On reading Partee 1995

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2016

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Note Partee 1995¹ is a long and rich article that could be read with many goals in mind. We don't expect you to master all aspects of it. The following questions are aimed at helping to get you focused on what's important for our discussions. You should keep studying the article until you can answer them all.

(1) Lewis's advice and Creswell's principle: What do they mean for semantics, and how do they inform our decision to treat lexical meanings and their combinations?

(2) Give definitions of the following in a manner that is perspicuous for you.
   a. Intersective adjective
   b. Subsective adjective
   c. Nonsubsective adjective

(3) Can we distinguish 'vague' from 'context-dependent'? How?

(4) What are the problems with treating context-dependent adjectives like tall as simply a kind of subsective adjective?

(5) How does Partee eventually classify context-dependent adjectives in the intersective/subsective/nonsubsective typology?

(6) Consider the Parallel Structure Effect, the Head Primacy Effect, and the Non-Vacuity Principle (all p. 334). Do these compromise compositionality?

(7) In what sense might context-dependence and point-of-view be said to challenge compositionality?

(8) How common is it for words to have vague meanings?