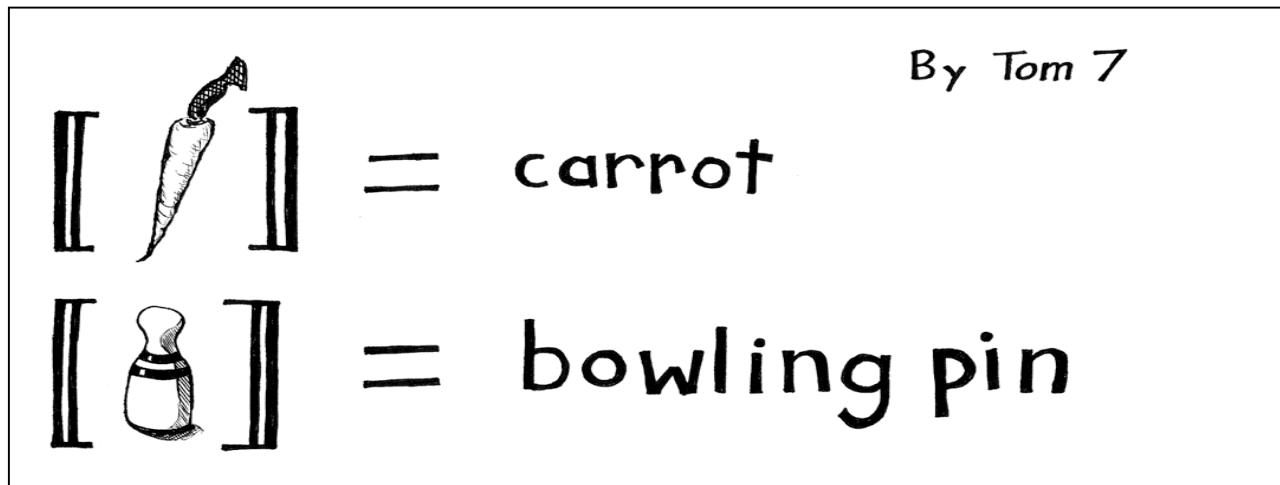


## Introduction to Semantics (LING510): Syllabus



Cartoon above by Tom Murphy (<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~tom7>)

**Lectures:**

Tuesday, Thursday 11:15-12:30  
Machmer W-22

**Discussion Period:**

Wednesday 2:30-3:35  
Bartlett 202

Course Website:

<http://people.umass.edu/scable/LING510-SP10>

Course Instructor: Seth Cable

E-mail: [scable@linguist.umass.edu](mailto:scable@linguist.umass.edu)

Office Hours: Thursday 2-3PM; and by appt.

Course TA: Aynat Rubinstein

E-mail: [aynat@linguist.umass.edu](mailto:aynat@linguist.umass.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesday 10-11AM

### 1. General Overview

- This course introduces students to the formal study of linguistic meaning, semantics.
- The focus of the course is on the cognitive systems responsible for computing the meaning of *complex expressions*.

As we will see, it is this system that allows a human being to express an unlimited number of novel, meaningful expressions.

- 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 semantic 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.

## 2. Course Requirements

### General Caveat:

This course and LING 503 are the courses 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 Intro Semantics course (LING 610).

For this reason, the overall difficulty level and workload will be found to differ markedly from the majority of your other linguistics courses, which are all at or below the 400-level.

### 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. These sessions will reinforce and build upon the content of the Tuesday and Thursday lectures. *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.*

### 2.4 Weekly Problem Sets

Each Thursday, you will receive a problem set, which will be due the following Thursday. 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.*

### 2.5 Take-Home Exams

There will be three take-home exams. The first exam will be distributed on February 23<sup>rd</sup> and due on March 4<sup>th</sup>. The second will be distributed on March 23<sup>rd</sup> and due on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. The final will be distributed on April 29<sup>th</sup> and due on May 13<sup>th</sup>.

While these exams will include some 'mechanical exercises', they will largely emphasize critical thinking and writing. You will be asked to apply the knowledge gained in class to novel empirical and analytic problems.

### 3. Textbook

There is one textbook required for this class. It should be available at the University book store:

- Irene Heim & Angelika Kratzer. 1998. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell.

In addition, I will post scanned excerpts from various other works, particularly the following:

- Gennaro Chierchia & Sally McConnell-Ginet. 2000. *Meaning and Grammar, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. MIT Press.
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## 4. Outline of Course Content

### 4.1 The Conceptual Foundations

- 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

### 4.2 The Formal Foundations

- 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

### 4.3 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

Suggested Reading

Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 99-104

#### 4.4 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

<b>FIRST TAKE-HOME EXAM</b>
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#### 4.5 Further Elements of English

- Nouns and adjectives
- The semantics of adjectival modification
- Definite DPs (and a little on presuppositions)

Required Reading:

Heim & Kratzer: 61-85

#### 4.6 Conversational Implicature

- Distinguishing conversational implicature from ‘conventionalized meanings’
- The Gricean theory of conversational implicature
- Applications: the semantics of disjunction and numerals

Required Reading:

Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 25-28, 239-255  
Korta & Perry 2006: Section 1 and Section 2.1.2

Suggested Reading

Gamut 1991: 195-219

#### 4.7 The Semantics of Binding and Movement

- The semantics of deictic pronouns
- Relative clauses, and the semantics of movement
- The semantics of bound pronouns and traces

Required Reading:

Heim & Kratzer: 86-115, 239-245

<b>SECOND TAKE-HOME EXAM</b>
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#### 4.8 The Semantics of Quantifiers

- The basic semantics of quantificational DPs
- The puzzle of quantificational DPs in non-subject position
- Two solutions to the puzzle: *covert movement* and *type shifting*
- Arguments for/against either solution

Required Reading:

Heim & Kratzer: 131-220

#### 4.9 Towards an Intensional Semantics

- Cases where our extensional semantics is not enough
- The formalization of intensions: possible worlds and functions over them
- A basic ‘intensional semantics’
- Some over-arching weaknesses of the formalism

Required Reading:

Heim & Kratzer: 299-312

<b>FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAM</b>
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#### 5. Important Dates

- Tuesday 2/16: No class (Monday schedule)
- Thursday 2/23: First Take Home Exam Distributed**
- Thursday 2/25: No class (I will be away)
- Tuesday 3/4: First Take Home Exam Due**
- Tuesday 3/16-18: No class (Spring Break)
- Tuesday 3/23: Second Take Home Exam Distributed**
- Thursday 4/2: Second Take Home Exam Due**
- Thursday 4/29: Final Take Home Exam Distributed**
- Tuesday 5/4: Last day of class
- Thursday 5/13: Final Take Home Exam Due**