

January 8, 2018

SYLLABUS

LIN 892: Seminar in Linguistics

1 The course & the topic

The course is a seminar, which means we'll read the primary literature and talk about it, and do our own research and talk about it. Here is a sketch of the topic:

Straining at the Margins of Truth Conditions: Flavors of Meaning, Discourse, and Context of Use

There is a certain tension between the simplicity and formal elegance of truth conditions and the richness of natural language meaning. Formal semantics has advanced in part by finding creative ways of reconciling that tension. The obvious example is presupposition: it's superficially a challenge to basing a theory of meaning on truth conditions, but it turns out to be evidence for a more sophisticated view of the role truth conditions play. The aim of this seminar is to explore a few particular related places where such a tension asserts itself.

We'll proceed in three steps. First, we'll talk about models of discourse and how basic sentence meanings work in a formal theory of pragmatics. Then we'll talk about some lexical semantic distinctions that benefit from an analysis that appeals to a representation of discourse. Finally, we'll confront the question of whether this terrain could be better understood by building a bridge to notions that we normally regard as sociolinguistic.

2 Contact information

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I'll put all the readings on D2L rather than doing everything via email, as has been my custom in the past.

3 Requirements

The requirements for this course are:

- Writing two squibs (very short papers) or a single fully-developed paper in two drafts. The choice is yours. More on this as we proceed.
- Presenting your work on the squib/paper in class.
- Presenting one of the readings.
- Participating vigorously in the discussion. This is not syllabus window-dressing. This really is a requirement.

If you haven't taken LIN 437 and don't have a fair bit of background in logic, you may want to work through the first two chapters of the first volume of the Gamut textbook (info below) and do some exercises.

Grading Your final grade will be determined on the basis of your written work and your contributions in class (in presentations and more generally), weighted equally. (So, seriously, talk.)

A word about squibs They don't need to provide a full analysis of a phenomenon, and they do not need to reflect an entirely novel empirical discovery. Reasonable things to do in a squib are:

- make some empirical observations that you haven't seen made before and explain their significance
- attempt to extend an existing analysis of some phenomenon to a new range of data

- point out a disadvantage or difficulty in an existing analysis or discuss some larger issues it presents
- develop your own analysis from scratch of a phenomenon, without looking at the literature, then compare what you invented to what others have proposed

It is *not* sufficient, though, to simply read and summarize a handful of papers.

If you're writing a paper, you'll need an actual analysis.

4 Textbooks

Much of what we read will be from the primary literature. But you should also get a copy of:

Gamut, L. T. F. 1990. *Logic, Language, and Meaning*. University of Chicago Press.

It comes in two volumes. You should get both. This is somewhere between a textbook and a reference work. It's useful as a kind of handbook to have by one's side when reading semantics. It is quite sophisticated formally, which can make it pretty challenging in places, but it actually rewards the effort put into it.

For purely formal background, you might also be interested in this:

Partee, Barbara, Alice ter Meulen, and Robert Wall. 1990. *Mathematical Methods in Linguistics*. Kluwer, Dordrecht.

5 Tentative schedule

This is just a rough road map. We'll make adjustments in this schedule as we proceed. At a minimum, we'll most likely move slower than this and not cover everything listed here.

I'd also especially welcome some input about stuff we should look at in sociolinguistics.

Jan. 8: logistics
 quick overview: indirect interpretation
 brief chat about coming attractions

Jan. 15: first step toward discourse: [Stalnaker \(1979\)](#)
 rising declaratives & the Stalnakerian framework
 in use: [Gunlogson \(2002\)](#)

Jan. 22: sign up for a paper to present (/a date to present on)
 extending the framework: [Farkas & Bruce \(2010\)](#)
 polarity emphasis & the extended framework
 in use: [Taniguchi \(2017\)](#) (ch. 1 & 2)

Jan. 29: considering everything *totally*:
 [Beltrama \(2016a\)](#)
 (this should be split among several people)

Feb. 5: expressive meaning: [Potts \(2007\)](#)
 (possibly also [Potts & Kawahara \(2004\)](#) on
 honorifics)
 conventional implicatures: [Potts \(2003\)](#) (ch. 1)
 possibly: CIs, appositives, and discourse update:
 [AnderBois et al. \(2011\)](#)

Feb. 12: pragmatic slack: [Lasersohn \(1999\)](#)
 metalinguistic comparison and imprecision:
 [Morzycki \(2011\)](#)
 (you could also get background on vagueness
 and imprecision from [Morzycki \(2016\)](#)
 ch. 3, especially 3.2)
 imprecision, hedging, and *like*:
 [Beltrama & Hanink \(2017\)](#)

Feb. 19: extremeness in adjectives: [Morzycki \(2012\)](#)
 extremeness & intensification: [Beltrama \(2016b\)](#)

Feb. 26: paper proposals/squib presentations

March 12: *Canceled*

March 19: paper proposals/squib presentations spillover
 predicates of personal taste: [Lasersohn \(2005\)](#)

March 26: subjectivity more widely: [Bylinina \(2014\)](#) (ch. 2)
 subjectivity & aesthetic adjectives:
 [McNally & Stojanovic \(2017\)?¹](#)

April 2: a taste of degree words in sociolinguistics: [Ito & Tagliamonte \(2003\)](#)

¹Other options: [Nouwen \(2007\)](#), [Stephenson \(2007\)](#), [Fleisher \(2013\)](#).

- semantic change (timed partly to coincide with colloquium): Deo (2015)
- April 9: demonstratives and social meaning: Acton (2014) (this should be split among several people)
- April 16: semantic viruses: Sobin (1997), Morzycki (2017) social meaning in game theory: Burnett (2017)
- April 23: paper/squib presentations
- Finals week: paper/squib presentations

Other stuff possibly worth discussing that I haven't been able to fit into this schedule, but we may want to shoehorn in:

- Questions Under Discussion: Roberts (1998)
- focus: Rooth (1996)
- topic and focus: Büring (2003)
- inquisitive semantics: Groenendijk & Roelofsen (2009)
- questions: Karttunen (1977)
- evidentials: Rett & Murray (2013)
- subjectivity, adjective order, and cognition: ?

References

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