## Theoretical Perspectives on the Languages of the Pacific Northwest ${ }^{1}$

Proseminar on Semantic Theory
Linguistics 720
Tuesday, Thursday 2:30-3:45
Room: TBA
Course Website: On SPIRE


## 1. General Overview

Tagline:
"This seminar will explore recent, theoretically-informed research into the semantics and syntax of the languages of the American Pacific Northwest."

## What is this seminar about?

Simple Answer:
The languages of a particular geographic, cultural and linguistic area of North America.
Deeper Answer:
This seminar is about all human languages, since it's specifically concerned with the ways in which these particular languages inform our knowledge of

- the scope and limits of cross-linguistic variation, and thus
- UG

[^0]
## But, why organize a seminar around these languages?

How are 'the languages of the Pacific Norwest' a natural linguistic class?
Isn't this like having a seminar on 'the languages whose names begin in $/ \mathrm{p} /$ '?
Two things to say to this:
(i) These languages form a distinct sprachbund, an area where languages that are not historically/genetically related to one another nevertheless share a variety of grammatical features.
(ii) Many of the shared features that distinguish this sprachbund are of significant typological/theoretical interest (e.g. verb-initial, little-to-no labials, predicate/argument flexibility)

This seminar will explore a variety of areas - both semantic and syntactic - where the languages of the Pacific Northwest have advanced or otherwise impacted our theory of UG.

## (1) (Potential) Topics to be Discussed ${ }^{3}$

(Non)-Configurationality and the Pronominal Argument Hypothesis
Lexical Categories (or Lack Thereof)
Syntax and Semantics of Transitivity
Presuppositions
Quantification
Principle C (and Lack Thereof)
Tense
Modals and Evidentials
Wh-Questions
Polysynthesis (in the Wakashan language family)
Information Structure and Intonation
Topic-Tracking, Argument Hierarchies and the Passive/Inverse
[ The Left-Periphery]
[ Ergativity]
[ Possessor Raising]
[ Control and Backwards Control ]
[ Matrix Subordinates ]

Following some further 'mechanical details', I will provide a brief overview of each of these topics.

[^1]
## 2. Course Requirements

The only course requirement is a final paper/project.

## Final Paper/Project

Given that we'll be focusing on languages whose speakers are rather inaccessible to us here in Massachusetts, final papers(/projects) need only 'touch upon' the issues and readings discussed in class (as well as subjects/materials on the course website that we haven't had time to cover).

## Examples:

- A paper that simply works towards a compositional semantics for wh-questions in Nuu-chah-nulth (not a trivial problem, as we'll see).
- A paper whose focus is transitivity alternations in (say) Greek, but which makes explicit, thoughtful comparison to transitivity in Salish languages.
- A paper that critically re-examines any of the issues or questions discussed in class.

Participants, however, will be expected to 'go beyond the available data' in some way. That is, even papers that simply re-examine issues from class will be expected to make some form of original proposal, and to draw out the (novel) predictions of that proposal.

Furthermore, participants are especially encouraged to develop original elicitation tasks that could be used 'in the field' to test the predictions of either existing or novel hypotheses.

## Example:

Suppose you've developed a compositional semantics for wh-questions in Nuu-chah -nulth, and have identified certain predictions the analysis makes.
What would you actually ask a speaker of Nuu-chah-nulth to determine whether the predictions of your analysis are correct?

While a well-designed elicitation task could alone be sufficient as a final project, it might in some cases also be possible to obtain original data from linguists currently working on the relevant language(s).

## Obtaining Data:

If you are able to submit to me by (say) November $1^{\text {st }}$ a well-designed elicitation task for St'át'imcets, Henry Davis and Lisa Matthewson have very generously agreed to review it. If it meets their own approval, they may be able to 'run the experiment' for you with their language consultants, and provide the crucial data prior to the final due date (December $26^{\text {th }}$ ).

But bear in mind that it is becoming increasingly difficult for Henry and Lisa to conduct fieldwork on this language, and so there is never any guarantee that they will be able to obtain the data.

Furthermore, depending upon student interest, I might be able to make similar arrangements with linguists working on other languages (e.g. Squamish, Thompson River Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth, Haida). [And I myself can, of course, field certain inquiries regarding Tlingit.]

## 3. Important Dates

Tuesday, October 14: No class (Monday schedule)
Thursday, October 30: No class (I'll be away)
Friday, October 31: Last day to submit elicitation tasks on St'at'imcets for potential review by Davis and Matthewson.

Thursday, November 6: Day before NELS (maybe no class?)
Tuesday, November 11: No class (Veterans' Day)
Wednesday, November 12: CLASS (Tuesday schedule)
Thursday, November 20: No class (I'll be away)
Thursday, November 27: No class (Thanksgiving)
Thursday, December 11: Last Class
Friday, December 26: Final papers/projects are due
Wednesday, December 31: Grades due

## 4. Overview of the Twelve Main Topics

## 4.1 (Non-)Configurationality and the Pronominal Argument Hypothesis

Virtually all the languages of the Pacific Northwest have at some time been argued (or assumed) to be either 'Non-Configurational' or 'Pronominal Argument Languages'.
(2) Non-Configurational (Flat Structure) vs. Pronominal Argument Language
a. Non Configurational (Flat) Structure

Subject and Object mutually c-command one another.

b. Pronominal Argument Structure

Nominal phrases (e.g. Subject and Object) are always adjoined to the clause, and merely co-refer with pronouns/agreement markers inside the clause

c. Configurational Structure

Nominal phrases (e.g. Subject and Object) can occupy argument positions inside the clause, and the argument position of the Subject is hierarchically superior to (i.e. asymmetrically c-commands) that of the object.


Important Fact:
Typically, the arguments that a given language (of the area) is either a Non-Configurational or a Pronominal Argument language are based either upon (a) very surface-level properties of the language (e.g. freedom of word order), or (b) an alleged absence of data motivating a configurational structure.

We will critically assess these arguments for languages in each of the major language families of the area - Salishan, Wakashan, Tsimshianic, Na-Dene - especially in light of more recent research supporting configurational analyses. In so doing, we also critically assess the diagnostics typically employed to establish (non-)configurationality, as well as the more general viability of 'macroparameters' in typological research.

### 4.2 Lexical Categories (or Lack Thereof)

The languages of the Salishan, Wakashan and Chimakuan families have long been noted for appearing to lack any morpho-syntactic distinction between 'nouns' and 'verbs'. In all these languages, any open class lexical item can freely inflect as either a predicate or an argument.

## (3) Predicate/Argument Flexibility in St'át'imcets (Salish)

$$
\begin{array}{ll}
\text { a. } \quad \begin{array}{l}
\text { t'ak } \quad \text { ti=nk'yáp=a } \\
\text { go.along } \mathrm{DET}=\text { coyote=EXIS } \\
\text { The/a coyote goes along. }
\end{array} \\
\text { b. } \quad \begin{array}{l}
\text { n'kyap ti=t'ák=a } \\
\text { coyote DET=go.along=EXIS } \\
\text { The one going along is a coyote. }
\end{array}
\end{array}
$$

(Davis \& Matthewson 1999)
This apparent lack of any morpho-syntactic diagnostics for 'noun/verb-hood' has classically been taken to show that these languages simply lack the distinction been nouns and verbs altogether.

Alternately, the apparent 'category neutrality' of roots these languages might also be viewed as supporting recent theories of the nature of syntactic categories, such as Marantz (1997) and Borer (2005).

We critically assess these claims in light of more recent research, which suggests that there in fact are some (extremely subtle) structural differences between nouns and verbs in these languages. Along the way we also assess the consequences either result holds for our theory of UG and the nature of lexical categories.

### 4.3 Syntax and Semantics of Transitivity

Languages of the Salishan family (or 'Salish languages') exhibit a remarkably extensive and productive 'transitivizing' system. By and large, it appears that all simple roots in these languages are intransitive (unaccusative), and any transitive stem is created only through the suffixation of a 'transitivizer' to one of these roots.

## (4) Transitive / Intransitive Alternation in St'át'imcets (Salish)

a. zuqw to die
b. zuqw-s to kill
(Davis 2005)

Intriguingly, this holds even for such thoroughly 'transitive' concepts such as 'hit' and 'see'.

## (5) Transitive / Intransitive Alternation in St'át'imcets (Salish)

$\begin{array}{ll}\text { a. qam't } & \text { to get hit (by throwing) } \\ \text { c. 7ats'x } & \text { to get seen }\end{array}$
b. qam't-s to hit s.o/s.t (by throwing)
d. 7ats'x-en to see s.o./s.t.
(Davis 2005)

We will read and critically assess theoretically-informed analyses of this system. Of particular interest is the claim made by Davis \& Demirdache (2000) that while simple roots of the 'get kicked' variety are syntactically unaccusative, they are nevertheless semantically transitive.

### 4.4 Presuppositions

Semantic research into Salish languages has uncovered the following startling fact - these languages seem not to linguistically encode presuppositions. For example, pronouns and clefts can be freely used in 'out-of-the-blue' contexts where their 'correlates' in (e.g.) English are strongly disallowed.

## (6) Lack of Existence Presuppositions with Pronouns and Clefts

The following are acceptable in 'out-of-the-blue' contexts.
a. Pronouns in St'át'imcets (Salish)

$$
\begin{array}{lll}
{\left[\text { ulhcw } \varnothing_{1}\right] \text { nilh }[\mathrm{s}=\mathrm{mítsa} / \mathrm{q}=\mathrm{s}} & \left.\mathrm{s}=\mathrm{John}_{1}\right] \\
\text { enter pro and.then sat.down } & \mathrm{John} \\
\text { He entered and then John } n_{1} \text { sat down. } \tag{Davis2008}
\end{array}
$$

b. Clefts in St'át'imcets (Salish)
nets'écw=7i7 nilh [kwse leplít ][kwse 7ené 7e te méllexelh] once it DET priest DET come OBL DET Malahat Once upon a time, it was a priest that came to Malahat. (Davis et al. 2004)

Similarly, the Salish 'correlates' of certain discourse particles in English do not seem to share those particles' presuppositions.

## (7) Lack of Presuppositions with Certain Discourse Particles

The following St'át'imcets sentence is felicitous in a context where there has been no prior discussion of anyone being in jail.
wá7 t'it l-ti gélgela tsitcs k Lisa
is also in-DET strong house DET Lisa Lisa is also in jail.
(Matthewson 2008)
We will read and critically assess the literature surrounding this issue, one that plays a crucial role in the subjects that follow.

### 4.5 Quantification

We examine the nature of quantification across several language families of the area. As the Salish languages have received the most extensive study by far, our discussion will center largely on them.

We will first examine the highly influential work of Jelinek (1995), who argues that the Straits Salish languages lack any so-called 'D-quantification' (i.e., adnominal quantifiers), and can only express quantification through (unselective) adverbial quantifiers (so-called 'A-quantification').

## (8) Quantification in Straits Salish ${ }^{4}$

| mek'w=lh | 7ew7 ngat tse | stseenexw. |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| all $=1 \mathrm{pS}$ | LINK eat DET | fish |  |
| We all ate the fish. |  |  |  |
| We ate all the fish. |  |  |  |
| We ate the fish | ish up completely. |  | (Jelinek 1995) |

We will also examine the notion put forth by Jelinek (1995) that such a lack of D-quantification could be connected to the language's alleged lack of an N/V-distinction.

Following, this we will examine some of the extensive work done by Lisa Matthewson on the structure and semantics of quantification in the Salish languages, including work that argues that many languages of the family do (unlike Straits Salish) possess D-quantification. In addition, we will examine work by Matthewson on the semantics of specific indefinites and distributive numerals in St'át'imcets, work that is relevant to debates concerning their nature in more familiar languages (such as English).

### 4.6 Principle C (and the Lack Thereof)

Along with their apparent lack of presuppositions, Salish (and certain neighboring) languages also appear to permit violations of Principle C. That is, it is (sometimes) possible for a pronoun in these languages to co-refer with a name that it c-commands.
(9) Licit Violations of Principle $\mathbf{C}$ in St'át'imcets


We will critically assess the literature surrounding this issue, as well as the consequences it might have for our understanding of the nature of Principle C. Of special importance will be the work of Davis (2008), who seeks to derive these puzzling facts from the more general absence in these languages of linguistically encoded presuppositions (cf., in particular ex. (6a) above).

[^2]
### 4.7 Tense

We will examine a variety of issues related to tense in the languages of this area. As regards the Salish languages, we will critically examine the claim by Demirdache (1998) that (some) languages of this family express tense distinctions via nominal (rather than verbal) morphology.
(10) Determiners in St'át'imcets Affect Tense Interpretation of the Clause

| a. sécsec [ ti | kel7áqsten-s-a | ti $\quad$ United-States-a ] |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| fool PRESENT.DET chief-3sgPoss-DET | DET U.S.-DET |  |
| The president of the United States is a fool. |  |  |
| * The president of the United States was a fool. |  |  |

b. sécsec [ni kel7áqsten-s-a ti United-States-a ]
fool ABSENT.DET chief-3sgPoss-DET DET U.S.-DET
The president of the United States was a fool.

* The president of the United States is a fool.
(Demirdache 1998)
We will also examine the related claim by Wiltschko (2003) that tense can function as an adnominal modifier in Halkomelem, and that this entails the absence of a TP and Nominative Case in the language.
(11) Tense Morphemes Can Function as Adnominal Modifiers in Halkomelem
$\begin{array}{lll}\text { a. } & \text { te-1 } & \text { má:1-elh } \\ & \begin{array}{l}\text { DET-1sgPoss } \\ \text { My late father. }\end{array} & \text { father-PAST }\end{array}$
(Wiltschko 2003)
Following these works, we will examine the competing claim by Matthewson (2006) that, while sentences of these languages appear not to have any verbal tense morphology, they nevertheless possess a phonologically empty and semantically underspecified Tense projection. We will then examine recent research by Johannsdottir \& Matthewson (2008) that makes a parallel claim for certain Tsimshianic languages.

Finally, we will examine the curious 'decessive' tense/modal in Tlingit (a Na-Dene language), which may provide evidence for a similarly 'unpronounced and underspecified' tense projection in that language.

### 4.8 Modals and Evidentials

We will first review recent work by Henry Davis, Lisa Matthewson and Hotze Rullman regarding the semantics of modals in St'at'imcets (a Salish language). This work argues that while modals in more familiar European languages linguistically encode quantificational force and leave the nature of the modal base underspecified - modals in St'at'imcets linguistically encode features of the modal base and leave quantificational force underspecified.

## (12) $K^{\prime} \boldsymbol{a}$ in St'át'imcets: Base is Epistemic, but Force is Variable

Wa7 k'a qwenúxw.
is INFER sick
(Based upon what I know), he must be sick.
(Based upon what I know,) he may be sick.
(Rullmann et al. 2007)
We will then examine the ways in which Davis, Matthewson and Rullman extend this work to an analysis of evidentials in St'at'imcets. Finally, we will examine recent research by Tyler Peterson that applies the work of Davis and colleagues to the treatment of evidentials in Tsimshianic languages.

### 4.9 Wh-Questions

We will examine a variety of issues related to the syntax and semantics of wh-questions in the languages of this area.

Regarding the Salish languages, we will examine recent work by Henry Davis, who argues that contrary to surface appearance, the Salish language St'át'imcets employs a wh-in-situ strategy directly parallel to that in Japanese.
(13) Wh-Questions in St'át'imcets Appear to Exhibit Obligatory Wh-Fronting


Regarding the Wakashan languages, we will review work by Henry Davis and Naomi Sawai, who seek to analyze the puzzling surface structure of wh-questions in Nuu-chah-nulth, a language that requires wh-words to simultaneously be incorporated and to be left-peripheral in the clause.

## (14) Wh-Questions in Nuu-chah-nulth Require Incorporation ${ }^{5}$

> a. $\begin{aligned} & \text { 7aq7iicith John? } \\ & \text { what-ate John } \\ & \text { What did John eat? }\end{aligned}$ b. * 7u7iicith John 7aqi? ate John what c. * 7aqi 7u7iicith John? what ate John
(Davis \& Sawai 2001)
Finally, we will critically examine work probing the structure of wh-questions in the Na-Dene languages Tlingit and Haida, as well as the claim by Cable (2007) that wh-fronting in these (and perhaps all) languages is ultimately an operation targeting Q(uestion)-particles, and not the whwords themselves.

### 4.10 Polysynthesis (in the Wakashan Language Family)

The languages of the Wakashan family exhibit polysynthesis (incorporation) to a degree that is otherwise uncharacteristic of the Pacific Northwest, and more akin to languages of the arctic (e.g. Inuit). The following illustrates the range of material that can be incorporated into a verbal root in the Southern Wakashan language Nuu-chah-nulth.

## (15) Possible Polysynthetic Forms in Nuu-chah-nulth ${ }^{6}$

a. Object Incorporation
maht'ii-7amit7is cakup
house-bought man
A man bought a house.
b. Adjective Incorporation
ha7um-7ic7is7alh 7aapinis
tasty-eating apples
They are eating tasty apples.

[^3]c. Quantifier Incorporation

| 7ayi-is7is | m'uks7i |
| :--- | :--- |
| $\underline{\text { many-on.the.beach }}$ | rocks |

There are many rocks on the beach.
(Wojdak 2003)
d. Wh-word Incorporation
waa-ya7mith Ray puk?
which-buy Ray book
Which book did Ray buy?
(Davis \& Sawai 2001)
We will critically examine a variety of competing theories regarding the nature of complex word formation in the Wakashan languages. First, we examine work by Emmon Bach and Stephen Anderson arguing that polysynthesis in the Northern Wakashan languages Haisla and Kwakwala is a lexical (rather than syntactic) phenomenon. Following this, we examine research by John Stonham and others arguing that polysynthesis in the Southern Wakashan language Nuu-chahnulth is a syntactic (rather than lexical) phenomenon.

Finally, we examine two other competing analyses of Nuu-chah-nulth polysynthesis: the 'PF' analysis of Rachel Wojdak, and the HPSG analysis of Ryan Waldie. Both of these latter approaches view polysynthesis in Nuu-chah-nulth as, at base, a morpho-phonological phenomenon, wherein the verb of the clause must phonologically merge with the left-most element of the object.

### 4.11 Information Structure and Intonation

While linguists have only just begun to study the relationship between information structure, intonation and syntax in the languages of this region, some intriguing results have already been obtained.

We will first examine recent doctoral work by Karsten Koch, which argues that properties such as 'givenness' or 'focus' have no effect upon the prosody of sentences in Nlhe7kepmctsin (a Salish language). That is, Nlhe7kepmctsin displays the following intriguing set of properties:
(a) it is a 'stress language' whose sentences contain identifiable prosodic peaks,
(b) is a 'focus movement' language, where focused/new information must occupy a sentence-initial position (and given/old information must occupy a sentence-final position), but
(c) the obligatory placement of focused/new information at the beginning of the sentence does not place that material in a prosodically prominent position.

We will also examine Koch's proposals concerning the possible consequences of this system for the status of constraints such as 'Stress-Focus'.

Following this work, we will examine research exploring the prosodic structure of several other Salish languages, paying special attention to claims made by David Beck and Allison Benner that they pose difficult challenges to current models of the syntax/prosody interface.

### 4.12 Topic-Tracking, Argument Hierarchies and the Passive/Inverse

One feature of Pacific Northwest languages that has garnered much attention from linguists is the way in which the 'voice' of a transitive clause is affected by properties of the semantic agent, generally either its 'topicality' or its position along a 'person hierarchy'. As in many languages across the world, languages of this area tend to require that a clause appear in the 'passive/inverse' voice if the topicality or person of the theme is 'higher' than that of the agent.
(16) Hierarchical Alignment Triggers Obligatory Passivization in Straits Salish ${ }^{7}$
a. xci-t-ongas-sxw
know-TRANS-1/2sO-2sS
You know me.
b. $\quad$ xci-t- $\varnothing$-s
know-TRANS-3Abs-3Erg
He knows it.
c. $\quad *$ xci-t-ongas-s
know-TRANS-1/2sO-3Erg
He knows me.
d. xci-t-ng-sen
know-TRANS-PASS-1sS
I am known (by him). (Jelinek \& Demers 1983)

We will critically review studies of this phenomenon across the languages of this region. Special attention will be paid to the question of whether the effects of the person hierarchy on voice can as is often claimed - be reduced to the (more productive) effects of topicality.

In addition, we will explore the parallel controversies concerning the very nature of 'voice' morphology in the Pacific Northwest: whether such morphology is best analyzed as encoding an active/passive contrast (as in European languages), an inverse/direct contrast (as in other North American languages), or something else entirely.

[^4]
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[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ In designing the content of this seminar, I benefited hugely from the expertise of Henry Davis and Lisa Matthewson, who deserve special thanks and recognition for their unparalleled generosity in both their time and their resources.
    ${ }^{2}$ Image taken from David Beck's website: http://www.ualberta.ca/~dbeck/NWCmap.html

[^1]:    ${ }^{3}$ Time will probably not permit us to address in class the final five topics listed here (hence the brackets). However, I have collected material on these topics, which will be freely available on the course website to anyone that is interested.

[^2]:    ${ }^{4}$ Because my computer lacks the orthographic symbols used by Jelinek (1995), the transcription here is not entirely accurate. Please see Jelinek 1995 for the true data.

[^3]:    ${ }^{5}$ Because my computer lacks the orthographic symbols used by Davis \& Sawai (2001), the transcription here is not entirely accurate. Please see Davis \& Sawai (2001) for the true data.
    ${ }^{6}$ Again, my lack of proper orthographic fonts used by Wojdak (2003) entails that my transcription of her data is not entirely accurate. Please refer to Wojdak (2003) for the fully correct forms.

[^4]:    ${ }^{7}$ Because my computer lacks the orthographic symbols used by Jelinek \& Demers (1983), the transcription here is not entirely accurate. Please see Jelinek \& Demers 1983 for the true data.

