

# Semantics I Syllabus

050.317/617, Fall 2009, JHU

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Course times: Monday & Wednesday 1:30–2:45  
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Email is the best way to reach me.

## 1 General description

This course is an introduction to the study of meaning in natural language. We address both the conceptual and empirical issues that a semantic theory must grapple with, as well as some of the formal machinery that has been developed to deal with such problems. After discussing foundational questions, we turn to formal semantics and pragmatics, as well as their interfaces with syntax and the lexicon. Specific topics covered include conversational implicature, presupposition, type-driven composition, quantification and scope, lexical aspect, argument structure, and the nature of lexical representations of meaning. The course makes use of two textbooks, Heim and Kratzer 1998 for the linguistic component, and Gamut 1990 for the logic component. This year I have made the second textbook optional, but I recommend that all graduate students get a copy.

While this class is not a logic class, we will use and discuss many mathematical and formal tools (especially propositional logic, predicate logic, and a typed lambda calculus); it is important that you be prepared for this to happen.

The class covers three main topics: pragmatics, compositional semantics, and lexical semantics.

- Pragmatics is the study of communication in context. We will focus on the different types of meaning that utterances convey, and how they arise from the linguistic properties of the utterances.
- Compositional semantics is the study of how sentence meanings are computed from the pieces of a sentence.
- Lexical semantics is the study of the meanings of lexical items, and the principles that govern such meanings.

While we will read and discuss some classic papers in the field, we won't have enough time to be thorough in this respect. If you are interested in doing so, some good places to start are Portner and Partee 2002 and Ludlow 1997.

## 2 Course requirements

- Prerequisites: this course requires some basic knowledge of linguistic theory. If you have mathematical abilities, this can usually substitute. 050.317 requires one of: Cognition, Language and Mind, World of Language, or Formal Methods: Language. As with any upper division course, there is a significant time and energy commitment.

- Participation in lecture is crucial to understanding the material. Doing the reading is also crucial. You will not understand the material if you do not critically engage with readings and lecture.
- The class involves weekly homework assignments. Collaboration is highly encouraged, but **you must write up your assignments yourself**. Please write who you work with on your assignments. Certain problems will be either graduate-only, or extra credit for undergraduates. Right now, the syllabus specifies 7 assignments. This may decrease, and will not increase.
- The midterm exam is take-home.
- The final requirement differs for 050.317 (undergrad) and 050.617 (grad) students. Undergrad students will have a final exam at the scheduled time for the class. Grad students instead must write a final squib.
- (Grads) There will be a final squib of 8-15 pages, where you investigate and analyze some semantic phenomena in some natural language. Please start looking for topics early; feel free to come to me or the TA for guidance. The choice of topic is very open, but it must be within the bounds of formal semantics/pragmatics, and make use of tools and theories discussed in class.
- **Please type your work**. Any notation we use in this class will be reproducible in L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X, Word, or its free alternatives.
- The grades will be calculated as follows: 20% exams/squibs, 15% participation, and 65% assignments.

### 3 Schedule

The chart on p. 3 gives a schedule projecting to the end of the course. The “Reading” column shows the date the reading is primarily discussed; readings will be assigned in class prior to this. You must pay attention in class to get the precise readings; those given on the syllabus are only approximate. Precise homework due dates may also change. Readings in parenthesis are optional background readings, and more background readings are posted on the course website.

Day	Topic	Reading (discussed)	Assignment
Wed Sept 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Introduction, truth & truth conditions. Set theory & functions.	H&K ch. 1	#1 out
Mon Sept 7 <sup>th</sup>	No class (memorial day)		
Wed Sept 9 <sup>th</sup>	Varieties of meaning: entailment, implicature, presupposition.		#1 due, #2 out
Mon Sept 14 <sup>th</sup>	Compositionality, type theory, lambda notation	H&K ch. 1-3	#2 due, #3 out
Wed Sept 16 <sup>th</sup>			
Mon Sept 21 <sup>st</sup>	Syntax review, logic (KR out of town)		
Wed Sept 23 <sup>rd</sup>			
Mon Sept 28 <sup>th</sup>	Type-driven interpretation and the syntax/semantics interface	H&K ch. 3	#3 due
Wed Sept 30 <sup>th</sup>	Argument structure, linking, proto-roles	H&K ch. 3, Dowty 1991 (long)	
Mon Oct 5 <sup>th</sup>		(Levin and Rappaport Hovav 2005 ch. 3)	#4 out
Wed Oct 7 <sup>th</sup>	Function words, modification	H&K ch. 4	
Mon Oct 12 <sup>th</sup>	(In)definite descriptions		#4 due
Wed Oct 14 <sup>th</sup>	Implicature	Grice 1975, (Gamut ch. 6),	Midterm out
Mon Oct 19 <sup>th</sup>	Scalar implicatures	(Matsumoto 1995; Sauerland 2004)	
Wed Oct 21 <sup>st</sup>	Scalar implicatures, presupposition		Midterm due
Mon Oct 26 <sup>th</sup>	Presupposition projection	Karttunen 1973	
Wed Oct 28 <sup>th</sup>	Relative clauses, variables	H&K ch. 5	#5 out
Mon Nov 2 <sup>nd</sup>			
Wed Nov 4 <sup>th</sup>	Quantification	H&K 6, (Barwise and Cooper 1981)	#5 due, #6 out
Mon Nov 9 <sup>th</sup>		H&K 7	#6 due
Wed Nov 11 <sup>th</sup>			
Mon Nov 16 <sup>th</sup>		H&K ch. 8	(617) squib proposal due
Wed Nov 18 <sup>th</sup>	Pronouns	H&K 9, (10-11)	#7 out
Mon Nov 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Verb meanings and events	Parsons 1990 ch. 1-3	
Wed Nov 25 <sup>th</sup>	No class (thanksgiving break)		
Mon Nov 30 <sup>th</sup>	Event structure and lexical aspect	Dowty 1979, Bach 1986	#7 due
Wed Dec 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Verbal alternations	Rappaport-Hovav and Levin 1998	
Mon Dec 7 <sup>th</sup>			
Exam period			(317) Exam, (617) Squib due

## Bibliography

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- Karttunen, Lauri. 1973. Presuppositions of compound sentences. *Linguistic Inquiry* 4:167–193.
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- Ludlow, Peter, ed. 1997. *Readings in the philosophy of language*. MIT Press.
- Matsumoto, Yo. 1995. The conversational condition on Horn scales. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 18:21–60.
- Parsons, Terence. 1990. *Events in the semantics of english*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
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