

HW2: Grammar and meaning

Assigned: January 14, 2011

Due: January 21, 2011

The goal of this assignment is to help you develop and allow you to demonstrate deeper understanding of course concepts. In working on this assignment, please feel free to consult your classmates, or anyone else for that matter. But make sure to write up your answers independently. Please double-space all work and use a font size no smaller than 12. The homework is due at the beginning of class on the due date.

Each of the following sets of sentences evidences a particular, relatively infrequently used grammatical construction. Your task is to describe this construction. You don't have to use any particular notation, though if you'd like to use something like any of the formats we've seen in lectures and in readings, you may. Note that you do not have to perform a grammatical analysis for each sentence—just for the one big construction that all the utterances in each set have in common. Make sure that for each of these constructions, you identify the following things [you can do so in this order, or combining the different parts if you have a concise way to do that]:

- i. the construction [give it an apt name]
- ii. constructional constituents [a.k.a. slots]
- iii. constraints on these constituents [like their form, meaning, or that they have to be a particular word or other construction]
- iv. the meaning contributed by this construction [stated in terms of constituents, if applicable]
- v. the form of this construction [including word order, prosody, or anything else not contributed by its constituents]
- vi. one other utterance that uses the same construction, but with different fillers for [most of] its slots

To figure out some of these constraints, you might have to work with some additional sentences using the same constructions. If you're not a native speaker of English, and potentially even if you are, it may be hard for you to do this without consulting with [other] native English speakers.

1. [a] Yo' mama is so fat, when she dances the band skips.
[b] It was so cold, flashers in the park were just describing themselves.
[c] Yo' mama is so fat, she broke her arm and gravy poured out.
2. [a] You have to hand it to him; those unwashed leeks really make the soup taste earthy.
[b] I have to hand it to the comedian—I didn't even see the punchline coming.
3. [a] Just because we live in Hawai'i doesn't mean we surf everyday.
[b] Yet, just because some people cannot distinguish between serious and hypothetical risks hardly means that we should spend all our time talking down to health consumers.
[c] The school board said that just because there are 150 years of scientific evidence for evolution, that does not prove that we are related to monkeys.