

## LING 239 Possible Word Semantics Syllabus (as of 03.14.13)

### 1 Administrative Information

INSTRUCTOR:

Pranav Anand  
Location: Stevenson Rm. 260  
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Phone: 831.459.3352  
Office hours: T 14.00-15.00

LOGISTICS:

Class: W 14.00-17.00, The Cave  
Website: eCommons  
Prerequisites: Semantics B, its equivalent, or instructor's permission.

THE PLAN

What's in a word? This is the simple question guiding this seminar. As practicing linguists we often pack a lot of meaning into these little packages, and the question on the table is how much is too much, or too little. We will be exploring a variety of perspectives on this topic, in an order yet to crystallize. Here are some of our available topics I will winnow down from:

- fuzzy generalizations: Maybe words associate with prototypes, maybe they are prototypes; maybe they associate with particular contexts of use, maybe they are particular contexts of use. We will look at the experimental (e.g., Rosch) and computational (e.g., Resnik) approaches to this question, and the formalist rejoinder (e.g., Kamp & Partee).
- homonymy, polysemy & coercion: When does one word become two and where does that happen? Is there systematic lexical coercion or is everything online? We will read selections from the formal (e.g., Pustejovsky), experimental (e.g., Traxler), and computational (e.g., Fellbaum) communities on this front.
- levels of content: According to current literature, lexical content may be at the at-issue, softly presupposed, hard-ly presupposed, conventionally implicated, and backgrounded levels. I seriously want to ask the following – is that all we need? And is this fixed by the lexical items themselves? We will look at current work in this area (e.g., Abrusan, Beaver, McCready, Roberts, Romoli, Potts, Schlenker, etc.)
- conservativity, a test case: Is the prospect of conservativity for natural language determiners something axiomatic or a theorem? We will look at the decompositional approaches to this problem in 80s and 90s and evaluate their successes.

### 2 Requirements

The course has three formal requirements: assigned readings, an in-class presentation, and a final paper. If you fail to complete any of this requirements, you will fail the course.

## 2.1 Assigned Readings

We will read widely and prolifically, likely 2-3 readings per week. Please be prepared for this pace.

## 2.2 Class Presentation

You will have to make one in class presentation on one designated reading. You will have to provide a handout for your presentation, which you will need to discuss with me **one week** before you are to present.

## 2.3 Research Paper

You are required to write a final paper, due on **June 17th**. The paper should be 15-20 pages, single spaced, 12 point font. The paper should connect with the ideas of the course, a determination I alone make. If you are concerned about the suitability of your topic, come talk to me well in advance.

A one-page **proposal** for the paper, consisting of a description of the problem you are working on and how you plan on explaining it, will be due on **May 29th**. We will likely discuss the proposals in class that day.