Implicatures and Polarity
Gennaro Chierchia
(Harvard University)

Syllabus

This course studies the relation between language and logic, from the point of view of the Polarity System. Main topics include:

a. Negative Polarity Items (NPIs)

b. Free Choice Items (FCIs) and their relation to NPIs

c. The unity of FC phenomena across FCIs and disjunction/plain indefinites

d. Scalar reasoning and scalar implicature

e. Interference and intervention phenomena between the Polarity System and scalarity.

NPIs and FCIs have been at the center of much research over the past thirty years.

Words like ever/any are restricted in their distribution to contexts that license 'subset interences'. Why is this so?

One of the questions one would like to understand is why do NPIs so often (though not always) also admit of FC uses? Importantly, FC phenomena are not limited to items like any (or German irgendein, or Italian qualunque) with a restricted distribution.

The FC effect does not follow straightforwardly from the compositional semantics of the items involved. Various scholars have recently developed interesting approaches to FC that views it as an implicature (e.g. Fox 2007).

Implicatures interact with the Polarity System in other ways as well. In particular, the relation between an NPI and its licensor displays 'intervention' effects.

Interveners turn out to be non-weakest members of natural quantificational scales like <a/some, many, most, every>.

The reason for studying such a largish sample of Polarity Sensitive and FC items, which, as we shall see, differ so much in their behavior, is to investigate to what extent they form a system, and how tight/loose such a system is.

Students can earn 2 point credit for participating in the series. Please register to course # 36855 at the Linguistics department administrative secretary. For further questions write to llcc@mail.huji.ac.il.

If you would like to be notified about similar events in the future, please write to llcc@mail.huji.ac.il to be added to the Language, Logic and Cognition Center mailing list.