

SEMANTICS SEMINAR:  
CONDITIONALS IN DISCOURSE

**Syllabus**

INSTRUCTOR:

Professor Maria Bittner

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*office hour:* Tu 8:30–9:30 am

WHEN & WHERE:

Tu 2:50 – 5:50 pm, SEM-001 (18 Seminary Pl., in the basement).

PREREQUISITE:

*Semantics 2*, or permission of the instructor.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

There is a huge semantic literature on conditionals, but most of the formally explicit accounts are limited to English and/or account for only some types of discourse anaphora (nominal, temporal, or modal). The goal of this seminar is to work toward a cross-linguistic dynamic theory that is suited for surface-faithful incremental interpretation of multi-sentential discourse, including formally explicit representation of possibly interacting nominal, temporal, and modal anaphora into and out of conditional sentences. Toward this end we will work through some promising English-based literature and try to extend the proposed accounts to languages of other linguistic types (Kalaallisut, plus whatever languages the seminar participants bring to the debate).

READINGS: Most are available online. Only those that aren't (•) will be in the xerox room.

Bittner, Maria. 2005. Future discourse in a tenseless language. *Journal of Semantics* **22**:339–388.

Bittner, Maria. 2007. Online update: Temporal, modal, and *de se* anaphora in polysynthetic discourse. In *Direct Compositionality* (Chris Barker and Pauline Jacobson, eds.), 363–404. Oxford University Press, Oxford. [<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~mbittner/ou.html>]

Brasoveanu, Adrian. 2007a. Structured anaphora to quantifier domains. *Proceedings of the 14th Workshop on Logic, Language, Information and Computation*. [[http://abrsvn.googlepages.com/P\\_n\\_P\\_Sem.html](http://abrsvn.googlepages.com/P_n_P_Sem.html)]

Brasoveanu, Adrian. 2007b. *Structured Nominal and Modal Reference*. Ph.D. dissertation. Rutgers, New Brunswick. [[http://abrsvn.googlepages.com/P\\_n\\_P\\_Sem.html](http://abrsvn.googlepages.com/P_n_P_Sem.html)]

Crouch, Richard. 1993. Tense in simple conditionals. In *Proceedings of the 9th Amsterdam Colloquium*. [<http://www2.parc.com/istl/members/crouch/>]

•Kratzer, Angelika. 1981. The notional category of modality. In *Words, Worlds, and Contexts* (H.-J. Eikmeyer & H. Reiser, eds.), 38–74. de Gruyter, Berlin.

Lewis, David. 1973. Counterfactuals and comparative possibility. *Journal of Philosophical Logic* **2**:418–46.

Lewis, David. 1981. Ordering semantics and premise semantics for counterfactuals. *Journal of Philosophical Logic* **10**:217–234.

Schulz, Katrin. 2007. *Minimal Models in Semantics and Pragmatics: Free Choice, Exhaustivity, and Conditionals*. Ph.D. dissertation. ILLC, Amsterdam. [<http://www.ilc.uva.nl/Publications/reportlist.php?Series=DS>]

- Stalnaker, Robert. 1968. A theory of conditionals. *Studies in Logical Theory, American Philosophical Quarterly* **2**: 98–112.
- Stalnaker, Robert. 1975. Indicative conditionals. *Philosophia* **5**:269–286.
- Stone, Matthew. 1997. The anaphoric parallel between modality and tense. IRCS Report 97-06. [<http://www.cs.rutgers.edu/~mdstone/compsem.html>]
- Stone, Matthew. 1999. Reference to possible worlds. RuCCS Report 49. [<http://www.cs.rutgers.edu/~mdstone/compsem.html>]
- Stone, Matthew and Daniel Hardt. 1999. Dynamic discourse referents for tense and modals. In *Computing Meaning*, vol. 1 (Harry Bunt and Reinhard Muskens, eds.), 302–321. Kluwer, Dordrecht. [<http://www.cs.rutgers.edu/~mdstone/compsem.html>]
- Veltman, Frank. 1996. Defaults in update semantics. *Journal of Philosophical Logic* **25**:221–261
- Veltman, Frank. 2005. Making counterfactual assumptions. *Journal of Semantics* **22**:159–180.

#### REQUIREMENTS:

Students will be expected to give one *class presentation* and write a *conference paper*. You're welcome—indeed, encouraged—to team up with another student in the seminar, and give a joint class presentation and/or write a joint conference paper.

The class presentation will take up an entire 3-hour seminar session. You will present one of the readings and lead the discussion on that reading. If you plan sensibly, your conference paper will be on a related topic, but that is not required.

What is required is (i) that you explicitly state which conference your paper is intended for (it should be a conference with proceedings), and (ii) that you format your paper exactly as required for the proceedings from that conference (page limit: **15 pages max**).

Note for *2nd year students*: This will be your first semantics paper so talk about conferences may sound rather daunting. Hopefully, it also sounds exciting—no more homework exercises, this is for real! I suggest you take a deep breath, go through the motions, study some abstracts, extended abstracts, and conference papers to get an idea of what is expected, and then just do your best. I'll guide you through this process if you come and ask me well before the deadline.

Important *deadlines*:

- 11/27: extended abstract (**6 pages**) or handout for 30 min conference talk (**6-8 pages?**)
- 12/21: conference paper (**15 pages max**, formatted as for your conference)

Late papers will *not* be accepted. There will be *no* midterm, *no* final, and *no* incompletes.

#### TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

We will study the following topics in the indicated order. Hopefully we'll cover most of them.

TOPIC 1 (*weeks 1–3*). Classics on conditionals

- T 9/4. Ordering semantics  
Read: Stalnaker 1968, Lewis 1973
- T 9/11. Premise semantics  
Read: Kratzer 1981
- T 9/18. From premises to order. Modal presuppositions.  
Read: Lewis 1981, Stalnaker 1975  
Deadline for *W. Starr*: Handout on Veltman 2005 due

TOPIC 2 (*weeks 4–5*). Counterfactuals

- T 9/25. Making counterfactual assumptions. Retraction. (*W. Starr*)  
Read: Veltman 2005, (Veltman 1996)  
Deadline for *K. Lewis & G. Greenberg*: Handout on Schulz 2007, Ch. 5 & App. due
- T 10/2. Counterfactuals in causal frameworks (*K. Lewis & G. Greenberg*)  
Read: Schulz 2007, Ch. 5, App. to Ch. 5

TOPIC 3 (*weeks 6–8*). Nominal & modal anaphora

- T 10/9. Nominal anaphora with plural information states  
Read: Brasoveanu 2007a
- T 10/16. Quantificational subordination: From English to Kalaallisut  
Read: Brasoveanu 2007b, Ch. 6  
Deadline for *S. Murray*: Handout on Brasoveanu 2007, Ch. 7, due
- T 10/23. Modal anaphora with plural information states (*S. Murray*)  
Read: Brasoveanu 2007b, Ch. 7

TOPIC 4 (*weeks 9–11*). Anaphora & (re)centering across domains

- T 10/30. Nominal & modal anaphora with functional referents  
Read: Stone 1999  
Deadline for *D. Altshuler & C. Fasola*: Handout on Stone 1997 due
- T 11/6. The anaphoric parallel between modality and tense. (*D. Altshuler & C. Fasola*)  
Read: Stone 1997
- T 11/13. (Re)centering across domains: From English to Kalaallisut  
Read: Stone & Hardt 1999
- T 11/20. THANKSGIVING BREAK

TOPIC 5 (*weeks 13–15*). Centering-based anaphora across domains

- T 11/27. Centering-based anaphora. Start-up defaults & incremental update.  
Read: Bittner 2007
- T 12/4. Factual & conditional discourse: From Kalaallisut to English  
Read: Bittner 2005
- T 12/11. Future & conditional discourse: From Kalaallisut to English. *Course evaluation*.  
Read: Crouch 1993