
Semantics: Essential Tools

Winter Semester 2017/2018, Heinrich-Heine Universität

Monday 8:30am-10:00am

Room 23.32 – 01.43

Instructor

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General Information

Goals of the course The goal of this course is to expand students' understanding of the empirical domain and techniques in formal semantics and to develop the skills to do independent semantic analysis. The semantic system that we will develop has two central tenets. First, following the long tradition initiated by logicians like Frege, Tarski, Carnap and Montague, it aims at developing a *truth-conditional* semantic system, one where the meanings of a sentence is determined by stating the conditions under which it is true in the world. Second, the semantic system that we will develop is *compositional*, i.e. it determines a systematic procedure that allows us to obtain the meaning of each sentence from the meaning of its parts. In the first half of the course we will learn standard formal tools which we will then apply and develop during the second half to analyze a range of empirical phenomena, including adjectival modification, quantifiers and (in)definites, pronouns, attitude verbs, etc. This course has a heavy hands-on component, including in-class exercises as well as homework assignments.

Pre-requisites The course assumes familiarity with predicate logic, basic set theory and functions, as well as the conceptual foundations of semantics. You can still take (and succeed!) in this class in the absence of this background, but it means that during the first few lectures the class will move at a higher pace for you. The most important concepts will be reviewed on the first two/three classes of the semester. If you are in doubt about whether this class is for you, please contact me.

Website There is a website for this course (see above). There you will find the lecture notes, readings, homeworks and handouts covering the materials and discussion from previous classes. I expect you to visit the website regularly, as it is the central hub of information and document dissemination outside of class. If you miss class, checking the website for what you missed should be the very first thing you do.

Textbook There is no required textbook for this class. All assigned readings will be posted online on the website. If you really want a textbook, let me know and I will provide you with recommendations.

Assessment

Beteiligungsnachweis (2 ECTS) In order to get a BN, you must get at least 50% of the total available homework points. Class participation is strongly encouraged (see below).

Abschlussprüfung (6 ECTS) In order to qualify for the AP, you must meet the requirements for the BN, and furthermore do one of the following two things. You can either (i) do the AP entirely through homework assignments, or (ii) write a term paper. The homework-based AP grades will be assigned like this:

Percentage	Grade
> 90%	1
> 80%	2
> 70%	3
> 60%	4

The term paper can take a number of different forms. You could, for example, choose a classic paper in semantics, make up reading comprehension exercises for it along with model solutions. Alternatively, you could elaborate on some aspect of the materials we worked on in class, or apply what you learned to analyze a new construction in a different language. In any case, **you must talk to me and agree with me on a term paper before you decide to write it**. Because of university regulations, I must allow the term paper to be written in German or English, but please bear in mind that my German comprehension is limited.

Class Policies

Homework Homework assignments consist of a set of questions and exercises pertaining to the reading and associated lecture, and each question is worth a certain number of points. (The total number of points may vary from assignment to assignment.) The answers must be written in English. You may consult with other students in the class, but you *must* write up your answers by yourself. Please type up your assignments, put your name on them, print them out, staple them, and bring them with you to class, because we will discuss them in class on the day that they are due. Homework assignments must be typed. Late homework assignments will be accepted, with a 20% reduction in your score for each day that it is late. Your homework is late if you fail to turn it in before class begins the day it is due. You can bring late assignments to the main office of the linguistics department and leave them in my mailbox. After turning in your homework you can *revise* it and turn in a new version by noon on the day the homework is due.

Keep in mind: semantics is not so much about reading and memorizing terms and facts; it's about practicing how to analyze the data using the tools we learn. You can only get good at this with practice. Doing the homework is the only way to learn.

Collaborating on Homeworks Collaborating on homeworks is allowed and encouraged, but you must independently write up and turn in your own answers. That is, you can discuss the homeworks with one another, but by turning in your homework you are certifying that it represents your understanding of the material, not someone else's. Thus, when you collaborate with someone, **please write on the homework the name(s) of your collaborator(s)**.

Copying another person's homework is **not** acceptable collaboration, it is academic dishonesty, and it is generally quite easy to tell when you do this. If you are so lost with an assignment that you are tempted to copy someone else's, you should stop and contact me for extra help.

Attendance Attendance is strongly recommend and important to do well in class; remember, there is no “official” textbook and the materials I will provide you have to be taken as guides of the lectures, discussions and exercises that will be held in class.

Participation Active participation in class is extremely important. The more you participate, the more you learn, and the more you help other students learn. Feel free to raise your hand whenever you are confused, you have a doubt, you think that something is wrong, or you have an idea that you want to share. Be prepared to share your own solutions to the homework that was most recently assigned.

Exams There is no exam.

Class Decorum As I mentioned earlier, class attendance is important and missing it regularly will most probably have a negative impact on your final results. In order to profit maximally from our time in class, treating your instructor and your fellow classmates with respect at all times is a must. This includes, but is not limited to, abstaining from activities which may distract others (including me) during class. I specifically request that you not send/receive text messages, check social networks, or otherwise play with electronic devices for non-academic purposes during class. You are not invisible, and it is generally quite easy to see what you’re doing!

Need some help?

Keep in touch with me whenever there is a problem, you feel lost, or generally whenever I am not making sense (yes, it happens). E-mail is the fastest and most reliable way, I check it many, many times a day. I am very happy to answer questions on the content of course material and homework by email and I’m often prompt. Note, however, that it will take me longer to respond if you email me late in the evening or during weekends. If you need extra help, I am available for appointments, you only need to email me or talk to me after class to set up an appointment. Oftentimes, a single meeting can solve issues that hundreds of emails can’t!

Important Dates

First day of class	09/10
No class!	09/30
Weinachtsferien	25/12
Weinachtsferien	01/01
Last day of class	29/01

Rough plan

WEEK 1	
09/10	Overview & Review of basic formal tools and concepts
WEEK 2	
16/10	Review of basic formal tools and concepts (cont).
WEEK 3	
23/10	Compositionality
WEEK 4	
30/10	NO CLASS!
WEEK 5	
06/11	Lambda-abstraction
WEEK 6	
13/11	A theory of types
WEEK 7	
20/11	Modes of composition
WEEK 8	
27/11	Relative clauses and movement
WEEK 9	
04/12	The interpretation function: indexes and pronouns
WEEK 10	
11/12	Quantification
WEEK 11	
18/12	Intensional semantics
WEEK 12	
08/01	Propositional attitude verbs
WEEK 13	
15/01	<i>De Re/De dicto</i> ambiguity
WEEK 14	
22/01	Modal auxiliaries
WEEK 15	
29/01	Final review

