Linguistics 480

Topics in Linguistics III: Semantics for Generics and Mass Terms.

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Instructor: Prof. Jeff Pelletier
Office: WMX 5661   Phone: 778-782-4485
Cognitive Science Lab: RCB 7406 (knock on door)   Phone: 778-782-5674
email: jeffpell@sfu.ca (best way to contact me)

Prerequisite: Ling. 324 or equivalent (please contact me in advance to discuss "equivalences") plus 9 credit hours of upper division linguistics, or permission of the instructor. Please contact me in advance to discuss missing prerequisites.

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.

Style:
     My style is to lecture. However you are free to break in with questions, comments, further observations, etc. (Indeed, part of your grade is on this: see below).

Required text:

G.N. Carlson & F.J. Pelletier (1995) *The Generic Book* (Univ. Chicago Press) paperback, ISBN: 0-226-09292-5.

Other material will also be made available in the form of duplicated articles or pointers to publications available in the library.

Evaluation:

You will be evaluated on the following, although the exact amount of each item depends on the enrolment in the course:

Two short review papers (where you summarize some article):	15% each
Class Presentation (where you lecture about an article or compare a number of different articles, possibly an expanded version of a "short review paper", or maybe a first draft of your final paper):	30%
Class participation (which includes attendance and also discussion especially of other students' presentations):	10%
Final paper (10-15pp):	30%

THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM.

The short review papers you are supposed to prepare essentially ask you to read some article(s) and write a summary of what their main point was, what innovations were presented, whether you think it is (or isn't) better than the alternatives (which we may be talking about in class or which you may have read independently). Some articles are in the Carlson & Pelletier book, and I will give other bibliographical information in class. (The bibliography in the book is pretty thorough up to 1995 or so).

The class presentation is where you give a lecture to the rest of the class. The idea is that you will read some paper(s) and then give a lecture about them, so that others will know what the author said and will know whether you think author is on the right track or not. You can also try out a version of your final course paper, looking to get feedback that will help you on the version you turn in. The exact length of the presentations depends on how many students are enrolled, but my current picture is that it will be about 30 minutes.

A crucial component of your participation grade concerns the attention you pay to other students' presentations and the sort of discussion you can have with them.

Your final paper can be an "original contribution" to the topics of the course (if you are so fortunate as to come up with one!), but more likely it will be to compare and contrast two authors on their different analyses, and make some sort of adjudication as to who is right.

I should mention that the paper (and the presentation) can emphasize languages other than English, if you wish. Indeed, I would be pleased to discover how genericity or mass nouns work in other languages. Furthermore, although your description should have at least some semantics in it, there may also be large amounts of syntactic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, L2, or even developmental material