Course description:
Experimental investigations into quantifier interpretation

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This course provides an introduction to experimental work on quantifier interpretation. We will use experimental work we have conducted during the last ten years, and address both methodological and theoretical questions we came across when designing and running experiments on quantifier scope. In case you are planning an experiment yourself, we would be happy to discuss it with you.

Session 1 – Methodological considerations (Friday)

• The application of psycholinguistic methods in experimental research on quantifier interpretation
  – Offline methods
  – Online methods

• Which method(s) are suited for assessing quantifier scope readings [1]?
  – The importance of baseline controls to assess the availability of scope readings
  – Cross-methodological comparison: the reliability and validity of scope judgments

• Which scope readings are available during ordinary comprehension?
  – A new method: the incremental truth value judgment task [2]
  – Limitations of the new method: How to choose appropriate (= unbiasing) models for the truth value judgment task [3]

Session 2 – The online interpretation of quantifier scope (Friday)

• Is relative scope assigned incrementally? The time course of scope inversion of German quantifiers in fronted object position [4]
  – Scope reconstruction in German only happens after processing the complete sentence – eyetracking evidence for a minimal domain account

• Is quantifier scope left underspecified before disambiguating information is encountered? [5][6]
We present two non-standard online methods to address this question, again we find evidence for the minimal domain account.

Session 3 – Relating experimental results to semantic theory (Saturday)

- The gradient nature of scope preference – factors affecting quantifier scope \[7\]
  - The way different scope factors (linear precedence/c-command, distributivity, discourse linking) interact can help us to decide between different theoretical approaches to quantifier scope
  - Learning from the data: the observed distribution of gradient scope preferences in German calls for a new model
- Information structure as a guide to the interpretation of German quantifiers?
  - The influence of contrastive topic accentuation in German quantifier-negation- and quantifier-quantifier-sentences: (unpublished) evidence against a uniform account
- The absolute scope of quantifiers – binding without c-command?
  - Experimental evidence for telescoping \[5\]

Session 4 – The complexity of quantifiers (Saturday)

- Testing predictions from computational complexity theory \[9\] [10]
  - Intractable interpretations of proportional quantifiers in reciprocal sentences?
- What makes downward monotone quantifiers so difficult to interpret \[11\]?
  - From data to theory and back again – Accounting for empty set effects

References


