

Ling 147: Semantics of Questions

Thursdays 12-3pm, Boylston 303
Spring 2019, Harvard University

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I. Overview

This course is an in-depth investigation into the semantics of questions and wh-constructions. Several canonical and modern approaches are introduced, namely the Hamblin-Karttunen approaches, Partition Semantics, Alternative Semantics, Categorical Semantics, Inquisitive Semantics. Topics covered include composition of questions, variations in exhaustivity, anti-uniqueness effects, quantificational variability effects, mention-some readings, focus intervention, evidentiality, negation and NPIs in questions, polar and alternative questions, and non-canonical questions.

II. Prerequisites

Ling 116 or permission of the instructors.

III. Required Textbook

Questions

by Veneeta Dayal

Oxford University Press

2017, 352 pages

ISBN: 9780199281275

Weekly readings will be 25-30 pages from the textbook. We may also provide supplemental readings as we go along.

IV. Course Requirements

Students will be mainly evaluated based on two criteria.

1. Class discussion
2. Final paper

The class discussion component includes a summarizing of last week's discussion and raising of issues for 30 minutes (all students together) at the beginning of each class (starting from Week 2/3). It also includes general participation in the class discussion each week. The final paper has to be a term paper on one/some of the issues discussed in the course.

This course will be on the reading-heavy side, which is to mean we will expect the required readings to be done **before** class.

V. Schedule (subject to change)

<u>Week</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Required Readings</u>	<u>Discussion</u>
1	1/31	Introduction: What do questions mean? Wh-movement or the lack of it. Classical and modern theories of questions and answers	Dayal (2016), Chapters 1 and 2	DB + GC
2	2/07	Exhaustive and Non-Exhaustive answers. In-depth discussion of the notion of <i>alternatives</i> .	Dayal (2016), Chapter 3 Ciardelli et. al. (2017). Composing Alternatives. <i>Linguistics and Philosophy</i> , 40:1–36.	GC +DB
3	2/14	Single pair, pair-list, and functional answers	Dayal (2016), Chapter 4 Chierchia (1993). Questions with Quantifiers. <i>Natural Language Semantics</i> , Vol. 1, pp. 181-234.	GC
4	2/21	Embedded Questions: Selection, Quantificational Variability, Concealed Questions	Dayal (2016), Chapter 5 Beck and Sharvit (2002). Pluralities of Questions. <i>Journal of Semantics</i> , 19 105-157.	DB
5	2/28	Weak Islands and Extraction	Dayal (2016), Chapter 6	GC (DB away)
6	3/7	Wh inside Islands	Dayal (2016), Chapter 7	DB
7	3/14	Focus and alternatives: focus-based semantics for questions, focus intervention effects	Dayal (2016), Chapter 8 Kratzer and Shimoyama (2017). Indeterminate pronouns: The view	GC

			from Japanese. In Chungmin Lee, Ferenc Kiefer and Manfred Krifka, eds., <i>Contrastiveness in Information Structure, Alternatives and Scalar Implicatures</i> . Springer, 123-143.	
8	3/28	Polar-alternative questions, alternative questions, verum focus propositional anaphora, focus intervention in alternative questions	Dayal (2016), §8.3 Biezma and Rawlins (2012). Responding to alternative and polar questions. <i>Linguistics and Philosophy</i> , 35:361–406	DB
9	4/4	The road not taken: questions as topical properties	Parts of: Xiang (2016). Interpreting questions with non-exhaustive answers. Harvard University dissertation.	GC
10	4/11	Evidentiality and questions. Negation and bias in questions. Non-canonical questions.	Dayal (2016), Chapter 9 Parts of: Bhadra (2017). Evidentiality and Questions: Bangla at the Interfaces. Rutgers University dissertation.	DB
11	4/18	NPIs, minimizers and verum focus in questions	Nicolae (2015). Questions with NPIs. <i>Natural Language Semantics</i> , 23:21–76.	GC
12	4/25	TBA Tentative: Inquisitive Semantics, Correlatives, wh-exclamatives	TBA	DB + GC