Final exam

Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2025

Distributed March 11; due March 20, 6:30 pm Pacific

Notes and reminders

- This is due on March 20, by 6:30 pm. No late work will be accepted. This is also the final due date for all late work. We cannot be flexible about this due to constraints imposed by the University on when grades need to be submitted.
- You must submit your work electronically via Canvas.
- No collaboration of any kind is permitted. You are, though, free to use your notes and any other reference materials you like.
- Please note carefully the course policy on using generative AI tools, on the Syllabus tab of the course website.
- Please submit questions on the Ed forum or to the staff email address. Questions sent to individual instructors probably won't be answered in a timely enough fashion to be useful.
- As a general rule, we will not give feedback on interim answers that students have written. We are happy to talk openly and freely about the practice midterm available from the Section tab of the course website.

1 Quantifiers, entailments, and implicatures [2 points]

A classic Gricean argument is that *most* is semantically consistent with *every* but tends to exclude it pragmatically because of a quality–quantity interaction. This argument depends on the semantic claim that *every* entails *most*. Your task is to support this claim, assuming the following meanings:

(M) $[\![most]\!] = \lambda X\Big(\lambda Y\Big(\mathsf{T} \text{ if } |X \cap Y| > |X - Y|, \text{ else } \mathsf{F}\Big)\Big)$

(E) $[\![every]\!] = \lambda X\Big(\lambda Y\Big(\mathsf{T} \text{ if } X \subseteq Y, \text{ else } \mathsf{F}\Big)\Big)$

In this context, a determiner meaning D_1 entails another determiner D_2 if and only if the following holds: if $[\![D_1]\!](A)(B) = \mathsf{T}$, then $[\![D_2]\!](A)(B) = \mathsf{T}$, for all A and B. **Assume throughout that the first argument to the determiner is non-empty.**

2 Crash blossoms [3 points]

A *crash blossom* is a comically ambiguous headline. Language Log now has a huge collection of them.[1] Some examples:

[1] http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?cat=118

- Dr. Ruth Discusses Sex with Reporters
- McDonald's Fries Holy Grail for Potato Farmers
- Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant
- German Factory Orders Slide Unexpectedly
- Missing Woman Remains Found
- Gator Attacks Puzzle Experts
- Violinist linked to JAL Crash Blossoms

John McIntyre identified the origins of the term, I believe.[2] The headline that inspired it is the last one given above, which makes you wonder how a violinist could cause a crash blossom (whatever *that* is). First, articulate the nature of the *clash* (in the sense of that word from 'Logic and conversation') that these examples manifest, with references to specific (sub)maxims, using a subset of the examples from above (3–5 sentences). Second, comment on why it is surprising, from a Gricean perspective, that we perceive these ambiguities at all (3–5 sentences).

3 Presuppositional quantificational determiner [1 point]

Keenan defines a quantified, presupposition-free version of *neither* as follows:

$$\lambda X\Big(\lambda Y\big(\mathsf{T} \text{ if } |X| = 2 \text{ and } X \cap Y = \emptyset, \text{ else } \mathsf{F}\big)\Big)$$

Convert this to a presuppositional quantificational determiner, on the model of our presuppositional treatment of *both* from the 'Presuppositions' handout. The presupposition should be that the first argument to the determiner has cardinality 2.

4 Monotonicity and presuppositionality [1 point]

Show that the presuppositional *neither* you defined above is nonmonotone on its first argument. Given the presuppositions involved here, it is worth being explicit that all the monotonicity definitions require preservation of truth, and flipping from T to 'undefined' is not preservation of truth.

5 What kind of meaning is this? [2 points]

The handout 'Diagnosing different kinds of meaning' provides a flow-chart for classifying meanings as variously at-issue, conventionally implicated, presupposed, or conversationally implicated. Use that framework to classify meaning p as expressed in (W).

(W) Carol wasted the opportunity to visit Nepal.

p = Carol visited Nepal

Section 3 of the handout provides model answers. Your own answer could adopt the same format, and we're looking for a similar level of explanation about the relevant examples.

[2] http://johnemcintyre.blogspot.com/2009/08/now-we-have-term-for-it.html

6 Invoking one's right to counsel [2 points]

Uttering the sentence "I hereby invoke my right to counsel" would seem to be a very clear way in which to invoke one's Sixth Amendment rights in the U.S., but people often resort to much more indirect strategies like "Didn't you say I have the right to an attorney?" and "Maybe I ought to have an attorney". Your task: use section 4.2 of the 'Speech-acts' handout to build an argument for why people often use these indirect strategies. You are required to directly invoke one of the properties listed in section 4.2. You are free also to bring in other considerations. (3–5 sentence response.)

7 Swearing and the FCC [3 points]

Provide three cogent linguistic or cognitive arguments in favor of the position that swears like the F-word should be subject to different legal restrictions than other kinds of speech. (2–4 sentences per argument; the arguments might not be persuasive to you, but they should make sense! You are free to use arguments given in the lecture, or invent your own.)