



COLLOQUIUM SERIES

## **“Ambiguity and Scalar Implicature: Evidence for a Modular System”**

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It is generally assumed that at least two systems of the mind are involved in the task of linguistic interpretation: (1) the formal linguistic system, which is responsible for the generation of sentences and the assignment of (literal) meanings to these sentences, and (2) language-external cognitive systems responsible for rational inference and action. This talk will focus on the interaction of these systems as manifested in the generation of a class of inferences called ‘scalar implicatures.’ For example, while the literal meaning of ‘John ate some of the cookies’ is compatible with his having eaten all of them, upon hearing this sentence we normally infer that he did not, in fact, eat all of them.

Since the seminal work of Grice (1967), such inferences (so-called ‘scalar implicatures’) have been standardly analyzed as being due to the pragmatics of rational thought and action, i.e. the output of system (2). I will briefly introduce this idea, and then present some evidence against it. Specifically, I will discuss some evidence pointing to the idea that scalar implicatures are the output of the linguistic system itself (i.e. system (1)), and will draw some theoretical conclusions in response to these observations. If these conclusions should turn out to be correct, the resulting view would constitute a significant shift in our understanding of the organization of language and mind.

**Friday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**3:00 PM**

**3A36 Paterson Hall**

*All are welcome!*