

653: Topics in Noun Phrase Interpretation

Course Description

This course explores the following topics in Noun Phrase (NP) interpretation:

1. “Specific” NPs; indefinites and choice functions. We will look at different notions of specificity in the literature and at the use of choice functions to explain some special properties of indefinites.

2. NP objects of attitude verbs. NPs that are the objects of attitude verbs have received different analysis and different semantic types in the literature. The debate extends to the nature of generic and existential indefinites/bare plurals in English and Romance. Concealed question NPs will also receive our attention.

3. Alternatives approaches to pronominal NPs: Situation Semantics (SS) and Variable-Free Semantics (VFS). Reanalyzing “donkey” pronouns as E-type pronouns in SS offers an alternative to their treatment in dynamics. As for bound and free pronouns, an alternative to the Montagovian approach is provided by VFS, which assigns a functional type to pronouns rather than the classical individual type. This has important consequences for the analysis of focused pronouns.

4. Comparatives and Superlatives. Adjectives (and some adverbs and determiners) contain a degree variable that is used to build the comparative and the superlative. We will investigate the semantics of these constructions in general and the possible scopes of the binders of their variable in particular. (NOT COVERED! FOR NEXT SEMINAR)

Course Requirements

As a prerequisite, the student should have competence in Formal Semantics at least equivalent to Ling 553 Formal Semantics I.

Requirements:

- Class presentation of two papers on the syllabus.
- Class presentation of your own incipient project on Nov 8.
- Final presentation of your project on our last class, on Dec 6.
- Written version of your paper, due on Dec 12 by noon.

Syllabus

	“SPECIFIC” NPs; CHOICE FUNCTIONS.
Sept 13	Epistemic specificity. Background: Donnellan 1966, Kripke 1977; Hellan 1981, Ioup 1977, Partee 1972.
Sept 20	Choice functions variables for indefinites: referential or \exists-closed? Reading: Kratzer 1998 (excerpt) Matthewson 1999 Chierchia 1999 Background: Abusch 1994, Fodor and Sag 1982, Reinhart 1997, Romero 1999, Ruys 1992, von Stechow 1996, Winter 1997.
Sept 27	Presuppositional Specificity. Reading: Enc 1991 Background: Saarinen 1981, Diesing 1992. Other: Han-Romero on yes/no and alternative questions.

	NP OBJECTS OF ATTITUDE VERBS
Oct 4	NPs as Objects of Attitudes I Reading: Zimmermann 1993 van Geenhoven-McNally 199? Background: Montague 1974, Moltmann 1997
Oct 11	NPs as Objects of Attitudes II Reading: Forbes (forth.) Larson - den Dikken – Ludlow 1997
Oct 18	Concealed Questions Reading: Heim 1979 Sharvit 1999 Background: Hirshcbühler-Rivero 1983, Quer 1998.

	ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO PRONOMINAL NPs
Oct 25	“Donkeys” as E-Type Pronouns in Situation Semantics Reading: Kratzer 1989 Heim 1990 Background: Evans 1977, 1980, Cooper 1979, Berman 1987.
Nov 1	Free and bound pronouns in Variable-Free Semantics I Reading: Jacobson 1997 Jacobson 2000 Background: Sauerland 2000
Nov 8	Free and bound pronouns in Variable-Free Semantics II Reading: Dimitriadis (forth. 2000) Other: <i>First class presentation of your project</i>

	COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES (NOT COVERED! FOR NEXT SEMINAR)
Nov 15	The scope of the Degree Phrase I Reading: Kennedy 1997 Stateva 1999
Nov 22	The scope of the Degree Phrase II Reading: Heim 2000 Sharvit-Stateva 2000
Nov 29	Focus, Reconstruction and Superlatives Reading: Szabolsci 1986 Bhatt 1999

Dec 6	<i>Final class presentation of your project</i>
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References

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- Enc, M. 1991. The semantics of specificity. *LI* 22.1: 1-25.
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2. NP OBJECTS OF ATTITUDE VERBS

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- Montague, R. 1974. On the nature of certain philosophical entities. In Thomason, R. (ed.), *Formal Philosophy*. New Haven. 148-186.
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3. ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO PRONOMINAL NPS

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4. COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES

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