

LINGUISTICS 341 : SEMANTICS

MW 3:10–4:30 PM, Library 387

Course Syllabus Spring 2016

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PREREQUISITES

LING 323 *Introductory Syntax* (or equivalent), or permission from the instructor, is required to take this course. For students who have previously taken LING 211 *Introduction to Linguistic Analysis* (or equivalent), LING 323 and LING 241 may be taken concurrently.

TEXTBOOKS

- Allwood, Jens, Lars-Gunnar Andersson, and Östen Dahl. (1977) *Logic in Linguistics*. Cambridge. [P106.A4213 1977]
- Cann, Ronnie. (1993) *Formal Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge. [P325.C28 1993]
- Portner, Paul H. (2005) *What is Meaning? Fundamentals of Formal Semantics*. Blackwell. [P325.P635 2005]

In the *Course Outline and Readings*, these books are listed as ‘Allwood’, ‘Cann’, and ‘Portner’, respectively. All three are available for purchase in the bookstore, though only Cann is required while the other two are recommended for purchase. Limited copies of each book are also available on 2-hour reserve in the Library. Allwood gives background on those aspects of set theory and formal logic which it is useful for semanticists to know about, while Cann and Portner provide introductions to formal linguistic semantics proper. Portner offers a very elementary overview of the major concepts and research questions, and largely avoids formal notation, while Cann offers a more thorough and technical discussion. Chapters from these books will be supplemented by additional readings, available on print reserve and through the course Moodle page.

FOCUS OF THE COURSE

Semantics is the branch of linguistics which deals with the relationship between the form and meaning of *linguistic expressions* (morphemes, words, phrases, sentences, etc.). Like phonology, morphology, and syntax, semantics is ultimately concerned with *mental grammar*, the system of

abstract principles or rules which underlies our ability to use human language—in this case, those principles or rules which inform our ability to interpret expressions.

The basic project of formal semantics is to develop a theory which accounts for how the meaning of a complex linguistic expression is built up from the meanings of its component parts and the way in which those parts are combined (*compositionality*). In order to be explanatorily adequate, a theory of semantics must successfully predict native speaker intuitions about meaning relations such as *entailment*, *presupposition*, and *ambiguity*. Formal semantic theories are couched in a notationally explicit *metalanguage*, derived in part from work in syntax, mathematics (set theory), and especially formal logic. A large part of this course will involve looking at fragments of metalanguage for semantics and exploring how they can be used to say things about natural language expressions.

Many linguists treat *pragmatics* as a sub-field of semantics, while others regard semantics and pragmatics as separate but related fields. Pragmatics deals with how speakers use language to perform communicative tasks (making assertions, asking questions, issuing commands, promising, etc.). Broadly speaking, pragmatics explores how people ‘mean things’ when they use linguistic expressions, rather than what the expressions themselves ‘mean’. We will have a number of things to say about pragmatic issues in this course; however, our primary focus will be on semantics narrowly defined—that is, the study of the ‘notional content’ of expressions, irrespective of how those expressions are used to communicate particular ideas or intentions in particular contexts.

Lectures and discussion will be based on textbook chapters, supplemented with outside readings. We will also do a number of in-class exercises, both to practice the formalisms we will be learning, and to explore how they can be applied to various problems in the data. The written work for the course will consist of periodic problem sets plus a final exam.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, POLICIES, DEADLINES

Participation — Students are expected to complete all assigned readings, attend every class meeting, and participate in discussion on a regular basis. Students may also be asked to post questions or comments to the Moodle forum, lead the discussion, or present supplementary material in class. Participation will count for approximately **15%** of the course grade.

Problem Sets — The problem sets will count for approximately **60%** of the course grade. Assignments will be handed out in class and also posted on Moodle. Due dates (subject to modification) are listed below:

	<i>handed out</i>	<i>due in class</i>
PS1	27 January	10 February
PS2	10 February	24 February
PS3	24 February	9 March
PS4	9 March	30 March
PS5	30 March	13 April
PS6	13 April	27 April

Written work must be turned in on time if you wish to receive full credit and comments. Late assignments will be penalized 10% of total points for each day they are late, unless you receive an extension from me in advance. Extensions will normally only be granted in cases of non-academic difficulties, such as an illness or family emergency. Late work will not be accepted for credit if it is turned in after the assignment has been handed back with comments.

Please *type* your assignments. I prefer to receive your assignment in hard copy form; however, I will also accept assignments electronically if they are emailed to me before the beginning of the class in which they are due. In the latter case, assignments should be submitted as PDF documents.

Note that problem sets are *not* assigned with the expectation that you will be able to complete them without help. It is perfectly acceptable to consult with me *before* an assignment is due if you are have trouble with any of the questions. As in all my classes, you are encouraged—indeed, expected—to work on assignments together, so long as you write up your answers separately and in your own words. So find yourself a study partner (or two, or three) as soon as you can!

Final Exam — The final exam for this course will be comprehensive, and will count for roughly **25%** of the course grade. It will be an untimed take-home exam, and you will be given approximately a week to work on it. The exam will be handed out towards the end of reading week and due towards the end of finals week (exact dates TBD). The format for the exam will be similar to that of the problem sets, except of course that you will be required to work on the exam on your own.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

The following outline lists the topics I intend to cover, and the approximate order in which we will cover them, together with numbered reading assignments for each unit (readings are required unless otherwise indicated). This outline is subject to change, and I do not anticipate that we will necessarily get through all the topics listed here. As is usual in my classes, the topics and readings are not assigned to particular weeks. Rather than trying to stick to a predetermined schedule, we will simply set the pace as we go along and get through as much of the material as we can. I will let you know in class which readings you should be working on for the coming week(s).

Supplementary readings (not from Cann, Portner, or Allwood) are available on print reserve and e-reserve. Call numbers are listed for items on print reserve, while items marked “Moodle” can be accessed on e-reserve from the Moodle page.

A. *Dimensions of Meaning*

What is meaning? Meaning and communication. Meaning relations: entailment, presupposition, implicature. Compositionality. Truth-conditional approaches to meaning. ‘Speaker meaning’ versus ‘semantic meaning’. Sense and denotation: extension and intension.

1. **Portner**, chapter 1 ‘The fundamental question’, pp. 1–27.
2. **Cann**, chapter 1 ‘Introduction’, pp. 1–26.
3. **Grice**, ‘Meaning’, *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 66 (1957), pp. 377–388. [Moodle]
4. **Ziff**, ‘On H.P. Grice’s account of meaning’, *Analysis*, vol. 28 (1967), pp. 1–8. [Moodle]
5. **Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet**, chapter 1 ‘The empirical domain of semantics’, *Meaning and Grammar: An Introduction to Semantics*, pp. 1–52. [Moodle, P325.C384 2000]
6. **Keenan**, ‘Two kinds of presupposition in natural language’, *Studies in Linguistic Semantics*, ed. Fillmore and Langendoen, pp. 45–52. [Moodle, P325.S85]
7. **Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet**, chapter 2 ‘Denotation, truth, and meaning’ (sections 1–3.1 and section 4), *Meaning and Grammar: An Introduction to Semantics*, pp. 55–73, 99–110.

(You may read the rest of section 3, pp. 73–98, or you may skim it, or skip it altogether; the formalisms presented in this section will be properly introduced in later readings.) [Moodle, P325.C384 2000]

B. An Elementary Compositional Semantics for Natural Language

Foundations for a semantic metalanguage: Basic set theory, propositional logic and predicate logic. Developing an (extensional) model-theoretic semantics: Arguments and predicate saturation. Phrase structure rules and their translations. Basic interpretive rules for predicates and logical connectives. Semantic types and function application. Modification. Lambda notation.

8. **Allwood**, chapter 2 ‘Set theory’, pp. 3–14; chapter 3 ‘Inference and logical analysis of sentences’, pp. 15–25.
9. **Portner**, chapter 2 ‘Putting a meaning together from pieces’, pp. 28–39; chapter 3 ‘More about predicates’ (through section 3.5), pp. 40–54. (Section 3.5, pp. 49–54, is recommended, but we won’t be discussing this material in class.)
10. **Allwood**, chapter 4 ‘Propositional logic’, pp. 26–57; chapter 5 ‘Predicate logic’ (through section 5.1), pp. 58–61.
11. **Cann**, chapter 2 ‘Predicates and arguments’, pp. 27–53.
12. **Cann**, chapter 3 ‘Negation and coordination’, pp. 54–81.
13. **Portner**, chapter 3 ‘More about predicates’ (continued), pp. 54–60.
14. **Portner**, chapter 4 ‘Modifiers’, pp. 61–77.
15. **Cann**, chapter 4 ‘Type theory’, pp. 82–111.
16. **Cann**, chapter 5 ‘The lambda operator’, pp. 112–149.

C. Noun Phrase Semantics, Scope, and Quantification

Reference. Definiteness and specificity. Representing quantification in predicate logic. Quantification in English and other natural languages. C-command, binding, and scope. Quantification and syntactic structure: QR and Logical Form. Stage- versus individual-level predication and the semantics of bare plurals. The semantics of pronouns: variables and coreference. Donkey anaphora and e-type pronouns.

17. **Portner**, chapter 5 ‘Complexities of referring expressions’, pp. 78–111.
18. **Lyons, J.**, chapter 7 ‘Reference, sense, and denotation’, *Semantics* volume 1, pp. 174–229. (Focus on the first five sections, pp. 174–223.) [Moodle, P325.L96 v.1]
19. **Lyons, C.**, chapter 1 ‘Basic observations’, *Definiteness*, pp. 1–46. (The final two sections, pp. 41–46, are optional.) [Moodle, P299.D43 L97 1999]
20. **Allwood**, chapter 5 ‘Predicate logic’ (continued), pp. 61–95.
21. **Portner**, chapter 6 ‘Quantifiers’, pp. 112–131.
22. **Cann**, chapter 6 ‘Quantification’, pp. 150–196.

23. **May**, chapter 1 ‘Logical form as a level of linguistic representation’, *Logical Form: Its Structure and Derivation*, pp. 1–30. [Moodle, P158.M38 1985]
24. **Carlson**, ‘A unified analysis of the English bare plural’, *Formal Semantics: The Essential Readings*, ed. Portner and Partee, pp. 35–74. [Moodle, P325.F676 2002]
25. **Evans**, ‘Pronouns’, *Semantics: A Reader*, ed. Davis and Gillon, pp. 435–455. [Moodle, P325.S3798 2004]
26. **Heim**, ‘File change semantics and the familiarity theory of definiteness’, *Formal Semantics: The Essential Readings*, ed. Portner and Partee, pp. 223–248. [Moodle, P325.F676 2002]

D. Meaning and Context: Places, Times, Intensions, and Possible Worlds

Deixis. Representing tense and aspect. Modal logic and quantification over possible worlds. Scopal interactions involving modal operators. Modality in natural language. Sense and reference/denotation (revisited). Intensional semantics and referential opacity.

27. **Levinson**, chapter 2 ‘Deixis’, *Pragmatics*, pp. 54–96. [Moodle, P99.4.P72 L48 1983]
28. **Portner**, chapter 7 ‘Extensional vs. intensional contexts’, pp. 132–136.
29. **Portner**, chapter 8 ‘Tense, aspect, and modality’ (through section 8.2), pp. 137–153.
30. **Cann**, chapter 8 ‘Time, tense and aspect’, pp. 233–262.
31. **Portner**, chapter 8 ‘Tense, aspect, and modality’ (continued), pp. 154–160.
32. **Allwood**, chapter 7 ‘Modal logic’, pp. 108–124.
33. **Portner**, chapter 9 ‘Propositional attitudes’, pp. 161–175.
34. **Cann**, chapter 9 ‘Possible worlds’, pp. 263–281.
35. **Cann**, chapter 10 ‘Intensional semantics’, pp. 282–322.

E. Meaning and Discourse: Semantics Meets Pragmatics

Entailment versus implicature (revisited). More on conversational implicatures. Scalar implicature and quantification. The semantics and pragmatics of presupposition. The projection problem.

36. **Portner**, chapter 10 ‘The pragmatics of what’s given’, pp. 176–198; chapter 11 ‘The pragmatics of inference’, pp. 199–205. (Chapter 11 is optional.)
37. **Grice**, ‘Logic and conversation’, *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3: *Speech Acts*, ed. Cole and Morgan, pp. 41–58. [Moodle, P1.S9 v.3]
38. **Levinson**, chapter 3 ‘Conversational implicature’, *Pragmatics*, pp. 97–166. [Moodle, P99.4.P72 L48 1983]
39. **Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet**, chapter 6 ‘Indexicality, discourse, and presupposition’ (sections 3 and 4 only), *Meaning and Grammar: An Introduction to Semantics*, pp. 349–389. [Moodle, P325.C384 2000]