

**University of Arizona**  
**Fall 2008**  
**LING/PSYC/PHIL 596D**  
**TOPICS IN LINGUISTICS AND PHILOSOPHY**

*The syntax-semantics interface: Logical Form versus The Language of Thought*

Instructors: Heidi Harley and Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini

Tuesday 3.30pm-6pm in Harvill 105

Description:

The nature of the interface between syntax and “thought” has been a perennial problem for linguistic theory ever since the dawn of transformational grammar in the mid-Fifties. Initially, the hypothesis was that Deep Structure (later called D-Structure) and not surface structure was syntax’s gate to meaning (*John loves Mary, Mary is loved by John, It is John who loves Mary, It is Mary who(m) John loves* are invariant as to the identity of the agent, the object, the kind of “action” and the selectional restrictions of the verb). However, already in *Syntactic Structures* Chomsky pointed out that this hypothesis presented difficulties (*Everyone in this room speaks at least two languages* is not synonymous with *There at least two languages spoken by everyone in this room*). Later on, Ray Jackendoff analogously pointed out the difference in meaning between *Many arrows did not hit the target* and *the target was not hit by many arrows*). The Standard Theory already suggested that Surface Structure is, after all, the gate to meaning, but not directly. As fully developed later in *Government and Binding* (1981) and then in a monograph by Robert May (1985), the new hypothesis was that SS feeds onto a separate level of representation, Logical Form (LF), with specific syntactico-semantic operations intervening (quantifier raising, covert transformations, scope ambiguity). An interesting issue was whether there can be parametric differences between languages in the mapping to LF and, if so, how could a child learn such parametric values. Today, in Minimalism, the issue becomes again rather delicate. Let’s suppose that there are no representations, and even less so “levels of representation”, but only derivations, and that Narrow Syntax (NS) interfaces directly with the Conceptual-Interpretive system (C-I). Not only, but that NS is designed by nature to do so perfectly. No LF any more. Two basic issues stem from this model: the nature of the information provided by the morpho-lexicon (the only locus of parametric variation) and the nature of the Language of Thought (LOT), if any. Jerry Fodor, the original and most forceful proponent of LOT (1975), has just completed a new book (*The Language of Thought Revisited*) that will be available to us. In a nutshell, Fodor’s thesis is that reference is all there is to semantics (his is a rather physicalistic/causal and atomistic kind of reference, based on Zenon Pylyshyn’s FINSTS). At the opposite end of the spectrum, the young German semanticist Wolfram Hinzen (now at Durham University) in two books and a paper maintains that syntactic form is all there is to semantics. We will critically compare these several theories and hopefully develop our own theory.

Preliminary plan of the course:

### **LF, the very idea, and a little bit of history**

Readings:

Chapters from May, R. (1985). Logical Form: Its Structure and Derivation. Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press.

And Chomsky's Lectures on Government and Binding

### **Can semantics be parametric?**

Readings:

Chapters from Chierchia, G. and S. McConnell-Ginet (1990). Meaning and grammar: An introduction to semantics. Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press.

Chierchia, Gennaro (1998b). Plurality of nouns and the notion of "semantic parameter." *Events and grammar*, ed. Susan Rothstein, 53-103. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Higginbotham, J. (1983). "Logical form, binding and nominals." Linguistic Inquiry 14(3): 395-420.

Higginbotham, J. (1993). Grammatical form and logical form. Philosophical Perspectives, vol. 7: Philosophy of Language and Logic. J. Tomberlin. Altascadero (CA), Ridgeview Publishing Company: 173-196

### **Lexical semantics: the very idea and a bit of history**

Readings:

Chapters from Levin, B. and M. Rappaport-Hovav (2005). Argument Realization. Cambridge UK, Cambridge University Press.

Rappaport, M. and B. Levin (1988). What to do with Theta-Roles. in Thematic Relations. W. Wilkins (ed.). New York, Academic Press. 21.

### **The lexicon and/in syntax**

Readings:

Hale, K. and S. J. Keyser (1993). On argument structure and the lexical representation of semantic relations. The View from Building 20. S. J. Keyser and K. Hale (eds.) Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press.

Folli, R. and H. Harley (2006). "What language says about the psychology of events." Trends in Cognitive Sciences 10(3): 91-92.

Folli, R. and H. Harley (2007). "Causation, obligation and argument structure: On the nature of little v." Linguistic Inquiry 38(2): 197-238.

### **Is meaning really truth-making?**

Readings:

Pietroski, P. M. (2003). The character of natural language semantics. In Epistemology of Language. A. Barber (ed). Oxford UK, Oxford University Press: pp. 217-256.

Pietroski, P. M. (2005). Meaning before truth. Contextualism in Philosophy: Knowledge, Meaning and Truth. G. Preyer and G. Peter (Eds). Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press: : pp. 255-302.

### **Enter minimalism: feature checking, spell-out and the disappearance of LF.**

Readings:

Chapters from Lasnik, H., J. Uriagereka, and C. Boeckx. (2005). A Course In Minimalist Syntax: Foundations and Prospects. Oxford UK, Blackwell.

Uriagereka, J. (1999). Multiple spell-out. In Working Minimalism. S. D. Epstein and N. Hornstein (Eds). Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press: pp. 251-282.

### **Lexical atomism and its problems**

Readings:

Fodor, J. A., M. F. Garrett, et al. (1980). "Against definitions." Cognition 8: 263-367.

Fodor, J. and E. Lepore (2005). "Morphemes Matter: The Continuing Case against Lexical Decomposition (Or: Please Don't Play that Again, Sam)." Ms. Rutgers University.

Harley, H. (2003). Wanting, having and getting: A note on Fodor and Lepore 1998. Linguistic Inquiry 35.2

### **The Language of Thought (if any): the very idea and a little bit of history**

Readings:

Chapters from Fodor, J. A. (1975). The Language of Thought. New York, Thomas Y. Crowell. And from the new book

### **Syntax is all the semantics you need**

Readings:

Chapters from Hinzen, W. (2006). Mind Design and Minimal Syntax. Oxford UK, Oxford University Press.

Hinzen, W. (in press) *Hierarchy, Merge and Truth* (to appear in Of Minds and Language: The Basque Country Encounter with Noam Chomsky (M. Piattelli-Palmarini, J. Uriagereka and P. Salaburu (eds), Oxford University Press.

### **Wrap-up**

#### **Evaluation:**

30%: In-class presentation on paper

10%: Class participation, interaction

70%: Final paper/diss chapter on related topic of your choice.

**Auditors Welcome!!**