

LING 53, Semantics 1
Course Description & Syllabus
Summer 2021

1 Organizational matters

- Class: MonWed 09:00AM–12:30PM, on Zoom and Canvas
- Instructor: Adrian Brasoveanu
- TA: Stephanie Rich
- LSS Tutor: Sabrina Madden

Office hours

- For quick things, please talk to the instructor and/or TA immediately before/after class
- Adrian's office hours: by email appointment
abrsvn@ucsc.edu
- Stephanie's office hours: by email appointment
skrich@ucsc.edu
- Sabrina's small group tutoring sessions: Tue 7-8:15pm, Thur 10-11:15am, Sun 1-2:15pm
smadden1@ucsc.edu

Web access

- There is a Canvas site for this course. To access it, go to:
<https://canvas.ucsc.edu>.
- This is a synchronous class conducted on Zoom. The link for the recurring Zoom meeting is this one: <https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/95998714541?pwd=0VVUOHZDNT1aRUVjRjVNYnVyVlZYdz09>
- The syllabus, handouts and readings are posted under Files on Canvas.
- Videos for many topics will also be available on Canvas.
- All the assignments, which will add up to 90% of your final grade, will become available on Mon, July 26 before class. Their due dates are explicitly listed on the Canvas calendar for the course, and on the assignments themselves.

There will be an attendance quiz every class (every quiz is worth 1% of your final grade). The attendance quiz will become available the morning of the class, and will be available until the end of the class.

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.

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.

- Lecture attendance is a necessary part of this course, especially since the class has no textbook; attendance will be taken by means of a Canvas quiz every lecture. Reading the posted notes and watching the videos is crucial, but does not substitute for lecture attendance. Speaking up in class is strongly encouraged.
- Written work for the course consists of Canvas assignments, due on the date specified in each assignment. Homework assignments need to be submitted on Canvas. Some assignments will require you to write derivations (formulas) by hand, take pictures of the derivations, convert them to pdf (usually), and submit them on Canvas. PLEASE WRITE LEGIBLY AND CLEANLY. If we cannot read your assignment, you won't get any points for it.

- It is an excellent idea to form study groups and discuss the problem sets in your meetings. However, **YOU SHOULD COMPLETE THE ASSIGNMENTS ON YOUR OWN**. If you do form study groups, please list the people you discussed the problem set with in the pdfs submitted on Canvas. Turning in identical homework assignments counts as plagiarism for all students involved.
- Homework policy: no late homework is accepted unless this was allowed by prior arrangement, e.g., because of an unforeseeable emergency of some sort. A student who misses more than 1 assignment automatically fails the course.
- There will be no midterm for this class. You can think of the final homework assignment as the final for this class.

Grade calculation

- lecture attendance and participation: 10%
- 3 problem sets: 30% each

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)