Course objectives

Theme: Islands

Island phenomena have played several important roles in the development of syntactic theory. With respect to the computational theory, they are part of the argument that rule application is cyclically bounded. With respect to the acquisition problem, they present a core case of absence of negative evidence. The characteristic 8-formlessness of gap-leaving extractions out of the various island domains seems clear to most informants, but judgments of acceptability are in many cases gradual and subtly sensitive to apparently extra-syntactic variables. This hybrid seminar will revolve around the issue of this gradience: How should it be measured? And how should it be interpreted theoretically? In particular, we want to examine the claim that the marked status of extraction from certain island domains reflects the exceptional difficulty of processing an extraction dependency and that claim in the context of variation within and across languages.

Experimental linguistics

The methodological goal of LING280, which is a proseminar, is to teach you how to plan, execute, and analyze basic experiments in Linguistics, which includes a judgment study and a reaction time or reading time study. The pedagogical style is hands-on and students will work in small groups to replicate a judgment study on extraction from noun-complement clauses. (Dillon & Hornstein, 2013). This course neither presupposes a background in statistics, nor will it provide an exhaustive introduction. It will give you a set of tools to start with. In the second half of the quarter you will plan an experiment to address one of the course themes, and you will enjoy greater latitude in its design and execution.

Why a hybrid course?

We have hybridized this course because we believe that:

1. The issue of islandhood and the grammatical status of island structures is an important and rich one, but it is also vexed - no one set of tools suffice to provide a complete and satisfying answer to how islandhood should be understood.
2. Methods make the most sense as a means to answer a question.

We believe that it is easy to become silo-ized into our own specialties, in part because there is a lot to learn to become a specialist. But learning to generate and organize data, and learning to build and refine theories, are general skills that we should be able to practice in tandem.

Course organization

Meetings

There will be one joint meeting per week, on Tuesday, and one course-specific meeting on Thursday. There will be readings in common, as well as separate assignments for the separate courses. We will do our best to balance the load. Please think carefully and considerately about the work in front of you at each meeting.

Data clinic

There will be an optional ‘data-clinic’ on Thursday afternoons from 1–3pm. This will be an opportunity for LING280 students, and interested LING229 students, to get help working on their projects in a small-group setting. Additionally there will particularly be short tutorials on relevant topics.

eCommons

Course PDFs will be shared on an eCommons site.

Evaluation

Students in LING280 will be evaluated based on their in-class commitment and performance in 2 course projects. In-class commitment is demonstrated by attendance, active contribution and demonstration of engagement with the readings. Course projects, though ultimately cumulative, will sometimes have assigned, weekly components. There are no student presentations.

Topic listing

1. Theoretical and empirical landscape
2. Barriers/Pth-Container/Pre-Minimalist approaches
3. Long movement - Cinque/Postal/Chung generalizations
4. Phase theory
5. Language processing and resource-allocation theories
6. Learnability
7. Resumption
8. Information structural and pragmatic accounts
9. Ellipsis and islandhood

First steps

- Thu, Oct 6: Theoretical and empirical landscape
- Tue, Oct 8: [Joint] Theoretical and empirical landscape, cont’d
- Thu, Oct 10: LING280 Synopsis/highlighting assignment due
- Thu, Oct 17: LING280 What is experimental design? Planning our first replication experiment.

LING280 Experimental Linguistics

Hybrid course with LING229 - Gradience & Island phenomena

Meetings

Joint meeting, Tuesdays, 9–10:45am, The Cave

Separate meeting Thursday, 9–10:45am:
- LING280 in The Cave; LING229 in TBD

Instructors

Matt Wagers (mwegars@ucsc.edu, instructor of record: LING280)
Jim McCloskey (mcclosk@ucsc.edu, instructor of record: LING229)

Office hours

Mon: Thursdays 1–3pm; Data clinic Thursday 1–3pm
Wed: Mondays 1–3pm; Fridays 1–3pm

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