

Topics in Semantics: The Semantics of Degree

Course Description

This seminar will investigate the expression of gradability, comparison and degree in natural language. The course will address the following major issues, though we may also include other topics according to the interests and direction of the class:

- The underlying semantic representation of expressions of degree and the linguistic significance of scalar representations
- The logical form of comparative constructions, and the implications of comparatives for other aspects of the grammar
- The semantics of degree and the role of scalar representations in grammatical categories other than gradable adjectives

Requirements

Students enrolled in the course are expected to do the assigned readings and to participate fully in the classroom discussion, and they will also be required to write a research paper for the course. The topic should be selected in consultation with the instructors no later than the tenth week of the course. We will set aside the final week of the course for a research seminar in which students can present their work.

Schedule

The following is a tentative schedule for the semester, which we will adjust as we go along depending on the interests of the participants. Additional topics and readings may be added, and some of the ones listed may be deleted.

An up-to-date listing of the topics and readings for upcoming classes will be made available

Hardcopies of the readings for the course will be made available outside the instructors office. Optional background readings are listed in parentheses.

Class 1: Introduction

The semantics of grading and degree	Kennedy 1999, pp. 3-57; (Sapir 1944)
Vague predicates	Klein 1980; (Kamp 1975)
Degrees relations	Cresswell 1977; (Bierwisch 1989, pp. 73-139)

Class 2: A semantic typology of gradable predicates

Scale structure and degree modification	Kennedy and McNally 2002
Relative vs. absolute gradable adjectives	(Unger 1975, ch. 2)

Class 3: The grammar of vagueness

What exactly is the standard of comparison and how is it determined? Ludlow 1989; Kennedy 2002; (Graff 2000) (Barker 2002; Kyburg and Morreau 2000)

Class 4: Comparison and logical form 1

Scope ambiguities in comparatives and the semantic type of gradable adjectives Kennedy 1999, pp. 58-108; Heim 2000 (von Stechow 1984; Heim 1985)
Scope and superlatives Sharvit and Stateva 2000; (Farkas and Kiss 2000)

Class 5: Comparison and logical form 2

Quantification and comparison and the structure of degrees Schwarzschild and Wilkinson 2002 (Lerner and Pinkal 1992)

Class 6: Polarity

Comparison and polar opposition Kennedy 2001; (Bierwisch 1989, pp. 139-175;)
Comparison and negative polarity Rullmann 1995, ch. 2

Class 7: Comparative NPs

Comparative quantifiers Hackl 2000

Class 8: The grammar of measurement

Partitives and related matters Schwarzschild 2002
Amount relatives Grosu and Landman 1998; (Carlson 1977; Heim 1987)

Class 9: Aspect and degree

Telicity and degree of change Kennedy and Levin 2002

Class 10: Student presentations

References

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- Carlson, Greg N. 1977. Reference to kinds in English. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Cresswell, M. J. 1977. The semantics of degree. In *Montague grammar*, ed. Barbara Partee, 261–292. New York: Academic Press.
- Farkas, Donka F., and Katalan È. Kiss. 2000. On the comparative and absolute readings of superlatives. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 18.3:417–455.
- Graff, Delia. 2000. Shifting sands: An interest-relative theory of vagueness. *Philosophical Topics* 20:45–81.
- Grosu, Alexander, and Fred Landman. 1998. Strange relatives of the third kind. *Natural Language Semantics* 6:125–170.

- Hackl, Martin. 2000. Comparative quantifiers. Doctoral Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Heim, Irene. 1985. Notes on comparatives and related matters. Unpublished ms., University of Texas, Austin.
- Heim, Irene. 1987. Where does the definiteness restriction apply? Evidence from the definiteness of variables. In *The representation of (in)definiteness*, ed. Eric Reuland and Alice ter Meulen, chapter 2, 21–42. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Heim, Irene. 2000. Degree operators and scope. In *Proceedings of SALT X*. Ithaca, NY: CLC Publications.
- Kamp, J.A.W. 1975. Two theories of adjectives. In *Formal semantics of natural language*, ed. Edward Keenan, 123–155. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kennedy, Christopher. 1999. *Projecting the adjective: The syntax and semantics of gradability and comparison*. New York: Garland. (1997 UCSC Ph.D thesis).
- Kennedy, Christopher. 2001. Polar opposition and the ontology of ‘degrees’. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 24:33–70.
- Kennedy, Christopher. 2002. The grammar of vagueness. Ms., Northwestern University.
- Kennedy, Christopher, and Beth Levin. 2002. Telicity corresponds to degree of change. Unpublished ms., Northwestern University and Stanford University.
- Kennedy, Christopher, and Louise McNally. 2002. Scale structure and the semantic typology of gradable predicates. Unpublished ms.
- Klein, Ewan. 1980. A semantics for positive and comparative adjectives. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 4:1–45.
- Kyburg, Alice, and Michael Morreau. 2000. Fitting words: Vague language in context. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 23:577–597.
- Lerner, Jean-Yves, and Manfred Pinkal. 1992. Comparatives and nested quantification. Technical report, Universität des Saarlandes. CLAUS Report Nr. 21.
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- Rullmann, Hotze. 1995. Maximality in the semantics of wh-constructions. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Sapir, Edward. 1944. Grading: A study in semantics. *Philosophy of Science* 11:93–116.
- Schwarzschild, Roger. 2002. The grammar of measurement. In *Proceedings of SALT XII*, ed. Brendan Jackson. Ithaca, NY: CLC Publications.
- Schwarzschild, Roger, and Karina Wilkinson. 2002. Quantifiers in comparatives: A semantics of degree based on intervals. *Natural Language Semantics* 10:1–41.
- Sharvit, Yael, and Penka Stateva. 2000. Against ‘long’ movement of the superlative operator. In *Proceedings of SALT X*, 185–202. Ithaca, NY: CLC Publications.
- von Stechow, Arnim. 1984. Comparing semantic theories of comparison. *Journal of Semantics* 3:1–77.
- Unger, Peter. 1975. *Ignorance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.