



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
THINKING OF THE WORLD

## DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS

*Linguistics 812-4*

***TOPICS IN LINGUISTICS III: Semantics for Generics and Mass Terms***

### SPRING SEMESTER 2008

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#### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will look in detail at the phenomena involved with genericity in English. There are a number of very puzzling semantic-pragmatic issues that have prevented researchers from giving an adequate description of the semantics for these topics. These issues range from the philosophical (what sort of entities should we admit into our ontology?) to the logical (how can we maintain the truth of a generic statement while simultaneously acknowledging exceptions?) to the psychological (how do people reason using prototypical information?). There are also some more strictly linguistic issues concerning syntactic and semantic restrictions on what sort of predicates and NPs that can support genericity. Although the course lectures will focus on English, the topic of genericity in other languages is encouraged for presentations and papers.

A second (but related) topic is that of mass (vs. count) terms in English. Once again there is a large number of puzzling issues that range from the semantic to the philosophical, through the logical to the psychological. And the topic raises some very interesting problems concerning linguistic methodology.

#### STRUCTURE OF COURSE:

This class meets simultaneously with 480, and has an extra hour/week where the grad students meet alone. We will fix the time of the extra hour after class has started. My style in the 480 portion of the class is to lecture, and to have students ask questions. My style in the extra hour will be a seminar-style discussion of some reading that the 480 class does not deal with.

#### REQUIRED TEXTS:

G.N. Carlson & F.J. Pelletier (1995) *The Generic Book* (Univ. Chicago Press) paperbk ISBN: 0-226-09292-5.  
(Other material will also be made available in the form of duplicated or online articles.)

#### COURSE GRADING:

You are required to attend Ling 480, and do the required work for that course. (Which is to do two short critical review papers, a class presentation, class participation, and a final paper). Graduate students are also expected to do better at this material than undergraduates. In addition, students in 812 will be required to give a description of some phenomenon related to either generics or mass terms in some language other than English. This will form the basis of a presentation that they will then make to the 480 students. The description should have at least some semantics in the account, but may also be heavily syntactic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, L2, or even developmental.

In addition we will separately discuss some further readings on the topics during an extra hour each week. For this, you will be asked to prepare "reading notes" (a page or two) that summarize the main points of each reading and pose criticisms or questions about them. A copy of these "notes" is to be turned in each week or two (to be decided as we go along), and a copy kept to use as notes towards our discussions. (Some of these reading notes can be turned into the critical review papers mentioned as relevant to Ling 480).

Students requiring accommodations as a result of a disability, must contact the **Centre for Students with Disabilities** (778.782.3112 or [csdo@sfu.ca](mailto:csdo@sfu.ca)).