last decades, linguistic theory has been concerned with the syntax-semantics interface, mainly with issues linked to the scope of operators (negation, quantifiers, modals) and with the syntactic or semantic nature of structural representations. One important trend in syntactic theory (for instance, the cartographic approach) is to concentrate instead on the syntax-pragmatics interface, with strong arguments in favor of a syntactization of pragmatics: pragmatic issues, such as information structure, topic and focus, receive a structural explanation that relies on their syntactic loci in syntax.

Although the semantics-pragmatics interface is now in the agenda of formal semantics, mainly with the aim of increasing the explanatory power of dynamic semantics in accounting for context, implicature, presupposition, etc., the benefits of pragmatic theory (mainly neo- and post-Gricean approaches) have not been seriously taken into account.

In this talk, I would like to offer a proposal that deals with the following issues:

1. **How does the S-P interface work?** Broadly speaking, is pragmatics the output of semantics, or does pragmatic meaning systematically intrude in semantics? I will show that either perspective (pragmatics as an output and pragmatic intrusion) does not give a satisfactory answer to the S-P interface issue. My main argument will be based on the nature of semantic and pragmatic meanings, and specifically their conventional, truth-conditional and inferential aspects. I will show that the S-P border is porous, and that some inferred meaning is more semantic than pragmatic, and vice versa. The first positive contribution of my proposal will be that there is a continuum between semantic and pragmatic meaning.

2. **Why do we need the S-P interface?** I propose that the main function of the S-P interface is to allow quick and efficient information transfer, from a non-linguistic source to a linguistic one, and vice and versa. Contextual information is generally required in proposition enrichment, especially in accessing contextual assumptions so as to trigger implicit and explicit inferred meaning enrichments. Linguistically encoded meaning is also the starting point of enrichment processes that are required to access reference, inferred conceptual representations and implicatures (at least conventional and generalized conversational ones).

3. **Where is the S-P interface located?** The S-P interface is mainly a linguistic issue: semantic meaning is the locus of pragmatic processes, which implies that its conceptual or procedural nature has an impact on the way pragmatic meaning derivations are obtained. I will give an example of the S-P interface with discourse connectives, here using causal connectives. Another example, related to negation, will show how the narrow and wide scopes of negation can be computed and in which contexts.