

Subjectivity

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Class website: Chalk
Office hours: Thursday 1-3.30 or by appointment

Course Description Linguists and philosophers have traditionally examined the role of language and thought as a medium for (mis)representing objective facts about the world we are living in. However, language is also an important tool for sharing subjective perspectives with others, and clearly not all thoughts are objective. Taking subjectivity as a *sui generis* phenomenon that does not reduce to another instance of descriptive talk and thought has repercussions that go beyond the traditional distinction between linguistics and philosophy: it impacts both the way that linguists tend to think to about the nature of linguistic meaning and philosophical attempts to understand the nature of normative thoughts.

This is the second in a two-course sequence that addresses the resulting challenges in a systematic manner. The first course was taught in Fall 2014 by Malte Willer and focused on foundational philosophical issues surrounding subjectivity in language and thought, including issues pertaining to normativity and general considerations about the shape a theory of natural language meaning must have to take the phenomenon of subjectivity seriously. The second course will be taught by Chris Kennedy and will focus on linguistic issues surrounding subjectivity, with particular attention to the question of where subjectivity comes from and how — or whether — it is a property of linguistic expressions, a property of how linguistic expressions are used, or both.

Requirements Students who enroll in the course for credit will be required to turn in a research paper or equivalent project at the end of the quarter; you should consult with me on the topic by the end of the seventh week.

Registered students must also choose one of the required readings from each week and write a short (1-2 page) “reaction paper,” which provides an overview of the article’s central points: the main issue that it addresses, the core proposals, and the core arguments that are brought to bear to support the proposals.

Everyone (both registered students and auditors) is expected to do the required readings and participate in the class discussion.

The Plan

The following is a list of the topics that we will discuss, in the order in which we will address them. Please consult the Chalk site for updates on the topics and the readings. I want to keep things somewhat fluid both to allow us to follow up on things we find interesting, and because there is not yet a “canon” for this topic. Instead, we will look at several different kinds of phenomena that

- **Wednesday, January 7**
  - Introduction to the phenomenon and the central questions
  - Lasersohn 2005; Stephenson 2007
• **Wednesday, January 14**
  Subjective attitude verbs and varieties of subjectivity
  Sæbø 2009; Bouchard 2012 (ch. 3); Kennedy 2013; Fleischer 2013

• **Wednesday, January 21 and Wednesday, January 28**
  Lexical semantic foundations: Vagueness, gradability, multidimensionality, evaluativity
  Klein 1980; Bierwisch 1989 (secs. 4 and 10, plus whatever else you need to read to understand these); Sassoon 2013; Kennedy and McNally 2010; Bylilina ms.; ?

• **Wednesday, February 4**
  Fun with infinitivals
  Barker 2002; Fleischer 2011; Karttunen, Peters, Zaenen, and Condoravdi 2014

• **Wednesday, February 11**
  Perspective in expressive meaning
  Potts 2007; Amaral, Roberts, and Smith 2007; Harris and Potts 2009

• **Wednesday, February 18**
  Perspective in social meaning
  Acton and Potts to appear; ...

• **Wednesday, February 25 and Friday, February 27**
  “Meet the researcher:” Peter Lasersohn
  Lasersohn ms.

• **Wednesday, March 4**
  No class

• **Wednesday, March 11**
  TBD (Subjectivity and evidentiality)

**References**


