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 107

Discussion Period:
Friday: 12:20-1:10
Hasbrouck 107

Course Websites:
- http://people.umass.edu/scable/LING510-SP15
- Moodle Page

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

Course TA: Jon Ander Mendia
E-mail: jmendiaaldam@linguist.umass.edu
Office Hours: Thursday 9:30-11:30

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: 50%
- Midterm: 10%
- Final: 10%
- Writing Portfolio (Junior Year Writing): 30%

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 Friday (12:20-1:10). These sessions will reinforce and build upon the content of the main 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.

- Course readings will either be from the required textbook (see below) or will be posted on the course Moodle site.
2.4 Problem Sets (50% 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 (20% of Final Grade)

There will be two take-home exams, a mid-term and a final. Each is worth 10% 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 March 13th, and will be due in class on March 27th. The final will be distributed on the last day of class, April 29th. It must be submitted either by e-mail or in Seth Cable’s mailbox (Room 411 of the Integrated Learning Center) by May 7th.

2.6 Writing Portfolio (30% of Final Grade)

This course satisfies the Junior Year Writing requirement, and so a substantial component of the work involves the creation of a writing portfolio. There are two main pieces to this portfolio:

- A short ‘popular science’ article on the Principle of Compositionality in human and non-human systems of communication (Assignment 1)

- A conference-style handout for a presentation of your final research project in semantic fieldwork. (Assignment 2)

More information about each of these projects is given in Section 4 below.

3. Textbook

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


I will also post further readings, both required and optional, on the course Moodle page.
4. Junior Year Writing Component

As stated above, this course will require students to complete two main writing projects. Detailed instructions for each will be given in class; this section will provide just a brief overview.

For each of these projects, you will receive a grade of either Excellent (100), Very Good (90), Good (85), Pass (80), or Fail (65). The grade will be determined by both form and content: organization, style, accuracy of information, relation to assigned readings, and whether requested revisions were made in the final draft.

4.1 Assignment 1: Popular Science Article

Each of you will select two articles from a collection of articles on the following subject: Do any non-human species have a communication system that obeys the ‘Principle of Compositionality’?

You will then write a short ‘popular science’ article – of the kind that would appear in the NY Times, Scientific American, or io9.com – summarizing the key debate and the findings of those articles. There will be three main steps to the writing of your article.

4.1.1 Step One: First Draft (Due February 13th)

Based upon instructions given in class, you will write a first draft of your article and submit it to us by February 13.

4.1.2 Step Two: Peer Review (Due February 20th)

Each of you will be paired anonymously with a classmate. You will each read your anonymous partner’s article, and then play the role of the editor by writing a short review (1 page minimum, 2 page maximum). This review will contain specific comments and suggestions concerning style and content, including a list of typos (if any). Your review must be submitted to us by February 20.

4.1.3 Step Three: Revision and Second Draft (Due March 6th)

You will each receive the review that your anonymous partner wrote for your first draft. You will then have two weeks to revise your article in light of their comments and suggestions. With your revised draft, you should also include a short summary of the changes made and how they address your partner’s comments. This work will be due to us by March 6.

Once your final draft is turned in, the following materials will be added to your writing portfolio:

(i) Your first draft.
(ii) Your review of your partner’s paper
(iii)Your partner’s review of your paper
(iv) Your final draft
(v) The short summary explaining the changes to your final draft.
4.2 Assignment 2: Conference-Style Handout on Semantic Fieldwork Project

In the second half of the course, you will be taught about ‘semantic fieldwork’, how linguists construct and then test hypotheses about the meanings of expressions in languages that they don’t speak. In this part of the class, you will be given some practical, hands-on experience in applying the methods of semantic fieldwork to a puzzling expression in the Basque language (spoken by Jon Ander Mendia). This experience will form the basis for your second writing assignment. Once again, there will be three main steps to the assignment.

4.2.1 Step One: Initial Fieldwork Study (April 10th)

To begin this project, you will divide into small groups in class (3-5 people). Working together, your task will be to (i) construct a hypothesis concerning the meaning of the Basque expression in question, then (ii) formulate the predictions of your hypothesis, and finally (iii) test those predictions with a speaker of the language (i.e., Jon Ander).

4.2.2 Step Two: Lab Report (April 16th)

Following this in-class work, you will write up the results of your initial study in a problem set, to be submitted on April 16th. This lab report will state whether the predictions of your hypothesis were confirmed or not.

4.2.3 Step Three: Revise and Retest (April 24th)

If your initial hypothesis was not confirmed during your initial study, you must revise that hypothesis in light of the new data. You must then formulate the predictions of your new hypothesis. If your initial hypothesis was supported during your initial study, you must then formulate an additional prediction that the hypothesis makes. Finally, you will test those new predictions with a speaker of the Basque language. This work will be done outside of class by April 24th.

Once this second round of semantic fieldwork is complete, you will write up the results of your study as a brief, ‘conference-style’ presentation. This presentation will not be given in class, but you will be asked to write up a ‘handout’ for the planned presentation. The handout must be turned in by the last day of class, April 29th.

Once your final draft is turned in, the following materials will be added to your writing portfolio:

(i) The problem set constituting your initial lab report.
(ii) The conference style handout presenting the results of both semantic fieldwork sessions.

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


- 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

6.2 Week 2 (1/26-1/30): The Formal Foundations of Formal Semantics

- Basics of Set Theory
- Basics of Functions

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

6.3 Week 3 (2/2-2/6): 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
Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 99-104

6.4 Week 4 (2/9-2/13): Expanding Our Formalism

- Transitive verbs
- The system of ‘semantic types’
- The lambda notation for functions
- Some broader, syntactic consequences of our system
- First Draft of Writing Assignment 1 Due

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

- Nouns and adjectives
- The semantics of adjectival modification
- Review of Writing Assignment 1 Due

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 61-85

6.6 Week 6 (2/23-2/27): Further Elements of English, Part 2

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

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 61-85

6.7 Week 7 (3/2-3/6): Conversational Implicature, Part 1

- Distinguishing conversational implicature from ‘conventionalized meanings’
- The Gricean theory of conversational implicature
- Final Draft of Writing Assignment 1 Due

Required Reading: Suggested Reading
Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 25-28, 239-255
Gamut 1991: 195-219
Korta & Perry 2006: Section 1 and Section 2.1.2

6.8 Week 8 (3/9-3/13): Conversational Implicature, Part 2

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

Required Reading: Suggested Reading
Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet: 25-28, 239-255
Gamut 1991: 195-219
Korta & Perry 2006: Section 1 and Section 2.1.2


- The semantics of deictic pronouns
- Relative clauses, and the semantics of movement structures
- Midterm Exam Due

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 86-115, 239-245
6.10 Week 10 (3/30-4/3): Semantic Fieldwork

- Fieldwork methodology in semantics
- Some initial practice in semantic fieldwork

Required Reading: Matthewson 2004

6.11 Week 11 (4/6-4/10): Semantics and Language Acquisition

- How linguists study the semantics of child language
- The truth-value judgment task.
- In-Class Fieldwork Sessions with Jon Ander

6.12 Week 12 (4/13-4/16): Quantifiers

- The basic semantics of quantificational DPs
- Formal properties of quantifiers and their effect on grammar
- Negative Polarity Items
- Lab Reports on In-Class Fieldwork Session Due

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 131-177

6.13 Week 13 (4/22-4/24): Quantifiers and Covert Movement

- The puzzle of quantificational DPs in non-subject position
- First solution to the puzzle: covert movement (QR)
- Follow-up Fieldwork Sessions with Jon Ander

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 178-188


- The puzzle of quantificational DPs in non-subject position
- Second solution to the puzzle: type shifting
- Deciding between the two solutions: Movement-Scope Generalization
- Handout for Writing Assignment 2 Due
- Final Exam Distributed (Due May 7th)

Required Reading:
Heim & Kratzer: 193-208, 209-230
7. 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/](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.

8. Important Dates

- **Monday 2/2:** Last day to drop class without any record
- **Friday 2/13:** First Draft of Writing Assignment 1 Due
- **Monday 2/16:** No class; Holiday
- **Tuesday 2/17:** CLASS (Monday schedule)
- **Friday 2/20:** Review of Writing Assignment 1 Due
- **Thursday 3/5** Last day to drop with a ‘W’
- **Friday 3/6:** Final Draft of Writing Assignment 1 Due
- **Friday 3/13:** Take-Home Midterm Exam Distributed
- **Monday 3/16 – Friday 3/20:** No class; Spring Break
- **Friday 3/27:** Midterm Exam Due
- **Friday 4/16:** Lab Report for Writing Assignment 2 Due
- **Monday 4/20:** No class; Holiday
- **Wednesday 4/29:** Last day of class.
  - Handout for Writing Assignment 2 Due
  - Take-Home Final Exam Distributed
- **Thursday 5/7:** Final Exam Due
- **Tuesday 5/12:** Final Grades Submitted