Readings for Review Assignment

Below is a list of readings that are being put on reserve (680 course shelf in Oxley 222 hallway). After each is an excerpt (indicated by page numbers) you can choose to limit yourself to: you will want to read this part carefully and perhaps only skim the rest of the article, but in any case read the summary or conclusion section at the end (if there is one) to better understand the overall goal and conclusions of the article.

Your task is to select one article/excerpt and write a short (3 or 4 page) review of the indicated excerpt—or if you prefer, of more of the article than the indicated excerpt, or all of it. This assignment will be due on a date during finals’ week to be determined by the class and me later.

In your review you should (i) demonstrate that you have understood the technical concepts in the article that are related to those introduced in this course, and (ii), show that you can go beyond the article itself to infer some additional observations and conclusions—say why you found the article convincing or why you found it unconvincing, try to show that the author’s hypotheses apply to further kinds of linguistic data not mentioned in the article or that they are disconfirmed by further data or other considerations, make critical comments on the structure of the argument the author makes, and/or relate it to other linguistics work you have done. (Hint: your review probably should not consist entirely of prose but should include formulas and/or technical definitions, with observations about them, where these are important in the article. But your review should not consist ONLY of quotations from the article.)

The article excerpts vary somewhat in length. Choose one according to what subjects you’re interested in, according to the time you have to spend on this project, and according to how much time you feel it’s worth it to you to put in. You don’t automatically earn more “points” by choosing a longer article: it’s what you say about the article that counts (of course, you might well find you would have more to say about one of the longer articles, but then again you might not.)

The goal of this assignment is twofold: (1) to show you how some of the technical concepts used in this course are actually used in linguistics research, (2) to give you some experience in trying to read a technical article on your own—hopefully, to convince you that you CAN figure out new kinds of technical definitions and their use without always having them explained to you by an instructor or textbook in advance. Don’t necessarily expect to be able to understand every single thing in the article you’ve chosen, but get enough to grasp the main issues. If you feel you’re getting bogged down because there’s a key idea or definition or two you don’t understand, by all means come and talk to me (or anyone else). As long as you can figure out the major portion of the reading on your own, you’re OK.

   The topic is syntactic theory, relates to tree definitions. The article is foundational work, not new empirical research; it’s a useful article because it helps clarify concepts used in much other research.

   This is also a syntactic topic, but now a proof from empirical syntactic data as to what classes of formal grammars can and can’t describe natural language syntax. This is short but dense and involves a theorem about intersection of context-free languages and regular languages (PtMW p. 499) and the pumping lemma for context-free languages, which is in PtMW pp. 494-497.

The topic here is semantics: quantifiers in natural language vs. those in logic. It uses semantic definitions with respect to models. This is not a recent article but is an important, classic one, still often cited today. Some of the "universals" have been challenged (e.g. that all languages express quantification via NPs), others have not and are now recognized as important (e.g. conservativity).

4. Ladusaw, William, “Some Any’s Mean Some” (publication information unavailable, probably a CLS paper in the early 1980’s). [entire article]

Whether any (and anyone, anywhere etc.) represents a narrow scope existential quantifier, a wide scope universal quantifier, or both, and how you can tell.


This topic is Autosegmental Phonology, which you should probably know something about already if you choose this paper. Current phonological theories (and morphological theories) are less commonly studied formally than syntactic or semantic (or discourse) theories, but this article shows you they can be.