Lipman's Puzzle Revisited

Michael Franke

Arguably, vagueness makes communication less efficient. Standard models of meaning evolution predict a strive towards ever increasing communicative efficiency. But, arguably, a vague meaning is communicative less efficient than a precise one. Lipman's puzzle, therefore, is the observation that vagueness challenges standard models of rational communication and the evolutionary shaping of language meaning. This talk briefly reviews a few proposed solutions to Lipman's puzzle and then presents an argument for the view that (i) population-level vagueness (emerging as averages from different meaning representations in different speakers) is natural given, among others, different learning trajectories and perceptual differences between speakers, and that (ii) within-speaker vagueness (a representation of meaning which is held by a single speaker and which includes vagueness) is beneficial, if not essential, to deal with adaptation to inter-speaker differences resulting from (i).