

LINGUISTICS DEPARTMENT COLLOQUIA SERIES

OMER PREMINGER

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND



NATURAL LANGUAGE WITHOUT SEMIOSIS

This talk aims to show that the atoms of linguistic composition are not Saussurean signs (viz. arbitrary pairings of form & meaning; Saussure 1916, Hjelmslev 1943).

Setting aside ideophones and cases of onomatopoeia, most modern approaches to linguistic theory take it as a given that the atoms of morphosyntactic composition – be they ‘words’ or morphemes – are form-meaning pairings (which can be associated with additional, sui generis syntactic features). I will argue that this is incorrect: architecturally speaking, natural-language expressions are entirely devoid of Saussurean signs (with the possible exception of monomorphemic utterances like “wow!”, “ugh”, and the like).

I will argue in favor of a grammatical architecture where atoms of linguistic composition are entirely abstract, and are not directly associated with form or with meaning. Instead, these atoms, once syntactically arranged, constitute the input to a set of mapping rules to form, and to a separate set of mapping rules to meaning. These mapping rules are many-to-one rules and, importantly, nothing forces the set of atoms that map onto a particular element of form to also map, as a set, onto a particular element (or elements) of meaning.

Friday, October 30th, 2020 at 12pm
Zoom Link will be sent out on October 28th, 2020