Semantics of Modification

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Class time:	Tuesday 16:30–18:00
Classroom:	23.32.00.66
Office hours:	M 14:00–15:00, and by appointment
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1 Course Outline

In this seminar we will be examining the semantics of modifiers across different linguistics categories. Modification includes a wide assortment of constructions and facts, and raises many puzzles regarding how to account for modification as a grammatical phenomenon and how best to think of the division of labor between syntax, phrase-level semantics, and lexical semantics. In this course we will discuss classic and contemporary papers regarding the semantics of modifiers, especially adverbial and adjectival modifiers. The seminar will include discussion of the logical forms of adjectives and adverbs and ways of classifying them, gradability and vagueness, correlations between syntactic position and the interpretation of the modifier, and considerations regarding compositionality and linguistic ontology.

You will also learn how to read the primary literature in theoretical linguistics and especially formal semantics, get experience with the formal tools used in semantics, and gain and understanding of how to construct and evaluate linguistic arguments.

2 Textbook

There is no required book for this course. However, you may find the following book useful as an occasional reference. As this course doesn't presuppose any particular familiarity with formal semantics already, we will do our best to explain the machinery as it becomes necessary.

- Heim, Irene and Kratzer, Angelika. (1998). *Semantics in generative grammar*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

The course readings themselves will be distributed as PDFs via email.

3 Requirements

For the class, we require that you complete at least nine reading responses during the course of the semester (more detail on these below), in addition to participating thoughtfully in class discussions.

For an AP, you must meet the class requirements from the previous paragraph, as well as complete either an oral exam or a term paper.

4 Course Policies

Reading responses: An important aspect of this course is are the reading responses, short responses where you can think critically about the paper you read for class.

There are a number of ways of thinking critically about the paper. Here's a few ideas to get you started:

- What new, interesting, cool, or provocative ideas are in the paper?
- Are there any theoretical or empirical drawbacks to the paper?
- Does it make the right predictions? Can you extend the theory to account for other examples?
- What happens if you don't make the same assumptions the author makes?

If you plan to do a term paper for the AP, thoughtful reading responses will make it much easier to write a paper.

Language: Since a large proportion of the formal semantics literature we are interested in for this course is in English and one of the instructors speaks only a little German (Curt), the course will be conducted in English. Note, though, that you will **not** be evaluated based on your knowledge of English grammar; you will be graded solely on content.

Email: Make sure you check your email regularly. Handouts, readings, assignments, and class announcements will be sent to your university email address.

Common courtesy: Please silence handys and other electronic devices during class, and do not send or receive text messages. You're welcome to use a laptop in order to take notes or have a copy of the paper available.

Academic misconduct: Academic misconduct of all forms, including but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, and fabrication, is strictly prohibited. A definition:

> "Plagiarism is presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. 'Someone else's work' means anything that is not your own idea, even if it is presented in your own style. It includes material from books, journals or any other printed source, the work of other students or staff, information from the Internet, software programs or other electronic material, designs and ideas. It also includes the organization or structuring of any such material." (Glossary, University of Wellington, New Zealand).

5 Schedule

This is a tentative overview of the topics we'll address, in roughly the order we'll address them. The specifics of this schedule will depend on our in-class discussions and how much time we devote to particular topics, so this schedule is likely to be overly ambitious. Readings for the next week will be distributed via email, along with any additional instructions.

- WEEK 1
  - Course introduction
  - Basics of formal semantics

References

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Potts, Christopher. 2007. The expressive dimension. *Theoretical Linguistics* 33(2). 165–198.

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