Watch That Attitude! Current Attitudes on Attitude Verbs
Topics in Semantics (Linguistics 753); Spring 2020

Course Syllabus

Meetings: Tuesday, Thursday 11:30 – 12:45
Room: Integrative Learning Center N451
Course Instructor: Seth Cable (scable@linguist.umass.edu)
Course Websites: Main Course Page: http://people.umass.edu/scable/LING753-SP20
Moodle Page: https://moodle.umass.edu/course/view.php?id=61404
• Moodle Guest Access: “Attitudes2020”

1. General Overview

This seminar will explore recent literature on a variety of active debates regarding ‘propositional attitude sentences’ and the ‘attitude verbs’ that head them (think, believe, know, say). The main overarching – and intersecting – issues we will be exploring are:

• The syntax and semantics of ‘de re’ and ‘de se’ readings of attitude sentences

• The lexical semantics of attitude verbs and how they semantically combine with embedded clauses.

• The semantics of embedded questions, and why only certain verbs can appear with them.

• The ontology (and mereology) of attitude states and their content.
2. Course Requirements

Students taking this seminar for credit will be required to do the usual two things for advanced seminars: (i) present a paper, and (ii) write a paper.

2.1 Paper Presentation

Students are encouraged to present one of the papers listed in Section 4 that bear an asterisk. Students can in principle present a paper other than these, but must consult with me about their intended choice. All the papers listed in Section 4 are available on the course Moodle. Students are encouraged to begin looking them over at their earliest convenience.

- **Students must inform me of their chosen paper by Friday January 31st.**
  
- As the date for the student’s presentation approaches, I will meet with them to discuss their paper and help them organize their presentation.

2.2 Final Paper

Students must write a paper relating in some way to issues raised in the seminar or the readings. I will reach out to registered students in early February to schedule meetings to discuss potential paper topics.

- **The final paper must be submitted by Monday May 11th (grades are due May 12th).**

3. Special Guest Lectures

This seminar will feature a number of special guest lectures. Both registered students and auditors are advised to keep the following dates in mind:

- **February 13:** Angelika Kratzer  
  Topic: Constructing the semantics of attitude reports

- **February 20:** Angelika Kratzer  
  Topic: Constructing the semantics of attitude reports (*cont’d*)

- **February 25:** Maša Močnik and Rafael Abramovitz (MIT)  
  Topic: Variable-force, variable-flavor attitude verb in Koryak

- **March 24:** Petr Kusliy  
  Topic: Dissertation research on tense in attitude complements

- **April 2:** Deniz Ozyildiz  
  Topic: Dissertation research on interrogative embedding and factivity

- **April 9:** Alex Göbel  
  Topic: D-pronouns and *de se vs. de re* readings in German
4. Preliminary Schedule of Topics and Readings

All the papers listed below are available on the course Moodle. Papers marked with an asterisk are recommended for student presentations.

4.1 Introduction and Background (1/21-1/23)

I will review certain key background regarding the semantics of propositional attitude verbs, particularly the issues surrounding so-called ‘de re’ and ‘de se’ construals of propositional attitude sentences. There is no required reading, but the following paper would be useful to students who need a refresher reading on this background:


4.2 The LFs of De Re and De Se Readings (1/28-2/6)

One of the most long-standing issues concerning attitude verbs – and one that is still hotly debated – is exactly how so-called ‘de re’ and ‘de se’ interpretations of propositional attitude sentences are grammatically derived. We will begin by reviewing the highly influential work of Percus & Sauerland (2003). This work has the following two key features:

(i) De re readings are derived through the mechanism of ‘concept generators’

(ii) De se readings can be derived via a distinct LF, one that involves movement of a dedicated de se pronoun/operator.

We will then review some recent work that offers independent support for these proposals. Later in the semester, however, we will also examine some recent challenges for these views.

January 28:

January 30:

February 4:

February 6:
4.3 The Lexical Semantics of Attitude Verbs (2/11-3/3)

Since the pioneering work of Hintikka (1969) and Cresswell & Von Stechow (1982), propositional attitude verbs have largely been analyzed as having a modal lexical semantics. In particular, theorists have long assumed that verbs like believe syntactically select for a subordinate CP (their ‘sentential complement’), and that they introduce a modal relation between the attitude holder and the intension of the CP.

Beginning with Kratzer (2006), however, this network of views has in recent years come under increased scrutiny and re-evaluation. One prominent alternative to the ‘modal analysis’ of attitude verbs views the subordinate CP as neither a complement nor an argument to the attitude verb, but rather an adjunct – either to the verb itself or to a covert nominal argument. Furthermore, the modal quantification at play within a propositional attitude sentence is contributed not by the attitude verb, but rather by other functional material within the subordinate clause itself.

In this section of the class, we’ll explore some work developing this view regarding attitude verbs. We will also explore some recent work exploring the semantics of attitude verbs qua modals, and we will consider potential ways of resolving that latter work with the former.


February 13: Guest lecture by Angelika Kratzer


February 20: Guest lecture by Angelika Kratzer

February 25: Guest lecture by Maša Močnik and Rafael Abramovitz


Related, Optional Works (Available on Moodle)

4.4 Interrogative vs. Declarative Embedding (3/5-4/2)

It has long been observed that attitude verbs differ in terms of what force their subordinate CPs can exhibit. Some verbs can (generally) combine only with declarative CPs (believe), while others can combine only with interrogative CPs (ask). Importantly, though, some verbs can combine with either declarative or interrogative CPs (e.g., ‘know’).

For decades, these kinds of facts were captured simply through lexically stipulated syntactic and semantic selection. In more recent years, however, a veritable ‘semantic industry’ has developed seeking to find principled explanations for why attitude verbs pattern in this way. In this work, semanticists seek to predict from independent properties of the verb whether it will appear (i) only with declaratives, or (ii) with either declaratives or interrogatives.

Currently, a number of differing perspectives are now on the market, and it may be that different accounts are correct for different verbs. Interestingly, the subtlety of certain grammatical judgments in this domain have led specialists to employ more sophisticated and quantitative techniques for establishing (or verifying) the major generalizations these accounts predict. In this unit of the seminar, we’ll examine and critically discuss some key recent works.

March 5 – March 10:

March 12:

March 24: Guest lecture by Petr Kusliy [Date tentative]

March 26:
March 31:

April 2: Guest lecture by Deniz Ozyildiz [Date tentative]

Related, Optional Works (Available on Moodle)

4.5 *De Re and De Se, Redux: Some More Advanced Issues (4/7-4/16)*

Having gained a broader view of the semantics of subordinate CPs in Units 3 and 4, we then return to the general topic of *de re* and *de se* interpretations of attitude sentences. We will first examine work that documents and analyzes the ways in which, across a variety of languages, the form of the pronoun can affect the availability of a *de se* or *de re* interpretation. Following this, we will consider a range of challenges that have been raised for the concept generator analysis of *de re* readings, and we will consider whether the independently motivated device of ‘choice functions’ can help to resolve them.

April 7:

April 9: Guest lecture by Alex Göbel [Date tentative]

*Related Work:*

April 14:
April 16:

Related, Optional Works (Available on Moodle)

4.6 The Mereology of Attitudes, Attitude Degrees, and Attitude Contents

One rather striking feature of attitude verbs is discussed rather little in the semantic literature: they have a tendency to be *scalar*. That is one can believe/want/hope something *a lot*, or *more than* something else. We will examine some recent work by Pasternak (2019) that explores this side of attitude verbs, and relates it to the mereology (part-whole structure) of attitude states.

Another little-discussed feature of attitude verbs is that they seem to allow for so-called ‘cumulative readings’. That is, a sentence like “My students think I taught three terrible classes” can be read as true in a scenario where each student thinks only that I taught one terrible class. We will examine some recent work that explores two very different views as to the nature of these cumulative readings. As we’ll see, this debate may hold consequences for exactly what the argument structure of an attitude verb is (Unit 3).

April 21:

April 22:

April 28:

Related, Optional Works (Available on Moodle)
5. Various Dates of Interest and Importance

- Friday, January 31: Registered students must select a paper to present
- Monday, February 3: Last day to drop class with no record.
- Thurs., February 13: Guest lecture by Angelika Kratzer
- Tues., February 18: NO CLASS (Monday schedule)
- Thurs., February 20: Guest lecture by Angelika Kratzer
- Tues., February 25: Guest lecture by Maša Močnik and Rafael Abramovitz (MIT)
- Tues., March 17: NO CLASS (Spring break)
- Thursday, March 19: NO CLASS (Spring break)
- Tuesday, March 24: Last day to drop class with a DR
- Tuesday, March 24: Guest lecture by Petr Kusliy
- Thursday, April 2: Guest lecture by Deniz Ozyildiz
- Thursday, April 9: Guest lecture by Alex Göbel
- Tuesday, April 28: Final class meeting
- Monday, May 11: Final papers due
- Tuesday, May 12: Final grades due