

# Language and its structure III: Semantics and pragmatics (24.903/24.933)

Spring 2012, MW 11–12:30, 36-372

## Instructors

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**Course website:** <http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/24/sp12/24.903/>

## Course description

This course is an introduction to the study of meaning in human language, a discipline traditionally divided into two parts. Broadly speaking, semantics is concerned with meaning that arises from linguistic expressions themselves—sentences, along with the words and phrases out of which they are constructed—while pragmatics is concerned with meaning that arises from utterances and the circumstances surrounding them.

We will start the semester by taking up the working hypothesis underlying semantics: How is the meaning of a phrase or sentence derived from the meaning of its parts? We will explore this Principle of Compositionality in several empirical domains—including adjectives, quantifiers, existentials, and polarity items. In the second half of the semester, we will turn to different types of pragmatic meaning—including implicature, presupposition, expressive meaning, and intonational meaning—examining their interaction with the utterance context.

In the end, we will find that the boundary, both empirical and theoretical, between semantics and pragmatics is not as crystal clear as the definitions above would make it seem. But, throughout the semester, we will see how productively formal tools drawn from logic and mathematics can be used to study linguistic meaning.

## Course requirements

The requirements for the undergraduate version of this course (24.903) are the following:

1. Doing the readings
2. Full attendance and active participation (5%)
3. Nine weekly assignments, due at the beginning of class on Mondays, with the lowest grade dropped (65%)
4. An in-class midterm, on Monday, April 2 (15%)
5. A final assignment, due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, May 16 (15%)

If you are enrolled in the graduate version (24.933), please speak with the instructor at the beginning of the semester, as there may be additional course requirements.

## Readings

Most of the required reading will come from the primary literature on semantics and pragmatics and will be available on the course website. Nonetheless, you might want to look up a concept in a textbook, in which case you might find the following textbooks useful:

- Gennaro Chierchia and Sally McConnell-Ginet. 2000. *Meaning and grammar: An introduction to semantics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Stephen Levinson. 1983. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## Collaboration and academic dishonesty

You are encouraged to work out the solutions to the weekly assignments with other students. But, you must write up your answers **on your own**—that is, not while talking or otherwise communicating with other students. All incidents of suspected academic dishonesty (including copying someone else's work or allowing them to copy your work) will be reported to either the Office of Student Citizenship (OSC) or to the Committee on Discipline (COD), where they may result in formal disciplinary proceedings resulting in suspension or expulsion. Read the notes on Student Conduct and Academic Integrity at: <http://web.mit.edu/academicintegrity/>.

## Accommodations

If you wish to request an accommodation due to a suspected or documented disability, please inform the instructor and contact the Student Disabilities Service as soon as possible in 7-145 by telephone at: (617) 253-1674, or email at: [uaap-sds@mit.edu](mailto:uaap-sds@mit.edu). For additional information about accommodations, please consult the Service's website at: <http://mit.edu/uaap/sds/index.html>.

# Schedule

WEEK	DAY	TOPICS	READINGS	WORK DUE
1	2/8	overview		
2	2/13	compositionality	Partee 1995:311–325	
	2/15	compositionality (cont'd)	Heim and Kratzer 1998:1–26	
3	2/20	<b>no class (President's Day)</b>		
	2/21	adjectives	Partee 1995:330–336	Assignment 1
	2/22	adjectives (cont'd)		
4	2/27	quantification	Keenan 1996:41–51	Assignment 2
	2/29	quantification (cont'd)		
5	3/5	quantification (cont'd)	Optional: Nouwen 2010:244–254	Assignment 3
	3/7	existentials	Milsark 1977:1–9 Optional: Keenan 1996:56–61	
6	3/12	existentials (cont'd)		Assignment 4
	3/14	polarity items	Ladusaw 1980:457–467	
7	3/19	polarity items (cont'd)		Assignment 5
	3/21	<b>review session</b>		
8	3/26	<b>no class (Spring Vacation)</b>		
	3/28	<b>no class (Spring Vacation)</b>		
9	4/2	<b>in-class midterm</b>		
	4/4	implicature	Gamut 1991:28–35	
10	4/9	implicature (cont'd)	Grice 1975	Assignment 6
	4/11	implicature (cont'd)	Keenan 1976	
11	4/16	<b>no class (Patriot's Day)</b>		
	4/18	implicature (cont'd)		
12	4/23	presupposition	Karttunen 1973:169–185	Assignment 7
	4/25	presupposition (cont'd)		
13	4/30	conventional implicature	Potts, to appear: 1–10	Assignment 8
	5/2	conventional implicature (cont'd)		
14	5/7	intonational meaning	Optional:	Assignment 9
	5/9	intonational meaning (cont'd)	Beaver and Clark 2008:§§2–3	
15	5/14	intonational meaning (cont'd)		
	5/16	wrap-up		Final Assignment

## References

- Beaver, David I. and Brady Z. Clark. 2008. *Sense and sensitivity: How focus determines meaning*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Gamut, L. T. F. 1991. *Logic, language, and meaning: Introduction to logic*, volume 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Grice, H. P. 1975. Logic and conversation. In *Speech acts*, eds. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan, volume 3 of *Syntax and Semantics*, 41–58. New York: Academic Press.
- Heim, Irene and Angelika Kratzer. 1998. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Karttunen, Lauri. 1973. Presuppositions of compound sentences. *Linguistic Inquiry* 4:169–193.
- Keenan, Edward L. 1996. The semantics of determiners. In *The handbook of contemporary semantic theory*, ed. Shalom Lappin, 41–63. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Keenan, Elinor Ochs. 1976. The universality of conversational postulates. *Language in Society* 5:67–80.
- Ladusaw, William A. 1980. On the notion ‘affective’ in the analysis of negative polarity. *Journal of Linguistic Research* 1:1–16.
- Milsark, G. L. 1977. Toward an explanation of certain peculiarities of the existential construction in English. *Linguistic Analysis* 3:1–29.
- Nouwen, Rick. 2010. What’s in a quantifier? In *The linguistics enterprise: From knowledge of language to knowledge in linguistics*, eds. Martin Everaert, Ton Lentz, Hanna De Mulder, Øystein Nilsen, and Arjen Zondervan, 235–256. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Partee, Barbara H. 1995. Lexical semantics and compositionality. In *An invitation to cognitive science*, eds. Lila R. Gleitman and Mark Liberman, volume 1, 311–360. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2nd edition.
- Potts, Christopher. To appear. Conventional implicature and expressive content. In *Semantics: An international handbook of natural language meaning*, eds. Claudia Maienborn, Klaus von Heusinger, and Paul Portner. Berlin: de Gruyter.