

# Assignment 1

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2019

Distributed Jan 8; due Jan 22

## Submission information (for this and all other assignments)

As described on the syllabus, all work for this class must be submitted electronically via our course's Canvas site. Work submitted in any other way will not be accepted. Work is always due by 10:30 am on the due date. At 10:31 am, it counts as 1 day late. For more on the policies: <http://www.stanford.edu/class/linguist130a/syllabus.html>

## 1 A bit of fieldwork

[3 points]

The class 1 handout called 'Overview of topics' briefly reviews some of the phenomena we will address in this course. First, look it over again, thinking in particular about the topics and the examples that are relevant to them. Second, find a naturally occurring example that is relevant to one of the topics, and provide (i) the example and its source, (ii) its associated topic, and (iii) a couple of sentences explaining why the example is relevant to the topic.

**Note** Your example can come from anywhere — printed material, television, the Web, radio, overheard conversations . . . anywhere humans use language. If you get it from somewhere private (e.g., Facebook, a conversation), please change any identifying information.

## 2 Entailment

[2 points]

For the sentence pairs in (1) and (2), does the (b) sentence entail the (a) sentence? If it does, give an informal argument in favor of that judgment (1–2 sentences). If it doesn't, describe a counter-exemplifying situation.

- (1) a. Exactly three students danced.  
b. Exactly three Swedish students danced.
- (2) a. Exactly three students danced.  
b. Exactly three students waltzed.

## 3 The pseudo-adjective *pseudo-*

[2 points]

The prefix *pseudo-* is not genuinely an adjective syntactically, but it is a semantic modifier of nouns, so we can ask how it fits into Partee's typology of adjective meanings. For each of the meaning classes *intersective*, *subsective*, *non-subsective*, and *privative*, consider whether *pseudo-* belongs in that class. If it doesn't, provide a brief (1–2 sentence) argument for that conclusion, with at least one example from English. If it does, summarize your evidence in support of that conclusion (1–2 sentences).

## 4 Compounds and compositionality

[3 points]

Partee writes, “In compounds [...] there is no general rule for predicting the interpretation of the combination” (p. 341). First, articulate the challenge this poses for the principle of compositionality (2–3 sentences). Second, Levin et al. (2018)<sup>1</sup> show that experimental subjects presented with novel English compounds show strong biases for particular interpretations. For example, where both the modifier and the head noun in the compound refer to artifacts (e.g., *stew skillet*), 93% of participants inferred that the entire compound described an artifact used in events related to creating the modifier (as in, “a stew skillet is a skillet used to make stew”). Levin et al. relate this to corpus evidence showing high frequency for compounds like *bread knife*, *wedding band*, and *burger press*, and low frequency for compounds like *checkerboard cake*, where the modifier refers to a visual quality of the referent. How might facts like these be used to inform our theory of compositionality? (4–5 sentences)

## 5 Scalar adjective experimental predictions

[2 points]

On the theory developed by Syrett et al., what is the expected pattern of behavior (for children and adults) for the prompt ‘Hand me the long one’ in an experimental condition in which the subject is presented with two sticks, one longer than the other but neither long in any absolute sense? (2–3 sentence response.)

## 6 The puzzle of *full*

[3 points]

The adjective *full* was treated differently by children and adults in experiment 1 of Syrett et al. First, what is this difference? (2–3 sentence response.) Second, they offer three possible explanations for the difference. What are those explanations, and what is their assessment of them? (4–5 sentence response.)

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<sup>1</sup>Levin, Beth; Lelia Glass; and Dan Jurafsky. 2018. Systematicity in the semantics of noun compounds: The role of artifacts vs. natural kinds. *Linguistics*.