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. The goal of the current question is to assemble some additional interesting examples to inform our understanding of those phenomena.

Your task: find a naturally occurring example manifesting one of the following:

i. An utterance that presupposes something that is either clearly false or clearly not accepted as part of the common ground. (For example, (15) on the handout presupposes that the addressee has an eBay transaction, which is either false or not part of the common ground between the speaker and addressee.)

ii. An instance where someone’s utterance is extremely indirect about the speech act that person wants to perform, specifically so that the person can remain “off the record” for that speech act. (Example (17) is an extreme case. Cases like it are fine to provide; it’s a movie trope.)

iii. An instance of framing.

Please provide (A) the example and its source, (B) its associated topic (as i, ii, or iii from the above list), and (C) a couple of sentences explaining why the example is relevant to the topic. It is fine for examples to blend more than one of the above themes and/or include other themes from the handout.

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

2 Is this perjury? [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.
Your task: Provide one argument for the claim that Bronston perjured himself with his reply to “Have you ever”, and one argument against the claim that he perjured himself with this reply. You can rely entirely on the information provided on the handout when it comes to the Bronston case and the definition of perjury. (3–4 sentences per argument should suffice, though this is merely guidance. Arguments will be judged on their merits regardless of length.)

3  Entailment

This question assumes you have watched the ‘Entailment’ screencast and/or participated in the in-class discussion of the topic.

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 two and four Swedish students danced.
   b. Between two and four students danced.

(2) a. Between two and four students waltzed.
   b. Between two and four students danced.

4  Intensional identity and Cresswell’s Principle

This question assumes you have studied the handout/reading ‘Perspectives on meaning and interpretation’.

For truth-conditional theories, intensions are crucial to capturing intuitive meaning distinctions. Consider two sentences that are true in exactly the same situations in our particular reality but nonetheless differ intuitively in their meanings. Intensions save the day here: we can say that there are possible worlds where their truth conditions do differ. However, what about sentences that are true in all possible worlds, like two is greater than one and two is a prime number? Such sentences can intuitively differ from each other in meaning, and yet their intensions are identical.

Your task: assess whether these examples of intensional identity challenge Cresswell’s “Most Certain” Principle. (3–5 sentence answer.)

5  The nature of semantic mistakes

This question assumes you have studied the handout/reading ‘Perspectives on meaning and interpretation’, which provides short readings on I-semantics (Jackendoff) and conventionalism (Lewis).

Language users have intuitions that it is possible to be mistaken about the meaning of a word. For example, if one believes that restive means ‘relaxed’, there is a clear sense in which one is mistaken, even though this is a coherent and understandable belief.
Your task: discuss how each of I-semantics and conventionalism might characterize such apparent mistakes, noting any challenges you see for those views. (5–10 sentence answer.)

6 Classifying plastic  [2 points]

Provide an argument that plastic, used as an adjective, is not privative. (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.)