Learning to talk about events

Anna Papafragou

University of Delaware

A foundational aspect of human cognition is the ability to parse our constantly unfolding experience into meaningful representations of dynamic events and to communicate about these events with others. Understanding the nature and development of this ability requires a multi-pronged approach to the following key questions: What is the form of pre-linguistic event representations? How do event representations make contact with language in both novice (child) and experienced (adult) communicators? How does cross-linguistic variation in event encoding affect the acquisition of language for events? In this talk, I show that theories of how events are encoded in language can inform our understanding of how events are cognitively represented. These theories predict otherwise unexplained similarities in the way learners acquire event predicates across language communities and support the presence of deep homologies between linguistic and non-linguistic event structure.