This book deals with semantics and its interfaces – most prominently, the syntax-semantics interface. The introductory chapter is an excellent summary of each paper and clearly sets out the goals of the volume. The first four papers deal with reference and anaphora, and the last four with tense and aspect.

Robert May’s ‘Frege on identity statements’ is a tribute to the German philosopher’s work. The essay reviews the semantic puzzles that the mathematical concept of identity brings when it is applied to language. The fact that the identity symbol can carry non-trivial information (as in ‘The Evening Star is the Morning Star’) led the philosopher to posit the now well-known difference between sense and reference.

Gennaro Chierchia’s paper ‘A puzzle about indefinites’ focuses on the interpretation of NPs that have previously been argued to introduce an existential quantifier (as in the Russellian tradition). Concentrating on indefinites, he reviews recent proposals that indefinites are not quantificational, but introduce a choice-function instead. Chierchia shows that these proposals are not all in agreement. While Reinhart (1997) and Winter (1997) allow existential closure at any level (i.e. at the top-most or at the intermediate level), Matthewson (1999) argues, on the basis of Lillooet Salish data, that existential closure applies at the top-most level only, and Kratzer (1998) puts forward the hypothesis that choice functions are simply not existentially quantified. In the latter case, the interpretation that choice functions receive is through context. I will spend a little more time on Chierchia’s paper, since I have a special interest in choice functions.

The sort of example on which the whole discussion is based is illustrated in (1):

(1) Every linguist studied every conceivable solution that some problem might have.

The most natural reading that such a sentence receives is one according to which the existential takes scope under the first universal quantifier, but above the second one:

(2) \( \forall x [\text{linguist} (x) \rightarrow \exists y [\text{problem} (y) \land \forall z [\text{solution to} (z, y) \rightarrow \text{studied} (x, y)]]] \).

‘For every linguist \( x \), there is a particular problem \( y \) (possibly a different one for each linguist) such that \( x \) studied every possible solution to \( y \).’
This reading is greatly facilitated when a pronoun is present at the end of the sentence (‘Every linguist considered every conceivable solution that some problem that intrigued him or her had’) or by adding stress on some.

(3) informally summarises the different approaches mentioned above (where A = every linguist and B = every conceivable solution):

(3)  

(a)  A \exists B (\text{f problem}) \quad \text{Reinhart (1997)/Winter (1997)}

(b)  \exists A B (\text{f problem}) \quad \text{Matthewson (1999)}

(c)  A B (\text{f problem}) \quad \text{Kratzer (1998)}

On all approaches the indefinite remains in situ (for example it does not undergo Quantifier Raising and is not subject to the rule of Quantifying in). However, the differences between (3a), (3b) and (3c) are as follows. In (3a), existential closure applies at the intermediate level whereas in (3b) it applies at the top-most level. Finally, in (3c) nothing else happens. There is no existential closure. The value of f is supplied by the context, and should be something like the speaker’s intended reference.

Chierchia convincingly argues that in order for the third approach to be feasible at all, Skolemisation of the choice function is needed. This simply means that the choice function must contain some implicit arguments, akin to pronouns. Like other pronouns, these argumental variables can be bound or free. The configuration we obtain on this view is something like (4):

(4)  A \land B f(x_i)

The first quantifier (i.e. every linguist binds the argumental variable, call it pro) and the value of f is picked up via the context assuring that it is interpreted over the second quantifier (i.e. every conceivable solution).

Conflating Matthewson’s approach with Kratzer’s, Chierchia asks: can we decide between their strategy or the Reinhart/Winter strategy on empirical grounds? The answer to the question is that the first view is right for some kinds of contexts (downward entailing ones) and the second approach is correct for other kinds of contexts (namely, those related to weak crossover configurations).

Let us start with the first kind of contexts. In a nutshell, the argument is that in negative environments, the Matthewson/Kratzer approach yields the wrong results. Chierchia asks us to consider a natural context in which one would regard sentence (1) as true:

(5)  Situation 1: systematic linguists.

Linguist A (who considered many problems) studied every conceivable solution to the problem of weak crossover.

Linguist B (who considered many problems) studied every conceivable solution to the problem of donkey sentences.
Linguist C (who considered many problems) studied every conceivable solution to the projection problem for presuppositions.

Imagine now a situation in which some linguist, say, Linguist C, did not actually study every solution to some particular problem:

(6) Situation 2: the unsystematic linguist.
Linguist A studied every conceivable solution to the problem of weak crossover.
Linguist B studied every conceivable solution to the problem of donkey sentences.
Linguist C is such that there is no problem for which s/he studied all its solutions.

The formula we obtain for (6) on the Reinhart/Winter approach is:

(7) \( \neg \forall x \left[ \text{linguist} (x) \rightarrow \exists f \forall z \left[ \text{solution to} (z, f_{\text{problem}}) \rightarrow \text{studied} (x, z) \right] \right] \)

This comes out as true while what we had in (2) will come out as false. So far, so good. Now, consider the semantic representation for (6) on the Matthewson/Kratzer view:

(8) \( \exists f \neg \forall x \left[ \text{linguist} (x) \rightarrow \forall z \left[ \text{solution to} (z, f_{\text{problem}}) \rightarrow \text{studied} (x, z) \right] \right] \)

This is the only possible representation on Matthewson’s account, since on this approach existential closure applies at the top-most level only. On the other hand, according to Kratzer’s theory, (8) MAY be the formula for (6), but need not.

The problem with (8) is that it will come out true not only for (6), but also for (5). This is because in situation 1 there may be some problem considered by some linguist who, however, did not study all of its solutions.

Now, the Matthewson/Kratzer approach fares much better with the following contrast:

(9) a. A policeman searched every house.
   b. A certain policeman searched every house.

While in (9a) it is relatively easy to obtain a reading according to which every house takes wide scope over a policeman, that kind of interpretation is impossible in (9b). This example receives only the reading whereby a certain policeman takes wide scope over every house. If we assume, following
Kratzer, that a certain policeman contains a null pronominal (i.e. the indefinite introduces a Skolem function with an implicit argument), then the contrast can be made to follow from the Weak Crossover Principle. In (9b), a trace is coindexed with a pronoun on its left, something which, we know, is impossible in natural languages:

(10) every house, [a certain policeman pro] searched it.

On the other hand, nothing stops existential closure applying here on the Reinhart/Winter view. Therefore, the Kratzer approach (I’m less sure about Matthewson’s view here) has a clear advantage in this case.

At this point, Chierchia suggests a very interesting way to proceed. Both theories are right. In a very minimalist spirit, the two mechanisms we considered are subject to an economy condition. Existential closure is argued to be a costly operation while, on the contrary, implicit arguments are freely available, just as any other pronominals (e.g. PRO, pro). When there is an option, the Skolem function mechanism must therefore apply. However, in negative contexts the Skolem function account cannot yield the intended interpretations. Thus, existential closure applies as a last resort.

Chierchia’s proposal is very interesting. The only problem that I see with his theory is that he is perhaps too optimistic about the use of existential closure over choice functions in general. They, too, seem to overgenerate and yield interpretations that are not attested. For example, as demonstrated by Geurts (2000) nothing stops existential closure from applying in examples such as (11) when it should not:

(11) John didn’t eat any biscuit.  

The only reading obtained here is one according to which negation takes wide scope over the existential quantifier. So-called Negative Polarity Items (e.g. any biscuit) thus behave differently from other indefinites:

(12) John didn’t eat some biscuit.  

Similarly, it is not clear what stops existential closure over a choice function from applying in (13):

(13) What every boy saw was a friend of his.  
(Williams 1994:62)

The problem is that the wide scope reading after reconstruction is impossible. The only interpretation possible here is one according to which every boy saw a different friend. Nothing stops the existential closure view from assuming a simple choice function in the gap, giving:
To be fair, I do not think that the Matthewson/Kratzer approach fares any better in this case. Such examples in fact suggest that indefinites are ambiguous. As Williams (1994) has suggested, on the one hand, they introduce an existential quantifier, which takes scope via movement as is traditionally assumed, and which binds a variable ranging over individuals. On the other hand, indefinites introduce a Skolem function, which does not range over individuals. This explains why some indefinites can receive only one interpretation. If they were underspecified rather than ambiguous, then two readings (inverse scope) could be yielded. For completeness, consider (15) where it is clear that some indefinites cannot yield a pair-list, but only an individual reading:

(15) What bothered a friend of mine is every article that appeared.
(Williams 1994:62)

This closes my discussion of Chierchia’s paper.

Building on previous work of his own, Carlo Cecchetto in ‘Syntactic or semantic reconstruction? Evidence from pseudoclefts and clitic left dislocation’ argues that the copy theory of traces cannot account for the full set of data. Whereas reconstruction effects in chains derived via movement follow from the copy theory, the analogue of reconstruction (connectivity) in dependencies not created by syntactic movement requires a semantic treatment. He provides examples where an indefinite seems to behave as if it were reconstructed, as far as Binding Theory is concerned, whereas its scope properties are those of the non-reconstructed position.

Reconstruction is also the topic of Luigi Rizzi’s paper entitled ‘Reconstruction, weak island sensitivity and agreement’. In this contribution Rizzi tackles the problem of non D-linked versus D-linked WH phrases. As is well-known, the former are sensitive to weak islands while the latter are not. Rizzi argues that non-D-linked DP dependencies undergo obligatory reconstruction of the lexical semantic restriction as a consequence of Full Interpretation. Locality effects in such configurations follow from this fact. On the other hand, in the case of D-linked WH phrases the lexical restrictor can remain in the left periphery in the topic position, which Rizzi has proposed independently (cf. Rizzi 1997). Reconstruction is thus not necessary. This is because the restrictor is contextually given. Weak islands are violated, because the chain can be licensed via binding.

In ‘On a frequent misunderstanding in the temporal-aspectual domain: the “perfective-telic” confusion’, Pier Marco Bertinetto provides new insights into the distinction between Aktionsart and Aspect. He argues that these notions are two independent categories. For example, in many languages with rich morphology these two concepts are encoded differently.
Alessandra Giorgi & Fabio Pianesi in ‘Ways of terminating’ argue that the distinction between telic/atelic is less fundamental than – and depends on – the terminative/non-terminative contrast. In their view, these two concepts are properties of particular events. They propose a theory in terms of the topological properties of event domains. The traditional distinction between telic and atelic is thus recast in terms of how topological closure can be obtained: either by directly introducing the relevant closure operator (atelicity), or by making available an extra event variable for the telos/boundary.

Arnim von Stechow’s paper ‘Temporally opaque arguments in verbs of creation’ reviews the various proposals that have been put forward in the past to account for so-called ‘creation’ verbs. Such predicates (e.g. paint) differ from others (e.g. seek) in that they do not involve a pre-established object. In other words, the object created or coming into existence does not exist at the truth-interval of the VP. von Stechow argues that none of the accounts so far put forward in the literature are satisfactory.

Sandro Zucchi’s contribution ‘Tense in fiction’ argues that the point of origin of tenses in fictional texts can remain ‘floating’, as a reflex of the fact that for these texts it does not matter whether they are true or false. This fact allows the context of evaluation to be left underdetermined.

On the whole, the editing is of a very high standard. But some papers have been edited better than others. In some of the contributions, there are several typos, missing words and references to examples that have gone wrong. It can thus sometimes be more difficult to follow an argument than it should. Despite these few negative remarks, the book is a very good read.
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