Linguistics 504: Topics in Pragmatics

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Office Hrs: Tu 3:30-5:30; F 12-1 (and by appt.)

WWW:

Course Description

The study of linguistic meaning comprises two disciplines: semantics, the study of the conventional meanings carried by words and sentences, and pragmatics, the study of how speakers use words and sentences to convey meaning. This course surveys several core issues in pragmatics. We will be particularly concerned this semester with the interaction between pragmatics and semantics, exploring the numerous ways in which the truth-conditional meaning of a sentence interacts with the context in which it is uttered. Our goals will be (i) to determine the extent to which these interactions are regular and well-defined, and (ii) to arrive at a more precise understanding of what constitutes an utterance context, and how various types of utterances may affect it. Along the way, we will also consider the relevance of pragmatic theory to other disciplines, such as cognitive psychology and the law.

Prerequisite

The prerequisite for this course is LX 502, “Semantics I”. Our readings and class discussions will presuppose a familiarity with the material covered in that class.

Readings

There is no textbook for this course. Throughout the semester, we will read several foundational articles from the pragmatics literature, along with excerpted chapters from various pragmatics textbooks. Individual reading assignments will be distributed to students as PDFs available from the course website.
Requirements

**Attendance & Participation:** Regular attendance is required for a passing grade in this course, and participation in class discussions is expected. Together, attendance and participation will account for 5% of your overall grade.

**Group Presentation:** Each of you will participate in one group presentation during the semester, in which your group will provide a comprehensive overview of one of the week’s readings. The presentation will constitute 10% of your overall grade.

**Reading Responses:** Throughout the semester, you will submit five reading responses, in which you will summarize that week’s reading: what are the issues, what are the core proposals, and what arguments are advanced to support those proposals? Usually, I will pose specific questions about the reading, around which your discussion should be organized. Your responses need not be long (one single-spaced page of concise, targeted prose might suffice), but they should be thorough. The responses will constitute 35% of your overall grade.

**Problem Sets:** You will also complete three problem sets during the semester. The problem sets will cover material from the readings and our class discussions. At times, you will also be asked to apply your understanding of this material to novel types of problems. Together, the problem sets will constitute 25% of your overall grade.

**Final Paper:** You will also write and present a short paper (6-9 pages) on a topic in pragmatics. Depending on your interests, this might involve the description and analysis of some pragmatic phenomenon (perhaps in a language other than English), or an extended discussion of some paper(s) from the pragmatics literature that we have not already read. A one-page topic proposal will be due on Monday, November 10. During our final two class meetings, each of you will briefly present your paper to the rest of the class. The paper itself will be due at 8pm on Monday, December 15. The final paper will constitute 25% of your overall grade.

**Academic Conduct:** You are expected to abide by Boston University’s Academic Conduct Code, which is accessible at [http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/](http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/). Graduate students are additionally expected to abide by the GRS Academic Conduct Code, which is accessible at [http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/forms-policies-procedures/academic-discipline-procedures/](http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/forms-policies-procedures/academic-discipline-procedures/). Plagiarism in any form (including online sources) and other academic misconduct will not be tolerated.

**Late Policy:** It is your responsibility to bring any potential scheduling conflicts to my attention promptly, so that alternative arrangements can be made. In the absence of any such prior arrangements, late work will not be accepted.
**Preliminary Schedule** *(readings listed in bold will be presented by students)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>CLASS TOPIC</th>
<th>READINGS</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M 9/8</td>
<td>Course Overview: Meaning, Use &amp; Context</td>
<td>Potts 2007</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>M 9/15</td>
<td>Reference I: Deixis, Anaphora &amp; Indeterminacy</td>
<td>Huang 2007: Ch. 5 (§5.3 is optional); Partee 1989: §1-4</td>
<td>Reading Response #1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>M 9/22</td>
<td>Reference II: (In)definite NPs in Discourse</td>
<td>Karttunen 1976; Haviland &amp; Clark 1974</td>
<td>Problem Set #1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>M 9/29</td>
<td>Conversational Implicature I: Sentence Meaning, Utterance Meaning &amp; Grice’s Maxims</td>
<td>Grice 1975; Geurts 2010: Ch. 2</td>
<td>Reading Response #2</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>M 10/6</td>
<td>Conversational Implicature II: Quantity Implicatures &amp; Lexical Scales</td>
<td>Geurts 2010: Ch. 3; Papafragou &amp; Musolino 2003</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Tu 10/14</td>
<td>Conversational Implicature III: Sentence Meaning vs. Utterance Meaning Revisited</td>
<td>Sadock 1978; Carston 1988 (skip §5)</td>
<td>Problem Set #2</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>M 10/20</td>
<td>Presupposition I: Diagnostics, Triggers &amp; Projection</td>
<td>Huang 2007: Ch. 3, 64-75; Karttunen 1973 (skip §8,10,11)</td>
<td>Reading Response #3</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>M 10/27</td>
<td>Presupposition II: Common Ground &amp; Accommodation</td>
<td>Stalnaker 1974; Lewis 1979: 339-53</td>
<td>Reading Response #4</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>M 11/3</td>
<td>Discourse Markers (guest lecture by Prof. Bruce Fraser)</td>
<td>Kim 2007; TBA</td>
<td>Reading Response #5</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>M 11/10</td>
<td>Speech Acts I: Performatives; Direct vs. Indirect Speech Acts</td>
<td>Austin 1956; Sadock 1972</td>
<td>Final Paper Proposal</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>M 11/24</td>
<td>Metaphorical Utterances; Pragmatics &amp; Lang. Structure</td>
<td>Searle 1979</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>M 12/1</td>
<td>Student Presentations</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>M 12/8</td>
<td>Student Presentations</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>M 12/15</td>
<td>Final Paper Due (@ 8pm)</td>
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Reading List


