
24.903
Language & Structure III: Semantics and Pragmatics
<http://web.mit.edu/rbhatt/www/24.903>

Spring 2003, 2-151, MW 1-2.30

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The course offers a first introduction to semantics and pragmatics, the study of meaning in natural language. It introduces the basic tools and concepts that semanticists use to analyze meaning (set theory, relations, functions, phrase-structure rules and compositional semantic interpretation, statement logic and predicate logic, speech acts, implicature, presupposition, type theory and lambda abstraction). We will try out these tools on a number of semantic and pragmatic phenomena, like the composition of meaning of simple sentences, quantifiers and their scope, variable binding, the computation of implicatures, and presupposition projection. We will also discuss ways to relate syntactic structure to semantic interpretation which allow us to deal with the phenomenon of scope ambiguities.

Required Textbook:

Gennaro Chierchia & Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Meaning and Grammar*, MIT Press, 2000, (2nd edn.), ISBN 0-262-53164-X

Reference Textbooks:

The following textbooks provide further detail and alternate points of views.

1. Irene Heim & Angelika Kratzer, *Semantics in Generative Grammar*, Blackwell Publishers, 1998, ISBN 0-631-19713-3
2. Richard Larson and Gabriel Segal, *Knowledge of Meaning*, MIT Press, 1995, ISBN 0-262-62100-2
3. Shalom Lappin (ed.), *The Handbook of Contemporary Semantic Theory*, Blackwell Publishers, 1996, ISBN 0-631-20749-X
4. Barbra Partee, Alice ter Meulen, & Robert Wall, *Mathematical Methods in Linguistics*, Kluwer, 1990; revised edition, 1993. ISBN 90-277-2245-5

Requirements: Grading will be based on: class attendance and participation (10%), homework exercises (40%, approximately one a week), a midterm exam (20%), and a final exam (30%).

Topics

- Background: Sets and Functions, the λ -calculus
- Syntactic Structure and Semantic Interpretation
- Background: Statement Logic
- Predicates, Modifiers, Definite NPs, Type Theory
- Quantifiers in Natural Language
- Relative clauses, Variables, Variable Binding
- Quantification and Grammar: Constraints on Quantifier Movement
- Bound and Referential Pronouns and Ellipsis
- Syntactic Structure and Semantic Scope
- Speech Acts
- Implicature
- Presupposition
- Indexicality
- Vagueness