

LING 53, Semantics 1
Course Description & Syllabus
Summer 2015

1 Organizational matters

- Class: MonWed 09:00AM–12:30PM, PhysSciences 136
- Instructor: Adrian Brasoveanu

Office hours

- For quick things, please talk to me immediately after class; I will also have office hours every Wed 12:40PM–1:45PM and by email appointment, Stevenson 259
abrsvn@ucsc.edu

Web access

- There will be an eCommons site for this course. To access it, go to:
<http://its.ucsc.edu/ecommons/>.
- 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.**

Weekly schedule

- Assignments will generally be posted at the end of every week of classes (see eCommons > Resources).
- The due date for each assignment is specified at the very beginning of that assignment; please print them, solve them, and bring them to class on their due date.
- Please write legibly (typing your assignments would be best).
- Depending on how things will go, I might either grade your assignments directly, or we will work through the assignment in class on the day it is due, then you will correct your own assignment at that time, and then I will collect them and grade them. The exact procedure will be determined in due course and might vary from assignment to assignment.
- Grades for an assignment will be posted 7-10 days after the due date of the assignment (see eCommons > Gradebook).

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 Requirements

The learning (and grading) tools are: lectures and problem sets.

- Class attendance is a necessary part of this course, especially since the class has no textbook. Reading the posted notes is crucial but does not substitute for class attendance. Speaking up in class is strongly encouraged. If you cannot make a class, it is your responsibility to find out from a classmate what happened in the class you missed. If handouts are available, they will be posted on the eCommons site the night before class or the day of class. Reading them is important but does not substitute for class attendance.
- Written work for the course consists of problem sets, posted on eCommons and due on the date specified in each assignment. Homeworks will NOT be handed out in class. Homework should NOT be submitted by email—it must be submitted in person on the day it is due. Again: please write legibly.

- It is an excellent idea to form study groups and discuss the problem sets in your meetings. However, **YOU SHOULD WRITE UP THE ASSIGNMENTS ON YOUR OWN**. If you do form study groups, please list the people you discussed the problem set with at the beginning of the assignment. Turning in identical homeworks counts as plagiarism for all students involved.
- Homework policy: no late homework is accepted unless by prior arrangement (or because of a health problem properly documented to the satisfaction of the instructor). A student who misses more than 1 assignment automatically fails the course.
- There will be no midterm or final for this class.

Grade calculation

- course attendance and participation: 10%
- 3 problem sets: 30% each (unless otherwise specified)

Grading procedures:

- Problems sets will be graded on a 0–100 point scale.
- Unless otherwise specified, the percentage of the final grade that a given problem set represents is 30%.

4 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)