

Semantics 4/Seminar in Semantics

LING 665/765

Topics in the semantics of DP

Winter 2025
Tu, Th 8:35–10:25
1085 Penfield, R. 117

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Office hours: W 2:00-3:00pm (or by appointment)

Course content

Building on background established in Semantics 3, this year's edition of Semantics 4/Seminar in Semantics will explore a range of themes that arise in the semantics DP, including the notions of definiteness, modification, wh-movement, degree, plurality, scope, connectivity, variable binding, questions, intensionality, type shifting, polymorphism, maximality, and semantic pathology.

We will encounter these themes in our investigation of the semantics of DP, with a particular focus on definiteness and composition puzzles that originate within NP. Elements of grammar that introduce such puzzles prominently include modification by relative clauses, in particular the ways in which quantificational or intensional elements within a relative clause interact with material that appears to be external to it. By studying DP meanings that can be built on nouns of quantity or measurement we will also examine how lexical properties of the head of NP itself can have important consequences for composition. In turn, this will lead us to ask questions about definiteness, regarding the notion of maximality that it appeals to. Finally, questions about DP meaning inevitably generate questions about the way DPs compose externally with their linguistic context, and this could in particular prompt us to study copular sentences and so-called concealed questions.

The list below flags specific topics (likely more than we will actually be able to cover in detail in class) and provides selected references as possible starting points.

- Connectivity in relative clauses (Schenner 2019; ...)
 - Definiteness and maximality (von Stechow et al. 2014; ...)
 - Definiteness and maximization failure (Fox & Hackl 2006; Fox 2010; ...)
 - Degree DPs and predication (Scontras 2017; Alonso-Ovalle & Schwarz 2023, 2024a,b; ...)
 - Scope within degree DPs (Alonso-Ovalle & Schwarz 2024a; cf. Rullmann 1995, ch. 4; ...)
 - Functional DPs (Heim 2019; ...)
 - Scoping out of relative clauses? (Palucci 2024, in press, ...)
 - Definite DPs as concealed questions (Frana 2021; ...)
 - Definite DPs in copular sentences (Heycock 2021; ...)
- ...

Requirements and evaluation

Requirements

- Semantics 4: homework assignments, 2 presentations, final paper
- Seminar in Semantics: homework assignments, 1 presentation

Evaluation

Semantics 4		Seminar in Semantics	
homework assignments:	30%	homework assignments:	40%
presentations:	10%	presentation(s)	60%
paper:	60%		

Approximate schedule

The circled numbers in the schedule below indicate projected due dates for homework assignments. These due dates are subject to possible revision. In particular, there might be more homework assignments than indicated here.

	TOPIC	READING
WEEK 1		
Tu 01/07	(In)definiteness: extension to plurals	Heim (2011, 1.1-1.2)
Th 01/09	Degree modification	Buccola (2016, 1.2)
WEEK 2		
Tu 01/14	Relative clauses: where is the head interpreted?	Schenner (2019)
Th 01/16		
WEEK 3		
Tu 01/21		
Th 01/23 ①	Degree DPs: definiteness and distribution	Alonso-Ovalle & Schwarz (2024b)
WEEK 4		
Tu 01/28		Heim (2011, 2.1-2.2)
Th 01/30		
WEEK 5		
Tu 02/04	Degree DPs: internal composition, intensional contexts	Alonso-Ovalle & Schwarz (2024a)
Th 02/06		Rullmann (1995, ch. 4)
WEEK 6		
Tu 02/11		
Th 02/13 ②	Relative clauses: functional readings	Heim (2019, sec. 6); Schenner (2019)
WEEK 7		
Tu 02/18		Palucci (2024, in press)
Th 02/20		
WEEK 8		
Tu 02/25		
Th 02/27	Student presentations I: Semantics 4 students	
WINTER READING BREAK		
WEEK 9		
Tu 03/11	Definite DPs: concealed questions and specificational subjects	Frana (2021); Heycock (2021)
Th 03/13 ③		

WEEK 10

Tu 03/18	Definiteness: strength-based maximality in degree DPs	von Fintel et al. (2014)
Th 03/20		

WEEK 11

Tu 03/25	TBA	
Th 03/27 ④		

WEEK 12

Tu 04/01	TBA	
Th 04/03		

WEEK 13

Tu 04/08	Student presentations II: all students	
Th 04/10		

Course rules

Academic integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity>).

Assignments may be done in groups. However, a group may contain a maximum of three students. Also, each student must turn in a separate assignment **written up individually and independently**. If you worked in a group, you must provide the names of the students who you worked with on the first page of your assignment.

Inclusiveness

As instructors of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss these with us and [Student Accessibility and Achievement](#).

References

- Alonso-Ovalle, Luis, & Bernhard Schwarz. 2023. Structural ambiguity in pseudo-partitives: the case of quantity nouns. In *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) 33*, ed. Juhya Kim & Burak Oney. Linguistic Society of America.
- Alonso-Ovalle, Luis, & Bernhard Schwarz. 2024a. On the natural language metaphysics of numbers. In *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 28*, ed. Kristina Liefke, Daniel Gutzmann, Agata Renans, & Tatjana Scheffler, 18–35.

- Alonso-Ovalle, Luis, & Bernhard Schwarz. 2024b. To compose a number is to compose a cardinality: evidence from intensional contexts. In *Proceedings of the 24th Amsterdam Colloquium*, ed. Fausto Carcassi, Tamar Johnson, Søren Brinck Knudstorp, Sabina Parrado Domínguez, Pablo Rivas Robledo, & Giorgio Sbardolini, 8–14. Institute for Logic, Language and Computation (ILLC), University of Amsterdam.
- Buccola, Brian. 2016. Maximality in the semantics of modified numerals. Doctoral Dissertation, McGill University.
- Fox, Danny. 2010. Negative islands and maximization failure. Handout for talk given at MIT.
- Fox, Danny, & Martin Hackl. 2006. The universal density of measurement. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 29:537–586.
- Frana, Ilaria. 2021. Concealed questions. In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Semantics*, ed. Daniel Gutzmann, Lisa Matthewson, Cécile Meier, Hotze Rullmann, & Thomas Ede Zimmermann. John Wiley & Sons.
- Heim, Irene. 2011. Definiteness and indefiniteness. In *Semantics – An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning*, ed. Claudia Maienborn, Klaus von Stechow, & Paul Portner. de Gruyter.
- Heim, Irene. 2019. Functional readings without type-shifted noun phrases. In *Reconstruction effects in relative clauses*, ed. Manfred Krifka & Mathias Schenner, 284–301. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Heycock, Caroline. 2021. Copular sentences. In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Semantics*, ed. Daniel Gutzmann, Lisa Matthewson, Cécile Meier, Hotze Rullmann, & Thomas Ede Zimmermann. John Wiley & Sons.
- Palucci, Jonathan. 2024. Pseudo-scoping out of relative clauses: a dependent definite approach. talk given at Sinn und Bedeutung 29, Noto (Sicily).
- Palucci, Jonathan. in press. Pseudo-scoping out of relative clauses: an ‘individual concept’ approach. In *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) 34*.
- Rullmann, Hotze. 1995. Maximality in the semantics of wh-constructions. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts at Amherst.
- Schenner, Mathias. 2019. An introduction to reconstruction effects in relative clauses. In *Reconstruction effects in relative clauses*, ed. Manfred Krifka & Mathias Schenner, 1–34. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Scontras, Gregory. 2017. A new kind of degree. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 165–205.
- von Stechow, Kai, Danny Fox, & Sabine Iatridou. 2014. Definiteness as maximal informativeness. In *The Art and Craft of Semantics: A Festschrift for Irene Heim*, ed. Luka Crnić & Uli Sauerland, volume 1, 165–174. Springer.