

Semantics and Pragmatics: Author Guidelines

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Version: 2011-12-20

1 The journal

Semantics and Pragmatics (*S&P*) is a peer-reviewed open access journal, located on the web at semprag.org. Its mission is to bring the very best articles in semantics, pragmatics and allied subfields, to as wide an audience as possible, at no cost to readers or authors, as quickly as possible. The journal is affiliated with, and electronically published by, the Linguistic Society of America (under the umbrella of their eLanguage initiative: lsadc.org/info/pubs-elang-rfp.cfm and elanguage.net).

S&P is a new kind of journal, leveraging the advances in desktop publishing, open source journal management software, and internet communications infrastructure. Our aim is to publish a high-quality, peer-reviewed journal on a par with the established journals but with two very significant advantages:

- fast turn-around from submission to publication, facilitated by the all-electronic journal management plus online publication as soon as an article is ready;
- open, immediate, and free access to anyone with an internet connection.

S&P publishes both main articles and a variety of shorter contributions (squibs, commentaries, remarks and replies, state of the art). We first lay out the expectations for main articles and then discuss the nature of shorter contributions.

2 Expectations for main articles

The main content of *S&P* are high quality, original, self-contained research articles on the semantics and pragmatics of natural languages. While the

core of our target audience is academic linguists, we also publish material by, or of relevance to, philosophers, psychologists, and computer scientists.

Papers must include new results of interest to those working in semantics and pragmatics, and must demonstrate clear significance for theoretical development of those areas. Provided the work meets those criteria, we welcome both submissions of papers on core topics in semantics and pragmatics, and submissions of interdisciplinary papers involving work on syntax, phonology, psycho-linguistics, text and corpus studies, discourse and conversation analysis, computational semantics, the lexicon, historical linguistics, cross-linguistic typology, logic, and philosophy of language.

We have an ambitious goal: to publish as many as possible of the top 100 articles in semantics and pragmatics in a given year, and no other full articles. Issues that reviewers are directed to consider include the following:

Originality Are there important new theoretical insights, important new data, perhaps a notably original synthesis of ideas from disparate fields, or new formal techniques? Does the paper substantially overlap with a separate published paper of the author?

Advice to authors: Originality is the most basic requirement for S&P articles. However, and even though we must take into account any duplication of previously available material, overlap with a prior conference paper, thesis or other work does not automatically prevent publication in S&P. Each such case will be considered on its merits, subject to applicable copyright limitations. We might, for example, consider publishing material that overlaps with an existing publication if we judge that the new publication in S&P would serve the field by bringing visibility to important developments that might otherwise be overlooked.

Technical competence and presentation of technical material Are there minor or major examples of sloppiness or misunderstanding? Are there places where the argumentation should be strengthened? Would the paper be improved with new statistical analyses, proofs of claims, or worked examples demonstrating proposed techniques? Should graphs, tables, or other presentations of data be added or modified?

Advice to authors: Obviously if reviewers pick up on issues of this sort, the paper cannot be accepted without modification. Accepting subject to revision is possible, but we will only consider accepting a paper subject

to revision if it is absolutely clear to us what changes are needed.

Audience Consider the background someone would need to follow the main thread of this paper, e.g. only a few specialists, most of those who give papers at major semantics conferences, most people with a few graduate level semantics courses, most people who've taken a graduate level introduction to semantics and pragmatics, or perhaps any smart educated person with access to a search engine could follow the main thread. And if this is the population that could follow the main thread, are there nonetheless parts of the paper that are much more demanding? Might minor changes substantially increase the potential audience?

Advice to authors: There is no single audience profile for an S&P paper, though we will always discourage unnecessary complexity or use of jargon. The case is clearest at both ends: (i) if a paper has only a limited readership, it must be clear that the paper presents extraordinary results, and (ii) having a wide potential readership is neither necessary nor sufficient for acceptance.

Quality of prose Is the paper stylish, clear, and concise? Is it unclear in places, but probably repairable by the author? Could the prose be repaired by a native English speaker who has no special training in semantics and pragmatics, or would rewriting require both the author and probably also outside help of a native English speaker?

Advice to authors: We strongly recommend that all authors, whatever their native language, have their papers proofread by a native English speaker who is competent in linguistics. Reviewers provide their services for free, and we cannot expect them to wade through prose which is unclear or written in poor English. So if we, the editors, find the quality of English in a paper to be poor, we are likely not to even send the paper for review, so that we can avoid burdening our reviewers with it.

Contextualization of research Are the main research questions contextualized in terms of earlier related work? Does the paper adequately cite related work? Could the impact of the paper be improved through modifications that would show the relevance of the results to future work in the same or other fields?

Advice to authors: by contextualizing results appropriately, the author not only increases the worth of the paper to the audience, but also

makes the job of the editors and reviewers easier. It will be much easier for us to be sure that a paper should be published if we can clearly see what previous work it betters. Authors would do well to flag, both in the abstract and early on in the paper, the relationship of the paper to earlier proposals, and to indicate in broad terms what the relative advantages of the new approach are. Of course, it is then incumbent on the author to make sure that all such claims are fully justified in the main text of the article.

Subject matter and methodology The range of topics on which we can accept submissions is broad, though not so broad as for a general interest journal such as *Language*. Further, we have no intention to delimit the possible scope of the journal, beyond saying that articles must be highly relevant to the work of specialists in the fields of semantics and pragmatics. However, we do detect some important trends in these fields both as regards subject matter, and as regards methodology, and we hope to publish work which emphasizes these trends. In particular, we note the following trends:

- i. In the last decade, there has been a flowering of cross-linguistic work, much of it tackling relatively little studied languages, and often based on fieldwork. In this regard, we might say that semantics and pragmatics are finally ‘catching up’ with sister fields like phonology.
- ii. The creation of large corpora of text and speech, together with computer search techniques, have made new sources of data available. The citation of naturally occurring web examples is now *de rigueur*, and we anticipate that more sophisticated statistical and quantitative analyses, analyses which take into account both the advantages and potential pitfalls of corpus and web data, will become ever more common in the field.
- iii. There is a small but growing tendency for work in the area to include or reference experimental data, sometimes involving evidence from acquisition. This development is of particular importance for pragmatics, an area where judgments based on data for which context is not carefully controlled are notoriously variable.
- iv. Over the last three decades, formal techniques like those used

in semantics have been increasingly applied to pragmatics, to discourse, and to dialogue. Relatedly, there has been an ever greater awareness that semantic and pragmatic data are highly sensitive to context. So researchers are increasingly careful to contextualize examples, often presenting data in the form of mini-discourses rather than isolated single sentence examples.

- v. There is a growing sensitivity to differences between speech and written language,¹ and to the significance of prosody. Where prosody is established to be significant, it is becoming common for data to be presented along with some form of prosodic transcription.
- vi. Semantics and Pragmatics are undoubtedly the areas of linguistics which most freely import new formal tools from mathematics, computer science, philosophical logic, and elsewhere. A recent example is the importation of Decision Theory and Game Theory from psychology and economics.

Advice to authors: We will encourage submissions based on primary data, especially from under-studied languages. Whatever the source of data and judgments, whether naturally occurring or constructed, whether from corpora, consultants or colleagues, we ask that authors are as specific as possible about that source. Information as to the source of data and judgments may be specified in footnotes by each example, in a single summary footnote near the beginning of the paper, or in the main text in case the source of the data is of particular relevance to the claims being made. We strongly encourage authors to consider making data publicly available, for example in the form of text or data files that can be hosted on the S&P site.

Many S&P articles will not make use of corpora or web data, but nowadays all authors must be aware that readers and reviewers have rapid access to corpus and web evidence. It would be as well for authors to forestall potential objections based on these sources by considering for themselves whether any such data might be relevant to their claims prior to submission.

¹ However, as yet little work in formal semantics and pragmatics references broader differences in genre, whereas this is standard in the related subfield of Conversation Analysis. Perhaps work exploring the broader significance of genre will eventually appear in S&P.

If an article applies formal techniques and tools that are not (yet) widely known within the target audience of S&P, authors have to include an accessible introduction to those tools within their article. This will facilitate familiarity with such new developments and will enhance the potential impact of the article.

3 Additional contributions

Apart from main research articles, *S&P* publishes some shorter contributions and some contributions of a special nature. These will be subject to more relaxed peer review processes, in the discretion of the editors. Typically, squibs and remarks & replies will be sent out for review but perhaps to fewer reviewers and with clear instructions that shorter contributions have a lower bar to acceptability than full-length main articles. Commentaries will typically only be reviewed in-house.

3.1 Shorter contributions

S&P welcomes several kinds of shorter contributions:

Squibs Squibs are very short articles with a length of under 10 journal pages. As in the tradition established by *Linguistic Inquiry*, “manuscripts accepted as Squibs will not be required to propose a solution to problems they address as long as their relevance to theoretical issues is made clear” (<http://www.mitpressjournals.org/page/sub/ling>).

Remarks and Replies Somewhat longer than squibs but still shorter than main articles are remarks and replies, which deal with issues raised in the literature and present a new perspective on them.

Commentaries *S&P* welcomes and sometimes initiates debates that take place within the journal. Commentaries on main articles published in *S&P* will typically be quite short.

Authors should submit such shorter contributions in the standard way (see below).

3.2 Special contributions

S&P may also publish invited articles in at least two categories:

State of the art Occasionally, *S&P* may invite experts to provide a survey article on a relevant topic where it would be useful to the field to get expert guidance to the current state of the art.

Underground classics *S&P* anticipates publishing some articles that have achieved underground classic status, influential pieces of work that for some reason or other were never formally published (cf. e.g. Kaplan’s “Demonstratives” or Kripke’s “Presupposition and Anaphora: Remarks on the Formulation of the Projection Problem”, which were both finally published after years of underground influence).

The last two kinds of contributions are invitation-only but the editors welcome suggestions.

4 Submission

For initial submission of an article, we do not require adherence to any particular style guidelines. We ask for a pdf of the article, with generous margins for the convenience of our reviewers. The submission is made on the journal’s website. There is an author’s checklist that guides the authors through the steps involved in asking the journal to consider their article. All communication between the authors and the journal will be via the website and email. There is always a designated editor that will handle the peer review process and communication with the author. At any point during the process, we welcome personal messages to the editor in charge of a submission. Authors can also contact the editors-in-chief at any time at editors@semprag.org.

When an article is submitted to *S&P*, we strongly encourage authors to also deposit their manuscript to the Semantics Archive (semanticsarchive.net) so as to allow the research community to read the pre-publication version and to give feedback on the work to the author.² In the future, we will look into further ways of facilitating this kind of early feedback from the community.

² Obviously, if an author chooses to submit an anonymous manuscript for blind peer review, as discussed in Section 5, they wouldn’t want to choose to deposit the draft to the archive at the same time. But otherwise, we hold that it is the right thing to put the paper on the archive in parallel with the submission process.

5 Peer review

S&P has submission and rejection rates comparable with the other top journals in our field. The editors act as a first stage filter on papers, normally within a week of receipt. If a paper is determined to be of potential relevance, it is sent to at least two reviewers drawn from our Editorial Board. The Editorial Board consists primarily of PhD holding academics active in the subfields of semantics and pragmatics, selected by the editors, and subject to advice from the Advisory Board. The Board is of sufficient size that we will not normally call on the same reviewer more than twice in a year. The review board is public, but we will not reveal the identity of the reviewer of a particular paper except at the direct request of the reviewer.

We do not require that submitted papers be anonymous, since this is frequently an unattainable goal. However, the author of a paper has the right to remain anonymous to the reviewers throughout the review process. In that case, the author should take care to anonymize the paper, and should include in a clearly visible position on the front page the text “Submitted to *S&P* for anonymous review.” The reviewers are then considered under obligation not to attempt to discern the identity of the author.

S&P endeavors to make an initial decision on any submission within 60 days. To that end, reviewers are typically asked to provide their review within four weeks.

Following the review, the editors will communicate their decision to the author(s). The following are the types of decisions:

Accept submission “We will publish this paper as soon as possible”. Typically, there will be minor revisions needed but those shouldn’t take very long and the paper will move into production as soon as those are done. At this point, at the very latest, we strongly encourage authors to prepare their article via our \LaTeX style package. At a minimum, authors will need to follow the final submission guidelines spelled out in semantics-online.org/sp/sp-finalsubmission.pdf.

Revisions required “Accept the paper but minor revisions are necessary”. The revisions will take no more than 2 weeks of work and only need to be checked by the editors. We will only issue this decision if the revisions are crystal-clear to us. NB: If the authors have not submitted a revised version within 6 months of our decision, we will consider the paper rejected. Any resubmitted version after 6 months will be

considered a new submission and will be subject to the regular review process again.

Resubmit for review This is the decision also known as “Revise and Resubmit”. This is intended to be a rare decision, and implies that substantial rewriting and possibly new research is needed, possibly taking months, but that the extreme originality of the piece merits acceptance in spite of the flaws. We will only consider such a decision if the path to a successful revision is quite clear to us. The revised version will almost certainly be reviewed not just by the editors but by outside reviewers. These will likely be drawn from the reviewers who reviewed the initial submission; but the editors reserve the right to use fewer or different reviewers.

Decline submission “Reject”. This is the modal decision for a journal of *S&P*'s standards. There are shades depending on whether the reviewers and editors recommend submission of a substantially improved paper on the same topic. Any such submission will be treated as a new submission and while we might solicit the opinions of previous reviewers, there is no assurance whatsoever that the same set of reviewers will look at the paper. We should note that quite a few of our published papers were declined in an earlier round. Some of our most enthusiastically positive feedback has come from authors of declined submissions, because of the speed of decision and the quality of editorial feedback.

Any type of revised submission should be accompanied by a separate document explaining the changes that were made in response to comments from reviewers and editors.

After acceptance, the editors and their staff will take charge of the production phase in collaboration with the authors (see the separate document “Final Submission Guidelines”).

6 What happens when we publish

In accordance with the open access ethics of the journal, authors retain full copyright for their work. They grant a non-exclusive license to *S&P* to publish and archive their article. Readers can use the article under a Creative Commons Non-Commercial License, which gives them unrestricted

rights to copy, distribute and transmit the work, provided the original author and source are credited. The default license also allows “derivative works”, such as translations, without further authorization by the journal or the authors. Upon explicit request by the authors, any particular article can instead be published under a slightly more restrictive license which does not allow derivative works without specific permission by the authors. The copyright notice in the pdf of the article will specify which license the article is published under.

Once the final typeset version of an article has been produced by the journal’s staff, it will immediately be published at the journal’s website in pdf format. Thus, there is no delay at all, waiting for other articles to be bundled in an issue. This is unlike the “online first” publication of some of the commercial journals (where the online version has limited and provisional metadata, such as non-final page numbering).

The journal publishes each article as it is ready. To make this procedure compatible with existing bibliographic practice, we essentially treat each article as its own issue. The page numbering for each article will start at 1. Since there will thus not be sequential page numbering of all the article’s in a year’s volume, we notate the issue number and the page number at the bottom of each page. So, the 17th page of the 3rd article in the first volume will have the page number 3:17. This is essentially the scheme introduced by the ACM recently (Boisvert et al. 2007).

The journal is a member of CrossRef, a “not-for-profit network founded on publisher collaboration, with a mandate to make reference linking throughout online scholarly literature efficient and reliable.” Its mission is to “serve as the complete citation linking backbone for all scholarly literature online, as a means of lowering barriers to content discovery and access for the researcher.”³ What this means for *S&P* authors is that their article will be associated with a DOI (digital object identifier), which will serve as a permanent address for the article. CrossRef will maintain the integrity of the link and ensure that it will always point to the canonical version of the article, no matter what behind the scenes moves and changes in technology may occur.⁴ In addition, all reference lists at the end of *S&P* articles will list

³ The quotes are from crossref.org/o2publishers/16fastfacts.html.

⁴ Thus, we encourage all authors to link to their article through its DOI rather than directly to its address on the *S&P* site. The DOI is also preferable to serving a separate copy of the article from the authors’ own website, which would in addition lose potentially useful download statistics.

DOIs for any of the cited works that have one, so that readers can use those DOIs to access cited works in the most convenient way possible.

All work in *S&P* is immediately indexed on Google Scholar. Publication notices are published via email to subscribers, postings on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Google+), quarterly via notices on the LinguistList email list. Starting with the 2011 volume, *S&P* is indexed in the MLA bibliography. We are actively working on indexing by other services and impact rankings. As a new journal (an e-journal to boot), *S&P* has to be diligent in establishing its reputation. After three full years of publication, we believe that *S&P* is now firmly to be counted as one of the top journals in our field.

7 Contact

We welcome comments, criticism, and questions at any time. Send us email at editors@semprag.org.

References

Boisvert, Ronald F., Mary Jane Irwin & Holly Rushmeier. 2007. Evolving the ACM journal distribution program. *Communications of the ACM* 50(9). 19-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/1284621.1284637>.