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The Syntax-Semantics Interface of Nominal Quantifiers

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One of the central concerns of natural language semantics is how quantificational nominal expressions like 'all students', 'most students' and 'at most ten students' are to be analysed. A standard approach is represented by Generalized Quantifier Theory (GQT), which generalises the universal and existential quantifier of predicate logic to a higher-order concept of a quantifier as a set of sets. GQT assumes that natural languages make use of a multitude of quantifiers, which are essentially taken as unanalysed basic units. However, in recent years there has been a growing body of evidence indicating that the GQT view is too simple, and a more insightful analysis is needed to approach the semantics of complex quantifiers. This talk will present initial analyses taking the syntax-semantics interface of nominal quantifiers seriously. It focuses on nominal expressions involving negative (e.g. 'nobody'), comparative (e.g. 'more than three books') and superlative morphology (e.g. 'most students') and shows how a fully-compositional analysis can look like. In the end, the consequences for the inventory of quantifiers in natural languages are discussed. The conjecture is that the universal and the existential quantifier of predicate logic are in fact the only quantifiers employed in natural languages, and that more complex quantificational expressions require a detailed analysis of their composition at the syntax-semantics interface.