

Introduction to Semantics

V61.0004-01

Fall 2003

Instructors: Paul Elbourne and Eytan Zweig

1 Housekeeping

Timing: T/R 11:00am – 12:15pm.
Room: Silver 803
Credits: 4 points
Prerequisites: None

2 Subject Matter

This course is an introduction to the study of linguistic meaning. We will be addressing the question of how it is possible for human beings to understand sentences they have never heard before, and what might be the characteristics of the mental faculties that allow us to do this. We will attempt to give precise analyses of the meanings of various words by using concepts from set theory, logic and syntactic theory, the basics of which will be taught in the first few weeks of class. Attention will also be paid to foundational issues such as the question of what kind of thing the meaning of a sentence might be.

3 Aim

To give participants a solid grounding in the above issues, for its own sake or as background for more advanced study in semantics, syntax or the philosophy of language. Some issues discussed, such as presupposition and ambiguity, might be of interest to those whose interests are primarily literary; but it should be emphasized that the course has a mathematical flavor to it.

4 Requirements

1. A large number of reading assignments.
2. 10–12 problem sets to be given out in class and returned within a week.
3. One midterm and one final.

5 Provisional syllabus

Two textbooks will be used: *Linguistics. An Introduction to Linguistic Theory* by Fromkin et al. (Blackwell 2000); and *Logic in Linguistics* by Allwood et al. (Cambridge University Press). In the following syllabus, reading assignments to be done in connection with class meetings are indicated by ‘F’ for Fromkin et al. and ‘A’ for Allwood et al.

SEPTEMBER	Tue 2	Introduction (F Chapter 1)
	Thur 4	Set theory (A Chapter 2)
	Tue 9	Propositional Logic (A Chapter 4)
	Thur 11	Propositional Logic (A Chapter 4, §§3.3, 3.4)
	Tue 16	Predicate calculus (A §§5.1–5.6)
	Thur 18	Predicate calculus (A §§5.1–5.6)
	Tue 23	Predicate calculus
	Thur 25	Syntactic categories and thematic roles (F §§3.1, 3.2.1, 3.2.2)
	Tue 30	Phrase structure (F §§3.3.1, 3.3.2)
OCTOBER	Thur 2	Phrase structure (F §3.3.3)
	Tue 7	Compositionality and entailment (F §§7.1, 7.2, 7.3.1, 7.3.2)
	Thur 9	Determiners and nouns (F §7.3.3)
	Tue 14	MIDTERM
	Thur 16	Adjectives (F §7.3.4)
	Tue 21	Assertion and presupposition (F §7.4)
	Thur 23	Cross-linguistic comparisons (F §7.5)
	Tue 28	Pronouns and binding (F pp.246–252, §8.1)
	Thur 30	Negative Polarity Items (F pp.198–224, §8.2)
NOVEMBER	Tue 4	Relative scope (F §8.3)
	Thur 6	Relative scope (F §8.4)
	Tue 11	Count/mass nouns and telic/atelic verbs (F §9.1)
	Thur 13	Determiners and adverbs of quantification (F §9.2)
	Tue 18	Focus
	Thur 20	<i>Or</i> and Gricean reasoning
	Tue 25	<i>Or, both</i> and scalar implicatures
	Thur 27	NO CLASS — THANKSGIVING RECESS
DECEMBER	Tue 2	<i>And</i> , plurality and collective predication
	Thur 4	<i>the</i>
	Tue 9	The nature of meaning