

LANGUAGE IN CONTEXT

Syllabus
Spring 2004

INSTRUCTOR:

Professor Maria Bittner

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(download lecture notes, homeworks and solutions)*office hour:* Th 11:30 am–12:30 pm, SEM-203A.

WHEN & WHERE:

TTh 2:50 – 4:10 pm, MU-115.

PREREQUISITE:

Lin 201: *Introduction to Linguistic Theory*.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The interpretation of sentences and texts in English and other languages depends on the context, and the local context is dynamically updated as the interpretation proceeds. This course is an introduction to formally explicit theories of *context dependence* and *context dynamics*.

We will discuss various kinds of intuitions that speakers have about context dependence: e.g., Is sentence so-and-so *felicitous* in such-and-such a context? And if it is, is it *true* and what other *inferences* does it invite? Speakers also have intuitions about context dynamics: e.g., Are these sentences [specify] a *coherent text* or just a list? You will learn some logical tools to represent such intuitions in formally precise ways — precise enough to make predictions that can be tested against native speaker intuitions — and to derive such formal representations in systematic ways.

The ultimate goal of current semantic research is a *formally precise* theory of interpretation with *crosslinguistic applicability*. One kind of motivation is plain scientific curiosity: How exactly does the human mind, as reflected in our language use, work? Potential practical applications come from the increasingly common and varied use of computers by ordinary people who do not speak any computer language. So we need theories that are formally precise enough to tell a computer how to interpret, e.g., the following, in any language: *My nine year old nephew is coming next week. What's going on in New York that might interest him?*

In this introductory course we won't get anywhere near this distant goal — indeed, current semantic theories still have ways to go — but it may help you to understand, in a general way, what sort of tasks all this formal stuff you'll learn in this course is supposed to accomplish.

TEXTBOOK:

None. I don't know of any textbook suitable for this course. *Obligatory handouts:* There will be handouts covering the obligatory material. They will be explicit enough to follow if you come to class and make sure to ask questions about anything you don't understand. *No guarantees if you skip classes:* Most people find the handouts alone too formal to understand, if they've missed the discussion in class. *Optional readings:* I may sometimes give you references to some articles. All of these will be classics, definitely worth reading, but not required for this course.

REQUIREMENTS:

There will be *ten homeworks* (see below), which will account for 10 □ (3 + 1) pts = **40 pts**, and *three quizzes* (in class, open book), which will account for 3 □ 20 pts = **60 pts**.

The class schedule below indicates the Tuesday classes when a *homework with a solution* will be handed out and posted by 9 pm at <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~mbittner> under *Lecture notes*. Your task will be to complete the homework assignment (**3 pts**) and then to correct it yourself (**1 pt**). My solution should help, but you will still have to decide what's a mistake and what's just an alternative correct solution — an important part of the learning process. To get the **1 pt** credit you must *visibly mark* what you have decided: i.e., put a *visible check* (✓) if you think it's correct, or make a *visible correction* (e.g., in a different color). I will not check your corrections; the (**3 + 1**) pts credit is for doing the work: homework plus proofreading.

Self-corrected homeworks will be *due* at the beginning of the following Thursday class, when we will discuss the solution. If you cannot come to class, you can either (a) leave your self-corrected homework in my mailbox, or (b) e-mail it to me as a *pdf file*. Only pdf, with all the symbols embedded, is acceptable. *No late homeworks* will be accepted. Remember: *no visible mark* of proof-reading, *no 1 pt proofreading credit*.

If doing an assignment or correcting it makes you think of a question you would like us to go over in class, please write it at the end of your assignment and I'll do my best to respond — either in class or just to you, whichever seems most appropriate.

Finally, *if you cannot take a quiz as scheduled*, then you must come to me with a *written explanation from your dean or coach*. Otherwise you will automatically get **0 pts** on that quiz. Also, requests to reschedule a quiz are unlikely to be granted after the solution to the quiz has been discussed in class.

CELL PHONE POLICY:

5 pts penalty if your cell phone rings while I am in class; **10 pts penalty** if you continue the disturbance (e.g., by letting it ring again); **15 pts penalty** for 1st ring on 2nd occasion; ...

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

We will study the following topics in the indicated order. If we need more time at any point we'll take it, so we may not cover all of the topics on this syllabus. The homeworks and the quizzes will be about whatever material we do cover.

TOPIC 1 (*weeks 1–4*). Inference

- Th 1/22. Inference: What is presupposed, asserted, or implicated.
Ref: Lecture 1
- T 1/27. Formal theory of inference: *Dynamic Propositional Logic* (DL₀). **H1**.
Ref: Lecture 2
- Th 1/29. *Solution to H1*. More on DL₀.
Ref: Lecture 3
- T 2/3. Negation revisited: Entailment vs. presupposition. **H2**.
Ref: Lecture 4
- Th 2/5. *Solution to H2*. Conditionals revisited.
- T 2/10. **Quiz 1**.
- Th 2/12. *Solution to Quiz 1*. Looking back and ahead.
Ref: Lecture 5

TOPIC 2 (*weeks 5–8*). Anaphora and Centering

- T 2/17. Anaphora and centering: From NL to *Logic of Centering* (LC).
Ref: Lecture 6
- Th 2/19. From NL syntax to LC syntax. **H3**
Ref: Lecture 6 ctd
- T 2/24. *Solution to H3*. Semantics of LC. **H4**.
Ref: Lecture 7
- Th 2/26. *Solution to H4*. From LC syntax to semantics.
- T 3/2. LC models for simple nominal anaphora. **H5**.
Ref: Lecture 7 ctd.
- Th 3/4. *Solution to H5*. More on simple nominal anaphora.
Ref: Lecture 7 ctd.
- T 3/9. **Quiz 2**.
- Th 3/11. *Solution to Quiz 2*.

Week 9. SPRING BREAK

TOPIC 3 (*weeks 10–12*). Nouns in natural language texts

- T 3/23. Nominal reference and anaphora in *English*. **H6**.
Ref: Lecture 12.
- Th 3/25. *Solution to H6*. English ctd.
Ref: Lecture 12 ctd
- T 3/30. Nominal reference and anaphora in *Kalaallisut*. **H7**.
Ref: Lecture 13.
- Th 4/1. *Solution to H7*. Kalaallisut ctd.
Ref: Lecture 13 ctd
- T 4/6. Crosslinguistic generalizations.
Ref: Lecture 14
- Th 4/8. **Quiz 3**.

TOPIC 4 (*weeks 13–15*). Verbs in natural language texts

- T 4/13. Temporal anaphora: LC with 7-sorted ontology. **H8**.
Ref: Lecture 15
- Th 4/15. *Solution to H8*. LC₇ ctd.
Ref: Lecture 15 ctd
- T 4/20. Tense-based temporal anaphora in *English*. **H9**.
Ref: Lecture 16
- Th 4/22. *Solution to H9*. More on tense-based temporal anaphora.
Ref: Lecture 16 ctd
- T 4/27. Mood-based temporal anaphora in *Kalaallisut*. **H10** (*possible extra credit*).
Ref: Lecture 17
- Th 4/29. *Hand in H10*. *Course evaluation*.