

LING 53, Semantics 1

Course Description & Syllabus

Summer 2012

1 Organizational matters

- Instructor: Adrian Brasoveanu

Web access

- There will be an eCommons site for this course. To access it, go to:
<https://login.ucsc.edu/idp/Authn/UserPassword>.
- The syllabus, problem sets, and handouts will be posted under Resources. **CHECK REGULARLY, e.g., before/after each class, every day an assignment will/might be posted etc.**

Important note

If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please get an Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and submit it to me in person outside of class (e.g., office hours) as soon as possible. Contact DRC at 459-2089 (voice), 459-4806 (TTY), or <http://drc.ucsc.edu> for more information on the requirements and/or process. If needed, it is highly recommended that you get a note taker for this class—most of the material in the second part of the course will be exclusively introduced during lectures on the blackboard (there will be no handouts / slides).

2 General Description

The course is an introduction to the study of linguistic meaning. When we investigate how language is used in communication, we recognize two interacting systems:

- a. the semantic system, which is part of our knowledge of the language we speak
- b. the pragmatic principles that guide our interpretation of language in actual situations of use

This course is concerned with both the semantic and the pragmatic aspects of language understanding. Our goal is to investigate aspects of the semantic structure of English within the framework of an explicit theory of linguistic meaning. We will, however, make reference to other languages as we go along, though knowledge of another language is not required.

We begin with the pragmatic side, by distinguishing among different layers of meaning that an utterance conveys. We then move on to explore the basic meaning of verbs and the way the meaning of sentences is constructed from the meaning of their parts. We end with issues concerning reference and discourse. In talking about the meaning of sentences, we use the logical language of predicate calculus to help us arrive at a compositional account of the truth conditions of English sentences.

No previous work in linguistics is presupposed.

3 Course structure (subject to change)

The following is a general outline of the progress of the course. Details are subject to change.

1: Introduction

What is this course about?

2: Relations between sentences

What do we commit to when we say something?

- pragmatic implicature, entailment, presupposition
- tests for distinguishing between implicatures, entailments, presuppositions

3: Logical and compositional semantics

- what is the meaning of *and*, *or* and negation?
- propositional logic and sentential connectives
- how can we *compositionally* interpret simple English sentences?
- what is the meaning of *every*? (very briefly if at all)
- predicate logic and quantification in natural language (very briefly if at all)

4: Brief intro to computational semantics

- discussion of computational implementation and use of fundamental notions from lexical semantics, syntax and compositional semantics (very briefly)