NASSLLI 2025 proposal

**Truthmaker Semantics and the Semantics of Modals**

Truthmaker semantics is a situation-based alternative to possible-worlds semantics, developed by Kit Fine and others following him. Truthmaker semantics has received considerable interest over the last ten years from philosophical logicians, philosophers of language, as well as linguists (Champollion 2024). Unlike possible-worlds semantics, truthmaker semantics provides notion of aboutness / subject matter and partial content; unlike situation-semantics in the sense of Barwise and Perry (1983) and Kratzer (2007), truthmaker semantics is based on a notion of exact truthmaking (or satisfaction) that holds between a situation (or action or other entity) and a sentence (or, in object-based truthmaker semantics, a mental or utterance-related object). While truthmaker semantics has been applied to a range of topics in logic and semantics, it is not obvious how it applies to modals, in particular modal sentences in natural language. There are proposals of applying truthmaker semantics to deontic modality (Fine 2018a, b) as well as epistemic modality (Hawke/Ozgun 2023), though those are focused on logical aspects setting the expression of modality aside. A different and more general approach to the application of truthmaker semantics to modals is object-based truthmaker semantics, (Moltmann 2018a, b, 2020, 2021, 2025). Object-based truthmaker semantics takes modal sentences to describe modal objects, entities we refer to as ‘needs’, ‘obligations,’ ‘offers’, ‘dispositions’, ‘essences’, laws, and ‘lacks’. Modal objects are not states or events, but rather sui generis entities that come with satisfaction conditions of various sorts, yet exhibit features of concreteness as well.

This course will give a general overview of truthmaker semantics as such, against the background of possible-worlds semantics and other situation-based approaches. It will then address how truthmaker semantics may be applied to modals. It will discuss sentence-based truthmaker-semantic approaches to deontic modals (Fine and Hawke/Ozgun) and then develop in greater detail the approach of object-based truthmaker semantics. It will motivate and develop the ontology of modal objects, discuss the possible roles of modal objects in natural language semantics: as arguments of modal verbs and modal nouns as well as truthmakers of modal sentences themselves. It will discuss the particular advantages of object-based truthmaker semantics for phenomena that constitute particular challenges for standard possible-worlds semantics, which include deontic modals, essence-based modality, and completion-related modals (*lack, be missing* (Moltmann 2024))

**Course outline**

Session 1: Situation-based approaches to semantics

Session 2: Basics of truthmaker semantics and its application to natural language

Session 3: Truthmaker semantic approaches to deontic and epistemic modals

Session 4: Object-based truthmaker semantics for deontic and epistemic modals

Session 5: Object-based truthmaker semantics for metaphysical, circumstantial, and completion-related modals.

**Teaching experience**

I have significant experiences teaching for an interdisciplinary audience. My teaching experience includes teaching at four ESSLLI summer schools and a number compact courses in Paris (IHPST), NYU, Dusseldorf, and Hamburg, as well as several tutorials at the *Semantics and Philosophy in Europe* (SPE) Colloquia. My hybrid advanced courses at the Université Côte d’Azur (three so far) are tailored for an international audience of linguists and philosophers. I love teaching courses that relate to my own current research and my teaching is considered highly stimulating and novel in the perspectives it presents.

**Funding**

At this point, I would not be able to fund my travel or accommodation, which means that I would need funding for air travel from Nice, France, as well as accommodation. My department does not finance teaching at summer schools.

**References**

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