Assignment 1
Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2021
Distributed Jan 12; due Jan 26

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  [2 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  Pragmatically enriching indirect answers  [2 points]

In the ‘Bronston’ example from the ‘Overview of topics’ handout, Bronston is asked the yes/no
question “Have you ever [had a Swiss bank account]?”, and he replies “The company had a bank
account there for about six months, in Zurich”. People generally infer that he means something
like “No, but …”, even though he does not utter those words. This is presumably because some
information about the context and world knowledge come into play.

In the following small dialogue, a yes/no question is also posed, but there is more uncertainty
about the extent to which the answer is intended to resolve the question posed:

A: Is Deirdre in her office?
B: Deirdre is sick today.

Your task: Identify a piece of contextual information, shared between A and B, that would lead A
to conclude that B intended a “yes” answer, and identify another piece of such contextual informa-
tion that would lead A to conclude that B intended a “no” answer. I’m assuming these pieces of
contextual information can be described in a sentence or two each.
3 Entailment

For the sentence pairs in (1) and (2), does the (a) sentence entails the (b) 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. Between five and ten Swedish students danced.
   b. Between five and ten students danced.

(2) a. Between five and ten students waltzed.
   b. Between five and ten students danced.

4 Classifying plastic

Provide an argument that plastic, used as an adjective, is not subsective. (An argument in this context is just an example involving a modified noun and a brief statement of why the example is relevant to establishing this negative claim about the adjective’s classification.)

5 The pseudo-adjective non-

The prefix non- is not genuinely an adjective syntactically, but it can be a semantic modifier of nouns (for example, non-student, non-conformist), 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 non- 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).

6 The puzzle of full

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.)