September 5, 2024

SYLLABUS

LING 327: Introduction to Semantics

1 Course information

This course is an introductory course in linguistic semantics. We will avoid issues in pragmatics, which are the focus of another course, LING 345.

2 Prerequisites

LING 201 or equivalent. We will attempt not to assume much background and provide ample refreshers. Nevertheless, everyone should have an idea of what semantics is, as well as a foundation in syntax and a familiarity with linguistic reasoning and linguistic theory.

3 Contact information

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Location:	via Zoom or by prior arrangement, in person at Totem Field Studios 226
TA:	Starr Sandoval
Email:	starr.sandoval@ubc.ca
Office hours:	Wednesdays 10:00–11:00
Location:	via Zoom

You can click on the words 'via Zoom' above to join the meetings or navigate to them on Canvas.

4 Objectives

At the end of the course, you should...

- Be (more) proficient at thinking about conventionalized linguistic meaning

in a rigorous way, including stating explicit and falsifiable hypotheses about what linguistic expressions mean and how their meanings are assembled compositionally.

- Have a sense of empirical problems in semantics and of the tools used in addressing them.
- Have an understanding of the relation between semantics and other components of linguistic theory, especially syntax.

5 Course structure

We will use a mix of informal lecture and collective theory-construction via in-class discussion, which means your participation is crucial.

The work will involve take-home assignments and exams that ask you to wrestle with a series of linguistic problems and present clear arguments in favor of a proposed solution. See 'Activities' below for more.

All work will be done in small groups of three or four students.

There will be required tutorials on *alternating weeks*. These can be used both for review and for group discussions that can't easily happen in class.

6 Activities

The principal requirements for the course are:

- Ordinary take-home assignments, of which there will be two. These will require you to devise solutions to empirical problems and present them in the form of a brief well-reasoned prose argument.
- Two take-home exams, a midterm and a final, which will just be longer assignments.
- Two sets of low-stakes technical practice exercises. You will receive 100 on them just for turning them in.
- Some form of participation in lectures, tutorials, office hours, or on Canvas discussion boards. It's hard to talk in a big group, so we will be accommodating about the form this participation can take.

All the written work will be done in groups of three.

Outside of class You will collaborate on your take-home work (including the exams) with two or three other people and turn in a joint write-up. Each collaborator must be able to defend the proposed solution. You may discuss your work with other students not in your group, but other people's ideas must be explicitly acknowledged in the write-up.

In class You are responsible for learning what happens in class, and there is no substitute for coming regularly. 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.

7 Assessment

Your final grade will be determined on the basis of your written work and your contributions in class and in tutorials.

Practice exercises:	8%
Assignments:	34%
Take-home midterm exam:	25%
Take-home final exam:	25%
Participation:	8%

Participation includes coming to tutorials and participating in them and in class discussion. For some of us, it's a challenge to talk in class for a variety of reasons. An alternative is contributing something to a discussion forum on Canvas or coming to either the professor or TA's office hours.

This will map onto a letter grade according to UBC's standard scale, which is as follows for undergrads:

90–100	A+	76–79	B+	64–67	C+	50–54	D
85–89	A	72–75	B	60–63	C	00–49	F
80–84	A–	68–71	B–	55–59	C–		

For MA students, grades below C are failing; for PhD students, grades below B are.[1]

This is all subject to UBC's broader policies about grading, which apparently include the possibility of 'scaling' your grade to diminish grade inflation.

8 Reading

We will not use any one textbook. You will have access to slides to review and occasional handouts. We will occasionally point you the primary literature. You are not required to buy a book.

If you feel uncomfortable without a textbook to fall back on, one sometimes used in this course is this one:

> Kroeger, Paul R. 2018. *Analyzing meaning: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics*. Textbooks in Language Sciences 5. Berlin: Language Science Press.

[1] Consult the UBC Calendar for details.

It is available free online. It covers different material, however, and often from a different perspective. For support in formal logic, you could consult this, which is also available free:

> Magnus, P.D. 2005. *Forall x: An introduction to formal logic*.

9 Course policies and additional notes

Communication and work format You'll get handouts, assignments, and exams via Canvas. You should turn assignments in that way too, in the form of a PDF file. Please *don't* submit files in Word or any other format. Please turn assignments in on the due date *before the start of class*.

Disability Please notify us during the first two weeks of the course to make arrangements to accommodate a disability. If you haven't already done so, you should contact the UBC Centre for Accessibility for guidance.

Academic integrity Don't plagiarize. The structure of the course may make this a little trickier than it might seem, so don't hesitate to ask questions about any areas of uncertainty. If someone that isn't a coauthor of your write-up gives you an idea that you use or build on, explicitly acknowledge this in the text. *Don't look for solutions to the problems on your assignments online.* In most cases, this isn't possible, but in all cases, it's a form of cheating. For more on the university's academic integrity policies, look at the university's Academic Honesty and Standards statement.

Assistance from AI Don't use any AI assistance in any of your work for this class. It's a form of academic dishonesty. If you find it helpful, you can use writing assistance such as 'Grammarly'. This policy may need to be updated over the course of the term.

Social media and copyright issues The short version: don't share course materials (handouts, assignments, recordings, etc.) with anyone outside of class and don't record anything that happens in class without prior approval. Here is the standard syllabus text:

> All materials of this course are the intellectual property of the course instructor or licensed to be used in this course by the copyright owner. Redistribution of these materials by any means without permission of the copyright holder(s) constitutes a breach of copyright and may lead to academic discipline. Posting pre-recorded lectures, slides, or recordings of Zoom sessions on other websites or social media is not permitted.

10 University policies

Here is the official UBC text on resources available to support anyone struggling with difficulties that may undermine academic performance:

> UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.
>
> Details of the policies and how to access support are available on the UBC Senate website.

11 Acknowledgment

Here is the land acknowledgment we've adopted as a department:

> We acknowledge that the University of British Columbia is located on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh, and Sə́l̓ílwətaɬ Nations (Vancouver campuses) and the Syilx peoples (Okanagan campus). We at UBC Linguistics consider this land acknowledgment to be an opportunity to show our commitment towards reconciliation and the recognition of Indigenous peoples and languages. Please visit native-land.ca or maps.fpcc.ca to learn more about these places, peoples and languages.

There is a corresponding fact that is especially relevant to linguistics, one about the intellectual ground on which the enterprise rests. Endangered languages—notably those in our immediate area but also around the world—are crucial to discovering what sorts of phenomena occur in natural language more broadly and how languages vary from each other. Without the collaboration of their speakers, we would know less about the language faculty, and therefore about the human mind, and therefore about ourselves.

12 Approximate road map

Here is an *approximate* road map of the topics we'll discuss in roughly the order we'll discuss them. The precise timing will depend on class discussion.

Updates to this schedule may include modifications to due dates of the two assignments or the midterm. We realize that this may complicate your planning—sorry about that—and ask your indulgence. It's necessary to give us the flexibility to make changes in light of class discussion. We'll strive to mitigate the impact of this by communicating clearly about due dates. Please let us know in advance if you face a particular difficulty associated a particular date and we'll do what we can to help.

Sept. 5	Preliminaries & introduction Some big questions and some small puzzles
Sept. 10–Sept. 12	A meaning machine Truth conditions Entailments Implicatures Compositionality The model & ontological foundations The architecture of the semantics Functions as meanings Meet the lambda
Sept. 17–Sept. 19	Nouns, verbs, and adjectives Semantic composition Type-driven interpretation English as a metalanguage Word meanings and phrasal meanings *Practice exercises due around Sept. 17*
Sept. 24	*Assignment 1 due about here* *Class canceled (due to travel; sorry!)*
Sept. 26–Oct. 3	The challenge of transitivity Multiple arguments and Schönfinkeling The compositional challenge of functional morphemes Higher types Negation Passives *Practice exercises due about here*
Oct. 3–Oct. 8	Definite descriptions Presupposition Context sensitivity Presuppositions and lexical semantics *Assignment 2 due about here*
Oct. 10–Oct. 15	Ambiguity Modifiers Vagueness and structural ambiguity
Oct. 17–Oct. 22	Steps toward temporal semantics Tense

	Natural language metaphysics Grammatical aspect
Oct. 24–Oct. 29	Aktionsarten/lexical aspect Lexical semantics of verbs *Midterm due about here*
Oct. 29–Nov. 5	Cross-linguistic semantics Conservativity Polarity and polarity-sensitivity
Nov. 7–Nov. 14	Determiners and quantification
Nov. 19–Nov. 21	Some foundational puzzles Intensionality Modals, modality, and conditionals
Nov. 26–Nov. 28	A language of pure meaning Propositional logic Logical connectives Connectives in natural language Predicate logic with quantification
Dec. 3–Dec. 5	Scope ambiguity Consolidating and wrapping up *Final exam distributed*
Dec. 13	*Final exam due*