

Meaning & Communication (PH130)

Revision Topic 1: Productivity, Systematicity & Compositionality

Essential reading

Jennifer Hornsby & Guy Longworth (eds.), *Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (Blackwell: 2006) section 5

Recommended reading

Jennifer Hornsby & Guy Longworth (eds.), *Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (Blackwell: 2006) section 4 (section 3 is also useful).

These might help if you're stuck

Szabó, Zoltán Gendler (2004), "Compositionality", in E. N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2004 Edition).

Richard, Mark (1998), "Compositionality", in E. Craig (ed.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge.

Essay question

Are natural languages compositional?

Your essay should consist in a single, flowing text with an introduction and conclusion which answers the above question. In answering this question your essay should tackle the following tasks. Re-read your essay carefully before submitting it.

1. Someone who has mastered a formal first-order language such as FOL has a capacity which is systematic and productive. Explain what systematicity and productivity are.
2. Show that speakers of natural languages such as English have linguistic capacities which are systematic and productive.
3. Formal first-order languages such as FOL are typically compositional. Explain what it means to say that a language is compositional. Illustrate your explanation by appeal to the semantics for a formal first-order language.
4. How could the hypothesis that natural languages are compositional be used to explain the fact that speakers' linguistic capacities are productive?

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Revision Topic 2: Conditionals and material implication

Essential reading

Mark Sainsbury, *Logical Forms* chapter 2, especially §§4-8

Paul Grice, “Indicative Conditionals” which is chapter 4 of ‘Logic and Conversation’ in his *Studies in the Way of Words*, (Harvard)

E. Adams, “The Logic of Conditionals” (1965), Inquiry vol. 8, pp. 166-97, 1965 [has lots of good examples]

Further reading (optional)

J. Bennett, *A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals*, chapters 1–3, (OUP)

D. Edgington, “Do Conditionals Have Truth Conditions?” (1986) reprinted in Jackson (ed.), *Conditionals* [advanced]

Vann McGee, “A Counterexample to Modus Ponens” (1985), Journal of Philosophy vol. 82 [read the first two pages only if you find it too complex to follow.]

William Hanson, “Indicative Conditionals are Truth Functional” Mind vol. 100, issue 1, 1991, pp. 53-72

Frank Jackson (ed.), *Conditionals* (OUP)

Essay question

Suppose Ayesha says, “If the ball is not in the cupboard it is under the sink” and Ben says, “The ball is in the cupboard or it is under the sink.” Could one of these statements be true and the other false? If your answer is yes, explain how what Ayesha says differs from what Ben says. If your answer is no, how do you explain the fact that “The ball is in the cupboard” appears to logically imply what Ben says but not what Ayesha says?