

Ling 201C: Semantics 2

propositions and sets of propositions

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time: TTh 12-2pm
office hours: TTh 2-3pm

description

Following Montague's groundbreaking contributions, formal semantics quickly developed in its characterization of the meaning and use of propositions. This class explores three such types of developments.

1. the adoption of possible worlds as a semantic primitive, which allows for an elegant treatment of propositional attitudes, modals, and counterfactuals.
2. Hamblin's analysis of questions as sets of propositions, which inspired treatments of presupposition, focus, and discourse coherence.
3. modern adaptations of these uses of sets of propositions, which have formed the foundation of related semantic frameworks: Alternative Semantics (which we'll examine in the context of indefinites and conditionals); Inquisitive Semantics (which we'll examine in the context of disjunction and question-embedding); and dynamic-semantic treatments of context update.

schedule

week	date	topic	reading	homework
<i>propositions as sets of worlds</i>				
1	Jan 5 Jan 7	an introduction possible worlds	von Fintel and Heim 2011 Chapter 1	
2	Jan 12 Jan 14	propositional attitudes modals	von Fintel and Heim 2011 Chapter 2 von Fintel and Heim 2011 Chapter 3*	homework 1 due
3	Jan 19 Jan 21	conditionals ordering sources	von Fintel and Heim 2011 Chapter 4 von Fintel and Heim 2011 Chapter 5	homework 2 due
<i>sets of propositions: phase 1</i>				
4	Jan 26 Jan 28	questions	Roelofsen 2019: §1-2 Uegaki 2019: at least §1-4	homework 3 due
5	Feb 2 Feb 4	presupposition	Stalnaker 1973 Heim 1983	homework 4 due
6	Feb 9 Feb 11	focus	Rooth 1996 §1-3 Rooth 1996: §4-6	homework 5 due
7	Feb 16 Feb 18	topic & focus	Buring 2003: §1-6 Buring 2003: §7-12	homework 6 due
<i>sets of propositions: phase 2</i>				
8	Feb 23 Feb 25	alternative semantics	Alonso-Ovalle 2005 Rawlins 2008	homework 7 due
9	Mar 2 Mar 4	inquisitive semantics	Ciardelli and Roelofsen 2017 Theiler et al. 2019 §1-3	homework 8 due
10	Mar 9 Mar 11	dynamic update student presentations	Farkas and Bruce 2010	

*Don't bother with §3.2.5 or §3.3 (i.e. anything after §3.2.4).

expectations: participation (20% of your grade); homework (30%); final presentation (10%) and final paper (40%)

reading: The above schedule is almost certainly too ambitious for one quarter. We will amend it as we go, based on how discussion progresses, and how interested students are in the big picture versus the technical details.

homework: I will assign very short (1-2 exercise) weekly homework assignments to give students a chance to make sure they understand the relevant formalism.

final paper: A 10–15pg (single-spaced) paper is due on **Sunday, March 21**. In it, I'd like you to review one or two treatments of a particular phenomenon that invoke possible worlds or sets of propositions (i.e., papers that are written in the traditions of intensional semantics, Hamblin semantics, Stalnakerian update semantics, Alternative Semantics, and/or Inquisitive Semantics). The ideal paper will include constructive and thoughtful reviews and reflection on the recommended direction of future research. I have **no** expectation that you find these papers on your own! Please talk to me about it (see below) so I can help you scheme and quality control.

presentation: Students will be asked to present foundational work for their paper in the last week of class. You should aim for a 10-15 minute presentation; the main goal of the presentation is to inform your peers about additional and interesting areas of research, as well as for you to solicit advice on the paper. In preparation for the presentation, I'll ask each student to meet with me to discuss their topic and direction at some point before the end of **Week 8**.

References

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- Buring, D. (2003). On D-trees, beans, and B-accent. *Linguistics & Philosophy*, 26:511–545.
- Ciardelli, I. and Roelofsen, F. (2017). Hurford's constraint, the semantics of disjunction, and the nature of alternatives. *Natural Language Semantics*, 25:199–222.
- Farkas, D. and Bruce, K. (2010). On reacting to assertions and polar questions. *Journal of Semantics*, 27:81–118.
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- Heim, I. (1983). On the projection problem for presupposition. In Barlow, M., Flickinger, D., and Wescoat, M., editors, *Proceedings of WCCFL 2*, pages 114–125. Stanford University Press.
- Rawlins, K. (2008). Unifying *if*-conditionals and unconditionals. In Friedman, T. and Ito, S., editors, *Proceedings of SALT 18*. CLC Publications.
- Roelofsen, F. (2019). Semantic theories of questions. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. Oxford University Press.
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- Stalnaker, R. (1973). Presuppositions. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 2:447–457.
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