LING 140  Discourse and Pragmatics
Syllabus

Linguistics is concerned with scientific exploration of humans’ linguistic competence. Since we cannot observe knowledge directly, theoretical linguists collect language data, look for patterns, and propose formal theories of language knowledge that might explain why the data looks the way it does.

Linguistic data may come in many forms: speech and text that were produced by people going about their everyday business of communicating; results of experiments; people’s reactions to examples of speech.

The theory of language knowledge has to explain many different things:
• what is the nature of speech sounds,
• what are the laws that govern the arrangement of different sounds in speech,
• what is the system that allows people to construct words out of smaller bits like roots and affixes,
• what are the rules that people unconsciously use to construct new sentences out of words and phrases,
• what is the meaning of different types of words and how are word-meanings assembled into sentence meanings, and finally,
• how are sentences put together and used as utterances in actual interactions between speaker and hearer(s).

In this course, we will look at the last point: how sentences are put together and used in context.

We will suppose (for the sake of argument) that we have a theory to account for sentence-level linguistic competence. What are the phenomena still to be accounted for in the explication of language knowledge?

Our goal will be to examine data, theories, and methodologies dealing with language use in context. We will address a variety of topics, including
• reference/anaphora/definiteness, deixis, implicature, speech acts, use of (marked) syntactic constructions, information packaging
• the semantics of reference/sense, reference as cooperation of speaker/hearer
• pragmatics of dialogue/conversation

Requirements

Students will be required to do the assigned readings, and to present some of the assigned papers in class. In the course of the semester, they will complete two small assignments: one in collecting and preparing linguistic data, and one in data analysis. In addition, there will be a term research project, culminating in a presentation at a mini-conference at the end of the term, and in a term paper. The paper should be about 7, and no more than 10 pages long (so, only one-liners for intro and conclusion). The term project will involve collection of naturally-occurring linguistic data, or conducting an experiment to explore a topic in linguistic pragmatics.
The webpage for the course is [http://people.brandeis.edu/~smalamud/ling140.html](http://people.brandeis.edu/~smalamud/ling140.html)

It has the full schedule of papers and assignments.

**Grading**

Class participation 10% – obligatory to qualify for a grade

In-class presentation of assigned readings 40% (10% each)

Assignment in data collection/pred 10%

Presentation at the mini-conference 20%

Final paper 20%

**Textbooks**

There are two required texts for the course (see tables of contents attached):


**Schedule**

Below is a plan of readings and presentations. Papers that do not appear in Davis 1991 will be distributed to students. Only a selection of the papers listed will be actually required reading (two or three a week, depending on the length and complexity of the papers).

**Part One: Basic Notions**

Pragmatics in linguistics and philosophy
Division of labor: semantics vs pragmatics

*Levinson, Preface, Ch.1; Davis, Introduction.*

**Part Two: Language as cooperation - Implicature**

*Levinson, Ch.3, Grice 1975, Horn 1984, Sadock 1978, Wilson and Sperber 1986*

**Part Three: Language as Action**

Speech Acts
Indirect speech acts
Performativity

*Levinson, Ch.5, Strawson 1974, Searle 1965, Searle 1975, Clark 1979*

**Part Three: Deixis**

Deixis
Person, time, place deixis
Shifters
Social Deixis
Levinson, Ch.2, Castañeda 1968, Kaplan 1989, Shlenker 2003, Sharvit 2004, etc.

Part Four: Talking Together

Participant roles
Turn Taking
Current research in semantics and pragmatics of dialogue
Decision and Game theoretic approaches
Levinson, Ch.6, Lewis 1979, Garrod and Anderson 1987, Scheglov 1992,

Part Five: Structure of discourse, topichood, and coherence
Definiteness/indefiniteness and givenness hierarchy
Topic/comment and focus/ground
Entities in discourse
Entity-tracking and local discourse coherence
Malamud 2001, Prince 2003
Discourse structure

References:

http://www.msu.edu/~abbottb/support.htm.
107-166.
BranDial 2006.
Castañeda, Hector-Neri. 1968. ‘On the logic of attributions of self-knowledge to others.’ The
Journal of Philosophy 65 (15).
Clark, H. 1979. Responding to indirect speech acts. Cognitive Psychology 11.430-77. Also in
Davis 1991.
Clark, H. and Haviland, S. 1977. Comprehension and the given-new contract. In Freedle, R.,
Webber, and I.A. Sag, eds. 1981. Elements of discourse understanding. Cambridge:
Cambridge Univ. Press.


Schlenker, P. 2003. 'A plea for monsters.' Linguistics and Philosophy 26:29-120.


