

Focus, Topic and Beyond
LIN 4930-258F/LIN 6932-26B0
Fall 2019

MWF 7th period (1:55-2:45), AND 21
Office hours: MWF 6th period (12:50-1:40), or by appointment

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Course website on E-Learning in Canvas: <http://elearning.ufl.edu>

Course Description

The course deals with information structure, which is also called ‘information packaging’.

Information structure is about the ways information is presented by speakers within a sentence. The choices speakers make in this respect have to do with issues such as topic and focus, coherence and cohesion, old and new (information), and the like. These semantico-pragmatic issues may affect word order and other syntactic issues, as well as intonation, which means that information structure has to do with the interface of semantics, pragmatics, syntax and phonology/phonetics.

This course concentrates on the pragmatic and semantic facets of information structure but when necessary deals also with the syntactic and phonological facets as well. Note that the various issues will be illustrated mainly from English, but data from other languages will be considered (especially if there is some linguistic device for marking something, e.g. focus, that is not available in English).

Prerequisite: LIN 3010, graduate standing or permission by instructor.

Textbooks

There is no one textbook for this course.

The reading material includes articles or book chapters that can be found at Smathers library (often as e-books), or be posted on Canvas by instructor. See “List of Readings” below.

NOTE: There is a good entry on information structure in *Wikipedia*, which might give you a nice concise overview on the subject.

Course requirements and grading:

Undergraduates

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------|
| - <i>Homework</i> | 5 x 5% = 25% |
| - <i>In class Exam</i> | 25% |
| - <i>Take-home Exam</i> | 25% |
| - <i>Term paper OR Article Presentation</i> | 25% |

Graduates

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| - <i>Homework</i> | 5 x 5% = 25% |
| - <i>In class Exam</i> | 25% |
| - <i>Take-home Exam</i> | 25% |
| - <i>Article Presentation</i> | 10% |
| - <i>Term paper</i> | 15% |

Homework

- Each H/W assignment will be with respect to the reading of the respective week. It will include questions or problem solving + an open question that requires your reaction to the reading assignment.

- H/W will not be graded but only given a pass/fail check. In order to pass, each assignment must be **completed** and its lower grade should be a D, i.e., at least 60% of the assignment should be good. For each failing or un-submitted homework assignment, your grade will be lowered by 5%.
- Homework exercises are to be typed and printed out neatly. Staple multiple sheets together and put your name on it. Please write in complete sentences and complete thoughts. H/W assignments are due in class on the date stated on the syllabus. We will typically discuss the homework in class, so late homework cannot be accepted. If you are not in class when homework assignments are handed back, it is your responsibility to get your work from the instructor.
- You are encouraged to discuss the problems with other members of this class. However, you must write up your solutions entirely on your own, without help, in accordance with the Honor Code: <http://www.chem.ufl.edu/~itl/honor.html>

Exams

There will be two exams – one in-class and one a take-home. There will be no make-up exams without a documented medical excuse.

Term paper

A term paper is a conference-style paper, to be presented in class weeks 12, 13, or 14.

The paper (10-15 pages) and oral presentation (10-15 minutes, plus questions) will constitute 15% of the final grade of graduate students (7.5% for the written part and 7.5% for the presentation). Topics must be approved by week 12. All papers due by December 2nd.

Students may choose a theoretical topic to investigate or look into some local devices of marking topic or focus, or other discourse coherence relations.

Article Presentation

You can choose any article you wish – just make sure it has to do with information structure. Your presentation should be in such a way that the audience (the instructor and the students) will understand the issues the article discusses. Engage the students in your presentation, maybe by preparing questions or suggesting intriguing ideas. Students have to coordinate with instructor when they present their article.

NOTE: You can present your article any time during the semester.

Attendance and participation

Attendance and participation are essential. You are unlikely to succeed in this course without coming to class and paying attention. The material on the exams will come from the texts but also from what we do in class. Lecture notes and the texts will not always coincide.

Each student will be allowed 3 absences without penalty. After that, one point will be deduced from the final grade for every non-excused absence. Showing up later or leaving earlier is considered ½ absences.

NOTE: If you show up late it is your responsibility to make sure that I turn the absence into late. The least distracting method is to approach me at the end of the class.

Note: There will be no extra credit work to help raise your grade; please do not ask. The best strategy is to do the best work you are capable of on the assigned work (exams, homework, presentation, etc.).

Cell Phone Policy: Cell phones should be switched off for class. If you need it on for a specific class (because of a family medical emergency, for example) please notify me before class and sit near the door.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

The course grading scale is below. Further information about UF's grading policies can be found at: <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-
92 or above	89-91.9	85-88.9	80-84.9	77-79.9	74-76.9	70-73.9	67-69.9
D+	D	D-	E				
64-66.9	60-63.9	57-59.9	56.9 or below				

Other Information:

Honor Code: <http://www.chem.ufl.edu/~itl/honor.html>
Disabilities: <http://www.chem.ufl.edu/~itl/disabilities.html>
Counseling: <http://www.chem.ufl.edu/~itl/counseling.html>

Schedule (subject to changes according to class progress):

Week 1: 8/21, 23

- Course overview
- Introduction to Information Structure

Optional Reading: Lambrecht (1994)

Week 2: 8/26, 28, 30

Theme and Rheme; Thematic Progression – The Prague School

Week 3: 9/4, 6 (Note: 9/2 is Labor Day – no classes)

Coherence and Cohesion

Read: Reinhart (1980)

HW1 (W)

Week 4: 9/9, 11, 13

(Discourse) Coherence Relations

Optional Reading: Kehler (2002)

Week 5: 9/16, 18, 20

(Discourse) Coherence Relations (cont.)

Read: Lascarides and Asher (1993)

Optional Reading: Asher and Lascarides (2003)

Week 6: 9/23, 25, 27

Sentence Topic

Read: Reinhart (1982 [1981])

HW2 (W)

Week 7: 10/2 (Note: 9/30 is Rosh Ha-Shana and 10/4 is homecoming - classes cancelled)

Sentence Topic (cont.)

Read: Buring (2019)

Week 8: 10/7, 11 (Note: 10/9 is Yom Kippur; class cancelled)

Sentence Topic (cont.)

HW3 (W)

Week 9: 10/14, 16, 18

Discourse Topic

Read: Asher (2004)

Week 10: 10/21, 23, 25

Focus

Read: Rooth (1992)

Optional Reading: Rooth (1985)

HW4 (W)

Week 11: 10/28, 30, 11/1

Focus (cont.)

Review (M); In-class Exam (W)

Week 12: 11/4, 6, 8

Focus (cont.)

Student's presentation

HW5 (W)

Week 13: 11/13, 15 (Note: 11/11: Veterans Day; no classes)

Students' presentations

Week 14: 11/18, 20, 22

Students' presentations

Week 15: Note: 11/27, 29: Thanksgiving – no classes; **11/25:** Instructor is at a conference – class cancelled

Week 16: 12/2, 4

Students' presentations

12/2: Term papers are due

12/2: Review and Take-home Test

The test sheet will be given by instructor on 12/2 at the end of the class and be submitted by students at the beginning of the class on 12/4.

List of readings

Asher, Nicholas. 2004. Discourse Topic. *Theoretical Linguistics* 30: 163-201

Asher, Nicholas and Alex Lascarides. 2003. *Logics in Conversation*. Cambridge, UK and New York: CUP.

Büring, Daniel. 2019. (Contrastive) Topic. In: Féry, Caroline & Shin Ishihara (eds), *Handbook of Information Structure*. Oxford University Press. [The 2014 final version appeared on Semantics Archive, which can be accessed online]

Halliday, Michael A. H. 1967. Notes on the transitivity and theme in English. *Journal of Linguistics* 3: 199-244.

Kehler, Andrew. 2000. Coherence and the resolution of ellipsis. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 23: 533-75.

Kehler, Andrew. 2002. *Coherence, Reference and the Theory of Grammar*. Stanford, CA: Center for the Study of Language and Information (CSLI).

Kiss, Katalin É. 1998. Identificational focus versus information focus. *Language* 74: 245-273.

Lambrecht, Knud. 1994. *Information Structure and Sentence Form*. Cambridge: CUP.

Lascarides, Alex and Nicholas Asher. 1993. Temporal interpretation, discourse relations and commonsense entailments. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 16: 437-93.

Reinhart, Tanya. 1980. Conditions for text coherence. *Poetics Today* 1: 161-80.

Reinhart, Tanya. 1981. Pragmatics and linguistics: An analysis of sentence topics. *Philosophica* 27(1): 53-94. [Printed also as Reinhart 1982]

Reinhart, Tanya. 1982. *Pragmatics and linguistics: An analysis of sentence topics*. Bloomington, In: Indiana university Linguistics Club. [Printed also as Reinhart 1981]

Rooth, Mats. 1985. Association with Focus. Ph.D. thesis, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Rooth, Mats. 1992. A theory of focus interpretation. *Natural Language Semantics* 1: 75-116.

Schwarzchild, Roger 1999. Givenness, AvoidF and other constraints on the placement of accent. *Natural Language Semantics* 7: 141-177