Linguistics 661: Issues in Semantics
Measuring propositions and events
University of Maryland, Spring 2006
Syllabus

Room             Marie Mount Hall 1401G
Time             Tuesdays, 9am–12noon
Instructor       Alexander Williams
Office hours     Whenever you want them; best times: Wed. 8–5, Thur. 8–2.
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Contact          Office telephone: 5-4935
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Course webpage   Readings, lecture notes, assignments, and administrative announcements
                 will (soon) be available on the web.
Prerequisite      Linguistics 660
Course description The aim of this course to strengthen your grasp on both the tools and the
                     topics of formal semantics. We’ll do this by studying a few major research
                     topics in some detail.
                     The topics will fall under one broad theme: quantification and measurement
                     of objects other than ordinary individuals. We will see how the pursuit of a
                     compositional semantic derivation can lead to enrichment of the semantic
                     ontology.
                     The course will proceed roughly as follows. After reviewing the mechanics
                     of quantification and intensionality, we will spend a few weeks on the
                     classical cases of adverbial quantification. We will then look at various
                     theories of the semantics of interrogative clauses, thus putting us into
                     position to witness the main event: adverbial quantification over interrogative
                     complement clauses, a nonclassical case. Returning then to discussions of
                     adverbial quantification that rely on “events,” we will segue into a new
                     topic, namely: events and how they are counted and measured. We’ll start
                     with the basics of event semantics, and then talk about event-type and
                     telicity, with special attention to observations about “measuring” events
                     in terms of their thematic participants. Time permitting, we might finish
                     with by discussing these issues in relation to causatives.

                     Because of time, we will need to divert our attention from several topics
                     that are tightly related to ours, most significantly focus and plurals.
Work and grades

(a) Reading and class participation (20%).
(b) 2–4 take-home exercises (45%).
(c) One in-class presentation of a reading, either from our list, or otherwise related to our topics. Please confirm your selection with me. The presentation should be in the area of 30 minutes; class discussion may extend it (15%).
(d) Outline for, or a sketch of, a research paper. Due May 9th. Please discuss your ideas about this with me at some point prior to April 18. (20%)

Note: Some revision of the course work requirements is possible.

Outline of topics

(a) Review of quantification
(b) Overview of intensionality
(c) Adverbial quantification (standard)
(d) Semantics of interrogative clauses
   Karttunen 1977; Groenendijk and Stokhof 1982; Higginbotham 1993/1996; Ginzburg 1995; etc.
(e) Adverbial quantification over interrogatives
   Berman 1991; Lahiri 1991/2002; Williams 2000; Beck and Sharvit 2004; etc.
(f) Introduction to event semantics
   Parson 1990; Landman 2001; Rothstein 1995; Kratzer 1989; etc.
(g) Event-type (Aspectual classes)
   Dowty 1979; Bach 1984; Verkuyl 1991; Filip 1991; etc.
(h) Measuring events by their participants

Note: Outline of topics subject to arbitrary and significant revision.
Bibliography


Dowty, David. 1979. *Word meaning and Montague Grammar* [section on event type].


