

Focus, Topic and Beyond
LIN 4930-14228/LIN 6932-26B0
Fall 2022

MWF 7th period (1:55-2:45), TUR 2354
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

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

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

We will concentrate on the pragmatic and semantic facets of information structure but, when necessary, we will also deal with the syntactic and phonological facets. 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

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| - Homework | 5 x 4% = 20% |
| - In class Exam | 26% |
| - Take-home Exam | 34% |
| - Term paper OR Article Presentation | 20% |

Graduates

- *Homework* 5 x 4% = 20%
- *In class Exam* 26%
- *Take-home Exam* 34%
- *Article Presentation* 6%
- *Term paper* 14%

Homework

- For each homework exercise, I will create an “assignment” on Canvas, where it should be submitted.
- 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.
- Note that you were assigned the most classical works rather than the most recent ones. If you happened to come across recent studies that discuss one of them, it would be very good if you included them in the reaction part of the H/W assignment.
- H/W will not be graded but only given a pass/fail check. To pass, each assignment must be **completed**, and its lowest grade should be a D, i.e., at least 63% of the assignment should be good. For each failing or un-submitted homework assignment, your grade will be lowered by 4%.
- 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 take-home. There will be no make-up exams without a documented medical excuse.

Term paper (relevant for graduate students)

A term paper is a conference-style paper, to be presented in class weeks 12, 13, 14 or 15. The paper (10-15 pages) and oral presentation (10-15 minutes, plus questions) will constitute 14% of the final grade of graduate students (7% for the written part and 7% for the presentation). Topics must be approved by week 12. All papers due by December 5th.

Students may choose to investigate a theoretical topic or some local device(s) for marking topic or focus, old or new information, etc.

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 must coordinate with instructor when they present their article.

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 deducted 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.).

Grading scale

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-
93 or above	90-92.9	87-89.9	83-86.9	80-82.9	77-79.9	73-76.9	70-72.9
D+	D	D-	E				
67-69.9	63-66.9	60-62.9	59.9 or below				

Other Issues

- In response to COVID-19, the following recommendations are in place to maintain your learning environment, to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions, and to further the health and safety of ourselves, our neighbors, and our loved ones.
 - If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against COVID-19 virus. Visit one.ufl.edu for screening/testing and vaccination opportunities.
 - If you are sick, stay home. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 to be evaluated.
 - Course material will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work.
- **Cellphone and Laptop Policy:**
To ensure full attention during class, you can only use laptops for taking notes and cellphones for emergency.
- **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/>.

- **University Honesty Policy**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” [The Honor Code](#) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.

- **Students Requiring Accommodations**

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

- **Software Use**

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

- **Student Privacy**

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see the [Notification to Students of FERPA Rights](#).

Campus Resources:

- Health and Wellness
 - *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
 - *Counseling and Wellness Center*: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
 - *Student Health Care Center*: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).
 - *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

- *Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SAES)*: Student Health Care Center, 352-392-1161;
- *University Police Department*: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
 - Academic Resources
- **E-learning technical support**: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- **Career Resource Center**: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
- **Library Support**, Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- **Teaching Center**, Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
- **Writing Studio**, 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
- **Student Complaints On-Campus**: [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information](#).
- **On-Line Students Complaints**: [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process](#).

- **Schedule (subject to changes according to class progress):**

Week 1: 8/24, 26

- Course overview
- Introduction to Information Structure

Optional Reading: Lambrecht (1994)

Week 2: 8/29, 31, 9/2

Theme and Rheme; Thematic Progression – The Prague School

Week 3: 9/7, 9 (Note: 9/5 is Labor Day – no classes)

Coherence and Cohesion

Read: Reinhart (1980)

HW1 (W)

Week 4: 9/12, 14, 16

(Discourse) Coherence Relations

Optional Reading: Kehler (2002)

Week 5: 9/19, 21, 23

(Discourse) Coherence Relations (cont.)

Read: Lascarides and Asher (1993)

Optional Reading: Asher and Lascarides (2003)

Week 6: 9/28, 30 (Note: 9/26 is Rosh Ha-Shana; class cancelled)

Sentence Topic

Read: Reinhart (1982 [1981])

HW2 (W)

Week 7: 10/3

(Note: 10/5 is Yom Kippur; class cancelled; 10/7 is Homecoming Day; No classes)

Sentence Topic (cont.)

Read: Büring (2019)

Week 8: 10/10, 12, 14

Sentence Topic (cont.)

HW3 (W)

Week 9: 10/17, 19, 21

Discourse Topic

Read: Asher (2004)

Week 10: 10/24, 26, 28

Focus

Read: Rooth (1992)

Optional Reading: Rooth (1985)

HW4 (W)

Week 11: 10/31, 11/2, 4

Focus (cont.)

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

Week 12: 11/7, 9 (Note: 11/11 Veterans Day; No classes)

Focus (cont.)

Student's presentation

HW5 (W)

Week 13: 11/14, 16, 18

Students' presentations

Week 14: 11/21 (Note: 11/23, 25: Thanksgiving – no classes)

A presentation by a guest or student

Week 15: 11/28, 30, 12/2

Students' presentations

Week 16: 12/5, 7

Students' presentations

12/5: Term papers are due

12/5: Review and Take-home Test

The test sheet will be given by instructor on 12/5 at the end of the class and be submitted by students at the beginning of the class on 12/7.

List of readings

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

Asher, Nicholas & 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 & 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