

**FH6050**

**Linguistic Theories**

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**Subject descriptions**

<b>Targeted Participants</b>	DALS research students: Elective compulsory Other research students at CBS: Discipline-specific compulsory (linguistics)
<b>Credit Value</b>	3
<b>Level</b>	6

This subject aims at acquainting students with theories of language and linguistic studies at an advanced level. Upon completion of the subject, students are expected to be able to:

- a) Demonstrate an advanced knowledge of past and current theories related to the study of language;
- b) Analyze and evaluate specific theoretical claims with a scientific and objective attitude;
- c) Perceive the social, sociological, geographic and academic reasons that have motivated and shaped the development of linguistic theories over the past one hundred years.
- d) Relate theories of linguistics with the mainstream theories of communication and language use

**Teaching/Learning Methodology**

Students will be required to approach theories through both lectures and selected readings. They will be required to be actively engaged in presentations and discussions so as to grasp the spirit of particular linguistic claims. Emphasis will be laid on nurturing an impartial attitude towards theories.

## **Some Suggested Topics**

- The Use of Linguistic Theories and Methodological considerations
- Pragmatic theory: relevance theory 1
- Pragmatic theory: relevance theory 2
- Pragmatic theory: relevance theory 3: some topics of study: explicature, deixis, tropes
- Pragmatic theory: Grice Logic, Pragmatics and Rationality
- Semantic theory: Frege's Hypothesis and Compositionality of Meaning
- Semantic theory: Richard Montague and Formal Semantics
- Semantic theory: Logic and Language
- Semantic theory: Dynamic Studies of Meaning
- Syntax: Chomsky's System of Ideas and the Philosophy of Generative Grammar
- Syntax: Functional and cognitive studies
- Philosophy of Language: Contextualism vs Semantic Minimalism
- Presentation topics by registered participants

## **Presentations and Assessment**

Participants are welcome to suggest/bring their own topics of interest, be they theory-related or topic-related. Each participant is expected to contribute one 1.5-hour presentation. [Tutorial supervision will be provided at least two weeks before the presentations.]

Evaluation is made on one written work related to the given presentation.

Suggested length: 4000~6000 words.

The presentation with follow-up discussion and commenting will give students a first stage exposure to the right way of understanding and evaluating theoretical claims. With accumulated understanding, they can then try to compose a long essay with more in-depth content, in the right format and language style.

## **What other possible topics can be presented?**

- Try to avoid topics that will overlap with a parallel subject "Current Approaches in Applied Language Studies"
- Try to avoid discussing theories or schools that are no longer practiced in current linguistic studies, unless convincing justifications are provided.
- This is not a subject on history, nor one on current topics, but one reflecting on theoretical approaches.
- Topics starting from case observations and evolving towards theoretical concerns are especially welcome.
- The presenter has the burden of giving clear explanations to the data in any language.

**Presentations, discussions, and writing-up are to be in English only.**

### **Selected Readings:**

- Allan, Keith. and Kasia M. Jaszczolt (eds.) (2012). *The Cambridge Handbook of Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Aronoff, Mark. and J.Rees-Miller (eds.) (2003). *The Handbook of Linguistics*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Chapman, Siobhan. (2000) *Philosophy for Linguists: An Introduction*. Routledge. [complements Seuren]
- Chapman, Siobhan. (2005) *Paul Grice: Philosopher and Linguist*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Chapman, Siobhan. (2008) *Language and Empiricism - After the Vienna Circle*. Palgrave MacMillan. [good on ordinary language philosophy]
- Chomsky, Noam. and James McGilvray (2012) *The Science of Language, Interviews with James McGilvray*. Cambridge University Press.
- Clark, Billy. (2013). *Relevance Theory*. Cambridge University Press.
- Clark, Herbert. (1993). *Arenas of Language Use*. University of Chicago Press.
- Clark, Herbert. (1996). *Using Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cook Vivian J. and Mark Newson (2007). *Chomsky's Universal Grammar: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell. 3rd edition.
- Cosenza, Giovanna. (ed.) (2001). *Paul Grice's Heritage*. Brepols.
- D'Agostino, Fred. (1988). *Chomsky's System of Ideas*. Oxford University Press.
- Feferman, Anita Burdman. and Solomon Feferman (2008) *Alfred Tarski: Life and Logic*. Cambridge University Press.
- Franken, Dirk., Attila Karakus and Jan G. Michel (eds.) (2012). *John R. Searle: Thinking About the Real World*. Ontos Verlag.
- Gustafsson, Martin. and Richard Sørli (eds.) (2012) *The Philosophy of J. L. Austin*. Oxford University Press.
- Harris, Randy (1995). *The Linguistic Wars*. Oxford University Press.
- Harris, Roy. and Talbot Taylor (eds.) (1997). *Landmarks In Linguistic Thought Volume I: The Western Tradition From Socrates To Saussure (History of Linguistic Thought)*, Routledge. [on Frege, Saussure]
- Heine, Bernd. and Heiko Narrog (eds.) (2010) *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Analysis*. Oxford University Press.
- Joseph, John., Nigel Love and Talbot Taylor (eds.) (2001). *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought Volume II: The Western Tradition in the Twentieth Century (History of Linguistic Thought)* Routledge [on Chomsky, Austin, Goffman, et al.]
- Katz, Jerrold. (1985). *The Philosophy of Linguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Ludlow, Peter. (2011). *The Philosophy of Generative Linguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Lyons, John. (1968). *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge University Press.
- McCawley, James D. (1993). *Everything that Linguists Have Always Wanted to Know about Logic, but were ashamed to ask*. Chicago University Press. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.
- Newmeyer, Frederick. (1986). *Linguistic Theory in America: First Quarter Century of Transformational Generative Grammar*. Emerald. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.
- Newmeyer, Frederick. (1988). *The Politics of Linguistics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Newmeyer, Frederick. (1997). *Generative Linguistics: An Historical Perspective*. Routledge. New Edition.
- Partee, Barbara H., Alice ter Meulen, Robert E. Wall (1990). *Mathematical Methods in Linguistics*. Kluwer Academic.
- Partee, Barbara H. 2005. Reflections of a formal semanticist as of Feb 2005.
- Petrus, Klaus. (ed.) (2010). *Meaning and Analysis: New Essays on Grice*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pinker, Steven. (2007). *The Language Instinct*. Harper. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.
- Sampson, Geoffrey. (1980). *Schools of Linguistics*. Stanford University Press.

- Seuren, Peter. (1998). *Western Linguistics: an Historical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell.  
 [Part II very good on logical semantics]
- Seuren, Pieter A. M. (2004). *Chomsky's Minimalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Seuren, Pieter A. M. (2010). *The Logic of Language: Language from Within*. Volume II. Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Neil. (2004). *Chomsky: Ideas and Ideals*. Cambridge University Press. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.
- Strawson, P. F. (2012). *Philosophical Writings*. Oxford University Press.

## I. On the importance of theoretical commitments

- Theories provide explanations
- Theories can go wrong, but theoretical discussions can advance understanding.
- Theoretical commitments embody joint efforts
- Theoretical commitments are typically exclusive.
- Theory and facts support each other. Mere facts cannot refute theories. Theories can discover facts.

## 2. Descriptive vs. Formal Studies

- Data collection and statistic studies
- Formal characterization in linguistics
- Rule-based studies and statistical studies
- Goals in linguistic studies

## 3. What a conventional subject on this topic might look like (whose format we will not adopt)

- 19<sup>th</sup>.century
- Saussure and his Cours
- The American Descriptivists: Bloomfield, Sapir, Hockett
- The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis
- Functional linguistics: the Prague School
- The London School: J.R. Firth
- Chomsky and generative grammar

## 4. The emphasis of this subject

...any topics of theoretical relevance are most welcome  
 [Make good use of the Handbooks and companions], but we will start with three themes:

- Inferential pragmatics (Paul Grice)
- Formal semantics (Richard Montague)
- Formal syntactic theory (Noam Chomsky)

# FH6060: Lecture 1, Pragmatics A, Relevance Theory I

## Contents

1. Pragmatics: some general issues and facts
2. What to expect in communication?
3. Assumptions and the cognitive context
4. Contextual effects
5. Processing effort
6. The principle of relevance
7. The presumption of optimal relevance
8. Two principles of Relevance
9. Deduction, Abduction and the relevance-theoretic comprehension heuristics
10. A cognitive theory of communication
11. Theory of mind

### 1. What to expect in communication: a candid portrait

- Meaning changes in context in many ways.
- We produce utterances that take the form of sentences or sentence fragments.
- Sentences are always underdetermined, so are fragments. Then how is comprehension possible?
- Pragmatic inferences are made in context
- Misunderstandings do occur, but our less than perfect comprehension machinery generally works well enough.
- Utterance comprehension is quick in the busy agenda of life.
- No conscious learning is involved.

### 2. Assumptions and/in the cognitive context

- Each utterance carries assumptions, which are apparently taken by the utterer to be the factual representations. They take propositional forms.
- Our mind has in store old assumptions gathered through past experiences and put in memory, that can be retrieved when the mind works
- New assumptions will interact with old assumptions. Together, they form a cognitive context.
- The cognitive context is dynamic and changing.

### 3. Contextual effects

- Positive contextual effects
  - Old and new assumptions form premises for deduction, reaching a new conclusion
  - Old and new assumptions form a contradicting pair. The new one has stronger strength and wins out. The old one is discarded
  - The new assumption strengthens the old one.
- Negative contextual effects
  - Old and new assumptions form a contradicting pair. The new one has weaker strength and loses. The old one is kept.

- Old and new assumptions are similar in content, and the new one is weaker in strength than the old one. Nothing new is added.

#### 4. Processing effort

- ❑ Contextual effects are not obtained for free. They require mental processing which exerts effort, in the form of mental energy. Processing also takes time. Both contribute to mental exhaustion and agenda delays.
- ❑ Humans generally tend to avoid too costly activities. Or rather, they are only willing to be engaged in costly activities if the latter will bring rich effects.

#### 5. The principle of relevance

- Relevance: a balance between contextual effects and processing effort. The more the contextual effects, the more the relevance of an utterance. The more the processing effort, the less the relevance.
- Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance. [the 2<sup>nd</sup> principle or the communicative principle of relevance]

#### 6. The presumption of optimal relevance

- Optimal relevance is more realistic than maximal relevance
- The presumption:
  - The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it.
  - The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

#### 7. Two principles of relevance

- Two kinds of cognitive activities: utterance comprehension vs problem-solving
- Utterance comprehension is quick and should not take much time.
- Problem-solving can take as much time as one wishes.
- The first principle: the cognitive principle of relevance: Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance, searching for as much cognitive effects as possible and exerting little processing effort for known unworthy projects or intellectual pursuits.
- Overall relevance and specific relevance.

#### 8. Deduction, abduction and the relevance-theoretic comprehension heuristics

- Utterance comprehension is helped by the participants of communication.
- Assumptions are retrieved and arranged in a stack.
- The most easily available old assumptions to be joined with new assumptions are on top of the stack. Hence the first relevant interpretation is taken to be the optimally relevant one. There is no need to look further. Hence comprehension is quick.
- Computation in cognitive context is deductive.
- But the retrieval of assumptions is abductive.
- The idea of comprehension heuristics

- Pragmatic inference is a relevance-based comprehension heuristic process.
- Utterance comprehension is inter-subjective

## **FH6060: Lecture 1, Pragmatics A, Relevance Theory II**

### **Contents**

1. *Explicature & Explicating*
2. *Conceptual vs. procedural meaning*
3. *Lexical Pragmatics: ad hoc concepts and concept adjustment*
4. *What is in a word? – lexical, logical, and encyclopedic entries*
5. *Descriptive vs. Interpretive Use*
6. *What is a pragmatic theory ?*

#### 1. Explicature and explicating

- No explicating, no explicature, no literal meaning/entailment meaning.
- Explicature concerns literal meaning, implicature concerns non-literal meaning.
- Explicating involves disambiguation, argument recovery, pronoun resolution, enrichment, concept adjustment
- When is enough enough in explicating?
- Comparison to Grice's theory on "what is said" vs. "what is implicated"
- Chinese cases

#### 2. Conceptual vs procedural

A. What is encoded in a word?

B. Conceptual meaning: contributing to truth-conditional meaning of the propositions involved.

C. Procedural meaning: contribution to the reach of Relevance

#### 3. Ad hoc concepts and concept adjustment

- Ad hoc concepts vs. stereotypical concepts
- Ad hoc concept construction
- Narrowing and enlarging concept meaning
- Metaphor interpretation

#### 4. Entries in a word

- Lexical information
- Encyclopedic information
- Logical information
- These make deduction possible.
- These also make contextual effects possible.

#### 5. Descriptive vs interpretive use

- Describing the states of affairs

- Describing mental states
  - Interpreting the states: world, self-world, and others' world
6. What is a pragmatic theory?  
 Explaining inferential processes in an open context, not about mappings of meaning relations from syntactic/semantic representations to utterance meaning, because language use does not involve producing intended meaning, but involves producing evidence about intended meaning. Utterance comprehension is a theory of mind.

**Selected Readings:**

Blakemore, D. (1987) *Semantic Constraints on Relevance*. Oxford:

Blackwell. Blakemore, D. (1992) *Understanding Utterances*. Oxford:

Blackwell. Blakemore, D. (2002) *Relevance and linguistic meaning. The semantics and pragmatics of discourse markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carston, R. (2002) *Thoughts and Utterances*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Clark, B. (2013) *Relevance Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sperber, D. and D. Wilson (1986) *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell (2nd edition, 1995).

Wilson, D. and D. Sperber (2012) *Meaning and Relevance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.