

**LIN372L: Syntax and Semantics: The Structure and Meaning of Utterances**  
Spring 2014  
Practice midterm exam

1. The following joke by Groucho Marx exploits linguistic ambiguity:

*I once shot an elephant in my pajamas. How it got into my pajamas, I'll never know.*

Explain what type of ambiguity *I once shot an elephant in my pajamas* exhibits and argue for your answer. Provide one or more syntactic trees for the sentence to support your argument. Explain what happens, syntactically, in the reading corresponding to the joke and why it is funny.

2. It has been proven that a positive formulation (for instance, (a) as uttered by a parent to his/her child) works better for communication and bonding than a negative formulation does (see (b)).

- (a) If you get ready for bed early, I will read to you.  
(b) If you don't get ready for bed early, I will not read to you.

Are the two expressions logically equivalent? Answer this question using propositional logic.

3. Give the truth conditions for the sentence in italics, using quantification over possible worlds.

Martha: You know, John was drinking yesterday, but he drove home in his car, I'm a bit worried, have you seen him?

Bill: That was so stupid of him, *he could have had a serious accident!* But he was lucky: I have seen him this morning in class, and he was safe and sound.

4. The following two sentences exhibit the same type of ambiguity due to quantifier scope:

- (a) The professor gave all students a book on Derrida to read.  
(b) The teacher gave all students a treat.

Formalize each of the sentences using restricted quantifiers. Paraphrase each of the resulting readings. Which is the most natural reading in each case? Is it the order of the quantifiers in the respective preferred reading the same? If not, can you explain the difference?

5. Give the truth conditions for the following sentences using set theory. Does any sentence (or both) contain a strong quantifier? Argue for your answer and support it with the appropriate test.

- (a) Bill wants me to paint every room in the house.  
(b) Bill wants me to paint some room in the house.