

Linguistics for Philosophers

Seminar for UEA philosophy undergraduates

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Web:¹ <https://piazza.com/uea.ac.uk/fall2013/l4p/home>

Classes: Fridays, 12–2 (preliminary)

Description and goals. The seminar introduces some of the basic syntactic and semantic notions pertaining to the study of natural language. We'll look at the syntactic building blocks of English, as well as its main syntactic rules, principles, and constraints. We'll then go ahead to see how we can endow the syntactic forms with meanings utilising a compositional mechanism. Against this background, we shall study some of the most interesting linguistic expressions: proper names, definite descriptions, predicates, quantifiers, pronouns, verbs and so on. In brief, we present a broad variety of linguistic phenomena, and introduce important methods of linguistic analysis.

The outcome of the course is twofold. Firstly, you will get a clearer picture of how language works, and an overview of the diversity of linguistic phenomena. Secondly, you will learn to reason about language the way linguists do. For philosophers, this opens up the possibility of approaching problems in philosophy of language by applying linguistic methodology. Moreover, the ability to properly analyse language is more generally useful.

Prerequisites. Some basic notions of propositional and first-order logic, as well as an introductory course in philosophy of language would be useful, but is not required. A well motivated student will fully profit from the seminar even without the suggested background.

Textbooks. We are doing our best to make the seminar self-contained; so, no additional material beyond the one provided in class is required. That being said, we are going to use a few textbooks in syntax and semantics as a basis for the course material and would recommend them as supplementary reading as well:

- **TEXTBOOKS IN SYNTAX**

- Haegeman, L. (2006) *Thinking Syntactically. A Guide to Argumentation and Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- Carnie, A. (2007) *Syntax. A Generative Introduction*. Second edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- Haegeman, L. (1994) *Introduction to Government and Binding Theory*. Second edition. Cambridge Mass.: Blackwell

¹To be able to use the forum, you need to sign up using this *signup link*: piazza.com/uea.ac.uk/fall2013/l4p

- Sportiche, D., Koopman, H. and Stabler, E. (forthcoming) *An Introduction to Syntactic Analysis and Theory*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, draft downloadable at <http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/stabler/isat.pdf>

- **TEXTBOOKS IN SEMANTICS**

- Heim, I. and Kratzer, A. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- Gamut L. T. F. *Logic, language, and meaning*. Volumes I & II. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Levin, B. and Rappaport Hovav, M. (2005) *Argument Realization*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press

- **LINGUISTICS DICTIONARY**

- David Crystal (2008) *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing

Tentative schedule & readings. The seminar will consist of two main parts dealing with two basic aspects of a natural language: the syntax or form of natural language (2–6) and the semantics or meaning of natural language (7–11) respectively.

INTRO

1. **Basic constituents and structure diagnostics** (Alun & Andrei)
Readings: Haegeman (2006, pp. 67-92), Carnie (2007, ch. 2-3)

SYNTAX & INTERFACES

2. **Phrase structure** (Andrei)
Readings: Haegeman (2006, pp. 92-118), Carnie (2007, ch. 6)
3. **Thematic roles** (Alun)
Readings: Haegeman (1994, ch. 1), Carnie (2007, ch. 8)
4. **Movement** (Andrei)
Readings: Carnie (ibid., ch. 10-11)
5. **Binding theory** (Andrei & Alun)
Readings: Carnie (ibid., ch. 5)
6. **Argument structure** (Alun)
Readings: Levin and Hovav (2005, ch. 1)

MODEL-THEORETIC SEMANTICS

7. **Types of meaning and lambda abstraction** (Alun & Andrei)
Readings: Heim and Kratzer (1998, ch. 1-2), Gamut (1991, vol. 2, ch. 1,4), and the lambda tutorial at <https://files.nyu.edu/cb125/public/Lambda/>
8. **Non-verbal predicates and definite descriptions** (Alun)
Readings: Heim and Kratzer (1998, ch. 4), Gamut (1991, vol. 1, ch. 5.2)
9. **Semantic binding** (Alun)
Readings: Heim and Kratzer (1998, ch. 5, 10)
10. **Quantifier phrases** (Andrei)
Readings: Heim and Kratzer (ibid., ch. 6), Gamut (1991, vol. 1, ch. 3)
11. **Intensional semantics** (Andrei)
Readings: Heim and Kratzer (1998, ch. 12), Gamut (1991, vol. 2, ch. 1-2)

Learning advice. The suggested readings are optional but recommended. To make the

most of the seminar, it is important to read part of the material in advance (i.e. before the material is being introduced in class). You do *not* need to understand everything, and you are encouraged to skip over the bits that seem too difficult. What you need is just to familiarise with the main notions and to be able to formulate some meaningful questions about the topic. This will give us a basis on which we can build in class. It is crucial to solve at least part of the exercises assigned weekly. So, stick with the following workflow: read, attend the seminar, ask questions, and then do the exercises!

We estimate that the **total workload** (including the time spent in class, reading and doing the exercises) comes to about 5 hours a week. We'd also say that it's better to spend one hour a day for five days a week than 5 hours in one fell swoop.