Linguistics 801: Semantics and Pragmatics of Questions

Course description Linguistics 801 is the Seminar in Syntax and Semantics; this semester’s topic is the semantics and pragmatics of questions. Building on the approach to natural-language semantics developed in Linguistics 466 and 566, we will take an in-depth look at the interpretation of questions and answers, as well as connections with related areas of semantic and pragmatic inquiry (e.g. focus, topic, and other alternative-introducing constructions).

Readings Our readings will span the questions literature from the early 1970s to today. All course readings will be distributed either in class or on our Canvas site.

Course requirements Attendance and participation in discussion are essential to the success of the seminar (70% of course grade). Please prepare all indicated readings in advance of each Wednesday’s meeting. Each student will write a term paper (25+ pp.) on a questions-related topic of their choosing (30% of course grade).

Schedule of readings

Week 1  Sept. 4  
Topic Introduction to questions  

Week 2  Sept. 11  
Topic Introduction to answers  

Week 3  Sept. 18  
Topic Mention-some readings  

Week 4  Sept. 25  
Topic Multiple-wh questions  

Week 5  Oct. 2  
Topic Functional and pair-list readings  
Week 6  Oct. 9

_topic_ Reconstruction


Week 7  Oct. 16

_topic_ Embedded questions and QVE


Week 8  Oct. 23

_topic_ Embedders


Week 9  Oct. 30

_topic_ QUD and alternative semantics


Week 10  Nov. 6

_topic_ Alternatives elsewhere


Week 11  Nov. 13

_topic_ Alternative questions


Week 12  Nov. 20

_topic_ Concealed questions


Week 13  Nov. 27 – no class: Thanksgiving break

Week 14  Dec. 4

_topic_ Question resolution, ontology, and Inquisitive Semantics


Week 15  Dec. 11

_topic_ Wrapping up; paper presentations

_readings_ TBD

University boilerplate

- Applicable policies: For university policies regarding students with disabilities, religious observances, academic misconduct, complaint procedures, etc., see http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf
• Credit hour policy: This 3-credit course meets for 2.5 hours per week during the semester; students are expected to put in approximately 7.5 hours of additional work per week studying and working on assignments in order to meet the learning goals of the course (144 hours total).

• Workload statement: Per the credit hour policy detailed above, you should plan to spend an average of approximately 7.5 hours per week outside of class preparing course readings. This average figure of 7.5 hours per week includes the time devoted to the term paper.

References


Theiler, Nadine & Roelofsen, Floris & Aloni, Maria. 2016. A uniform semantics for declarative and interrogative complements. ms.


