

CAS LX 331 / GRS LX 631: Semantics & Pragmatics

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Office Hours: Mondays 3:30-5 and Thursdays 1-2:30, or by appointment

Course Description & Learning Objectives

People use sentences to convey information about themselves and about the world in which we live. This course provides an introduction to the study of how meaning is encoded and expressed in natural language. The study of linguistic meaning comprises two disciplines: *semantics*, the study of the literal meaning carried by words and sentences, and *pragmatics*, the study of how speakers use words and sentences to convey meaning. We will examine some of the basic concepts, findings, and theoretical approaches that underlie research in semantics and pragmatics. Along the way, we will also acquaint ourselves with some of the formal tools that are employed in the study of meaning. Throughout, our focus will be on an empirical understanding of meaning in natural language. In particular, we will investigate various aspects of the semantic structure of English while constructing an explicit theory of linguistic meaning.

Students who complete this course will: (i) acquire familiarity with some of the fundamental relationships that hold between the meanings of words and sentences; (ii) be able to distinguish between the literal/conventional aspects of a sentence's meaning, and those aspects of meaning that depend upon speakers and contexts; (iii) develop some mastery of the formal tools that linguists use to represent and reason about linguistic meaning; (iv) explore several of the core topics that constitute the empirical domain of modern semantic and pragmatic theory; and (v) develop the ability to identify and evaluate the predictions made by a formally explicit theory of meaning, and to assess the relative merits of competing analyses of a particular phenomenon.

Prerequisite

The prerequisite for this course is CAS LX 250 Introduction to Linguistics.

Literature

There is no required textbook for this course. All readings will be made available to you via Blackboard.

Course Requirements & Policies

Reading: All readings must be completed by the beginning of class.

Exams. There will be two in-class midterm exams, as well as a cumulative final exam on **May 8th**, 12:30pm–2:30pm.

Problem sets. You will complete nine (9) problem sets during the semester. Some of the problems will be technical exercises designed to develop familiarity with our formal tools, and will not require prose write-ups. Others will be more substantial problems in semantic analysis and argumentation, and will require clear and well-reasoned exposition. The problem sets will both test your understanding of previously covered material and also serve to introduce new topics that will be discussed in subsequent classes. In some cases, you will not yet have the tools to fully solve a particular problem; your goal here will be to develop a novel proposal for how to solve the problem.

Your solutions should be presented in coherent prose — groups of complete sentences that lay out your thinking clearly, explicitly, and in an organized fashion. Logical symbols may be hand-written, though these are also available in word processing programs such as Microsoft Word.

Remember to include your name, the date, and the assignment number on each submission. Solutions will be due at the beginning of class. We will often discuss some portion of the problem set on the day that it is due. For this reason, late submissions will not be accepted unless prior arrangements have been made.

Reading Responses. Students enrolled in LX 631 will engage more deeply with three of the readings on the syllabus, indicated with an asterisk in the schedule. For each of these readings, you will submit a concise, targeted summary: what are the central issues that the paper addresses, what are the core proposals, and what arguments are advanced in support of those proposals? You should also feel free to discuss other points that strike you as interesting or important, to raise any objections to the claims made in the paper, or to pose any questions that arose while reading it. You should aim to submit 2 pages of single-spaced prose.

Collaboration. Linguistics is a collaborative discipline, and you are encouraged to form study groups to discuss the problem sets. However, each student must write up his/her solutions independently, without reference to the written work of any other student. Any external sources that you consult must be cited in your solution. Also, give due credit to your collaborators by listing their names at the top of your submission.

All of the following constitute unacceptable forms of collaboration: (i) having one or more group members produce a “group draft”, which other group members then customize; (ii) individual group members writing up their solutions separately

while conferring in real time (whether in person or remotely); and (iii) using another student's completed solutions as a guide to producing your own.

Academic Conduct. You are expected to abide by Boston University's Academic Conduct Code, which is accessible at <https://www.bu.edu/cas/current-students/undergraduate/academic-conduct-code-2/>. Graduate students are additionally expected to abide by the GRS Academic Conduct Code, <https://www.bu.edu/cas/files/2017/02/GRS-Academic-Conduct-Code-Final.pdf>. Plagiarism in any form (including from online sources) and other academic misconduct will not be tolerated. If you are unsure of any aspect of these policies, please ask!

Attendance. Regular attendance is required to pass the class. If you are unable to attend class because of religious observance, you should submit email notification to Prof. Coppock at least a week in advance. Please look over the syllabus. If you anticipate a conflict, please bring this to her attention via email ASAP. If a religious conflict prevents you from submitting an assignment on the due date, you are invited to submit the relevant assignment in advance. In case of illness or other serious issues that may prevent your attending a class, please contact Prof. Coppock by email in advance (or as promptly after the class as possible, depending on circumstances). In case of extended illness or other extraordinary long-term circumstance, contact Prof. Coppock ASAP to make appropriate arrangements.

Late Policy. Late assignments will not be accepted without prior permission. The lowest homework grade will be dropped.

Final Course Grade: Your overall course grade will be determined as follows:

For LX 331 students		For LX 631 students	
15%	Midterm Exam #1	12.5%	Midterm Exam #1
15%	Midterm Exam #2	12.5%	Midterm Exam #2
20%	Final Exam	20%	Final Exam
45%	Problem Sets (best 8 of 9)	40%	Problem Sets (best 8 of 9)
5%	Attendance/Participation	15%	Reading Responses

Schedule (subject to change)

Date	Class Topic	Reading	Assignments
R 1/18	Overview		
T 1/23	Implication Relations <i>Entailment vs. implicature</i>	C&MG (17-27)	PS1 out
R 1/25	<i>... vs. presupposition</i>	C&MG (28-33)	
T 1/30	Propositional Logic <i>Boolean connectives</i>	Kearns §2.1-2.2.3**	PS1 due; PS2 out
R 2/1	<i>Conditionals</i>	Kearns §3.2.4-2.2.5**	
T 2/6	Predicate Logic <i>Predicates and Arguments</i>	Kearns §2.3**	PS2 due; PS3 out
R 2/8	<i>Variables and Quantifiers</i>	Kearns §2.4**	
T 2/13	<i>Models and Satisfaction</i>	Bach Ch. 1	PS3 due
R 2/15	In-Class Exam #1		
T 2/20	Generalized Quantifiers	de Swart Ch. 8	PS4 out
R 2/22	Negative Polarity Items	Ladusaw*	
T 2/27	Mass vs. Count	Murphy Ch. 8	PS4 due
R 3/1	Aspect	Vendler	LX631 RR1 due
T 3/6	Spring break		
R 3/8	Spring break		
T 3/13	Events & Thematic Roles	Kearns Ch. 8	PS5 out
R 3/15	Alternations	Fillmore 1970	
T 3/20	Presupposition	Horn, 299-309	PS5 due; PS6 out
R 3/22	Projection Problem	Karttunen*	
T 3/27	Gricean Implicature	Grice	PS6 due; PS7 out
R 3/29	Neo-Gricean Implicature	Horn, 309-317	LX631 RR2 due
T 4/3	Review		PS7 due
R 4/5	In-Class Exam #2		
T 4/10	Deixis	Fillmore 1997 sel.	PS8 out
R 4/12	Tense	Reichenbach Ch. 4	
T 4/17	Usage Conditions	Kaplan	PS8 due; PS9 out
R 4/19	Conventional implicature	Potts*	
T 4/24	Illocutionary acts	Searle 1969 Ch. 3	PS9 due
R 4/26	Indirect Speech acts	Searle 1975	LX631 RR3 due
T 1/5	Course wrap-up		
T 8/5	Exam 12:30pm–2:30pm		

*Indicates a reading response article (still required reading for everybody)

***Language, Proof and Logic* video lectures available for this topic; recommended.

***Language, Proof and Logic* video lectures**

On Boolean Connectives: Valid and Sound Arguments (11:41), Negation (18:19), Conjunction (18:37), Disjunction (16:03)

On Conditionals: Conditionals (15:19), The Many Uses of Implication (11:17), Bi-conditionals (10:18)

On Predicate Logic: Atomic Sentences (20:10), Introduction to the Quantifiers (6:43), Variables, Wffs and Sentences (24:02), Quantifier Semantics (9:01)

On Quantification: Introduction to the Quantifiers (6:43), Variables, Wffs and Sentences (24:02), Quantifier Semantics (9:01)

References

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