

# B. R. George

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## Employment

YALE UNIVERSITY  
Department of Philosophy and Department of Linguistics  
Lecturer and Postdoctoral Associate, 2012–present

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
Department of Linguistics and Philosophy  
Postdoctoral Associate, 2011–2012

## Education

*University of California, Los Angeles*

Ph.D. in Linguistics, June 2011

Dissertation Title: *Question Embedding and the Semantics of Answers*

Doctoral Committee:

Jessica Rett (chair), Ed Keenan, Ivano Caponigro (UCSD Linguistics), Sam Cumming (UCLA Philosophy), Terence Parsons (UCLA Philosophy and Linguistics)

M.A. in Linguistics, June 2008

Thesis Title: *Presupposition Repairs: A Static, Trivalent Approach to Predicting Projection*

M.A. Committee: Philippe Schlenker (chair), Daniel Büring, Ed Keenan, Ed Stabler

*Ecole Normale Supérieure*

UCLA/ENS Visiting Scholar, Spring 2010

*University of Pennsylvania*

M.S.E. in Computer and Information Science, August 2006

*Swarthmore College*

B.A. in Mathematics and Linguistics (with concentration in Computer Science), June 2003

## Areas and Interests

### *Areas of Specialization*

Semantics, Pragmatics, Logic, Formal Philosophy of Language

### *Areas of Competence*

Syntax, General Linguistics, Mathematical Linguistics, Philosophy of Language

### *Possible Introductory-Level Teaching Areas*

General Cognitive Science, Historical Linguistics, Discrete Mathematics

### *Research Interests*

Semantics of Questions  
Question Embedding  
Presupposition Projection  
Linguistic Applications of Multi-Valued Logics  
Second-Order Logics  
Foundations of Formal Semantics  
Experimental Semantics

## Articles

George, B. R. "Responsive Embedders and (Non-)Reducibility." Submitted to *Linguistics and Philosophy*.

George, B. R. "Some Remarks on Certain Trivalent Accounts of Presupposition Projection." Revisions under review at *Journal of Applied Nonclassical Logic*.

George, B. R. (2013) "Knowing-'wh', mention-some readings, and non-reducibility." *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy*.

George, B. R. (2013) "Which Judgments Show Weak Exhaustivity? (And Which Don't?)" *Natural Language Semantics* 21:401-427.

Weaver, G. and George, B. R. (2010) "The Fraenkel-Carnap Question for Limited Higher-order Languages." *Bulletin of the Section of Logic of the University of Lodz* 39:1-10.

George, B. R. (2008) "A New Predictive Theory of Presupposition Projection." *Proceedings of Semantics And Linguistic Theory* 18.

George, B. R. (2006) "Second-order Characterizable Cardinals and Ordinals." *Studia Logica* 84:425-449.

Weaver, G. and George, B. R. (2005) "Fraenkel-Carnap Properties." *Mathematical Logic Quarterly* 51:285-290.

Weaver, G. and George, B. R. (2003) "The Fraenkel-Carnap Question for Dedekind Algebras." *Mathematical Logic Quarterly* 49:92-96.

Weaver, G. and George, B. R. (2002) "Quasi-finitely Characterizable and Finitely Characterizable Dedekind Algebras." *Bulletin of the Section of Logic of the University of Lodz* 31:145-157.

## Presentations

### *Peer-Reviewed Conference Presentations*

George, B. R. (2011) "Wide-Scope Existentials as a Source of Mention-Some Readings in Questions." Talk at annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America.

George, B. R. (2008) "A New Predictive Theory of Presupposition Projection." Poster at Semantics And Linguistic Theory 18.

George, B. R. (2007) "Variable Presupposition Strength in Quantifiers." Poster at Experimental Pragmatics 2007.

### *Invited Presentations and Commentaries*

George, B. R. (2012) Commentary on Pettit, D. "'All You Can Eat:' More Than Generalized Quantifier Theory Can Chew." Logic Colloquium, American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division, 86<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting.

George, B. R. "Embedding Questions: Which Answers Matter, and How?" Invited talk at MIT (April 2011) and the University of Connecticut (January 2012).

George, B. R. "A New Case for an Old Logic: Reviving Strong Kleene Approaches to Presupposition Projection." Invited talk for Linguistics 247: Topics in Pragmatics, Linguistics Department, University of California, San Diego, 2009.

### *Other Presentations (selected)*

George, B. R. "Notes on the Compositional Semantics of *wh*-questions." UCLA Linguistics Colloquium, April 2011.

George, B. R. "Embedding Questions under Propositional Attitudes: A problem for Reductive Accounts and a Possible Solution." Talk at California University Semantics and Pragmatics Workshop 3, May 2010.

George, B. R. "'Middle Kleene' Trivalence as a Predictive Theory of Presupposition Projection." Presentation at the Institut Jean-Nicod Semantics and Pragmatics Seminar, May 2010.

George, B. R. "Grammatical Sources of Mention-Some Readings." Presentation at the Institut Jean-Nicod Semantics and Pragmatics Seminar, April 2010.

George, B. R. "Diagonalization and Belief." Presentation at the UCLA Philosophy of Language Workshop, March 2009.

## Theses and Manuscripts

Chemla, E. and George, B. R. "Can we agree about *agree*?" Manuscript in progress.

George, B. R. "A New Case for an Old Logic: Reviving Strong Kleene Approaches to Presupposition Projection." Manuscript in progress.

George, B. R. (2011) *Question Embedding and the Semantics of Answers*. Doctoral dissertation in Linguistics, UCLA.

<http://semanticsarchive.net/Archive/DZiMD1mZ/>

George, B. R. (2008) *Presupposition Repairs: A Static, Trivalent Approach to Predicting Projection*. M.A. thesis in Linguistics, UCLA.

<http://semanticsarchive.net/Archive/2ZiYmEyN/>

George, B. R. (2002) "*The*": *Definite Article of the English Language*. B.A. thesis in Linguistics, Swarthmore College.

## Grants, Awards, and Fellowships

Rosenfield-Abrams Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCLA, 2010-2011.

UCLA-ENS Fellowship, UCLA, Spring 2010.

Graduate Summer Research Mentorship, UCLA, 2009.

Graduate Summer Research Mentorship, UCLA, 2008.

Graduate Research Mentorship, UCLA, 2007-2008.

Graduate Summer Research Mentorship, UCLA, 2007.

IGERT Graduate Fellowship in Language and Communication Sciences, University of Pennsylvania, 2005-2006.

Honorable Mention, NSF Graduate Research Fellowship, 2005.

Honorable Mention, NSF Graduate Research Fellowship, 2004.

Graduate Fulbright Grant - declined in order to attend U.S. graduate school, 2004.

Award for Outstanding Thesis in Theoretical Linguistics, Swarthmore College Linguistics Department, 2003.

## Teaching Experience

*Instructor, Yale University*

Meaning (mixed undergraduate/graduate level, co-taught with Laurence Horn), Planned for Spring 2014

Problems in Semantics: Quantification (mixed undergraduate/graduate level), Fall 2013

Semantics (mixed undergraduate/graduate level), Spring 2013

Questions and Attitudes (graduate level, co-taught with Zoltán Szabó), Spring 2013

*Instructor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

Pragmatics in Linguistic Theory (graduate level), Spring 2012

Introduction to Semantics (graduate level, co-taught with Martin Hackl), Fall 2011

*Instructor, University of California, Los Angeles*

Syntax I (undergraduate level), Summer 2010

*Teaching Assistant, University of California, Los Angeles*

Introduction to Linguistics, Winter 2010

Introduction to Historical Linguistics, Fall 2009

Syntax I, Spring 2009

Semantics, Winter 2009

Introduction to the Study of Language, Fall 2008

Mathematical Structures in Language I, Fall 2006

*Teaching Assistant, University of Pennsylvania*

Mathematical Foundations of Computer Science, Spring 2006

Introduction to Cognitive Science, Fall 2005

*Grader, Haverford College*

Theory of Computation, Spring 2004

*Grader, Swarthmore College*

Theory of Computation, Spring 2003

Syntax, Fall 2001

*Teaching Assistant, Center for Talented Youth Young Students Program*

Introduction to Inductive and Deductive Reasoning, Summer 2000 (two sessions)

## Other Experience

REVIEWER, *Journal of Linguistics* (2013), *Philosophers' Imprint* (2013), *Linguistic Inquiry* (2012), *Linguistics and Philosophy* (2011,2012), *Journal of Semantics* (2011,2012), *Natural Language Semantics* (2011), West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics XXVII (2008).

SEMANTICS READING GROUP COORDINATOR, Yale, Fall 2012–present.

WORKSHOP ORGANIZER (with Martin Hackl), Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Scalar Implicatures, MIT, 2012.

SEMANTICS READING GROUP COORDINATOR, UCLA, Fall 2008–Spring 2009 and Winter 2010.

## References

JESSICA RETT, Linguistics, UCLA. rett@ucla.edu

ZOLTÁN GENDLER SZABÓ, Philosophy, Yale University. zoltan.szabo@yale.edu

BENJAMIN SPECTOR, Institut Jean-Nicod. spector.benjamin@gmail.com

PHILIPPE SCHLENKER, IJN and New York University. philippe.schlenker@gmail.com

SAM CUMMING, Philosophy, UCLA. sam.cumming@gmail.com

DAVID KAPLAN, Philosophy, UCLA. kaplan@ucla.edu

## Graduate-Level Coursework

(Selected audited courses are included, marked with a “\*”).

### *Philosophy*

#### **At Yale University**

\*Modal Logic and Metaphysics (Stanley, Fall 2013)

\*Philosophy of Mathematics (Whittle, Spring 2013)

#### **At the University of California, Los Angeles**

\*Philosophy of Language: Singular Terms (Kaplan, Fall 2010)

\*Philosophy of Language: Semantic Paradoxes and Theories of Truth (Parsons, Spring 2009)

Philosophy of Language: Student Research Seminar (Winter 2009)

Philosophy of Language: Names and Hyperintensionality (Cumming, Spring 2008)

#### **At the University of Pennsylvania**

Topics in Logic: Finite Model Theory (Weinstein, Spring 2005)

*Linguistics*

**At the University of California, Los Angeles**

Research Seminar in Syntax and Semantics (Winter 2011)  
Research Seminar in Syntax and Semantics (Fall 2010)  
\*Mini-Course on Scalar Implicature (Spector, Winter 2010)  
Research Seminar in Syntax and Semantics (Winter 2010)  
\*Language Change (Melchert, Spring 2009)  
\*Topics in Language Variation and Change: Mathematical Models (Stabler, Spring 2009)  
\*Syntax and Semantics: The Semantics of *wh*-phrases (Rett, Winter 2009)  
Research Seminar in Syntax and Semantics (Fall 2008)  
Syntactic Theory III (Sportiche, Spring 2008)  
\*Syntax and Semantics: Aspect and (In)definiteness (Hallman, Winter 2008)  
Field Methods II: Samoan (Koopman & Zuraw, Winter 2008)  
\*Synactic Typology (Lee, Winter 2008)  
Field Methods I: Samoan (Koopman & Zuraw, Fall 2007)  
Syntax and Semantics: Presupposition (Schlenker, Fall 2007)  
Semantic Theory II (Büring, Spring 2007)  
Mathematical Structures in Language II: Compositionality (Kracht, Spring 2007)  
Syntactic Theory II (Koopman, Winter 2007)  
Phonological Theory II (Hayes, Winter 2007)  
\*Syntax and Semantics: Locatives (Kracht, Winter 2007)  
Syntactic Theory I (Mahajan, Fall 2006)  
Phonological Theory I (Wilson, Fall 2006)  
\*Syntax and Semantics: Degree Semantics (Büring, Fall 2006)

**At the University of Pennsylvania**

Games and Proofs: Game-Theoretic Pragmatics (Clark, Fall 2005)  
Topics in the Syn.-Sem. Interface: Semantics for Tree Adjoining Grammars (Romero, Fall 2005)

*Computer and Information Science*

**At the University of Pennsylvania**

Analysis of Algorithms (Khanna, Summer 2006)  
Natural Language Processing: Tree Adjoining Grammars (Joshi & Kroch, Spring 2006)  
Friendly Logics (Tannen, Fall 2005)  
Natural Language Processing: Discourse Structure (Joshi, Spring 2005)  
Computational Linguistics (Marcus, Spring 2005)  
Software Foundations (Weirich, Fall 2004)  
Computer Architecture (Roth, Fall 2004)  
Introduction to Artificial Intelligence (Saul, Fall 2004)

*Other Areas*

**Germanic Languages, at the University of California, Los Angeles**

Gothic (Stevens, Fall 2008)

**Cognitive Science, at the University of Pennsylvania**

Math. Foundations for Language & Communication Sci. I (Lieberman & Kahana, Spring 2006)  
Language and Communication Sciences Research Seminar (Fall 2005)



## Summary of Dissertation Research

My dissertation presents a semantics of questions and question embedding. As in many other accounts, I begin with the observation that, if Bert and Carol were the only ones at the talk, the truth or falsehood of (1) can be evaluated by assessing the truth or falsehood of (2).

- (1) Ada knows who attended the talk.  
 (2) Ada knows Bert and Carol were the ones who attended the talk.

That is, the truth of sentence (1) is evaluated by determining whether Ada knows the proposition expressed by the underlined clause in (2), which answers the underlined question in (1). I present an account of how these two uses of an embedder like *know* are and are not connected, with the goal of providing a notion of content and a system of rules for embedding that are reasonably uniform across all embedders. Unlike many other accounts, I avoid defining distinct meanings for two uses of each embedder on a case-by-case basis.

This project is made difficult by variation in the kinds of answers that are used, and in the role they play in determining the truth of the embedding sentence. To make (1) above true, Ada needs to know an *exhaustive* answer, but for (3), this is not the case (if she knows of one place where she can buy a newspaper, that seems to be enough to make the sentence true). With (4), unlike the examples with *know*, the answer involved need not be the true one.

- (3) Ada knows where she can buy a newspaper.  
 (4) Ada is certain of which students attended the talk.

Some authors (e.g. Beck and Rullmann 1999, Lahiri 2002, and Sharvit 2002) address these issues by stipulating many different kinds of answers and embedding rules on a case-by-case basis. I seek to present a more uniform picture and to explain the sources and limits of flexibility without resorting to special rules for each embedder.

After developing a basic theory of questions, organized in part around the observed structural conceptual similarity between *wh* questions and relative clauses, I argue that this simple uniform account can handle a wide variety of phenomena. For example, I show that data that have been used to argue for two distinct kinds of exhaustive answer can instead be attributed general contextual effects that constrain the domain under consideration, and I suggest a way that incomplete-answer cases like (3) may result from scope interactions between the question formation process and other semantic elements (e.g. *can*).<sup>1</sup>

I also observe that examples like (3) present serious problems for available theories of question embedding. (3) is problematic for such reductive accounts because it requires not only that Ada know of one place where she can buy a newspaper, but also that she not falsely believe she can buy a newspaper at any place where she can't. I propose a new account of embedder content and a uniform rule that derives these effects. This rule connects *know wh* with *know that* without reducing one to the other, and it is uniform across all embedders. It accounts for the data at hand, overcoming the descriptive limitations of an approach that reduces the question-oriented use to the propositional use, but it still explains how the two uses are connected.

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<sup>1</sup>This last theme was also explored in my 2011 LSA talk "Wide-Scope Existentials as a Source of Mention-Some Readings in Questions."