

**CAS LX 433 / GRS LX 733 Intermediate Pragmatics:  
Meaning in Context**

---

Instructor: Elizabeth Coppock  
Contact: ecoppock@bu.edu  
Office: 621 Commonwealth Ave., Room 110  
Office Hours: Mondays 3:30-5 and Thursdays 1-2:30, or by appointment

---

## Course Description & Learning Objectives

The study of linguistic meaning comprises two disciplines: semantics, the study of the conventional meanings carried by words and sentences, and pragmatics, the study of how speakers use words and sentences to convey meaning in context. This course focuses on pragmatics, and is centered around two main goals:

- The first is to begin to map out some of the ways in which the semantic content of an utterance may depend on features of the context in which it is uttered, though the study of presupposition, anaphora, topic and focus, discourse particles, deixis, expressives, and words like *Goodbye*.
- The second goal will be to understand aspects of meaning that depend on reasoning about speaker intentions. We will start with Gricean pragmatics and some subsequent refinements of it, addressing how meaning arises through pragmatic reasoning against the background of conversational norms. We will then consider departures from the Gricean ideal in which speakers are fully cooperative, and explore lying, misleading, bullshitting, and ‘hustle’.

At several points, we will address potential legal, political, and literary applications of pragmatic theory such as perjury, fact-checking, and the use of language for oppression.

Students who complete this course will: (i) achieve an understanding of the different ways in which context contributes to linguistic interpretation, and how these contributions can be precisely represented and investigated; (ii) explore the specific interplay between context and meaning in a broad variety of domains, including deixis/anaphora, implicature, presupposition, and speech act theory; and (iii) have an opportunity to engage with the foundational pragmatics literature, and to evaluate the proposals and argumentation contained within it.

## Prerequisite

The prerequisite for this course is CAS LX 331 / GRS LX 631 Semantics & Pragmatics: Introduction to the Study of Linguistic Meaning (formerly CAS LX 502). Our readings and class discussions will presuppose a familiarity with the material covered in that class.

## Literature

There is no textbook for this course. Rather, we will focus on foundational articles from the pragmatics literature. (See the final page of this syllabus for a full list of readings.) Individual reading assignments will be distributed to students as PDFs via Blackboard.

## Course Requirements & Policies

**Reading:** All readings must be completed by the beginning of class. This is extremely important, because classroom discussions will be central to your learning experience in this course.

**Attendance & Participation:** Regular attendance is required for a passing grade in this course, and participation in class discussions is expected. Together, attendance and participation will account for 10% of your final grade. Students enrolled in LX 433 are expected to exhibit a particularly high degree of initiative, curiosity, and critical thinking during 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. 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.

**Presentations:** Each participant in the class will present and lead a discussion on two of the readings. Each presentation will constitute 10% of your final grade (total 20%). You should come prepared with a handout or a slide presentation that summarizes the important points and can be used as the basis for a discussion.

**Reading Responses:** Throughout the semester, you will submit four reading responses. These reading responses should begin with a concise summary of the

main points of the reading in question, and may either (i) critically reflect on some aspect of it, or (ii) identify some relevant example from the news, a fact-checking website, other media (e.g. film, television, or a book), your own personal experience, or your imagination, and analyze it in connection with the ideas and concepts in the reading. In the latter case, the example should be relevant to the reading, and the analysis should display a solid grasp of the ideas presented there. Students enrolled in LX 433 should aim to submit 1 to 2 single-spaced pages of concise, targeted prose in 12pt font. Students enrolled in LX 733 will be expected to demonstrate a more substantial engagement with the readings, and should aim to submit 2 to 3 pages. Each response will constitute 10% of your final grade, for a total of 40%. At least two reading responses must be submitted prior to spring break.

**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!

**Late Policy:** It is your responsibility to bring any potential scheduling conflicts to my attention promptly, so that alternative arrangements can be made. In the absence of any such prior arrangements, late work will not be accepted.

**Final Paper:** You will also write and present a final paper on any topic in pragmatics. Depending on your interests, this might involve the description and analysis of some pragmatic phenomenon (perhaps in a language other than English), or an extended discussion of some paper(s) from the pragmatics literature that we have not already read. A one-page topic proposal will be due on **Thursday, April 12**. During our final two class meetings, each participant in the class will present their paper to the rest of the class. The paper itself will be due on **May 9th**. For students enrolled in LX 433, the paper should be between 7-10 pages in length; for those enrolled in LX 733, it should be between 10-13 pages in length. The paper will constitute 30% of your final grade.

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

---

---

40%	Reading Responses
20%	Class presentations (10% each)
30%	Final paper
10%	Attendance/Participation

---

---

## Schedule (subject to change)

Date	Class Topic	Reading
R 1/18	Overview	
T 1/23	Sense and reference	Frege (1892 [reprinted 1948])
R 1/25	Denoting & referring	Russell (1905), Strawson (1950)
T 1/30	Projection problem	Karttunen (1973)
R 2/1	Admittance	Karttunen (1974)
T 2/6	DRT	Geurts & Beaver (2011)
R 2/8	Questions	Cross & Roelofsen (2016)
T 2/13	Focus	Rooth (2016)
R 2/15	Topic and prosody	Büring (2003)
T 2/20	Exclusive particles	Beaver & Clark (2008), selections
R 2/22	Response particles	Farkas & Bruce (2010)
T 2/27	Usage conditions	Kaplan (1999)
R 3/1	Expressives	Potts (2007)
T 3/6	<b>Spring break</b>	
R 3/8	<b>Spring break</b>	
T 3/13	At-issueness	Tonhauser et al. (2013)
R 3/15	Speech acts	Searle (1969)
T 3/20	Indirect speech acts	Searle (1975)
R 3/22	Gricean implicature	Grice (1975)
T 3/27	Neo-Gricean implicature	Horn (1984)
R 3/29	Embedded implicatures	Chierchia et al. (2008)
T 4/3	Ignorance implicatures	Cremers et al. (submitted)
R 4/5	Lying vs. misleading	Saul (2012)
T 4/10	Crimes of language	Solan & Tiersma (2014)
R 4/12	Bullshit	Frankfurt (1986), <b>1-page proposal due</b>
T 4/17	Insincerity	Stokke (2016), selections
R 4/19	Hustle	Beaver & Stanley (2017), selections
T 4/24	Fact-checking	Lim (2017)
R 4/26	Student presentations	
T 1/5	Student presentations	

**Final papers due on May 9th.**

## References

- Beaver, David & Jason Stanley. 2017. Hustle. Manuscript.
- Beaver, David I. & Brady Z. Clark. 2008. *Sense and sensitivity: How focus determines meaning*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Büring, Daniel. 2003. On d-trees, beans, and b-accent. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 26. 511–545.
- Chierchia, Gennaro, Danny Fox & Benjamin Spector. 2008. The grammatical view of scalar implicatures and the relationship between semantics and pragmatics. In Claudia Maienborn, Klaus von Stechow & Paul Portner (eds.), *Semantics: An international handbook of natural language meaning*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Cremers, Alexandre, Elizabeth Coppock, Jakub Dotlacil & Floris Roelofsen. submitted. Modified numerals: Two routes to ignorance. Manuscript available on Semantics Archive.
- Cross, Charles & Floris Roelofsen. 2016. Questions. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University spring 2016 edn.
- Farkas, Donka & Kim Bruce. 2010. On reacting to assertions and polar questions. *Journal of Semantics* 27. 81–118.
- Frankfurt, Harry G. 1986. On bullshit. *Raritan Quarterly Review* 6(2).
- Frege, Gottlob. 1892 [reprinted 1948]. Sense and reference. *The Philosophical Review* 57(3). 209–230.
- Geurts, Bart & David Beaver. 2011. Discourse representation theory. In Edward Zalta, Uri Nodelman & Colin Allen (eds.), *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, CSLI, Stanford.
- Grice, Paul. 1975. Logic and conversation. In *Studies in the ways of words*, chap. 2, 22–40. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Horn, Laurence. 1984. Toward a new taxonomy for pragmatic inference: Q-based and R-based implicature. In Deborah Schiffrin (ed.), *Meaning, form, and use in context: Linguistic applications*, 11–42. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Kaplan, David. 1999. The meaning of *ouch* and *oops*. Lecture presented at the University of California at Berkeley.
- Karttunen, Lauri. 1973. Presuppositions of compound sentences. *Linguistic Inquiry* 4(2). 169–193.
- Karttunen, Lauri. 1974. Presuppositions and linguistic context. *Theoretical Linguistics* 1. 181–194.
- Lim, Chloe. 2017. Checking how fact-checkers check. Manuscript, Stanford University.
- Potts, Christopher. 2007. Into the conventional-implicature dimension. *Philosophy*

- Compass* 2. 665–679.
- Rooth, Mats. 2016. Focus. In *The oxford handbook of information structure*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1905. On denoting. *Mind* 14. 479–93.
- Saul, Jennifer Mather. 2012. *Lying, misleading, and what is said: An exploration in philosophy of language and in ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Searle, John. 1969. *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, John R. 1975. Indirect speech acts. In Peter Cole & Jerry L. Morgan (eds.), *Speech acts*, vol. 3 Syntax and Semantics, 59–82. New York: Academic Press.
- Solan, Lawrence M. & Meter M. Tiersma. 2014. Crimes of language. In *Speaking of crime: The language of criminal justice*, 179–243. University of Chicago Press.
- Stokke, Andreas. 2016. Insincerity: Language and attitudes. Manuscript.
- Strawson, P. F. 1950. On referring. *Mind* 59(235). 320–344.
- Tonhauser, Judith, David Beaver, Craige Roberts & Mandy Simons. 2013. Toward a taxonomy of projective content. *Language* 89(1). 66–109.