Explaining presupposition
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Abstract
Currently, the best theories of presupposition, in terms of conceptual economy and empirical coverage, all assume that presuppositions are triggered by lexical items (like the definite article) and syntactic constructions (like it-clefts). There is a general awareness that there are problems with this approach. For one thing, it misses out on important generalisations: there are patterns amongst the lexical items that trigger presuppositions, which remain unaccounted for. For another, it leads to what would seem to be an overuse of the concept of accommodation. In this talk I consider the possibility that many presuppositions are not triggered at all, but are in fact associated with the information structure of the discourse. However, the explanation that I will offer doesn't apply across the board, and thus leads to a dichotomy between presuppositions that are conventional and ones that are not. While the orthodox approach is appropriate for the latter, the former call for an explanation in terms of information structure.