

SYLLABUS

LING 527: Topics in Semantics

1 Course information

This course is a second-semester graduate course in semantics, picking up from LING 425/525. It serves as a stepping stone to graduate seminars.

2 Prerequisites

LING 425/525 or the equivalent. We will assume a semantic framework in Heim & Kratzer tradition (but *not* necessarily the specific contents of the textbook that consolidated it). You'll need to be familiar with lambda abstraction, semantic types, and a type-driven theory of the syntax-semantics interface. We'll also assume familiarity with predicate logic.

3 Contact information

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Canvas: We'll use Canvas for communication and logistical support.

4 Objectives

The aim of this course is to equip you to do original research in semantics, building on other courses. That will entail engaging with a few areas of research that you may not already be familiar with and perhaps acquiring some new skills. It also entails attention to less tangible aspects of semantic research such as:

- how to participate effectively in a seminar

- how to contribute meaningfully to others' research
- how to identify and develop research topics
- how to present others' research
- how to direct your criticism of others' work in a productive direction
- how to direct others' criticism of your work in an only minimally self-sabotaging direction

Needless to say, these overlap massively.

5 Course structure

The course is a bridge between instruction-based courses like LING 425/525 and research seminars. To this end, it will combine a bit of informal instruction in particular areas with seminar-style discussion of research papers, with the emphasis shifting toward the latter as the semester proceeds.

If we proceed according to the current plan, the course will include as proper subparts mini-seminars on these topics:

- formal pragmatics
- intensionality, modality, and clausal complementation (negotiable)

6 Activities

The requirements for this course are:

- Participating *vigorously* in the discussion. This is not syllabus window-dressing. It is really a requirement.
- Writing a squib (very short paper) or more fully-developed paper.
- Presenting your work on the squib/paper.
- Presenting one of the readings.
- Doing one or two group 'quasi-assignments', which will not be written up. The aim of these is to get you to think in a hands-on way about how to approach a new empirical area. They'll involve collectively working on a few linguistic puzzles and crafting solutions. With your collaborators, you'll present the solution in class. To do this effectively, you will need a handout or slides. How much of this we do will depend on your collective background and interests.

A word about squibs They don't need to provide a full analysis of a phenomenon, and they do not need to reflect an entirely novel empirical discovery. Reasonable things to do in a squib are:

- make some empirical observations that you haven't seen made before and explain their significance
- attempt to extend an existing analysis of some phenomenon to a new range of data
- point out a disadvantage or difficulty in an existing analysis or discuss some larger issues it presents
- develop your own analysis from scratch of a phenomenon, without looking at the literature, then compare what you invented to what others have proposed

It is *not* sufficient, though, to simply read and summarize a handful of papers. If you're writing a full paper rather than a squib, you'll need an analysis as well.

7 Assessment

Your final grade will be determined on the basis of your written work and your contributions in class (in class presentations and more generally).

Participation (including quasi-assignments):	45%
Paper presentation:	15%
Squib/paper presentation:	15%
Squib/paper write-up:	25%

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

90–100	A+
85–89	A
80–84	A–
76–79	B+
72–75	B
68–71	B–
64–67	C+
60–63	C
00–59	F (failing)

For doctoral students, grades below B– are failing.¹

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

¹Consult the [UBC Calendar](#) for details.

8 Reading

In general, we will read the primary research literature. More on that is in the schedule section below.

We might briefly engage with the following textbook for additional logic support—and it is worth being familiar with as a resource more generally:

Gamut, L. T. F. 1990. *Logic, Language, and Meaning*. University of Chicago Press.

This comes in two volumes. It is somewhere between a textbook and a reference work. It's particularly useful as a kind of handbook to have by one's side when reading semantics. It is quite sophisticated formally, which can make it pretty challenging in places, but it rewards the effort of engagement.

For purely formal background, you might also be interested in this:

Partee, Barbara, Alice ter Meulen, and Robert Wall. 1990. *Mathematical Methods in Linguistics*. Kluwer, Dordrecht.

9 Notes and course policies

Communication and work format You'll receive materials via Canvas, and that's also where you'll turn in your work. Make all work a PDF file. Please *don't* submit files in Word or any other format.

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

Academic integrity Don't plagiarize. The structure of the course may make this a little trickier than it might seem. If someone that isn't actually a coauthor gives you an idea that you use or build on, explicitly acknowledge this in the text. Explicit discussion of citation practices is occasionally helpful, so please don't hesitate to ask questions. For more on the university's academic integrity policies, look at the university's Academic Honesty and Standards statement.

Social media and copyright issues Don't share course materials (handouts, assignments, recordings, etc.) with anyone outside of class. Don't record anything that happens in class without my prior approval.

10 University policies

Here is the standard UBC syllabus text about university policies and support:

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 Tentative schedule

The following schedule is extremely tentative, for two reasons. First, we will try to find a better time for the course, and may try to do once-a-week meetings. Second—and more important—the path we take will depend on the direction of our discussion and our collective needs and interests. customization.

We're also likely to go at a far slower pace than this ambitious schedule suggests.

- Sept. 7:** syllabus & logistics
chat about topics
- Sept. 12** a bit of logic (extras and/or review)
indirect translation and getting on the same page formally
generalized conjunction and indirect interpretation
for next time: quasi-assignment on plurals
for next time: Heim (1982) ch. 1
- Sept. 19** *No class due to sudden Dead Queen Day holiday*
- Sept. 26** discuss plurals quasi-assignment
Heim on (in)definites and the big picture circa 1981 (ch. 1)
for next time: quasi-assignment on kinds
for next time: Heim ch. 2
- Oct. 3** discuss kinds quasi-assignment
the familiarity theory of definiteness (Heim ch. 2)
for next time: Heim ch. 3
(optionally, glance at [Kamp 1981](#) or [Kadmon 2001](#) ch. 2)
- Oct. 10** *No class due to Thanksgiving*
- Around here?** *Possible make-up class to compensate for Dead Queen Day*
File Change Semantics (Heim ch. 3)
Discourse Representation Theory (DRT)
for next time: [Stalnaker \(1979\)](#)
for next time: [Farkas & Bruce \(2010\)](#)

- Oct. 17** Stalnakerian theory of discourse
the Farkas & Bruce Table model of discourse
for next time: [AnderBois et al. \(2011\)](#)
- Oct. 24** Expressive meaning and the Table: [AnderBois et al. \(2011\)](#)
for next time: [Portner \(2009\)](#) section 3.1
(potential alternative/supplement: [von Stechow & Heim 2005](#))
for next time: [Kratzer \(1981\)](#)
- Oct. 31** Modals: The usual story (via [Portner 2009](#))
Classic on the semantics of modals: [Kratzer \(1981\)](#)
for next time: a selection from [Moulton \(2009\)](#)
for next time: [Djävrv \(to appear\)](#)
- Nov. 7** Intensionality and clausal embedding ([Moulton 2009](#))
Content and belief predicates: [Djävrv \(to appear\)](#)
for next time: [Rawlins \(2013\)](#)
- Nov. 14** About ‘About “About”’ ([Rawlins 2013](#))
for next time: [Bochnak & Hanink \(2021\)](#)
for next time: [Bledin & Srinivas \(2019\)](#)
- Nov. 21** Clausal embedding in Washo ([Bochnak & Hanink 2021](#))
Comparatives and manner in *as if* ([Bledin & Srinivas 2019](#))
for next time: [Bledin & Srinivas \(2020\)](#)
- Nov. 28** Exclamative *as if* ([Bledin & Srinivas 2020](#))
Start squib/paper presentations (if necessary for time)
- Dec. 5** Squib/paper presentations
- Dec. 19** *Squib/paper due*

Alternatives A few possible additions/replacements/alternatives by topic:

- nominalizations ([Portner 1992](#), maybe [Chierchia 1984, 1998](#) or something more recent)
- de re/de dicto ([Keshet 2008](#)) or de re/de dicto/de se ([Chierchia 1989](#))
- intensionality and gradability ([Klecha 2014](#) and/or [Lassiter 2011](#))
- [Elliott \(2017\)](#) or [Elliott \(2020\)](#) on clausal embedding

Feel free to suggest others!

References

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