

Abstract zum Vortrag von **Prof. Dr. Susan Rothstein**



**Linguistischer Arbeitskreis** der RWTH Aachen  
**25. November 2015, 18.15 Uhr, Raum 103** im Gebäude der Philosophischen Fakultät

### **Crosslinguistic Expressions of Counting and Measurement**

Numbers are used both in expressions that count, *three* in *three cats*, and in expressions that measure, *three* in *three litres of wine*. Linguists, in particular semanticists, have been divided as to the relation between counting and measuring: is measuring a form of counting, is counting a form of measuring, or are they two independent operations? Insight into this question comes from expressions like *two glasses of wine*, which are ambiguous between a counting and a measuring interpretation. On the counting reading, *two* gives information about the number of objects under discussion, namely glasses of wine, while on the measuring reading *two glasses* give information about the quantity of wine under discussion.

In this talk, I shall show that each of these two readings is associated with a different semantic structure: on the counting reading *two* is semantically a modifier of *glasses of wine*, while on the measuring reading *two glasses* is a modifier of *wine*. I will show that this semantic distinction is realized as a syntactic, structural, distinction in a number of typologically unrelated languages, including English, Modern Hebrew, Mandarin and Hungarian, despite the very different ways in which these languages construct numerical expressions. This provides support for the hypothesis that the linguistic system treats counting and measuring as different operations: putting discrete individuated entities in one-to-one correspondence with the natural numbers (counting) and assigning values to quantities on a continuous dimensional scale (measuring) are operations which the linguistic system keeps separate.