

August 26, 2008

SYLLABUS

Linguistics 437: Semantics and Pragmatics

1 The Course

This course examines how natural languages encode meaning and how speakers use them to convey it. Our core aim will be to develop a theory of semantic and pragmatic competence that addresses these deep, complicated, and potentially slippery questions with the rigor and precision contemporary linguistics aspires to. In doing so, we will encounter some of the formal tools that provide a framework for answering these questions in a precise way, but the emphasis will be on the empirical phenomena the theory is designed to model and on the proper place of such a theory in the architecture of the grammar.

2 Contact Information

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Office hours: Tuesday 4:30–5:30 and Thursday 2:30–3:30
or by appointment
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Email is your best bet for reaching me, and will generally also be fastest. If you must call, though, my office number is 355-5171. (Expect me to be distracted and disoriented.)

3 Requirements

The principal requirements for the course are:

- Take-home assignments, of which there will be at most six. Most of these will require you to devise solutions to empir-

ical problems and present them in the form of a brief well-reasoned argument.

- Two take-home exams (a midterm and a final). They will essentially be long assignments.
- Contributing frequently and thoughtfully to class discussions. *This is not optional.*

You may—in fact probably should—discuss your work with other students. On the assignments, *you can collaborate on a single write-up* in groups of up to three, but each collaborator must be able to defend the proposed solution. Of course, other people's ideas must be properly cited. If you find any of this confusing, ask.

The course will revolve primarily around in-class discussion, and most of the progress we make will be made that way, *so coming to class is genuinely crucial*. If you miss classes, you are likely to miss information that will be necessary to understand the assignments and subsequent discussion. If you anticipate having to miss class frequently, do not take this course.

If it will be difficult for you to meet these requirements due to a disability, please notify me during the first two weeks of the course so we can make appropriate arrangements.

4 Grades

Each assignment and each exam will receive a grade. Your final grade will be the mean of the following:

- your grades on the assignments
- your grades on the exams, weighted double (that is, each will count as two assignments)
- a grade for what you contributed to class discussions (in other words, this will count as one assignment)

5 Textbook

There is a textbook for this course, though it will serve only as a supplemental resource:

Heim, Irene and Angelika Kratzer. 1997. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

This will be useful for providing additional background and getting a firmer grasp of the theoretical machinery. It is, of course, *not a substitute for coming to class*—much of what we discuss will have no direct analogue in the textbook, and where there is overlap, the conclusions will often have been arrived at differently.

6 Schedule

This schedule is basically a lie. Or rather, it is basically a lie that this is a schedule; what it really is is a general and tentative overview of some of the topics we'll address in roughly the order we're likely to address them. (The precise course we will take will to a large extent depend on in-class discussion.)

- Aug. 26: Preliminaries
Logistics
Some Big Questions and Some Small Puzzles
- Aug. 28: The Meaning Machine
Truth Conditions
- Sept. 2: A Bit of Lexical Semantics
Models and Natural Language Ontology
- Sept. 4: Compositionality and Functions
- Sept. 9: Predicate Abstraction: Meet the Lambda
- Sept. 11: Types and Type-Driven Interpretation
- Sept. 16: Multiple Arguments and Schönfinkeling
- Sept. 18: Definite Descriptions
Dirty Formal Tricks
Presupposition
- Sept. 23: Modifiers and Vagueness and Ambiguity
- Sept. 25: Steps Toward Temporal Semantics
- Sept. 30: Tense
- Oct. 2: Aktionsart
- Oct. 7: Quantificational Adverbs
- Oct. 9: Quantification and Quantificational Determiners
- Oct. 14: Kinds
- Oct. 16: Generalized Quantifier Theory

- Oct. 21: Pronouns and Variables
Midterm handed out¹
- Oct. 23: Generalized Quantifiers and Scope
- Oct. 28: Cross-Linguistic Semantics
Generalized Quantifiers and Conservativity
- Oct. 30: Generalized Quantifiers and Polarity
- Nov. 4: Two Flavors of Adjective and Two Ways to Predicate
- Nov. 6: Events
- Nov. 11: Intensionality and Possible Worlds
- Nov. 13: Modality
- Nov. 18: Discourse Structure and Information States
- Nov. 20: *No class (Thanksgiving)*
- Nov. 25: Gricean Maxims
- Dec. 2: Neo-Gricean Pragmatics
- Dec. 4: The Moral(s) of the Story
Conclusions and Open Questions
Final exam handed out (due during finals week)

¹Again, this is a very rough estimate—it may actually be earlier or later.