Ling 190: Speech Acts.

Spring 2019 Syllabus

Introduction:

A basic question in semantics and pragmatics is, how do we convey what we mean? Speakers' intended meaning is partially encoded in the utterance itself, and partially calculated using contextual information. What's the division of labour between grammar and context? The course will examine the notions of direct and conventionally indirect speech acts, and use the meanings of speech act modifiers like particles (2, 5), intonation (3), evidentials (4), and tag questions (1,2) in a variety of languages, using them as clues to the semantic and pragmatic computations.

1. John's in NYC, isn't he?
2. jo', la ‘k'o-k-ix tz'l a’w-ala ja’as-ik bi.
   huh CMP 2E-pluck-ACS PT 2E-DIM sapote-PL TAG
   ‘Huh, you picked your sapote fruits, eh?’ (Tzeltal. Brown 2010)
3. John's in NYC?
4. plan k'a tu7 wa7 tsu7c na máq7-a
   already infer then impf melt(inch ) det snow-exis
   ‘The snow must have melted already.’ (St’át'imcets. Davis 2006, Chapter 23)
5. 走 吧。
   Go BA (Mandarin)
   “Let’s go. / How about you go? / How about I go? / She’s going, right?”

The course prerequisites are Ling 140: Discourse and Pragmatics or Ling 130: Formal Semantics, but the course is also open to students who’ve done well in Ling 120: Syntactic theory.

In honour of the Year of Indigenous Languages, we will bring to bear examples from indigenous languages of the world (which may or may not be endangered). Homework reports will include research on indigenous languages.

Course Information

Time: T,Th 3:30 -- 4:50 PM
Reader: A collection of papers will be available on LATTE.
Professor: Sophia A. Malamud
Email: smalamud AT brandeis DOT edu
Office: Volen 215
Office Hours: TBA

Grading

• Come to each class prepared, and participate in what happens here. This includes having done the reading and any assigned work. Your course grade may be lowered by 5-10% for failure to attend or participate.
• 25% 2 in-class presentations of assigned papers.
• 30% homework assignments (mostly reports of particular phenomena in specific languages)
• 35% a research project, specifically
  o communicating with me, timely completion of all milestones, developing a topic
  o bibliographic and empirical research, including selection and understanding of papers, developing critique of these papers, consolidation and presentation of available language data, developing argumentation based on empirical data, writing of the paper
  o writing (both bibliographic and empirical) includes responding to comments and improvement from one version to the next
• 10% end-of-term presentation of the project

Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, homework exercises, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).
Honour code

You're supposed to work independently on all assignments in this class, except if you're presenting a paper together with another student. Of course, you're encouraged to talk to me about the assignments. Cheating is a very serious business and will not be tolerated at all. We will make every attempt to be reasonable about assignments, due dates, etc., but infractions of the honour code will be dealt with severely.

Additional information

Throughout the semester, deadlines, assignments, etc. will be announced through the LATTE page for this course that you can access by logging in here. You must be officially registered for the course in order to access the LATTE page.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see the professor immediately. Retroactive accommodation cannot be provided.

Schedule for April (tentative):

- April 2: Finish Roberts 1996/2012
- April 4: Start, and maybe finish, Condoravdi and Lauer
- April 11: Start, and maybe finish, Faller 2014
- April 18: depending on how fast we go (and when we start) with Murray and Starr, possibly a presentation of Farkas and Roelofsen’s model of conversation.
- April 29 by noon – Abstracts for projects due.
- April 30: last class. Project presentations, including my ongoing work with Tatjana Scheffler on “won’t you?” tags in English.
- May 10 or so – final papers due

Tentative plan:

Unit 1 Intro to Speech Acts

Unit 2. Clause types and utterance modifiers
   HW1 – clause types

Unit 3. Pragmatics with common ground/conversational scoreboard (to be revisited).

Unit 4. Semantics for interrogatives. Biased questions (to be revisited).
Unit 5. Possible world semantics for modals. Imperatives as modal propositions.


Unit 6. Epistemic modals and evidentials. Use conventions for imperatives.


Unit 5. Dynamic pragmatics: information structure


Unit 6. Evidentials and dynamic semantics of clause types


Unit 7. Evidentials as speech act modifiers


Unit 8. Biased questions, tags, confirmatorials
