

LIGN271/PHIL285 — The Experimental Study of Meaning

Professor: Eva Wittenberg and Paolo Santorio

UC San Diego, Spring 2019

Office Hours: Eva: Wednesdays 12-1, AP&M 4220; or under ewittenberg.youcanbook.me

Paolo: Thursday 3:30–5:30 (or by appointment), H&SS 8004

Language is (perhaps, after consciousness) the biggest mystery. It is routine for us to understand and produce linguistic utterances, but it is not at all transparent to us how these utterances work at any level of abstraction, and how we represent them in our mind.

Modern linguistics and cogsci have worked at the task of producing a map of our linguistic competence for a long time. In recent times, the theoretical work in this field has been supplemented by an explosion of experimental work. This seminar provides a selective overview of experimental work on linguistic meaning. We will start by discussing the theoretical foundations of the enterprise, touching on Chomskyan linguistics and its relationship to semantics, as well as other cognitive approaches to meaning. After a crash-course session on experimental design, we will look at some case studies where experiments have had an important impact on debates in semantics and pragmatics.

The goal of this course is not to teach you how to set up your own experiments, but rather to teach you how to read critically the experimental sections of papers in psychology and cognitive science. You will also be in a better position to take courses on experimental design, should you so want.

Readings

We will be reading 2-3 papers per week. All readings will be posted in the following Google Drive folder:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ug6nnv9D4e-ufI7q71fjmD6cLI7zvd0B>

Prerequisites

We will presuppose only willingness to learn some material that, from time to time, has (very light) formal aspects and might take you out of your comfort zone.

Assignments

If you're taking the seminar for credit, you will be asked to do four things. (1) Show up at each session with a question about the readings. (2) Hand in a mini-squib¹ (3-5 pages) and a mini-QALMRI² (1-2 pages) on one of the sections of the class by the Friday of Week 8, at 8pm. (3) Hand in a longer (8-10 pages) squib and a QALMRI by the Friday of Week 8, at 8pm. (As a default, we expect the two sets of assignments to be based on different topics, but the default can be overridden.)

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

- Participation: 20%
- Mini-squib + QALMRI: 30%
- Final squib + QALMRI: 50%

Laptop usage advice

Of course, you're allowed to do whatever you prefer with laptops/tablets/phones in the seminar. Just be aware that there's abundant research suggesting that taking notes on laptops or tablets is inefficient and leads to distraction.

Week-by-Week Schedule

Notice: schedule and readings may be subject to change. Please make sure you keep up with announcements.

Week 1. Introduction: Semantics in generative grammar

No required reading for the lecture; eventually, please read

- Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* chapter 1;
- Lasnik, 'Grammar, Levels, and Biology'.

Week 2. Alternative approaches: Jackendoff

- *Required reading:*
 - Jackendoff (2002), *Foundations of Language*, chapters 5 and 9-10
 - Chamberlin, T. C. (1965). The method of multiple working hypotheses. *Science*, 754-759.
- *Supplementary reading:*
 - Harris, *Linguistics Wars*, chapters 5-6 and 9 (optional but highly recommended – it is as illustrative as it is entertaining)

¹'squib' is linguists' jargon for 'short paper'.

²A QALMRI is an systematic way to plan and summarize experimental studies. Examples will be provided!

Week 3. Experimental Methods

- *Required readings:*
 - Abbuhl et al., (2014): Experimental Research Design. In: Podesva, R. J., Sharma, D. (Eds.). (2014). *Research methods in linguistics*. Cambridge University Press.
 - Mook, D. G. (1983). In defense of external invalidity. *American Psychologist*, 38(4), 379-387.
 - Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2005 (QALMRI)
- *Supplementary reading:*
 - Gibson, E., & Fedorenko, E. (2013). The need for quantitative methods in syntax and semantics research. *Language and Cognitive Processes*, 28(1-2), 88-124.

Week 4: Case study 1: Implicature

- *Required readings:*
 - Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: 3. Speech acts*. New York: Academic Press. , 41-58.
 - Chemla, E., & Singh, R. (2014). Remarks on the experimental turn in the study of scalar implicature. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 8(9), 373-386.

Week 5: Case study 1: Implicature, continued

- *Required readings:*
 - Papafragou, A., & Musolino, J. (2003). Scalar implicatures: experiments at the semantics–pragmatics interface. *Cognition*, 86(3), 253-282.
 - Chemla, E., & Spector, B. (2011). Experimental evidence for embedded scalar implicatures. *Journal of Semantics*, 28(3), 359-400.
- *Supplementary reading:*
 - Noveck, I. A. (2001). When children are more logical than adults: Experimental investigations of scalar implicature. *Cognition*, 78(2), 165-188.
 - Goodman, N. D., Frank, M. C. (2016). Pragmatic language interpretation as probabilistic inference. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 20(11), 818-829.

Week 6: Case study 2: Mass/count

Required reading:

- *Required readings:*
 - Jackendoff, R. (1996). The proper treatment of measuring out, telicity, and perhaps even quantification in English. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*, 14(2), 305-354.
 - Gillon, B. S. (1992). Towards a common semantics for English count and mass nouns. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 15(6), 597-639.

- *Supplementary reading:*
 - Krifka, M. (1992). Thematic Relations as Links between Nominal Reference and Temporal Constitution. in: *Lexical Matters*. Ivan A. Sag and Anna Szabolcsi, eds.

Week 7: Case study 2: Mass/count, continued

Required reading:

- *Required readings:*
 - Wiese, H., & Maling, J. (2005). Beers, kaffi, and schnaps: Different grammatical options for restaurant talk coercions in three Germanic languages. *Journal of Germanic Linguistics*, 17(1), 1-38.
 - Barner, D., & Snedeker, J. (2005). Quantity judgments and individuation: Evidence that mass nouns count. *Cognition*, 97(1), 41-66.
- *Supplementary reading:*
 - Wellwood, A., Hespos, S. J., & Rips, L. (2018). How similar are objects and events?. *Acta Linguistica Academica*, 65(2-3), 473-501.
 - Barner, D., Wagner, L., & Snedeker, J. (2008). Events and the ontology of individuals: Verbs as a source of individuating mass and count nouns. *Cognition*, 106(2), 805-832.

Week 8: Case study 3: Conditionals

- *Required readings:*
 - selections from Evans and Over, *If*
- *Supplementary reading:* TBA

Week 9: Case study 3: Conditionals, continued

- *Required readings:*
 - Ferguson, H. J., & Sanford, A. J. (2008). Anomalies in real and counterfactual worlds: An eye-movement investigation. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 58(3), 609-626.
- *Supplementary reading:* TBA

Week 10: Loose ends

- *Required readings:* TBA
- *Supplementary reading:* TBA