

Syllabus for Ling/Phil 596D (note cross-listing!), Spring 2004

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Topic: Compositionality

When/Where: Wed. afternoons 3:30-5:30, Psych 209. (NOT 3:00)

Are the meanings of natural language utterances really created by combining the meanings of their subparts? That they are is the assumption on which nearly all modern linguistic theory is based, but some linguists and philosophers of language have recently been considering the possibility that natural language is not compositional. Fodor, for instance, has proposed that compositionality, although non-negotiable for the language of thought, may not be operational for natural language. No question is more foundational to the study of language and mind. In this course, we will look at the problem as addressed both historically and currently. Normally both instructors will lecture in each meeting period.

Approximate Schedule of Topics:

Wed. 14th Jan

MPP The issue of compositionality in semantics at large, brief history.

HH From deep structure to LF. The issue of resolving ambiguity at some level, the genesis and interpretation of silent elements, and the role of compositionality.

Wed. 21st Jan

MPP A little more of recent history: The predicaments of generative semantics, the consolidation of the extended standard theory, the dawn of lexicalism (remarks on nominalization), up to minimalism.

HH Hale and Keyser, Gleitman & 'verb frames', the rise of 'constructionalist' approaches to vP meanings

Wed. 28th Jan

MPP Enter Fodor, the early Fodor, then atomism.

HH What kind of element can be an atom (possible words debate)? Pros and cons of atomism, morphosyntax. Carburetors.

Wed. 4th Feb

MPP The actual Fodor: Hume Variations and The Compositionality papers (part 1) with brief tutorials on Frege, Russell, Tarski

HH More about LF: What does the mind's logic look like?

Wed. 11th Feb.

MPP The actual Fodor (part 2). Why F. now resists compositionality for natural languages. Fodor versus Chomsky versus Higginbotham

HH Critique of Fodor's position. Case studies in syntax-semantics: are quantifier

meanings universal?

Wed. 18th Feb

MPP A view on the lexicon. Some essential history (Fillmore, Lakoff, Fodor-Katz, Jackendoff, Pustejovski, the critique of decomposition, Putnam and Fodor)

HH A complementary view on the lexicon. The state of the art: Lexicalists (HPSG, LFG) and non-Lexicalists(DM) converging; the tug-of-war between the 'lexicon' and morphosyntax.

Wed. 25th Feb.

MPP Challenges to compositionality: idioms, context-dependency and the rise of pragmatics

HH Post-syntactic interpretation: What's in the encyclopedia? (Marantz & DM, idioms). Challenges to supposed **NON**-compositionality: McGinnis, Harley

After this, each participant will be presenting to the class (a critical summary of 2 or 3 strictly related papers or book-chapters). Several further interesting topics are possible (see below). The topics will be chosen in large part as a result of the previous discussions, queries, and the individual interests of the participants who will be presenting.

Possible Topics:

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and counters to it

Late acquisition of some quantifiers by children

Vague predicates

Issues of parametrization, Yang's theory of language change

Pragmatics and interpretation: 'World-knowledge' vs. 'linguistic knowledge'

Scalar implicatures

Evidence from aphasics.

Presentations of student's own work

Readings will include:

Fodor, J.A. (2003) "Hume Variations", Oxford: OUP.

Fodor, J.A. and E. LePore (2002) "The Compositionality Papers" Oxford: Clarendon Press

Chomsky, Noam (2002) On Nature and Language, Chapter 4: Interview with A. Belletti and L. Rizzi. Cambridge University

Chomsky on reference and meaning (paper in "Mind", 1979??)

Chapters from Janet Dean Fodor's old book "Semantics" (for a historical reconstruction)

Partee, Barbara H. (Ms. Feb 2001) Montague grammar. To appear in Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes, eds. International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences. Oxford: Pergamon/ Elsevier Science

McGinnis, Martha. (2003) 'On the systematic aspect of idioms,' *Linguistic Inquiry* 33.4, 665-672.

Gleitman, Lila. (1990) "The structural sources of verb meanings." *Language Acquisition*, 1(1), 3 - 55

Harley, Heidi. (2002) 'How do verbs get their names? Denominal verbs, Manner Incorporation, and the ontology of verb roots in English,' To appear in a Kluwer volume edited by Nomi Shir and Tova Rapoport

Blutner, Reinhard, Petra Hendricks and Helen de Hoop. [A New Hypothesis on Compositionality](#). In: Peter P. Slezak (ed.), *Proceedings of the Joint International Conference on Cognitive Science*, Sydney, Australia, 2003, pp. 53-57.

Hopefully, some drafts of papers from the Feb 2004 'Conference on Compositionality, Concepts and Cognition' in Dusseldorf; check out the web page at <http://www.phil-fak.uni-duesseldorf.de/thphil/compositionality/>