

Seminar in Syntax (LING 365)

Fall 2023 – University of Southern California

Logistics

Instructor: Steven Foley (foleys@usc.edu)

Time: Wednesdays 9:30–11:50 (break ca. 10:45)

Location: GFS 330 (Linguistics Conference Room)

Office hours: By appointment

Course description

Argument structure refers to the number, configuration, and interpretation of nominal arguments selected for by a predicate. In broad crosslinguistic strokes, argument structure is remarkably similar: lexicons are overwhelmingly organized so that thematically similar relations are expressed the same way, within and across languages. However, we also observe a diversity of language-particular strategies for encoding argument–predicate relations, and morphosyntactic alternations that introduce, remove, or reconfigure them. This seminar surveys classic and contemporary literature at the intersection of syntax, semantics, the lexicon, morphology, and psycholinguistics, with the aim of better understanding the nature of and explanations for argument structure. Key topics include thematic roles, passives, applicatives, causatives, argument demotion, nominalizations, event structure, and contextual alloosemy.

Requirements

As in any seminar, engaged and curious participation in class discussions is of highest priority. (Readings can be found in a shared Google Drive.) Each enrolled student will be responsible for leading discussion for several readings, potentially including ones relevant to their own interests. Ideas for a final paper will be workshopped in class on November 1st; a final version will be due December 11, 2023.

Breakdown of final grades:

20% participation

30% in-class presentations (See readings with asterisks for suggestions)

50% final paper

Schedule

Subject to change; this document will be updated regularly.

SF will be abroad mid-semester. Remote meetings will be coordinated for Oct 4 and Oct 11.

Topic	Date	Reading
Introduction	Aug 23	n/a
Foundations	Aug 30	Dowty 1991, Hopper & Thompson 1980
	Sep 6	Marantz 1984: § 2.1 (pp 14–45), Ch. 4 (pp 121–165)

External arguments	Sep 13	Harley & Folli 2005, Lohndal 2012
Causative/ Anticausative	Sep 20	Alexiadou et al. 2015: Section 2.3, Chapter 4
Passives	Sep 27	Collins 2005, Legate 2012, Bruening 2012
n/a	Oct 4	<i>Class cancelled</i>
Applicatives	Oct 11 (remote meeting)	Bosse et al. 2012, den Dikken 2023, Nie to appear Optional: Pykkänen 2008, Georgala 2012, Bruening 2010
Student interest	Oct 18	Lin & Huang 2015, Baker 1996
Event structure	Oct 25	Ramchand 2008
Allosemy	Nov 1	Wood & Marantz 2017, Wood 2023
Georgian	Nov 8	Nash 2021, Nash 2022
Psych verbs	Nov 15	Belletti & Rizzi 1988, Harris 1981
Thanksgiving break	Nov 22	n/a
TBD	Nov 29	Possibilities: Müller-Gotama 1994, Bornkessel-Schlesewsky & Schlewsky 2014, Hartmann et al. 2014

References

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