

INTRODUCTION TO SEMANTICS

LING 163/ANTH 113

Syllabus: Fall 2018

Semantics is the study of the way in which the meaning of the sentences of human language is composed from the meanings of words and phrases. That may seem straightforward; we will quickly discover that it is not. The discipline of semantics makes use of concepts grounded in logic and mathematics to formalize a theory of how meaning is made. Our class will largely consist of acquiring a set of analytical tools (set theory, relations, functions, functional application, statement logic, predicate logic, type theory and lambda abstraction) and learning to apply those tools to natural language. While we will focus on English as our language of study for convenience, the majority of insights gained here will be relevant to human languages quite generally. In addition, we will encourage crosslinguistic comparison and dabble in the analysis of some simple semantic questions in a range of other languages, as well as examine a bit of work at the syntax/semantic interface.

Meeting Time/Place:

T/TH 1:15-2:30 Jeffords 127

Instructor:

Dr. Emily Manetta

514 Williams Hall

Emily.Manetta@uvm.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday 11:30-12:30 or by appointment

Required Textbook:

Heim, Irene and Angelika Kratzer. 1998. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell: Malden, MA.

Other reading as assigned.

How will I be assessed?

10 homework assignments (50%)

1 in-class midterm (15%)

1 take-home final (15%)

Attendance/participation (20%)

- The homework assignments will be assigned a percentage
- The exams will be assigned a percentage
- Attendance will be taken at every in-person class meeting

Homework:

Doing well on the weekly homework will be key to doing well in this class. The homework will be a set of problems and/or puzzles. Sometimes this will look a lot like a problem set from a math class. Sometimes it will look more like a set of language puzzles. Sometimes it will be mixed. In all cases, you will be asked to explain how you arrived at your

solution/answer/response when this is not obvious. These explanations should be in clear, flowing prose free of typographical error. Bullet points are never sufficient.

YOU ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO WORK IN A GROUP ON HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS, BUT YOUR WRITE-UP OF THE ASSIGNMENT MUST BE YOURS AND YOURS ALONE.

Exams:

Exams will look a lot like longer, more complex, and more challenging versions of HW assignments. All the same rules apply as above.

TOPICS AND READINGS:

Week 1: Introduction to truth conditional semantics and the Fregean program

Reading – Heim and Kratzer CH 1, sections 1.1-1.2 and CH 2, section 2.1; Portner CH 1; Frege 1892

Week 2: Toolbox: Set theory, Propositional logic

Reading – Heim and Kratzer CH 1 (the rest); Gamut CH 1-2 excerpts

Week 3: Extensional Semantics and Lambda notion

Reading – Heim and Kratzer CH 2

Week 4: Type theory and argument structure

Reading – Heim and Kratzer CH 3; Partee 2007 (excerpt)

Week 5: Semantics of the NP: modification and definiteness

Reading – Heim and Kratzer CH 4; Portner CH 4-5 (optional); Larson 1998

Week 6: Relative clauses and variables

Reading – Heim and Kratzer CH 5

Week 7: Quantifiers Part I

Reading – Heim and Kratzer CH 6; Portner CH 6 (optional)

Week 8: Midterm Review/Midterm

Week 9: Quantifiers Part II

Reading – Heim and Kratzer CH 7

Week 10: Bound variables and ellipsis

Reading – Heim and Kratzer CH 8; Takahashi and Fox 2005

THANKSGIVING

Week 11: Intensional semantics preview

Reading – Heim and Kratzer CH 12

Week 12: Take-home Final Review

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE:

HW 1 due Tuesday Sept 4

HW 2 due Tuesday Sept 11

HW 3 due Tuesday Sept 18

HW 4 due Tuesday Sept 25

HW 5 due Tuesday Oct 2

HW 6 due Tuesday Oct 9

MIDTERM: Thursday Oct 19

HW 7 due Tuesday Oct 30

HW 8 due Tuesday November 6

HW 9 due Tuesday November 13

THANKSGIVING RECESS

HW 10 due Tuesday November 27

FINAL: In class portion Tuesday, Dec 4; take home portion due Tuesday December 11

NOTE: Late homework can receive no greater than half credit. No exceptions.

Communication Policy:

I will contact you via your UVM email. Please be sure you have that email forwarded to an address you check regularly.

I will respond to your email within 24 hours during the week (usually much sooner!). If I don't, remind me (nicely!) and I will feel incredibly guilty and get back to you asap.

You will need to be able to access Blackboard in order to get readings and homeworks. Make sure this is easy for you.

Course Policies

Plagiarism is defined as any time that you present another's work as your own, and it will not be tolerated in this course. Be sure to give credit or cite sources whenever necessary (though this should rarely be necessary in this course). If you have any questions about how to avoid plagiarism, please ask me, or consult UVM's Code of Academic Integrity.

A note on outside research for HWs – it could be very tempting to do outside research as you work through our HW assignments (and final exam). I ask you to do your very best to refrain from this. If you do succumb, please give credit where credit is due and cite the site, text, or reference from which you learned. This is both the honest/upright thing to do and allows me to see what type of presentation of information really helped you out (maybe I'll want to include it in course resources for everyone!). Thank you.

Late work: Late homework can receive no greater than half credit. There are no exceptions.

Accommodations in the course can be provided with documentation of a learning disability or other disability (including a chronic health problem) through the ACCESS office. Please discuss any special requirements with the instructor.

Letter Grade Policy and Explanation:

A/A- – Demonstrating total mastery of the material and a level of effort well beyond what was explicitly required. Such work would likely include significant outside data/analysis, perfect writing/organization, exceptional style, and original, careful analytic thinking, in addition to complete accuracy. Exceeds all expectations.

B+/B/B- – Strong understanding of the material and complete response in all assignments. Few to no flaws in writing, compositional style, and competent and consistent analysis of all data presented. Moderate to high accuracy in computation. Meets all expectations.

C+/C – Decent, but not total understanding of the material, or perhaps incomplete response to some of the more complex questions asked in assignments. Occasional or perhaps more systematic flaws in writing, style, and/or background knowledge developed in the course so far. Frequent (though not constant) flaws in computation. Does not meet all expectations.

C- – Flawed comprehension of the material, distinct lack of effort, and/or incomplete responses to assignments. Characterized by significant flaws in writing and use of data and background knowledge. Lack of accuracy of computation. Meets few expectations.

D/F – Work is of barely passing or not passing quality, significantly lacking in basic understanding, and fails to meet most expectations.

References:

Frege, Gottlob. 1892. 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung', *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, pp.22-50. English translation: 'On Sense and Reference', in P. Geach & M. Black (eds.), 1980: *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Gamut, L.T.F. 1991. *Introduction to Logic*. (Vol 1, Logic, Language, and Meaning). University of Chicago Press.

Heim, Irene and Angelika Kratzer. 1998. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell: Malden, MA.

Larson, Richard K. 1998. Events and modification in nominals. Strolovitch, Devon & Aaron Lawson (eds.), *Proceedings from Semantics and Linguistic Theory VIII*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 145–168.

Partee, Barbara. 2007. Type Theory and Natural Language: Do We Need Two Basic Types? 100th meeting of the Seminar: Mathematical Methods Applied to Linguistics. March 31, 2007, Moscow State University.

Portner, Paul. 2005. *What is Meaning: fundamentals of formal semantics*. Blackwell: Oxford, UK.

Takahashi, Shoichi, and Danny Fox. 2005. MaxElide and the re-binding problem. In *Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) 15*, eds. Effi Georgala and Jonathan Howell, 223–240. Ithaca: CLC Publications.