



Philosophische Fakultät



Elsi Kaiser (University of Southern California)

Interpreting pronouns, interpreting perspectives: Similarities and differences

Monday, 7 November 2022, 6:00 p.m., Zoom

Different kinds of linguistic elements can trigger the retrieval of previously-mentioned referents. For example, identifying the intended referents of pronouns and demonstratives (e.g. *she*, *this*) – i.e. building a referential dependency between an anaphor and its antecedent – is a core component of successful communication. In this talk, I present a series of experiments that explores the idea that, at least in certain communicative contexts, these kinds of dependency-building can be extended to the domain of perspective-sensitive expressions. I will focus in particular on subjective adjectives, such as ‘tasty’ and ‘frightening,’ which are often analyzed as being interpreted relative to a perspectival center/attitude holder. While this perspectival center is often the first-person speaker, it can also be a third person referent present in the discourse context. Making reference to literature from linguistics, philosophy and cognitive psychology, I will present a series of experiments from my lab, including some recent eye-tracking work on subjective adjectives used in statements about the coronavirus (COVID-19), that explores the similarities and differences in the dependency-building processes triggered by anaphoric expressions such as pronouns and by perspective-sensitive elements, in particular subjective adjectives. Time permitting, I will also discuss how we used emerging methodologies such as webcam-based eye-tracking to collect real-time data during the pandemic.