

## **LING/PHIL 596D “Topics in linguistics and philosophy”**

Fall 2010 “Compositionality and its limits”

Instructors: Andrew Barss, Heidi Harley and Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini

Time: Wednesdays, 4-6:30

Classroom: Engineering 307

### Description

Compositionality is a cornerstone of natural language: the meaning of the whole is determined solely by the meaning of its parts and their mode (structure) of composition. The adverb “solely” is crucial here, it’s daring, but it’s what gives genuine interest to the phenomenon and the syntactico-semantic explanations. Jerry Fodor, in his unerring fight against connectionism, has insightfully qualified this property as “non-negotiable”. *Prima facie* candidates for the negation, or at least attenuation, of the adverb “solely” are

- Idioms (kick the bucket, spill the beans etc.)
- Ellipsis, sluicing, parasitic gaps (superficially there are no “parts” that can give meaning)
- Pragmatic uses that differ from the literal interpretation (questions interpreted as polite requests – e.g. can you pass the salt? -, negations interpreted as polite dissent – e.g. not entirely pleasant -, and some others),
- Linguistic illusions (No eye injury is too trivial to ignore, This books fills a much needed gap) where things that are “there” are not interpreted
- Montalbetti sentences (More people have been to Russia than I have), where something that is not “there” appears to be inserted
- Single lexical entries that appear to “contribute” more than their atomic meaning, specifying something else (added only said of eggs or meat, names of groups of animals specific to certain species, names of cries of specific animals)

In this course, we will examine such violations of compositionality, explaining why some are only apparent, while some are solvable, but not so easily, and some are possibly genuine.

### Requirements:

30% of final grade: Participation in class. This is a seminar-style lecture, and all students are expected to come to class prepared (having read the relevant material for the day's discussion) and to participate in discussion of the class materials.

30% of final grade: A presentation of a paper from the literature related to the course material. This presentation must be 15 minutes long, concise, and informative, so pick your paper or chapter appropriately! Another 10 minutes minimum of discussion of the paper you present is expected, which you will facilitate.

40% of final grade: a paper on a topic related to the course material. This paper can be part of another project, in particular, a dissertation chapter, that you are wishing to get feedback on. It cannot overlap substantially with material submitted for credit for another regular course, however.

### General:

Pagin, Peter and Dag Westerthal. Compositionality. In Klaus von Heusinger, Claudia Maienborn, and Paul Portner (eds.), *Semantics. An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin.  
<http://people.su.se/%7Eppagin/papers/DWPP7.pdf>

### On Idioms

FRASER, Bruce. 1970. Idioms within a transformational grammar. *Foundations of Language* 6:22-42.

MACHONIS, Peter A. 1985. Transformations of verb phrase idioms: Passivization, particle movement, dative shift. *American Speech* 60:291-308.

Janssen, Theo M.V. 2001. Frege, contextuality and compositionality. *Journal of Logic, Language and Information*, 10.1, 115-136.

Marantz, A. (1997). No Escape From Syntax: Don't Try Morphological Analysis in the Privacy of Your Own Lexicon. Proceedings of the 21st Annual Penn Linguistics Colloquium. A. Dimitriadis, Siegel, L., Surek-Clark, C. and Williams, A., Eds. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics 4.2: 201-225.

Marantz, A. (1984). Relevant selection from *Argument Structure*, MIT: MIT Press

NEWMAYER, Frederick. 1974. The regularity of idiom behavior. *Lingua* 34:327-42.

NUNBERG, Geoffrey, Ivan A. SAG, and Thomas WASOW. 1994. Idioms. *Language* 70:491-538.

Megan Stone ongoing research on idioms

Siloni, T. and J. Horvath. 2009. " Hebrew Idioms: The Organization of the Lexical Component". Brill's Annual of Afroasiatic Languages and Linguistics, 1.1., 283-310.

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/brill/baall/2009/00000001/00000001/art00010>

Williams, E. (1994). "Remarks on lexical knowledge." *Lingua* 92: 7-34.

Williams, E. (2003). *Representation Theory*. Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press.

### Lexical decomposition:

Harley, H. To appear, 2011. Lexical decomposition in modern syntactic theory. In Werning, M., Hinzen, W., & Machery, E., eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Compositionality*. Oxford: OUP.

Wunderlich, Dieter. To appear, 2011. Lexical decomposition. In Werning, M., Hinzen, W., & Machery, E., eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Compositionality*.

[http://www.zas.gwz-berlin.de/fileadmin/mitarbeiter/wunderlich/lexical\\_decomposition.pdf](http://www.zas.gwz-berlin.de/fileadmin/mitarbeiter/wunderlich/lexical_decomposition.pdf)

Marantz, A. (2007). "Phases and words."

[http://homepages.nyu.edu/~ma988/Phase\\_in\\_Words\\_Final.pdf](http://homepages.nyu.edu/~ma988/Phase_in_Words_Final.pdf)

On Ellipsis and sluicing (Andy, please complete)

Merchant, J. (2001). The Syntax of Silence: Sluicing, Islands, and the Theory of Ellipsis. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Merchant, J. (2004). "Fragments and ellipsis." Linguistics and Philosophy 27: 661-738.

Lasnik on ellipsis

On linguistic illusions and Montalbetti Sentences

<http://languagelog ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=1926#more-1926>

Data from U Maryland by Colin Philips and Scott Fults on EEG of Montalbetti sentences  
Wason and Reich's A Verbal Illusion", *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 31(4):591-97, 1979)

Meeting Dates:

Sept 1

1<sup>st</sup> half: Administrative arrangements, choice of presentation dates by students.

2<sup>nd</sup> half: 30 mins each Massimo, Heidi, Andy on what they hope to cover

Sept 8

1<sup>st</sup> half:

2<sup>nd</sup> half:

Sept 15

1<sup>st</sup> half

2<sup>nd</sup> half

Sept 22

1<sup>st</sup> half

2<sup>nd</sup> half

Sept 29

1<sup>st</sup> half

2<sup>nd</sup> half

Oct 6

1<sup>st</sup> half

2<sup>nd</sup> half

Oct 13

1<sup>st</sup> half

2<sup>nd</sup> half

Oct 20

1<sup>st</sup> half

2<sup>nd</sup> half

Oct 27  
1<sup>st</sup> half  
2<sup>nd</sup> half

Nov 3  
1<sup>st</sup> half  
2<sup>nd</sup> half

Nov 10  
1<sup>st</sup> half  
2<sup>nd</sup> half

Nov 17  
1<sup>st</sup> half  
2<sup>nd</sup> half

Nov 24  
1<sup>st</sup> half  
2<sup>nd</sup> half

Dec 1 (HH travelling)  
1<sup>st</sup> half  
2<sup>nd</sup> half

Dec 8  
1<sup>st</sup> half  
2<sup>nd</sup> half