

Language Science Colloquium 2018-19

Monday, May 13th Time: 11:00-12:30 pm

Location: Social Sciences Plaza, Building-B, Room 2214

Lunch provided.

## Dylan Bumford, Department of Linguistics, University of California, Los Angeles

"Superlative scope, comparison classes, and negative polarity"

Sentences containing superlative adjectives are famously ambiguous. On an "absolute" reading of 'John ordered the most expensive wine', we learn something about a wine that was more expensive than any other (that John ordered it). On a "relative" reading, we learn something about a person who out-spent all of their companions (that they're John). One common analysis of this pattern attributes the ambiguity to a difference in the scope of the superlative morpheme. Within this tradition there are approaches that treat the superlative operator as a relation between properties of degrees, and those that treat it as a relation between individuals. The best arguments for the former come from binding, negative polarity items, and attributive modal modifiers. In this talk, I'll review and juxtapose the arguments from these domains, challenge them, draw attention to inconsistencies in the theories that have resulted from them, and eventually propose an alternative mechanism for realizing superlative ambiguities based on recent ideas in dynamic semantics and split-scope.

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