Beyond the Logical Form of Action Sentences

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A Montagovian verb chomps through a set menu of arguments in a set order. Neo-Davidsonian verbs eat à la carte, selecting variable numbers of modifiers in any order. Both have drawbacks. For example, the analysis of adjuncts in Montague Grammar is arguably non-compositional. Take the sentences “Ann jumped” and “Ann jumped here”: a natural Montagovian analysis involves two different verbal predicates of different types, though related using a meaning postulate. It cuts against the compositional grain to choose the meaning of the verb according to what else is in the sentence. Davidsonian semantics allows just one verbal meaning to be used in such cases, but has other drawbacks. For example, it greatly complicates the analysis of quantified arguments, and places great demands on the ontology of events.

We propose Linking Semantics, a model of the syntax-semantics interface which combines features of Montague Grammar and Davidsonian Event Semantics. We retain the compositionality of Montague Grammar, but uniform typing and use of roles improve the treatment of modification, alternations, and optionality. We also retain the motivating inference patterns of Davidsonian Event Semantics, but improve by providing a uniform treatment of quantification, and distinguishing between saturating and non-saturating modification. Further, Linking Semantics makes no commitments as regards the nature of events, since events are no more privileged in the syntax-semantics interface than any other entity we may happen to talk about.