

# Review of vagueness and context dependence

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2024

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## 1 Testing for ambiguity

Try to use the ellipsis test to determine which of the following sense distinctions are ambiguities:

- (1) *crane*: bird sense vs. machine sense
  
- (2) *open*: for a door, a small amount vs. the maximum amount possible
  
- (3) *fly*: move through the air vs. move very fast
  
- (4) *break*: shatter into pieces vs. establish a new record in a sporting event (say)

## 2 Testing for scalar structure

- (5) Suppose adjective *A* can be modified by maximality adverbs like *perfectly*, but not minimality adverbs like *slightly*. What is the predicted scale structure of *A*?
  
- (6) Suppose adjective *A* can be modified by proportion adverbs like *two-thirds*. What is the predicted scale structure of *A*?
  
- (7) Suppose adjective *A* cannot be modified by maximality, minimality, or proportion adverbs. What is the predicted scale structure of *A*?

### 3 Understanding the Syrett et al. experiment

- (8) Make sure that you understand the experimental design well enough to actually try out the crucial conditions on a friend.
- (9) What assumptions do Syrett et al. make about the felicity conditions of the definite determiner?
- (10) What role do the control examples in Table 1 play in the experiment?
- (11) On the Syrett et al. theory, what is the expected pattern of behavior (for children and adults) for the following prompts in a situation in which there are two medium-sized, spotted cups, both with some liquid in them but neither full, where one is noticeably larger than the other?
- a. Hand me the cup.
  - b. Hand me the tall cup.
  - c. Hand me the full cup.
  - d. Hand me the spotted cup.
- (12) How well do the results of our in-class experiment align with those of Syrett et al. for (i) totally-open adjectives, (ii) lower-closed adjectives, and (iii) upper-closed adjectives?