



Sebastian Löbner,

Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf

Zeit: Montag, 09. November 2009 16 Uhr c.t.

Ort: Hörsaal 8

Sub-compositionality

(Sind Semantik und Syntax homomorph? -
Subkompositionalität und Anforderungen an eine Theorie der Komposition)

It is commonly held in most accounts of sentence semantics that semantic composition is homomorphous to syntactic composition. Consequently, rules of semantic composition are defined in terms of syntactic categories of expressions. The talk argues that this assumption is not a necessary consequence of the Principle of Compositionality, and in fact in need of revision. There appear to be types of syntactic constructions where semantic sub-rules of composition apply to mere semantic sub-types of the construction. Such constructions are called sub-compositional. Accounts in the tradition of Montague's were able to avoid sub-compositionality, and thereby adhere to homomorphy, only at the expense of 'generalizing to the worst case'. It is argued that this method is not in accordance with the aims of an appropriate theory of composition. Rather such a theory should properly acknowledge differences in compositional properties among semantic types of expressions. Using the example of German verb gradation with *sehr* 'very', it is argued that the compositional analysis of certain sub-compositional constructions may require deep decomposition of lexical meanings. Although the general assumption of homomorphy is therefore no longer rigidly tenable, this does not mean that the Principle of Compositionality is to be abandoned or modified.