

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AT AMHERST
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
THE FACULTY SENATE

UNDERGRADUATE COURSE APPROVAL FORM
(Courses Numbered 001-599)

- 1. DEPARTMENT, COURSE NUMBER AND TITLE: Linguistics 380 "Controlling the Discourse" _____
- 2. SCHOOL OR COLLEGE: Humanities and Fine Arts _____
- 3. Proposer's Name, Telephone and Email: Lyn Frazier 545-6827 lyn@linguist.umass.edu _____
- 4. Proposed Instructor: Lyn Frazier and Chris Potts _____
- 5. Course Credits: 3 _____
- 6. Are there Prerequisites? NO If yes, please specify _____

- 7. What is the intended clientele? Lower Division _____ Upper Division X _____
Department majors only _____ Departmental/related majors X Non-Majors X _____
If course is intended for majors, what role will it play in the curriculum? Required _____ Elective X _____

8. Complete Course Catalog Description (30 Words):

We'll look to current linguistic theory to answer questions about how speakers use language to structure and control discourses. Intuitional, corpus, and experimental data will be used to examine issues in pragmatics and discourse processing.

- 9. Please attach the following materials:
 - X Week-by-week outline of topics covered in course (or syllabus)
 - X List of Required readings
 - X Description of required assignments (papers, exams, projects, reports, presentations, etc.)
 - X Summary of course grade criteria
 - X Selected bibliography of works used by instructor in developing course, especially recent works (as appropriate)
 - X If the course number is above 200 and there are no prerequisites, please explain

The course is difficult and requires intellectual maturity but does not presupposed specific linguistic background. The course satisfies Gen Ed requirements and is open to non-majors.

- 10. If course has been offered as an experimental or special topics course, please comment (on an attached page) on its evolution.
 Evolution of "Controlling the Discourse"

This course has been taught three times. From the first time Professor Potts and I taught The course we have been very pleased with it. The students have been exceptionally engaged. Many of the students have gone on to take other courses in Linguistics.

There are only two general changes we have made in the course. The first concerns the readings for the course. Several of the readings we used in the initial version of the course were too difficult for the students. We have placed less of an emphasis on readings, and more of an emphasis on hands-on analysis of linguistic examples brought up by the students themselves. The second change in the course was to eliminate general lectures on writing, concentrating instead on laying out the criteria for individual writing assignments. Our impression is that the students learned the most about writing by critiquing each other's essays and by re-writing their own essays.

394A: Controlling the Discourse Instructors' Research Bibliography

Instructors: Lyn Frazier and Christopher Potts

Spring 2005

- Bach, Kent and Robert M. Harnish. 1979. *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Birner, Betty and Gregory Ward. 1998. *Information Status and Noncanonical Word Order in English*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Chafe, Wallace L. 1976. Givenness, contrastiveness, definiteness, subjects, topics, and point of view. In C. Li, ed., *Subject and Topic*, 25–55. New York: Academic Press.
- Frazier, Lyn. 2003. Processing silence, Paper presented at the Workshop on Ellipsis, UC Santa Cruz.
- Frazier, Lyn. 2004. The syntax–discourse interface: Processing ellipsis, Paper presented at the 2003 meeting of the Linguistic Society of America.
- Grice, H. Paul. 1975. Logic and conversation. In Peter Cole and Jerry Morgan, eds., *Syntax and Semantics*, Volume 3: *Speech Acts*, 43–58. New York: Academic Press.
- Gunlogson, Christine. 2001. *True to Form: Rising and Falling Declaratives as Questions in English*. Ph.D. thesis, UC Santa Cruz.
- Heim, Irene. 1982. *The Semantics of Definite and Indefinite Noun Phrases*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. [Distributed by GLSA].
- Heim, Irene. 1983. File change semantics and the familiarity theory of definiteness. In Rainer B`auerle, Christoph Schwarze, and Arnim von Stechow, eds., *Meaning, Use, and Interpretation of Language*, 164–189. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Frazier and Potts Controlling the Discourse, Research Bibliography

- Hirschberg, Julia and Gregory Ward. 1992. The influence of pitch range, duration, amplitude and spectral features on the interpretation of the rise-fall-rise intonation contour in english. *Journal of Phonetics* 20:241–251.
- Huddleston, Rodney and Geoffrey K. Pullum. 2002. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Keenan, Elinor Ochs. 1979. The universality of conversational postulates. *Language and Society* 5(1):67–80.
- Kehler, Andrew. 2000. Coherence and the resolution of ellipsis. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 23(6):533–575.
- Kehler, Andrew. 2002. *Coherence, Reference, and the Theory of Grammar*. Stanford, CA: CSLI.
- Lakoff, George. 2003. Simple framing. *The Rockridge Institute Website* URL <http://www.rockridgeinstitute.org/people/lakoff>.
- Levinson, Stephen C. 1995. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levinson, Stephen C. 2000. *Presumptive Meanings: The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Nunberg, Geoffrey. 1990. *The Linguistics of Punctuation*. Stanford, CA: CSLI.
- Potts, Christopher. 2003. The performative nature of expressive content, Talk given at the University of Connecticut (November 17) and the University of Rochester (November 18).
- Potts, Christopher. 2004. *The Logic of Conventional Implicatures*. Oxford Studies in Theoretical Linguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Revised 2003 UC Santa Cruz PhD thesis].
- Prince, Ellen F. 1981. Toward a taxonomy of given–new information. In Peter Cole, ed., *Radical Pragmatics*, 223–255. New York: Academic Press.
- Prince, Ellen F. 1992. The ZPG letter: Subjects, definiteness and information structure. In Sandra Thompson and William Mann, eds., *Discourse Description: Diverse Analyses of a Fundraising Text*, 295–325. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- The Rockridge Institute. 2003. The strategic framing overview. URL <http://www.rockridgeinstitute.org/projects/>.

Safire, William. 2002. Regime change. *The New York Times Magazine* March 20:20–21.

Searle, John. 1969. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Steedman, Mark. 2000. Information structure and the syntax–phonology interface. *Linguistic Inquiry* 31(4):649–689.

Steedman, Mark. 2001. *The Syntactic Process*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Truss, Lynn. 2003. *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*. London: Profile Books.

Ward, Gregory and Betty Birner. 2004. Information structure and non-canonical syntax. In

Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward, eds., *Handbook of Pragmatics*, 153–174. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Williams, Joseph M. 1990. *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. With two chapters coauthored by Gregory G. Colomb.

Wolf, Florian and Ted Gibson. 2003. The descriptive inadequacy of trees for representing discourse coherence, Ms., MIT.

Zanuttini, Raffaella and Paul Portner. 2003. Exclamative clauses at the syntax–semantics interface. *Language* 79(1):39–81.

ESSAY TOPICS

Over the course of the semester, you'll write three papers. The first two will be 2–4 pages in length. The third will be 5–7 pages. In this section, we provide a variety of questions to choose from for these assignments. But you should not feel constrained by this list; it is here merely to suggest topics and ideas. You are welcome to devise your own questions, perhaps based on ours, perhaps on entirely new topics. We will devote class time to selecting topics, so you will have plenty of opportunities to test the viability of your topic before it comes time to write a final draft.

1. Predictions for passives

Ward and Birner (2004) predict that English passive sentence like (a) are associated with a particular discourse effect.

- a. The book was read (by Ed).

Describe Ward and Birner's predictions for the information status of the NPs in this example and attempt to illustrate (or counterexemplify) these predictions using small texts (naturally occurring or of your own devising).

2. Car Talk

On the radio show *Car Talk* (broadcast March 31, 2002), one of the hosts read the following joke, purportedly taken from an evaluation sheet filled in by students at the end of a college course:

Q "How would you describe the quality of the textbook?" A "Very high. It is printed on the very best paper and beautifully bound." What does the speaker/writer intend to convey with this answer, and how does he manage to do it? Using Grice's maxims, give precise answers to these questions. Note: there are a few ways that this joke can be interpreted. Concentrate on one; if you perceive others, then you are welcome to discuss them, though this is not required.

3. Moore's Paradox

- a. It's snowy, but Freddy believes it isn't snowy.
- b. It's snowy, but you believe it isn't snowy.
- c. It's snowy, but I believe it isn't snowy.

Is the third example semantically contradictory? If not, can we use the maxims to understand why it is marked?

4. Cardinal determiners

Cardinal determiners like **three** seem to engender the generalized conversational implicature **at most three**. Try to find

- a. a scenario in which determiner **three** lacks its **at most** scalar implicature; and
- b. a scenario in which determiner **three** lacks its **at least** meaning.

5. The real crime

"Professor Erika Kohut (Isabelle Huppert), who gives piano lessons to advanced students at the Vienna Conservatory, stands at the window of her studio and hurls thunderbolts at the teen-age musicians. When a talented boy hits a clinker, she says, "A wrong note in Beethoven is better than a bad interpretation," which, she implies, is his real crime." (Denby, David. 2002. *The New Yorker*, April 1, p. 98)

How does Professor Kohut manage to imply that the student's interpretation is bad? (And what about those thunderbolts? How do we understand them?)

6. Cultural relativity?

Read Keenan 1979 and identify the factors that she regards as evidence that Malagasy speakers devalue the quantity maxim. Are these criteria, taken individually, unique to Malagasy society, or can we find them in our own as well? Is the combination of all those factors unique to Malagasy society? What does this tell us about Keenan's special kind of cultural relativism? Has she convincingly challenged the universality property of conversational implicatures? 7.

Framing

Identify a political or social event that is (in part) shaped by the language people use to talk about it.

8. Rhetorical questions

Rhetorical questions are remarkable: they make assertions sound like questions and thus leave readers and listeners unsure how to respond. It is therefore valuable to be able to spot them. Identify some conventional markers of rhetorical questions and try to explain how they work.

9. The power of false presuppositions

False or misleading presuppositions can have a remarkable effect on a discourse. Write a short passage, then have speakers answer questions about it. Devise some of the questions so that they presuppose false things about the passage. Describe the reactions you get and try to find patterns in them.

10. You're a werewolf?

Rising intonation on a declarative (often signalled by a question mark on a sentence with declarative form) has a particular discourse effect. Develop a hypothesis about this discourse effect and then test the hypothesis with speakers.

11. Discourse coherence

Stock of discourse coherence relations explored in Wolf and Gibson (2003) to analyze a small text of your own choosing. Can you use that restricted range of relations? Does it yield insights into the text? Could it be done using the more restrictive stock of relations discussed in class?

Linguistics 380 Controlling the Discourse

Academic dishonesty will not be allowed. Go to http://www.umass.edu/gradschool/handbook/univ_policies_regulations_a.htm

Students with disabilities will be accommodated per the University policy as described by the University Accommodation Policy Statement.

Grading Policy for Linguistics 380 -Controlling the Discourse

This course involves regular written assignments typically in the form of short essays. Three of these will be developed into longer papers. Students will work in groups to critique the first draft of the essay and then each student will rewrite his or her own essay and hand it in to the instructors. The three long written papers will be worth 20% each of the course grade. The remaining 40% will be based on the shorter written assignments (30%) and class participation (10%).

Students' essays will be evaluated based on both content and clarity.

Readings

Grice, H. Paul. 1975. Logic and conversation. In Peter Cole and Jerry Morgan, eds., *Syntax and Semantics*, Volume 3: Speech Acts, 43–58. New York: Academic Press.

Keenan, Elinor Ochs. 1979. The universality of conversational postulates. *Language and Society* 5(1):67–80.

Lakoff, George. 2003. Simple framing. *The Rockridge Institute Website* URL <http://www.rockridgeinstitute.org/people/lakoff>.

Truss, Lynn. 2003. *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*. London: Profile Books.

Ward, Gregory and Betty Birner. 2004. Information structure and non-canonical syntax. In Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward, eds., *Handbook of Pragmatics*, 153–174. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Wolf, Florian and Ted Gibson. 2003. The descriptive inadequacy of trees for representing discourse coherence, MIT Ms.

ing 390A Written assignment due Friday, February 3 Name_____

Pick one of the examples below and write a paragraph about why the example is unfair or odd. Your paragraph should not be longer than a half page at most. Please bring enough copies to class on Friday for every member of your small group. In class on Friday, twenty minutes will be set aside for small groups to read and comment on the paragraphs. You will hand in to us a paragraph that has been annotated with comments from your group.

1. Billy supports tax-relief. [Find the hidden bias in “tax-relief.”]
2. He walked in. Hubert sat down. [Why is it hard to get “He” and “Hubert” to refer to the same individual?]
3. Why did you commit the murder? [Why is this question likely to lead to an objection if asked of a defendant in a murder trial?]

4. Lucinda is in favor of terrorist surveillance. [What's the hidden bias in "terrorist surveillance?"]

The point of this exercise is to get you used to writing and commenting on each other's work. The assignment will also show that even in the first week of the semester you have something intelligent to say about the issues that are addressed in this course. Your paragraphs will also give us a better sense of your background.

Assignment 2

Lyn Frazier and Chris Potts, Ling 390a: Controlling the Discourse, Spring 2006 Distributed Feb. 13; group work on Feb. 17; final draft due Feb. 21

For in-class work on Friday, Feb. 17 [bring three copies!]

- i. Bring four examples of pragmatic meaning. You can construct your own examples, but try to find them in natural contexts (in print, radio, television, overheard conversations, etc.).
- ii. For each example, say which Gricean maxim or maxims is/are relevant to understanding it, and briefly explain why (one or two sentences).¹

In class on Friday, Feb. 17

You'll discuss your examples with your group members. They will help you further articulate your explanation for each pragmatic meaning that you identified.

Don't shy away from difficult or confusing examples that seem not to be easily explained in terms of the maxims. Your group members might be able to help you work through them. And we'll discuss the most intractable and/or interesting cases as a class.

For Tuesday, February 21 (a UMass Monday)

An essay of about one page. Your essay should have at least the following parts:

- i. A brief introduction that gives the readers some idea of what pragmatics is and, more importantly for this writing, what the Gricean maxims are and (broadly speaking) how they are supposed to work.
- ii. Discussion of two of your examples (probably one paragraph for each). Basically, for this, you'll want to flesh out the few sentences you wrote for Friday in the light of the group and full-class discussions.
- iii. Some summary remarks about what you accomplished in this essay.

¹The maxims are on the handout called 'Overview of pragmatics', and they are the central topic of Grice's 'Logic and conversation', which is downloadable from the course weblog.

Notes We've now moved from the simple one-paragraph form of Assignment 1 to a genuine essay, so you'll need to pay attention to overall coherence.

- The introductory paragraph is intended to make the work more or less self-contained.
- Your two examples should relate to each other, so that a theme emerges. They might be similar, or diverse, or complementary. Perhaps one is easy, the other hard. There are a lot of possibilities. Try to make the relationship clear.
- Your summary remarks shouldn't just repeat what you already said. They should synthesize it.

Assignment3

Lyn Frazier and Chris Potts, Ling 390a: Controlling the Discourse, Spring 2006 Distributed Mar. 1; first draft due Mar. 10; final draft due Mar. 17

Overview

Your task is to choose exactly one of the following two questions and write a response to it. The response should be approximately 2.5 double-spaced pages. Bring three copies of a draft to class on March 10. You will give these to your group members, who will read them in time for group-work on March 13.

1 Presuppositions

Find two examples of presuppositions in naturally occurring discourse and produce analyses of them. What is an analysis? That's a difficult question to answer in general. But, in this case, we are looking for a precise description of the examples in which you do at least the following:

- i. Clearly identify the presupposed content.
- ii. Trace the presupposed content to particular words or phrases.
- iii. Describe the context of utterance clearly, and explain what role it plays in our understanding of the presupposition.

You should probably also address some or all of the following questions:

- iv. Is the presupposition true? If not, is it a subtle but deliberate attempt to mislead?
- v. Were the discourse conditions for the presupposition met, or were hearers required to accommodate it?
- vi. What were the overall effects of the presupposition on the discourse?

2 Noncanonical syntax

The italicized sentence in each of the examples in (1) involves what is called locative inversion or PP-inversion.

In general, locative inversion involves a prepositional phrase (PP) in initial position, then a main verb or passive-participle construction, and then a noun phrase that would normally be the subject. (For instance, for (1c), one might draw

- (1) a. Elaine was enchanted by the zoo near her house. She went often to two exhibits in particular, one with a cave and another with a swimming pool. There were scary animals in both: In the cave lurked some hungry-looking lions, and in the swimming pool lived a giant shark.
- b. Elaine was enchanted by the zoo near her house. She went often to two exhibits in particular, one with some hungry-looking lions and another with a giant shark. #In a cave lurked the hungry-looking lions, and in a swimming pool lived a giant shark.
- c. Sam's room was wonderfully decorated, with lots of warmth and life. For example, in the southeast corner stood a tall green plant that really warmed the place up.

connections with A tall green plant that really warmed the place up stood in the corner).

Locative inversion is definitely a noncanonical structure for English. Does it conform to our generalizations about noncanonical structures? Your essay should answer this question. To do this effectively, you'll want to consider questions like these:

- i. What must the discourse status of the sentence-final noun phrase be?
- ii. In which contexts does locative inversion sound normal?
- iii. In which contexts does it sound weird?
- iv. Which generalizations about new vs. old information and sentence structure are relevant here, and why? Don't feel limited by these questions. Others might be important.

Your essay will benefit greatly from a wider array of data than just (1a-d). You're encouraged to concoct additional examples.

Essay #3—First draft due Wednesday, March 2

Write a four page essay on one of the topics below. Bring three copies of the essay to class next

Wednesday to distribute to your group so that each member of the group can read your essay BEFORE Friday (March 4). On Friday, in class, you can discuss each other's essays. Then you should revise your essay over the weekend and turn in the final draft on Monday (March 7).

1. Predictions for passives

Ward and Birner (2004) predict that English passive sentences like (a) are associated with a particular discourse effect.

a. The book was read (by Ed).

Describe Ward and Birner's predictions for the information status of the noun phrases in this example ("the book", "Ed") and attempt to illustrate (or counterexemplify) these predictions using small texts. These texts may be naturally occurring texts or ones of your own devising.

2. Framing

Identify a political or social event that is (in part) shaped by the language people use to talk about it. Describe the frame for whatever word(s) or phrase(s) you place at the center of your essay" Relate your examples of linguistic framing to the four "morals" that Lakoff presents in "Simple Framing."

Moral 1. Every word evokes a frame.

Moral 2: Words defined within a frame evoke the frame.

Moral 3: Negating a frame evokes the frame.

Moral 4: Evoking a frame reinforces that frame.

Try to explore some linguistic aspect of framing.

3. Do information structure constraints help the reader/listener?

The processing task of the reader (or listener) appears to be very difficult because so much of the message conveyed by a discourse is left unsaid. How could the information structure constraints of Ward and Birner (2004) help the reader (or listener) to draw the intended inferences and fill in the right information?

4. Topic of your choice

You may submit a topic in writing to us. If we accept the topic, you may then write your essay on the topic you have submitted. It should bear some relation to what we have done in class.