Semantics and Generative Grammar (LING610): Syllabus

1. General Overview
   - This course introduces students to the concepts 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.
   - These phenomena will largely be taken from English, our primary language of study, but comparisons (and extensions) to other languages will also be made.
   - Through the development of this formal semantic system, students will gain a better understanding of how to ask and answer ‘semantic questions’, not only regarding their own language, but also ones for which they themselves are not speakers.

2. Course Requirements
   2.1 Problem Sets

   You will be assigned approximately nine problem sets. Problem sets will be assigned on Thursdays and will be due the following Thursday. Answers to the problem sets will be discussed in class on the date they are due, and so late assignments will not be accepted.
2.2 **Take-Home Exams**

There will be two take-home exams. The mid-term exam will be distributed October 25, and due November 6. The final exam will be distributed December 6, and due December 20.

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.

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3. **Textbook**

There is one textbook required for this class, which should be available at the University bookstore:


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


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4. **Outline of Course Content**

4.1 **Formal Foundations: A Basic Review of Sets and Functions**

- 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

4.2 **The Conceptual Foundations of Truth-Conditional 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’
- Intensions and Extensions
- Computing extensions of complex phrases
- Deriving truth-conditions in an extensional semantics

**Required Reading:**

Heim & Kratzer: 1-12, 13-26

**Suggested Reading**

Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 1-33, 53-73, 99-104

Larson 1995: 361-368

Partee 1995: 311-316
4.3 Expanding Our Formalism

- Transitive verbs and sentence connectives
- 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

4.4 Further Elements of English

- Semantically vacuous words
- Non-verbal predicates: nouns and adjectives
- The rule of ‘Predicate Modification’
- The semantics of adjectival modification (intersective vs. subsective)
- Definite DPs, and a little on presuppositions

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 61-85

4.5 Conversational Implicature: The Classic Gricean Theory

- The notion of ‘conversational implicature’
- The Gricean conversational maxims and their relation to conversational implicatures
- Distinguishing conversational implicature from ‘conventionalized meanings’
- Applications: the semantics of disjunction and numerals
- Scalar implicatures
- Some problems for the classic Gricean theory: processing/acquisition of scalar implicatures and embedded scalar implicatures

Required Reading:  
Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 25-28, 239-255  
Gamut 1991: 195-219  
Korta & Perry 2015: Section 1 and Section 2.1.2

Suggested Reading

4.6 The Semantics of Pronouns and Movement

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

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 86-115, 239-245
4.7 The Semantics of Quantificational Determiners

- The basic semantics of quantificational determiners and quantificational DPs
- The basics of Generalized Quantifier Theory
- Formal properties of quantifiers
- The basics of the strong/weak distinction

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 131-177

4.8 Quantifier Raising and/or Type Shifting

- The puzzle of quantificational DPs in non-subject position
- Two solutions to the puzzle: covert movement (Quantifier Raising) and type shifting
- Arguments for/against either solution
- More on the syntax of QR

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 178-188, 193-208, 209-230

4.9 Towards an Intensional Semantics

- Cases where extensional semantics is not enough
- The formalization of intensions: Possible worlds and functions over them
- A basic ‘intensional semantics’ for clausal complements
- Some major weaknesses of the formalism

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 299-312
von Fintel & Heim 2011: 1-28

5. Some Important Dates

October 9: NO CLASS (Monday Schedule)
October 25: Mid-Term Exams Distributed
November 6: Mid-Term Exams Due
November 19-23: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)
December 6: Final Exams Distributed
December 11: Last Class
December 20: Final Exams Due
January 2: Final Grades Due (by Noon)