Introduction to Semantics (LING 510): Syllabus

Lectures:
Tuesday, Thursday 1 – 2:15 PM
ILC N111

Discussion Period:
Wednesday: 1:25 – 2:15 PM
ILC N111

Course Websites:
- [http://people.umass.edu/scable/LING510-FA19](http://people.umass.edu/scable/LING510-FA19)
- Moodle Page

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Office Hours: Mondays 10-12 (and by appt.)

Course TA: Shay Hucklebridge
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Office Hours: Tuesday 9-10; Thursday 12-1

1. General Overview

One of mankind’s most distinctive and consequential cognitive capacities is our 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 these expressions. Throughout the semester, students will be trained in the tools and techniques of formal 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 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 will 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 Wednesday (1:25-2:15). 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)

There will be seven problem sets assigned over the course of the semester. Problem sets will be assigned on Tuesday and due the following Tuesday. 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 Tuesday 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 Thursday October 24th, and will be due in class on Tuesday November 5th. The final will be distributed on the last lecture day, Tuesday December 10th. It must be submitted either by e-mail or in Seth Cable’s mailbox (Room 411 of the Integrated Learning Center) by Thursday December 19th.

3. Textbook

There is one textbook required for this class:

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 (9/3-9/5): 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 (9/10-9/12): The Formal Foundations of Formal Semantics

- Basics of Set Theory
- Basics of Functions

**Required Reading:**
Heim & Kratzer: 3-11

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

5.3 Week 3 (9/17-9/19): The Formalization of “Meaning”

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

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

5.4 Week 4 (9/24-9/26): Expanding Our Formalism, Part 1

- Transitive verbs
- Sentence connectives
- The system of ‘semantic types’

**Required Reading:**
Heim & Kratzer: 26-29

5.5 Week 5 (10/1-10/3): Expanding Our Formalism, Part 2

- The lambda notation for functions
- Some broader, syntactic consequences of our system

**Required Reading:**
Heim & Kratzer: 34-49

5.6 Week 6 (10/8-10/10): Nouns, Adjectives, and Adjectival Modification

- Nouns and adjectives
- The semantics of adjectival modification

**Required Reading:**
Heim & Kratzer: 61-73
5.7 Week 7 (10/17): The Semantics of DPs, Part 1: Definite DPs

- Definite DPs
- Presuppositions in our formal theory

**Required Reading:**
Heim & Kratzer: 73-85

5.8 Week 8 (10/24): The Semantics of DPs, Part 2: Quantificational DPs

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

**Required Reading:**
Heim & Kratzer: 131-135, 140-147

5.9 Week 9 (10/29-10/31): Conversational Implicature, Part 1

- Distinguishing conversational implicature from ‘conventionalized meanings’
- The Gricean theory of conversational implicature

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

5.10 Week 10 (11/5-11/7): Conversational Implicature, Part 2

- **Midterm Exam Due**
- Applications of the Gricean theory of conversational implicature
- Problems for the Gricean theory of conversational implicature

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

5.11 Week 11 (11/12-11/14): Pronouns

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

5.12 Week 12 (11/19-11/21): The Semantics of Adverbs

- Semantic puzzles concerning adverbs
- Solution to the puzzles by assuming verb phrases are predicates of *events*
5.13 Week 13 (12/3-12/5): 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

5.14 Week 14 (12/10): Final Summary and Distribution of Final Exam

- Summary of what we’ve learned this term
- Questions from students on any of the material
- Questions from students related to the final exam
- Final Exam Distributed (Due December 19)

6. Academic Honesty Policy

Please take some time to review the University’s academic honesty policy, which can be found here: https://www.umass.edu/honesty/

Please note especially Appendix B, which covers plagiarism. You should be careful to avoid plagiarism when completing your problem sets and exams, especially if you’re working with other students.

7. Important Dates

- Monday 9/16: Last day to drop class without any record
- Tuesday 10/15: NO CLASS (Monday schedule)
- Tuesday 10/22: NO CLASS (Travelling)
- Thursday 10/24: Take-Home Midterm Exam Distributed
- Tuesday 10/29: Last day to drop with a W (Undergrad) or DR (CPE and Graduate)
- Tuesday 11/5 Midterm Exam Due
- Tuesday 11/26 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)
- Thursday 11/28 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)
- Tuesday 12/10 Last lecture; Take-Home Final Exam Distributed
- Wednesday 12/11 Last discussion session
- Thursday 12/19 Final Exam Due
- Thursday 1/2 Final Grades Submitted