

Semantics 4, LING 665
Seminar in Semantics, LING 765
Winter 2018

Focus, modals, and their interaction

Spatiotemporal information

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:45 to 11:05
1085 Dr. Penfield, Room 117

Instructor information

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Plan for the course

Semantics 4 / Seminar in Semantics explores advanced topics in formal semantics. The course provides a bridge between the introductory topics discussed in Semantics 3. A main goal of the course is to get students started with their own research projects. This year the course will focus on two classes of operators which compose with propositions: focus operators (e.g. *only*) and modals (e.g. *must*, *can*.) First, we will read literature about focus and modals separately. Then, we will look at poorly understood interactions which arise when focus operators and modals co-occur, building both on prior literature and our own ongoing work. We will move from a gentle, pedagogical introduction to these topics to seminar-style discussions of current work.

Pre-requisite: LING 660, or equivalent.

Evaluation schema

Semantics 4

- Homework assignments (40%)
- Class project (proposal: 5%, presentation: 10%, paper and abstract: 45%)

Seminar in Semantics

- Final grade: Pass/Fail
- Homework assignments (75%)
- Class presentation (25%)

Homework assignments

Homework assignments will be handed out on Thursdays and will be due by next Tuesday. They will come approximately weekly in the first half of the course, and then taper off in the second half, as you work on your projects. They will largely consist of technical exercises, but might also include open-ended questions, and puzzles we wish we could solve, but can't.

The aim with homework is to help you master the material. You will likely not get all the answers right on the first pass, and that is expected. What's important is to see where you ran into difficulty and to understand the assignment fully by the end.

Final project

You will conduct an original research project in semantics. Ideally, your topic would relate in some way to the course, but the most important goal is to find something you are interested in that you want to continue working on afterwards. Please submit a project proposal (<1 page) **by March 15**. You will present your project at the end of the semester, and write a conference abstract and a paper.

Talk to us!

We encourage you to meet with us—early and often—with questions from class, project ideas, puzzles you run into, or any other linguistic thought you have (related or unrelated to the course). You should be starting to think about research questions immediately, and we are here to help. Note that you do *not* need a well worked out idea to schedule a meeting.

Class materials

Readings, class handouts, and assignments will be available in an online shared folder, added and modified as we progress.

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 (<http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest>).

We encourage students to discuss homework assignments and class projects with other students, but every student must submit his or her own individual write-up. Homework assignments must list the students that collaborated in the assignment.

Students are advised to declare all sources in their homework assignments, presentations, and final paper, following the citation conventions that are standard in the field.

Right to submit written work in English or French

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit any written work either in English or in French.

Tentative roadmap for the course

You can find below a list of topics to be covered in the course, together with a tentative schedule. The plan is ambitious, and almost certainly will be truncated as the class progresses.

Week	Deadlines	Topic
Unit 1: The Essentials		
1	1/9	Moving beyond Semantics 3.
	1/11	Essentials of extensional and intensional semantics.
Unit 2: Topics in Focus Semantics		
2	1/16	homework
	1/18	
3	1/23	homework
	1/25	
4	1/30	homework
	2/1	
5	2/6	homework
	2/8	
Unit 3: Modals and Propositional Operators (I): Free choice.		
6	2/13	
	2/15	
7	2/20	
	2/22	paper topic
8	2/27	
	3/1	
9	3/6	No class (reading week)
	3/8	No class (reading week)
10	3/13	
	3/15	paper proposal
11	3/20	
	3/22	
Unit 4: Modals and Propositional Operators (II): Sufficiency.		
12	3/27	
	3/29	
13	4/3	
	4/5	
14	4/10	presentations abstracts due
	4/12	

Expanding the roadmap

Our plan is to divide the class roughly into the following four units. An abstract for each unit and a list of suggested readings is provided below. Specific readings will be announced in class.

Unit 1: The essentials

We will review intensional semantics in rapid fashion, and then discuss in more detail the fundamentals of intensional semantics, which will form the backbone of this course.

On extensional semantics, we will presuppose the entirety of Heim & Kratzer (1998). If you have any technical questions about that system, please get them answered right away. On intensional semantics, the main readings at this point will be Chapter 12 of Heim & Kratzer and, especially, Chapter 1 of von Stechow & Heim (2011).

Heim, I. & Kratzer, A. (1998) *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell.

von Stechow, Kai and Irene Heim. *Intensional Semantics* (Spring 2011 version), ms. MIT.

Unit 2: Topics in focus semantics

Once we have established our intensional system, sentences will denote *propositions*, rather than truth-values. In Unit 2, we will put propositions to work in the analysis of *focus*. The seminal idea is that focus introduces *sets of propositions* (“alternatives”). Focus-sensitive operators such as *only* and *even* crucially depend on those alternatives for their interpretation. We will introduce a compositional theory of focus, consider some debates in the analysis of *only*, and briefly compare focus with questions and/or disjunction, which might also involve alternatives.

Focus in alternative semantics:

Rooth, Mats. (1992). A theory of focus interpretation. *Natural Language Semantics* 1, 75-116.

Rooth, Mats. (1996). Focus. In Shalom Lappin (ed.), *The handbook of contemporary semantic theory*, 271-298. Oxford: Blackwell.

Büring, Daniel. (2016). *Intonation and meaning*. Oxford surveys in semantics and pragmatics. (See in particular Chapter 3: *Focus and givenness theories*.)

‘Only’ and its presupposition:

Horn, Laurence. (1969). A presuppositional analysis of only and even. In *Papers from the 5th meeting of the Chicago Linguistics Society*.

Horn, Laurence R. (1996). Exclusive company: *Only* and the dynamics of vertical inference. *Journal of Semantics* 13:1–40.

Beaver, David & Brady Clark. (2003). *Always and only*: why not all focus operators are alike. *Natural Language Semantics* 11(4), 323-362.

Ippolito, Michaela. (2008). On the meaning of *only*. *Journal of Semantics* 25(1): 45-91.

von Stechow, Kai & Sabine Iatridou. (2007) Anatomy of a modal construction. *Linguistic Inquiry* 38(3). 445–483.

Is 'only' ever really a propositional operator? If so, it is always?

Rooth, Mats. (1985). Association with focus. Ph.D. dissertation, UMass Amherst.

Wagner, Michael. (2006). Association by movement: evidence from NPI licensing. *Natural Language Semantics* 14: 297-324.

Hirsch, Aron. (2017). An inflexible semantics for cross-categorial operators. Ph.D. dissertation, MIT. (Chapter 6)

As was discussed in Semantics 3, questions denote sets of propositions. Should questions and focus alternatives be derived through the same mechanisms? Time permitting, we will consider some theories that answer positively, and also some reasons to consider negatively.

Beck, Sigrid. (2006). Intervention effects follow from focus interpretation. *Natural Language Semantics* 14(1), 1-56.

Kotek, Hadas. (2014). Composing questions. Ph.D. dissertation, MIT.

Cable, Seth. (2008). *Wh*-Fronting (in Hungarian) is Not Focus-Fronting. Ms, UBC.

Cable, Seth. (2017). Focusing in on *wh*-words, focus, and focus movement. Handout from workshop honoring David Pesetsky.

In addition, Luis has proposed that disjunction should be analyzed as introducing alternatives. We will discuss that proposal, and evaluate whether it should also extend to conjunction.

Alonso-Ovalle, Luis. (2006). Disjunction in alternative semantics. Ph.D. dissertation, UMass Amherst.

Davidson, Katherine. (2013). *And* and *or*: general use coordination in ASL. *Semantics & Pragmatics* 6, 1-44.

Unit 3: modals and propositional operators (I)

In this unit we will introduce another class of propositional operators: modal auxiliaries. The unit starts with a primer on modals. We will first explore the classic approach to the semantics of modal auxiliaries developed by Angelika Kratzer. Topics include: flavors of modality and

context dependency, rankings and inconsistencies, modal domains and conditionals. A list of useful background readings is included at the end of this course outline. Once we are done with the basics, we will explore a few more advanced topics dealing with the interaction of modals and propositional alternatives. Readings will include:

Bar-Lev and Fox (2017) Universal Free Choice and Innocent Inclusion. *Proceedings of SALT 27*.

Alxatib, S. (2016) Free Choice Disjunctions under *Only*. *Proceedings of NELS 44*.

Alxatib, S. (2016) Actuality Entailments, Negation, and Free Choice Inferences. *Proceedings of SALT 26*.

Santorio, P. (2017) Alternatives and Truthmakers in Conditional Semantics. *Journal of Philosophy*.

Unit 4: modals and propositional operators (II): Sufficiency

We now have in hand a widely accepted analysis of *only*, and a widely accepted analysis of modals. We will see what happens when we put them together, and find that puzzles arise. Do these necessitate a revision to the individual operators? Or, are they due to some third factor (e.g. a separate covert operator only discernable when focus and modals co-occur)?

von Stechow, Kai & Sabine Iatridou. (2007). Anatomy of a modal construction. *Linguistic Inquiry* 38(3). 445–483.

Alonso-Ovalle & Hirsch. Weak *Only*. Class notes.

Stechow, Arnim von, Sveta Krasikova, and Doris Penka. 2006. Anankastic conditionals again. In *A festschrift for Kjell Johan Saebø—in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the celebration of his 50th birthday*, ed. by Torgrim Solstad, Atle Grønn, and Dag Haug, 151–171. Oslo: University of Oslo.

Appendix: additional readings on modals

-- *Useful background readings on modality*

von Stechow, Kai and Irene Heim. (2011) *Intensional Semantics* (Spring 2011 version), ms. MIT. (chapters 1-5).

Portner, Paul. (2009) *Modality*. Oxford University Press.

Gamut, L. T. F. (1991) *Logic, Language and Meaning. Vol 1: Intensional Logic and Categorical Grammar*. The University of Chicago Press.

Hacquard, Valentine. (2011) Modality. In Heusinger, Klaus von; Claudia Maienborn and Paul Portner (eds.) *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning*. Vol.2, de Gruyter, pp. 1484-1515.

von Fintel, Kai. (2006) Modality and language. In Donald M. Borchert (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy – second edition*. Detroit: MacMillan Reference USA.

Conditionals

von Fintel, Kai. (2012) Subjunctive conditionals. In Gillian Russell & Delia Graff Fara (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Language*, 466-477, New York: Routledge.

von Fintel, Kai. (2011) Conditionals. In Heusinger, Klaus von; Claudia Maienborn and Paul Portner (eds.) *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning*. Vol.2, de Gruyter, pp. 1515-1538.

-- Syntax/Semantics Interface

Bhatt, Rajesh & Roumyana Pancheva. (2006) Conditionals. In *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax*, vol. 1, 638-687. Blackwell.

von Fintel, Kai & Sabine Iatridou (2009) *Morphology, Syntax, and Semantics of Modals*. Materials for LSA Institute class, University of California, Berkeley, CA. (Available at <http://kaivonfintel.org/work/>)

-- Kratzer's Work

Kratzer, Angelika (1977) What “must” and “can” must and can mean. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 1:337–355.

Kratzer, Angelika (1979) Conditional necessity and possibility. In R. Bäuerle, U. Egli, and A. von Stechow (eds.), *Semantics from Different Points of View*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 117–147.

Kratzer, Angelika. (1981) The notional category of modality. In Hans-Jürgen Eikmeyer & Hannes Rieser (eds.), *Words, Worlds, and Contexts: New Approaches in Word Semantics* (Research in Text Theory 6), 38-74. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Kratzer, Angelika (1986) Conditionals. In Anne M. Farley, Peter Farley, and Karl Eric McCollough (eds.), *Papers from the Parasession on Pragmatics and Grammatical Theory*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Linguistics Society.

Kratzer, Angelika (1991a). Conditionals. In Arnim von Stechow and Dieter Wunderlich (eds.), *Semantics: An International Handbook of Contemporary Research*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 651–656.

Kratzer, Angelika (1991b). Modality. In Arnim von Stechow and Dieter Wunderlich (eds.), *Semantics: An International Handbook of Contemporary Research*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 639–650.

These classic papers have been updated (sometimes partially or extensively rewritten) in a recent collection:

Kratzer, Angelika (2012). *Modals and Conditionals. New and Revised Perspectives*. Oxford University Press.

-- *Modals and Aspect: Actuality Entailments and the Height of Modals*.

Hacquard, Valentine (2009) On the interaction of aspect and modal auxiliaries. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 32, pp. 279-312.

Hacquard, Valentine. (2006) *Aspects of Modality*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Ph.D. dissertation.

Homer, Vincent. (2010a) French modals and perfective: A case of aspectual coercion. *Proceedings of WCCFL 28*.

Homer, Vincent. (2010b). Epistemic modals: High *ma non troppo*. *Proceedings of NELS 40*.