

Linguistics for Philosophers

Seminar for UEA philosophy undergraduates

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Classes: Fridays, 12–2 (preliminary)

Description and goals. We discuss some of the basic notions in philosophy of language and linguistic semantics. We'll learn how the meaning of complex expressions are built from the meanings of simpler expressions, and, more generally, how the syntax and semantics of natural language are connected. Against the background of model-theoretic semantics, 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 (especially at a semantic level), and an overview of the diversity of linguistic phenomena. Secondly, you will learn to reason about language the way linguists and philosophers of language do. For philosophers, this opens up the possibility of approaching problems in philosophy of language by applying linguistic methodology. Of course, 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 handouts provided in class (and the articles listed below) is required. That being said, we shall use a few textbooks in linguistic semantics as a basis for the course material and would recommend them as supplementary reading as well:

- TEXTBOOKS

- Heim, I. and Kratzer, A. (1998) *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- Gamut L. T. F. (1991) *Logic, language, and meaning*. Volumes I & II. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- von Fintel, K., and Heim I. (2011) *Intensional semantics* (unpublished) downloadable from: <http://mit.edu/fintel/fintel-heim-intensional.pdf>
- Beaver, D. (2001) *Presupposition and assertion in dynamic semantics*. Stanford: CSLI. downloadable from: <https://webpace.utexas.edu/dib97/silli.pdf>

Tentative schedule & readings. The seminar has 12 sessions. We are going to discuss 6 *themes* in the study of meaning: proper names, predicates and definite descriptions, quantification, binding, intensional semantics (propositional attitudes and modality), and dynamic semantics. We shall spend 2 *sessions* on each theme.

THEMES & READINGS

1. **Types of meaning (with focus on proper names)**
textbook: Heim and Kratzer (1998, ch. 1-2), Gamut (1991, vol. 2, ch. 1,4)
articles: Kripke (1980, pp. 1-70), Matushansky (2008), (cf. Cumming 2013)
2. **Predicates and definite descriptions**
textbook: Heim and Kratzer (1998, ch. 4), Gamut (1991, vol. 1, ch. 5.2),
article: Fara (2001), Brogaard (2007), (cf. Ludlow 2013)
3. **Quantifier phrases**
textbook: Heim and Kratzer (1998, ch. 6), Gamut (1991, vol. 1, ch. 3)
articles: Westerstahl (2011), Szabolcsi (2010, ch. 1-3)
4. **Binding**
textbook: Heim and Kratzer (1998, ch. 5, 10)
articles: Fine (2003) (cf. Fine 2007, ch. 1-2), Pinillos (2011)
5. **Intensional semantics (propositional attitudes and modals)**
textbook: Heim and Kratzer (1998, ch. 12), Gamut (1991, vol. 2, ch. 1-2), von Fintel and Heim (2011, ch. 1-3)
articles: Kratzer (1977, 1981) (collected in Kratzer 2012, ch. 1-2), Swanson (2011)
6. **Dynamic semantics**
textbook: Yalcin (2013), cf. Beaver (2001)
articles: Nickel (2013)

Organisation. The seminar will take 12 weeks, with 2h weekly sessions.

Each seminar session has two parts. We dedicate the *first part* to the presentation (by Alun or Andrei) of the textbook treatment of a theme in semantics. This will provide (at least part) the background needed for approaching the second part of the seminar. In the *second part* we'll discuss an article on the main theme of the session. It would be good if each of you could direct the weekly discussion in the second part of the seminar, for example by presenting the main ideas of the article. This shouldn't be seen as a presentation strictly speaking, but rather as a way to encourage a structured discussion.

Learning. The suggested textbook readings are optional but recommended. (We shall introduce you to the relevant textbook material in the first part of each session.) However, the articles are not optional, since we shall all discuss them in the second part of each session. The material is technical, and some of the notions will be unfamiliar to you. Don't worry. You do *not* need to understand everything, and you are encouraged to skip over the bits that seem too difficult. Focus on the main examples and try to find an intuitive analysis of the potential technical bits; also, it is helpful to note down some questions about the material that you find most interesting. Then, in class we can build on that.

We estimate that the *total workload* comes to about 6-8 hours a week, a bit more in the weeks in which you direct the discussion on an article.

References

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- Brogaard, Berit (2007). "Descriptions: predicates or quantifiers?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 85.1, pp. 117–136. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048400601185495> (cit. on p. 2).
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- Fine, Kit (2003). "The role of variables". *Journal of Philosophy* C.12, pp. 605–631. DOI: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3655524> (cit. on p. 2).
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- Matushansky, Ora (2008). “On the Linguistic Complexity of Proper Names”. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 21.5, pp. 573–627 (cit. on p. 2).
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- Pinillos, Ángel (2011). “Coreference and meaning”. *Philosophical Studies* 154, pp. 301–324. DOI: 10.1007/s11098-010-9543-y (cit. on p. 2).
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- von Fintel, Kai and Irene Heim (2011). “Intensional Semantics”. manuscript MIT. URL: <http://mit.edu/fintel/fintel-heim-intensional.pdf> (cit. on p. 2).
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- Yalcin, Seth (2013). “Introductory notes on dynamic semantics”. ms. Berkeley. URL: <http://www.yalcin.cc/resources/yalcin-2013-dynamic-notes.pdf> (cit. on p. 2).