

**NEW COURSE**  
**University of Arizona**  
Spring 2015

**LING/PSYCH/PHIL 596D “Topics in Linguistics and Philosophy”**  
Course description

The development of linguistic theories and research methods in the last 50 years or so has witnessed a proliferation of interesting concepts and fundamental problems that may benefit from a philosophical analysis. This is a situation common to many scientific domains, because the ongoing progress of research produces hypotheses, theoretical posits and relations often dictated by the immediate need of generalization and explanation, before a complete elucidation of their meaning is available. (The meaning of the quantum wave function is still under analysis by physicists and philosophers of science almost 90 years after it was first introduced by Schroedinger). In this course, we examine in detail three areas that are deeply rooted in current linguistics (some more recent, some less so), and that offer a special occasion for a foundational reanalysis:

- **Evidentiality and Evidentialism:** There has been a flurry of research activity in the past decade or so on *grammatical evidentiality*. This has largely been driven by the assumption that all languages possess grammatical strategies that give a speaker ways of talking about states, events and actions that they did not directly witness. In some languages, such as English, a speaker asserts *It might be raining* just in case she does not know that it is raining or not. This use of *might* is an example of grammatical modality. Other languages appear to lack modals of the English kind. Rather, these languages grammatically encode *how* a speaker knows that it is raining, which may or may not lead to the assertion that it is raining. This bears directly upon the thesis of *evidentialism*: a speaker *S* is justified in believing proposition *p* iff and only if *S*'s evidence for *p* supports believing *p*. The rich base of descriptions of linguistic evidentiality gives us the opportunity for casting evidentialism in a new light. Among the questions we will ask: does a speaker of language that possesses grammatical evidentials (and lack grammatical modals) assert *p*? And how does this fit in with the logical dichotomy of asserting  $\Box p$  or  $\Box \neg p$ ? Likewise, to what extent do modal assertions in language such as English underly evidence? Can grammatical evidential languages tell us anything about the mental representations of evidence? In exploring these (and other) questions, we will draw from primary language data from understudies languages, and look at the ways our theories of evidentiality, modality and evidentialism help us explain these empirical phenomena. A complementary, but distinct line of inquiry we will follow in this

course turns this on end: what counts as evidence for supporting a particular theoretical approach, or within a specific discipline?

Part of this course will be centered on the important work of the late James Higginbotham, one of the protagonists of the modern semantics of natural languages. In particular, we will reanalyze the following issues:

**The role of events in lexical semantics.** In his pioneering paper of 1985, (Higginbotham (1985)) Higginbotham adopted a Davidsonian approach to lexical meaning, introducing a thematic role for events and showing that Tense is the syntactic operator that binds them. In the light of considerable recent progress in the syntactic and semantic analysis of TP and its avatars, we will reanalyze this suggestion. The recent enrichment of the theory with the introduction of “forces” (by Heidi Harley and collaborators) will be also presented and discussed.

**Elucidations of meaning.** This notion and this approach to meaning represents a novel and interesting attempt to integrate the contribution of the speaker’s spontaneous knowledge of language with judgments and reasoned intuitions, opening also to contributions from pragmatics and language use.

This will open our domain onto the more general and central issue of the relations between logic, semantics and pragmatics.

**The English Perfect and the Past Tense.** Higginbotham has stressed the rather unique syntax and semantics of these verbal forms.

Non-native English speakers, notably those who have a Romance language as their first language, are frequently at a loss in their proper use of these forms. To them (a) “John has spilled coffee on the table” and (b) “John did spill coffee on the table” are synonyms, while to native English speakers (a) has the tacit implication that the traces of the mishap are still visible, while (b) has no such implication. Likewise, it’s deviant to ask someone (a) “Have you ever met Einstein?” because Einstein has long been dead, while (b) “Did you ever meet Einstein” is OK. Such difference is rather inscrutable to non-native speakers. An interesting connection of such peculiarities is with the issue of parameters. Are the peculiarities of the English Perfect and Past Tense evidence for the exclusive localization of parameters in the functional morpho-lexicon, are we witnessing evidence of a syntactic parameter? It’s worth reporting, in this context, that Higginbotham was a fierce opponent of the idea of semantic parameters, but was also not quite persuaded by the thesis that all parameters are in the functional morpho-lexicon, disagreeing with the initial suggestion by his friend and colleague (at USC) Hagit Borer and with several authors in Minimalism.

***Attitudes DE SE.*** The contributions of Higginbotham to this problem (referring to one self) are especially remarkable and innovative. After several publications by philosophers (notably by Hector Neri Castaneda, David Lewis and Michael Dummett), Higginbotham introduced the explanatory role of the syntax and the semantics of the silent pronoun PRO (the subject of infinitivals and gerunds), which binds its antecedent more tightly than names and pronouns. He introduced a new operator on events,  $\sigma(e)$ . The subject or *experiencer* of the event  $e$  cannot fail to be known as the thing  $x$  that *is* that subject *I expect [PRO to win]*. This will allow us to reexamine the syntax and semantics of attitudes *de re*, *de dicto* and *de se*.

Basic references:

- Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. (2004). *Evidentiality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-926388-4.
- Castañeda, H.-N. (1966). "'He': A study in the logic of self-consciousness." *Ratio* **8**: 130-157.
- Conee, Earl and Richard Feldman. *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.
- Folescu, M., & Higginbotham, J. (2012). Two takes on *de se*. In S. Prosser & F. Recanati (Eds.), *Immunity to Error Through Misidentification: New Essays* (pp. 46-61). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, D. (1979). "Attitudes *de dicto* and *de se*." *The Philosophical Review* **88** (4): 513-543.
- Higginbotham, J. T. (1985). On semantics. *Linguistic Inquiry*, *16*(4), 547-593.
- Higginbotham, J. T. (1989). Elucidations of meaning. *Linguistic and Philosophy*, *12*(3), 465-517.
- Higginbotham, J. (1992). "Reference and Control". In *Control and Grammar*. R. Larson, S. Iatridou, U. Lahiri and J. Higginbotham (Eds). Dordrecht, Kluwer: 79-108.
- Hornstein, N. (1999). "Movement and control." *Linguistic Inquiry* **30** (1): 69-96.
- Higginbotham, J. (2003). "Remembering, imagining and the first person". *Epistemology of Language*. A. Barber (Ed). Oxford UK, Oxford University Press: 495-534.
- Higginbotham, J. (2007). The English perfect and the metaphysics of events. In J. Lecarme & J. Guéron (Eds.), *Time, Tense and Modality*. Berlin: Springer Verlag.
- Higginbotham, James (2010). "On Words and Thoughts About Oneself." François Recanati, Isidora Stojanovic, and Neftalí Villanueva (eds.), *Context-Dependence, Perspective, and Relativity*. De Gruyter Mouton: Berlin and New York. pp. 253-282.

## Schedule (very flexible)

**Week 1:** General introduction

**Week 2:** Elucidations of meaning: fine grained interactions between the meanings of words and the meanings of syntactic structures.

Higginbotham, J. T. (1985). On semantics. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 16(4), 547-593.

Higginbotham, J. T. (1989). Elucidations of meaning. *Linguistic and Philosophy*, 12(3), 465-517.

**Week 3:** Objections to a compositional and truth-functional semantics and counters to those objections.

**Week 4 and 5:** Events, tense and forces

Higginbotham, J. (2007). The English perfect and the metaphysics of event In J. Lecarme & J. Guéron (Eds.), *Time, Tense and Modality*. Berlin: Springer Verlag.

Higginbotham, J. (2007). The English perfect and the metaphysics of events. In J. Lecarme & J. Guéron (Eds.), *Time, Tense and Modality*. Berlin: Springer Verlag.

Bach, Emmon. 1986. The Algebra of Events. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 9 (1986): 5-16.

**Week 6:** Evidentiality and evidentialism

Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. (2004). *Evidentiality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-926388-4.

Conee, Earl and Richard Feldman. *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.

**Week 7:** Modals and Intensional contexts

- Counterfactuals
- Non-monotonic reasoning
- DPs in intensional contexts

**Week 8:** Truth de re versus truth de dicto

**Week 9 and 10:** Truth de se

Higginbotham, J. (2003). "Remembering, imagining and the first person". *Epistemology of Language*. A. Barber (Ed). Oxford UK, Oxford University Press: 495-534.

Higginbotham, James (2010). "On Words and Thoughts About Oneself." François Recanati, Isidora Stojanovic, and Neftalí Villanueva (eds.), *Context-Dependence, Perspective, and Relativity*. De Gruyter Mouton: Berlin and New York. pp. 253-282.

Folescu, M., & Higginbotham, J. (2012). Two takes on de se. In S. Prosser & F. Recanati (Eds.) *Immunity to Error Through Misidentification: New Essays* UK: Cambridge (pp. 46-61).

Lewis, D. (1979). "Attitudes de dicto and de se." *The Philosophical Review* 88 (4): 513-543.

**Week 11 and 12:** Truth-conditional pragmatics

Recanati, F. (2010), *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

**Week 13 and 14:** TBA or Advanced modality

**Week 15:** Wrap-up and general discussion