

SYLLABUS

LING 447D: Expressive Meaning

1 Contact information

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2 Prerequisites

LING 327 or PHIL 220. Although the facts in this area are fun and accessible, the formal tools for characterizing them are often quite challenging, in part because what makes them fun is precisely what requires special tools. That definitely doesn't mean that everyone needs to master complicated technical machinery, but it does mean that everyone should be prepared to spend some time agonizing over it.

3 Course structure

The course is a capstone seminar, so your main responsibilities will be to engage with the research literature, think creatively about it, and do some research of your own. The course will be structured around in-class discussion and, near the end of the semester, presenting your own original research.

There's more information on course activities under 'Activities' below.

4 Brief course description

To make it possible to characterize meaning rigorously, formal semantics has always relied above all on the truth conditions of sentences. But of course, not all meaning is about truth conditions. ‘Your father died’ arguably has precisely the same truth conditions as ‘Dude, your old man kicked the bucket’ and ‘Alas, your dad passed away’, but they differ in interesting and highly consequential ways. The difference between them is in expressive meaning. This seminar will examine this variety of meaning through its manifestations, including in diminutives, discourse particles expressive like *man*, modifiers like *goddamn*, slurs, epithets, honorifics, and elsewhere, and its relation to other varieties of meaning, including presupposition, conventional implicature, and social meaning.

5 Objectives

The chief aim is to provide you with an interesting and occasionally entertaining capstone experience that leverages the linguistic training you’ve received over the past few years. More concretely, I hope you’ll get better at the following:

- engaging with research literature
- discovering new puzzles
- thinking carefully and in detail about empirical phenomena without a safety net (that is, coping with phenomena won’t have been distilled carefully into clear tractable problem sets)
- applying the analytical skills you’ve acquired productively and originally in research of your own

6 Activities

The principal requirements for the course are:

- Readings. Do them.
- Three ‘microassignments’. These consist of saying something in a discussion on Canvas about a paper we’re reading. It needn’t be more than a sentence or two. There’s more on this requirement below.
- Presenting a reading. You’ll do this in a group of (at least) two. Start thinking about choosing one early on.
- Writing a short paper (a ‘squib’, in linguistics lingo). You can do this in a group.

- An in-class presentation about what you're working on for the paper. This presentation will take place before the paper is due so you have time to incorporate feedback.
- Contributing frequently and thoughtfully to discussion in class and/or in the online forum. This is not optional.

In class The course consists primarily of class discussion, so making it to class is important. If you anticipate having to miss class frequently, do not take this course.

Microassignments These are very brief posts in a Canvas discussion on a paper we're reading for class. The intention is for these to be truly 'micro'—a very small low-pressure low-effort task. A sentence or two should suffice. The purpose of these is to register thoughts and questions so that we can come back to them in class discussion. You could ask a clarification question, offer some additional relevant data from any language, share your opinions about the analysis, or anything else you think might be constructive. You will get full credit for doing these irrespective of the content (within reason; no credit for 'this paper sux lmfao'). You're encouraged to post reactions to or comments about other people's thoughts at any time, of course.

Presenting a reading In a group of at least two, you'll present a class reading. To do so effectively, you'll want to prepare a handout or slides. Your job is definitely not to understand everything. It's to summarize the main points of the paper, ask some questions, and ideally have some original thoughts related to the paper. Your job is essentially just to facilitate an informal friendly chat on a topic of common interest.

The paper You will write a short paper, potentially in a group, on a topic relevant to the class. This should involve original research. It should either offer some original observations about a phenomenon or an original analysis of it. (It needn't necessarily be 'original' with respect to the literature, something no one in the world has previously noticed. It just needs to be something *you* have noticed on your own.) The paper needn't be long (approximately 10 pages is fine, but of course it's content that matters, not length). There'll be more information about this later in the semester.

Presenting your work on the paper You'll present your work in progress on the paper to the class. The aim is for you to give everyone an idea of what you're thinking about, stimulate an interesting discussion in class, and yield feedback that will be useful to you in writing up the paper. To give you time to incorporate feedback, the paper is not due until some time after the presentation.

7 Assessment

Each task will receive a percentage grade. Your final grade will be determined as follows:

Presentation of a reading:	20%
Microassignments:	15% total (5% each)
Presentation of your paper:	15%
Write-up of your paper:	30%
Class participation:	20%

This will map onto a letter grade according to UBC's standard scale, which is as follows for undergrads:

90–100	A+	76–79	B+	64–67	C+	50–54	D
85–89	A	72–75	B	60–63	C	00–49	F
80–84	A–	68–71	B–	55–59	C–		

For MA students, grades below C are failing; for PhD students, grades below B are.¹

This is all subject to UBC's broader policies about grading, which apparently include the possibility that the university will 'scale' your grade to diminish grade inflation.

8 Important warning about swearing and slurs

Some of the most revealing facts around expressive meaning involve linguistic taboos—expressions that violate social norms. That includes swearing and ethnic and racial slurs. In order to discuss these linguistic taboos, it may occasionally be necessary to violate them. For this reason, someone in the class may need to utter linguistic expressions that none of us particularly want to hear. In discussions of swearing, this is likely not to be a major issue for most of us. In discussing slurs, however, there is a danger of genuinely causing offense or social discomfort. In class, let's make an effort not to utter slurs that are especially offensive or likely to cause discomfort, but let's also be forgiving of each other if we slip up. The literature, however, explicitly mentions slurs that you may not be comfortable reading without warning.

If you find reading a particular paper traumatic, you are of course welcome to simply not do so. If you will find it difficult to be exposed to swearing and slurs of any kind, however, this is not the right course for you.

¹Consult the [UBC Calendar](#) for details.

9 Other course policies

Communication and work format Class materials will be distributed through Canvas in the usual way. When you submit your paper, please do so in the form of a PDF file.

Disability Please notify me during the first two weeks of the course if you need to make special arrangements to accommodate a disability. If you haven't already done so, you should contact the UBC Centre for Accessibility for additional help.

Academic integrity Don't plagiarize. If someone that isn't actually a coauthor of your write-up gives you an idea that you use or build on, say in the write-up who it was. Do not have Chat-GPT do anything for you. For more on the university's academic integrity policies, look at the university's Academic Honesty and Standards statement.

Social media and copyright issues Don't share course materials with anyone outside of class. This would be a serious breach of trust, a form of academic misconduct, and a violation of copyright. Don't record anything that happens in class without prior approval. Violating these policies may result in academic disciplinary sanctions.

10 University policies

Here is the standard UBC syllabus prose about university policies:

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.

Details of the policies and how to access support are available on the [UBC Senate website](#).

More generally, if you're struggling with an issue that is affecting your ability to engage with the course, please don't hesitate to communicate that.

11 Acknowledgment

Here is the land acknowledgment we have adopted as a department:

We acknowledge that the University of British Columbia is located on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəy̓əm, Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh, and Səl̓ílwətał Nations (Vancouver campuses) and the Syilx peoples (Okanagan campus). We at UBC Linguistics consider this land acknowledgment to be an opportunity to show our commitment towards reconciliation and the recognition of Indigenous peoples and languages. Please visit native-land.ca or maps.fpcc.ca to learn more about these places, peoples and languages.

For anyone interested in linguistics, it's also worth acknowledging a corresponding fact about the intellectual ground on which we stand, which we are particularly well-positioned to perceive. Endangered languages—here and around the world—are crucial to discovering what sorts of phenomena occur in natural language and how languages vary from each other. Without them and without the collaboration of their speakers, we would know less about the language faculty, and therefore less about ourselves.

12 Approximate road map

Here is an approximate road map of the topics we might discuss and of crucial dates. There will almost certainly be changes to topics, readings, and timing in light of the backgrounds and interests of people in the class and the direction our discussion takes. In particular, we're very unlikely to get through everything here.

- Jan. 9** Syllabus & logistics
Introducing ourselves
Overview of the empirical terrain
- Jan. 11** Continuing the empirical overview from last time
Acquiring some additional tools: types and lambdas
A few words about presupposition
- Jan. 16** Establishing that expressive meaning exists: [Potts \(2007b\)](#)
- Jan. 18** Is expressive meaning actually a kind of presupposition?:
[Schlenker \(2007\)](#)
Is expressive meaning special: [Geurts \(2007\)](#)
- Jan. 23** Japanese honorifics: [Potts & Kawahara \(2004\)](#)
- Jan. 25** Establishing conventional implicature: [Potts \(2003\)](#) chapter 1

- Jan. 30** Conventional implicature continued, possibly?
Capturing conventional implicature: [Potts \(2003\)](#) chapter 2
- Feb. 1** More recent take on expressive adjectives:
[Gutzmann \(2019\)](#) chapter 4
- Feb. 6** Expressive intensifiers: [Gutzmann \(2019\)](#) chapter 5
- Feb. 8** More on expressives and intensification:
[Castroviejo & Gehrke \(2019\)](#)
- Feb. 13** Hey, you! Vocatives!: [Gutzmann \(2019\)](#) chapter 6
- Feb. 15** Expressive meaning in Ktunaxa
- Feb. 20 & Feb. 22** *Reading week. No class.*
- Feb. 27** Exclamatives and questions, in Japanese and elsewhere:
[Taniguchi \(2017\)](#) ch. 3
or possibly: [Castroviejo Miró \(2008\)](#)
- Feb. 29** Japanese discourse particles: [Taniguchi \(2017\)](#) ch. 4
- March 5** Evaluative adverbs in questions in French:
[Mayol & Castroviejo \(2011\)](#)
- March 7** Epithets ([Beller 2013](#) or [Arsenijević 2006](#))
- March 12** *Extremely* in questions: [Castroviejo & Mayol \(2009\)](#)
(these are just slides)
- March 14** *Man*: [McCready \(2009\)](#)
- March 19** Expressive meaning and social meaning: [Burnett \(2019\)](#)
- March 21** Intensifiers between social and descriptive meaning:
[Beltrama \(2016a\)](#) (excerpts)
- March 26** Spillover day or paper presentations
- March 28** Paper presentations
- April 2** Paper presentations
- April 4** Paper presentations
- April 9** Paper presentations
- April 11** Paper presentations
- April 19** *Final paper write-up due. (But no class.)*

There is a lot of other work that we might want to discuss. Here are some possibilities, in no particular order:

- perspective-shifting: [Harris & Potts \(2009\)](#)
- idioms: [McClure \(2011\)](#)

- expressives & identity conditions Pullum & Rawlins (2007) Potts et al. (2009)
- McCready on ‘emotive equilibria’: McCready (2012)
- discourse particles, especially in German (Kratzer 1999, Döring 2013, Egg 2013, Repp 2013)
- how expressives project: Simons et al. (2011) (and possibly if someone is very brave a touch of Barker et al. 2011)
- swearing and measure phrases: Morzycki (2011)
- metalinguistic intensification: Beltrama (2016b)
- other replies to Potts 2007: Amaral et al. (2007), Anand (2007), Jay & Janschewitz (2007), Lasersohn (2007), Zimmermann (2007) and Potts’ reply to the replies (Potts 2007a)
- focus and more intonation: Kratzer (2004), Gutzmann & Castroviejo Miró (2011)
- exclamatives and still more intonation: Castroviejo Miró (2008), Potts & Schwarz (2008)
- more on vocatives, imperatives, and epithets: Portner (2007), Arsenijević (2006)
- appositives, supplements, and non-restrictiveness: Potts (2003, chap. 3), Morzycki (2008) and possibly Solt (2011) or some of Schlenker (2009a) and Schlenker (2009b)
- mixed expressives and varieties of conventional implicature: Gutzmann (2011) and some of McCready (2010)
- negation and pushing the expressive envelope: Potts (2010)
- slurs, mixed expressives, and more about expressive meaning and presupposition: Cepollaro (2015), Cepollaro & Stojanovic (2016)

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