

ADVANCED TOPICS IN LINGUISTICS: THE STRUCTURE OF QUESTIONS
ANTH 278/LING 278
Syllabus: Fall 2011

Questions adopt a unique structure in naturally-occurring human language. Their syntactic and intonational properties often set them apart from other kinds of utterances, and their interpretation has commanded particular attention. Linguists have long investigated the special problems that questions present for linguistic theory, and in this seminar we will explore both classic work on questions/answers as well as new developments in the field. We will look at the fascinating variation found cross-linguistically in the form and function of questions, with special focus on less-familiar languages. We will also investigate the use of questions in discourse, and the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic variation in questioning routines and question/answer sequences. The reading volume and pace of the course are designed to be challenging and rewarding. Students will be asked to produce a high-quality (though short) final paper featuring original research on some aspect of the structure and/or use of questions and will be required to submit an abstract to a major undergraduate research conference.

Meeting Time/Place:

Tuesday/Thursday 1-2:15pm, Perkins 300

Instructor:

Dr. Emily Manetta
509 Williams Hall
Emily.Manetta@uvm.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 3-4pm, by apt.
IM (for online office hrs): emilyatUVM (AOL IM)

How will this course work?

On typical weeks we will meet twice. There will be relatively little formal lecturing – the bulk of the course content on a daily basis will be directed by the interests and investigations of the students. Each week small groups of students will present the reading and pose key questions for the group to discuss. Twice throughout the semester the class will spend a week focusing on the individual semester-long research project.

How will I be assessed?

In-class presentation of reading/participation (20%)
3 homework assignments/occasional 1 pg. reading response (30%)
Final research squib/presentation/abstract (50%)

Schedule:

Week 1 (Aug 30 & Sept 1): Introduction/Overview
Week 2 (Sept 6, 8): The meaning of questions
Week 3 (Sept 13, 15): The meaning of questions (HW1 due Sept. 15)
Week 4 (Sept 20, 23): The sound of questions/question intonation & prosody
Week 5 (Sept 27, 29): The syntax of questions (wh-movement languages)
Week 6 (Oct 4, 6): The syntax of questions (wh-in-situ languages) (HW2 due Oct 16)
Week 7 (Oct 11, 13): Pragmatics: questions/answers in discourse
Week 8 (Oct 18, 20): Pragmatics: questions/answers in discourse
Week 9 (Oct 25, 27): Student Project Week, no reading
Week 10 (Nov 1, 3) : Advanced syntax: beyond questions
Week 11 (Nov 8, 10) Linguistic Anthropology and questions/answers
Week 12 (Nov 15, 17) NO CLASS: Linguistic Anthropology and questions/answers,
reading (HW3 due Nov 17)
Week 13: Thanksgiving
Week 14 (Nov 29 & Dec 1) Student presentations
Week 15 (Dec 6): Overflow and wrap-up (Tues only)

NOTE: Late homework can receive no greater than half credit. No exceptions.

How do I present the reading?

In the first week of the course each student will sign up to present a reading to the group. In order to be an excellent presenter, you will probably need to read the article/excerpt 3-4 times. You MUST create a handout or media presentation for the class to help you organize your presentation of the reading and consolidate data. You will need to summarize the important aspects of the reading for the class, and review the key data (this part should be brief) or new terms/definitions/concepts. You should then quickly begin to address questions, concerns, comments, challenges, etc that you believe the class should discuss and/or begin to compare this approach with others we may have encountered. You will be assessed both on how well you yourself have understood the reading, and how well you have communicated that understanding to others and gotten meaningful discussion of the reading underway.

What should my homework look like?

Homework should be written up by you alone, solely in your own words (with no help from the internet, or classmates). Although you should try solving the problems in a group, the way you write up that solution is crucial. Through this course you will learn to use a concise, clear, analytical writing style.

Your homework should be written up in prose, in complete, well-crafted sentences. You should use examples both from the homework itself and of your own creation to illustrate your claims. You should present a solution to the problem at hand, or write clearly about why none of your attempted solutions will work.

The homeworks will be graded for clear argumentation, effective writing, strong use of linguistic examples, and internal consistency. The “right” answer (when there even is one) is not nearly as valuable as your approach to the problem.

I have posted a sample homework response for you under the “Assignments” link in Blackboard so that you can see what an ideal assignment should look like.

What is the research project? How will I write the paper? What is a squib?

In Linguistics, as opposed to in Harry Potter, a squib is a short paper that focuses on a single clear argument, observation, or analysis. For great examples of squibs, see the online Linguistics journal Snippets, which publishes squibs only. Your research paper, however long, should contain original research on some aspects of questions or questions/answers. It can be drawn from any sub-topic we review here, or any other sub-topic of interest in Linguistics (for instance, the acquisition of questions, which we do not discuss). You must conduct an experiment or collect naturally-occurring data for your paper in some way (we will discuss methods in class). You will be required to write an abstract for your short paper and to ultimately submit that abstract to an undergraduate Linguistics conference. The paper is due at the end of the semester.

Communication Policy:

I will contact you via your UVM email. Please be sure you have that email forwarded to an address you check regularly.

I will respond to your email within 24 hours during the week (usually much sooner!).

I use AOL IM, and will hold “office hours” online through my IM account in addition my weekly “real” office hours. If you can see me online, it is as though I am in my office, so don’t hesitate to contact me. My screenname is: emilyatUVM.

Course Policies

Plagiarism is defined as any time that you present another's work as your own, and it will not be tolerated in this course. Be sure to give credit or cite sources whenever necessary. If you have any questions about how to avoid plagiarism, please ask me, or consult UVM's Code of Academic Integrity.

Late work: Late homework can receive no greater than half credit. There are no exceptions.

Accommodations in the course can be provided with documentation of a learning disability or other disability (including a chronic health problem) through the ACCESS office. Please discuss any special requirements with the instructor.

Readings and Assignments

Week 1 (Aug 30 & Sept 1): Introduction/Overview

What are questions? What do they do?

A typology of questions
Overview of crosslinguistic features of questions and answers
Begin Week 2 readings

Week 2 (Sept 6, 8): The meaning of questions

Hamblin 1973 (excerpt)
Karttunen 1977 (excerpt)
Hagstrom 1999 (Chapter 1 and Chapter 5 sections 1-2)

Week 3 (Sept 13, 15): The meaning of questions: considering lesser-studied languages

Caponigro and Davidson (to appear): ASL
Dayal 1993: Hindi-Urdu
HW 1 due Thursday, Sept. 15

Week 4 (Sept 20, 23): The sound of questions/question intonation

Background: Selkirk 1995
Truckenbrodt 2011
Lai 2008
See also: Büring 2009

Week 5 (Sept 27, 29): The syntax of questions (wh-movement)

Adger 2003 (Ch. 9)
Chomsky 1977
McCloskey 2000

Week 6 (Oct 4, 6): The syntax of questions (wh-in-situ/multiple wh)

Cheng 2003
Bošković 2002
HW 2 due Thursday, Oct 6

Week 7 (Oct 11, 13): Pragmatics: questions/answers in discourse

Background: Grice 1975, Searle 1975
Roberts 1996 (p. 1-27)
Potts 2008
See also: de Marneffe, Grimm, and Potts 2009

Week 8 (Oct 18, 20): Pragmatics: questions/answers in discourse

Gunlogson 2001 (Ch 1-2)
Bennett 1982

Week 9 (Oct 25, 27): Student Project Week, no reading

Project abstract due
Data collection (first pass) due
Begin next week's reading

Week 10 (Nov 1, 3) : Advanced syntax: beyond questions

Manetta 2010
Gribanova 2010
Manetta & Gribanova (?)

Week 11 (Nov 8, 10) Linguistic Anthropology and questions/answers

Schiffirin 1994 (Chapter 5)
Ainsworth-Vaughn 1994

Week 12 (Nov 15, 17) NO CLASS: Linguistic Anthropology and questions/answers

Heritage 2002
Mori 2002
HW 3 due Thursday, Nov 17

Week 13: Thanksgiving

Week 14 (Nov 29 & Dec 1) Student presentations

Week 15 (Dec 6): Overflow and wrap-up (Tues only)

Final Paper due Tues. Dec. 6

References: