Introduction to Semantics (LING510): Syllabus
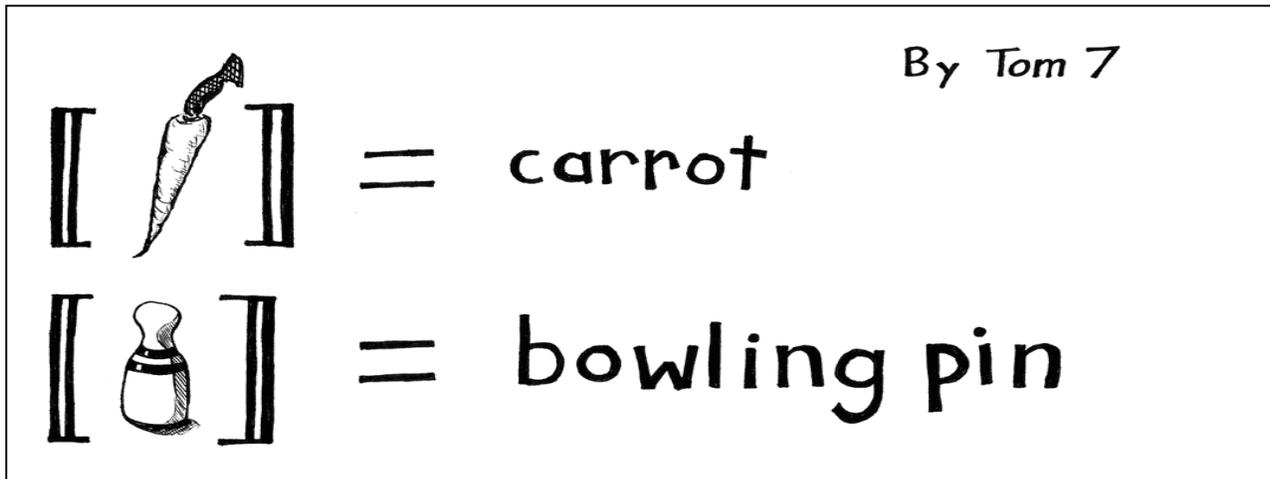
Cartoon above by Tom Murphy (http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~tom7)

Lectures:
Mon., Wed., Fri: 10:10-11:00
Hasbrouck 230

Course Websites:
- http://people.umass.edu/scable/LING510-FA15
- Moodle Page

Discussion Period:
Friday: 12:20-1:10
Hasbrouck 230

Course Instructor: Seth Cable
E-mail: scable@linguist.umass.edu
Office Hours: Monday 2-3PM; and by appt.

Course TA: Yangsook Park
E-mail: yangsook@linguist.umass.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 2-3PM

1.   General Overview

One of mankind's most distinctive and consequential cognitive capacities is our unique ability to form an unlimited number of novel, meaningful linguistic expressions. This course introduces students to the formal study of one facet of this capacity: the cognitive system that computes the meanings of complex linguistic expressions. Throughout the semester, students will be trained in the tools and techniques of semantic theory, as well as certain basic results of the field. Students will develop experience with a particular formal semantic system (Heim & Kratzer 1998), largely by learning how such a system can be adjusted and expanded in order to cover ever-larger domains of linguistic phenomena. Through the development of this formal system, students will gain a better understanding of how the human mind is able, through language, to express an infinite variety of thoughts and experiences.

Prerequisites: Linguistics 201, Linguistics 401

2.   Course Requirements and Grading

General Caveat:
As a 500-level course, this course is one of those in our undergraduate program that come closest to graduate courses. Indeed, I've designed the present course to largely be a 'toned-down' version of our graduate-level Introduction to Semantics course (LING 610).

For this reason, the overall difficulty level and workload will be much greater than the majority of your other linguistics courses (which are all at the 400 level or below).

The Composition of Your Final Grade:

- Problem Sets: 70%
- Midterm: 15%
- Final: 15%

2.1   Lecture Attendance

For most students, the subject matter of this course will be rather difficult. For this reason, class attendance is absolutely essential. *If you fail to attend class, you <u>will</u> fall behind, and you will have great difficulty catching up.*

2.2   Discussion Attendance

It is also essential that students attend the discussion sessions every Friday (12:20-1:10). These sessions will reinforce and build upon the content of the main lectures; they will also give students essential practice with calculating formal semantic derivations.
        The discussion sessions are a crucial component to your mastery of the course material.

2.3   Course Readings

Class lectures will for the most part *assume* that students have read and largely understood the assigned readings. In many cases, the assigned readings will treat a subject in more explanatory depth than could ever be done in class. *For this reason, it is crucial that you complete assigned readings before the lecture and discussion periods.*

- Course readings will either be from the required textbook (see below) or will be posted on the course Moodle site.

2.4   Problem Sets (70% of Final Grade)

Problem sets will be assigned on Friday and due the following Friday. The answers to the problem set will be discussed on the day that it is due. For this reason, *no late assignments will be accepted.*

Problem sets are to be typed up, printed out, and submitted before the start of class on the Friday that they are due. If you cannot make it to class, you can e-mail the assignment to Seth Cable (scable@linguist.umass.edu).

Students are permitted (indeed, encouraged) to work together on the problem sets. ***However, each person must write up their own work themselves, using their own words.*** In addition, students who work together should make a note on each of their submitted solutions of who they worked with.

*2.5   Take-Home Exams **(30% of Final Grade)***

There will be two take-home exams, a mid-term and a final. **Each is worth 15% of your final grade.** These exams will go beyond the work done in the problem sets to emphasize critical thinking and writing. You will be asked to apply the knowledge gained in class to novel empirical and analytic problems.

The midterm will be distributed on **October 23**, and will be due in class on **November 6**. The final will be distributed on the last day of class, **December 11**. It must be submitted either by e-mail or in Seth Cable's mailbox (Room 411 of the Integrated Learning Center) by **December 18**.

3.   Textbook

There is one textbook required for this class. It should be available at the University bookstore:
*   • Irene Heim & Angelika Kratzer. 1998. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell.
I will also post further readings, both required and optional, on the course Moodle page.

4.   Extra Credit

Your lowest homework grade will be dropped if you participate in an experiment run by the Linguistics Department. The experiments are open to everyone. They typically involve listening or reading, and last about an hour. **Contact Seth Cable for more information.**

5.   Rough Outline of Course Content (Subject to Change)

5.1   Week 1 (9/9-9/11): The Conceptual Foundations of Formal Semantics

   • The overarching program of 'formal semantics'
   • The principal of compositionality
   • The different dimensions of meaning (assertion, presupposition, implicature)
   • Analyzing (part of) meaning via 'Truth-Conditions'

   Required Reading:
   Larson 1995: 361-368
   Partee 1995: 311-316
   Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 1-33
   Heim & Kratzer: 1-3

5.2   Week 2 (9/14-9/18): The Formal Foundations of Formal Semantics

- Basics of Set Theory
- Basics of Functions

Required Reading: Suggested Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 3-11   Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 529-540
                                                         Partee *et al.*: 3-36

5.3   Week 3 (9/21-9/25): The Formalization of "Meaning"

- Intensions and Extensions
- First steps towards a compositional semantics
- Computing extensions of complex phrases
- Deriving Truth-Conditions

Required Reading: Suggested Reading
Heim & Kratzer: 13-26   Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 99-104
Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 53-73

5.4   Week 4 (9/28-10/2): Expanding Our Formalism

- Transitive verbs
- The system of 'semantic types'
- The lambda notation for functions
- Some broader, syntactic consequences of our system

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 26-42, 43-53

5.5   Week 5 (10/5-10/9): Further Elements of English, Part 1

- Nouns and adjectives
- The semantics of adjectival modification

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 61-85

5.6   Week 6 (10/12-10/16): Further Elements of English, Part 2

- The semantics of adjectival modification
- Definite DPs
- Presuppositions in our formal theory

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 61-85

5.7   Week 7 (10/19-10/23): Quantifiers

- The basic semantics of quantificational DPs
- Formal properties of quantifiers and their effect on grammar
- Negative Polarity Items
- **Midterm Exam Distributed**

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 131-177

5.8   Week 8 (10/26-10/30): Conversational Implicature, Part 1

- Distinguishing conversational implicature from 'conventionalized meanings'
- The Gricean theory of conversational implicature

Required Reading: Suggested Reading
Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 25-28, 239-255   Gamut 1991: 195-219

5.9   Week 9 (11/2-11/6): Conversational Implicature, Part 2

- The Gricean theory of conversational implicature
- Applications: the semantics of disjunction and numerals
- **Midterm Exam Due**

Required Reading: Suggested Reading
Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 25-28, 239-255   Gamut 1991: 195-219

5.10   Week 10 (11/9-11/13): Pronouns

- The semantics of deictic pronouns
- Variable assignments
- The semantics of pronominal gender features

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 86-115

5.11   Week 11 (11/16-11/20): Movement Structures – Topicalization and Relative Clauses

- Review of the syntax of movement structures
- The rule of 'Predicate Abstraction'
- Semantics of topicalization structures
- Semantics of relative clauses

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 86-115, 239-245

5.12   Week 12-Week 13 (11/23-12/4): Quantifiers and Covert Movement

- The puzzle of quantificational DPs in non-subject position
- Major solution to the puzzle: *covert movement (QR)*

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 178-188

5.13   Week 14 (12/7-12/11): Semantics in Language Processing and Language Acquisition

- How linguists study the way that people process presuppositions and implicatures
- The time-course of presupposition and implicature processing
- How linguists study the semantics of child language
- Development of presuppositions and implicatures in children
- **Final Exam Distributed (Due December 18)**

6.   Academic Honesty Policy

Please take some time to review the University's academic honesty policy, which can be found here: http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/.

Please note especially Appendix B, which covers plagiarism. You should be especially careful to avoid plagiarism when completing the first of the two writing assignments.

7.   Important Dates

- Monday 9/21:   Last day to drop class without any record
- Friday 10/9:   No lecture; (Seth will be away)
- Monday 10/12:   No class; Holiday
- Tuesday 10/13:   CLASS (Monday schedule)
- Friday 10/16:   No lecture; (Seth will be away)
- Thursday 10/22:   Last day to drop with a 'W'
- Friday 10/23:   **Take-Home Midterm Exam Distributed**
- Friday 11/6:   **Midterm Exam Due**
- Wednesday 11/11:   No class; Holiday
- Friday 11/27:   No class; Holiday
- Friday 12/11:   Last day of class; **Take-Home Final Exam Distributed**
- Friday 12/18:   **Final Exam Due**
- Monday 12/28:   **Final Grades Submitted**