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**Anaphora in Formal Pragmatics**  
LSA Summer Institute at UMass, Summer 2023  
Course 319

**Syllabus**

I will outline a general theory of pragmatics—what a context of utterance is and how it influences compositional semantics—which aims to meet the usual standards for a generative account of linguistic phenomena: We want to predict, for a given linguistic constituent (along with its prosodic contour) uttered in a particular context, both its (in)felicity and all and only the meaning(s) that a competent native speaker would attribute to its speaker in uttering it in that context. In this very short course, I will focus on evidence from anaphora resolution, though at each step I will argue that all the tools required are independently motivated by either semantics or other pragmatic phenomena (focus, presupposition, domain restriction, conversational implicature, speech act theory, perspective, etc.). The central thesis here is that anaphora is simple (and involves all the definite NPs and indexicals, as well as a wide variety of triggers of other logical types): Use of an anaphoric trigger presupposes that the speaker's intended referent can be retrieved from the context of utterance. But discourse is complicated, so that explaining how this is possible requires consideration of a range of contextual factors. Just as in classical generative syntax we consider the possibly complex interaction of a variety of components of the grammar (binding, case, control, etc.) to derive judgments of grammaticality for a given string, so in pragmatics we consider the interaction of multiple distinguished components of the context of utterance (a component of our linguistic competence), as well as the semantic and lexical analysis of its parts (including non-proffered, pragmatic lexical content), in order to predict attested felicity and meaning(s), and in particular the attested ways of felicitously resolving anaphora in a given utterance.

This is an advanced course that assumes students know something about formal semantics, basic pragmatic phenomena like presupposition and projection, focus, and implicature, and (optimally) something about dynamic semantics. That said, all are welcome who'd like to scramble along with us and do a little bootstrapping; to that end, I'll provide an extensive background bibliography, with short introductory readings where available.

I don't know much about the background students will bring to the class. Our time together will be short, and I want to consider some relatively sophisticated issues. So to help any of you who are not already familiar with the rich contemporary literature on anaphora, especially anaphora in discourse and donkey anaphora, I'm posted to our course website some material intended to help you to get your bearings. If you have the time and interest before class, you might have a look at one or more of these files. The full citations for all these references and others to be discussed in class should be in the course bibliography on our website (a bibliography which I'm updating through the course of preparing my lectures; only the final version will be reasonably complete).

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<sup>1</sup> Revised mid-July to reflect some changes made during the course.

You'll find, not surprisingly, that most of the foundational work discussed in these articles focuses on English data. Alas, such is the state of the field. But because of the way that anaphora resolution depends on the structure of discourse, there is good reason to think that the central issues which arise in treating discourse anaphora in English also arise for other languages. I hope we'll have some time to discuss any differences between how English discourse anaphora works and what you find in your own native languages.

**Class meetings:** MR 10:30am – 11:50am, S231

7/3/23: **Anaphora, RETRIEVABILITY and Weak Familiarity**

Suggested background reading:

Background on anaphoric binding (syntactic and semantic) and dynamic semantics:

Roberts, Lecture One from short course on anaphora at the University of Saõ Carlo, Brazil, 2017 (revised 2023).

Roberts, Lecture Two from short course on anaphora at the University of Saõ Carlo, Brazil, 2017 (revised 2023).

Introduction to dynamic semantics:

Geurts & Beaver (2011)

Overview of contemporary literature on discourse anaphora: puzzles and approaches

King & Lewis (2021)

Introduction to contemporary approaches to the semantics of definite descriptions:

Coppock (2022)

7/6/23: **Context update in the Architecture of Interpretation: A dynamic pragmatics**

Suggested background reading:

On the notion of the QUD and its role in discourse:

either Roberts (2012b) or Roberts (2004)

Roberts (2013) (very short)

On the architecture of interpretation and the semantics/pragmatics interface:

Roberts (2017a)

7/10/23: **Anaphora, Semantics and Pragmatics: Other views**

Suggested background reading:

King & Lewis (2021) (from above)

Coppock (2022) (from above)

Other TBA

7/13/23: **Salience and RETRIEVABILITY in anaphora resolution**

Suggested background reading:

Jasinskaja & Karagjosova (2017)

Roberts (2016): Coherence, salience and anaphora. Ms.

All suggested reading will either be available on the course website (in the appropriate class meeting) or available free on-line (including all the instructor's own papers).

For those who know very little about anaphora, I'm posting two files that are revised versions of the first two lectures I gave in an introductory short course on anaphora at the University of São Carlo, Brazil, in 2017. Even if you know most of this material, you might want to quickly take a look at sections 3.2.3 - 3.4 in Lecture 1, to see some of the terminology I adopt, the characterization of the ROOFING constraint on antecedence (3.3), and my remarks on the semantics of co-indexation (3.4).

In our meetings, for reasons of time I'll focus mainly on presenting my own views about the interpretation of anaphora in discourse and what it tells us about the relationship between semantics and pragmatics. But as time permits and the linguistic phenomena compel, I'll briefly compare aspects of this approach to other prominent accounts in the literature. I will argue that the account I've been exploring is empirically and explanatorily superior to those involving dynamic semantics and to D-type accounts like that of Elbourne (2005 and subsequent work). Reading one or more of the following handbook-style introductory articles would help you to get your bearings in this literature:

King, Jeffrey C. & Karen S. Lewis (2021) Anaphora. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Available on-line at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anaphora/>

This article gives an overview of contemporary literature on discourse anaphora, outlining some central puzzles and the main approaches

Coppock, Elizabeth (2022) On definite descriptions: Can familiarity and uniqueness be distinguished? In Daniel Altschuler (ed.) *Linguistics Meets Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This is a nice comparative overview of the literature on definite descriptions.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> lecture from São Carlos includes a very brief introduction to Kamp's Discourse Representation Theory, a dynamic semantics which I modify for use in a dynamic pragmatics. If you want more information about that approach or find my introduction unsatisfactory, I recommend the following, especially their sections 3 and 4, which introduce how DRSEs are constructed and interpreted:

Geurts, Bart & David Beaver (2011) Discourse Representation Theory. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available on-line: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/discourse-representation-theory/>

While I'm in Amherst I plan to make myself available to talk with any of you who would like about your own interests and work, or to help those playing catch-up on the background. If several have similar questions or issues, we'll try to find times to talk together outside the regular class meetings, or to chat on-line.

Please only use this email address (not, e.g., my gmail account): [roberts.21@osu.edu](mailto:roberts.21@osu.edu)  
website: <https://www.asc.ohio-state.edu/roberts.21/>