Course: LIN 438/538 Semantics I
Term: Fall 2003
Instructor: Bohnemeyer
Text: Saeed 2003

Overview: This course offers an introduction to the basic concepts and methods in the analysis of natural language meaning through a survey of major current approaches and their findings: structuralist semantics, cognitive semantics, referential semantics, and radical pragmatics. Topics of focal interest include: semantics at the language-cognition interface; lexical semantics, construction meaning, and syntax; semantics, pragmatics, and interaction; semantic typology and universals.

Goals: Semantics is a core discipline of linguistics, in the sense that (both descriptive and theoretical) research in most other subdisciplines (especially in syntax, morphology, lexicology, pragmatics, discourse studies, computational linguistics, historical linguistics, and much of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics) presupposes acquaintance with some basic concepts and analytical tools of semantics. In addition, semantics is an important "interface" between linguistics and the other disciplines of the cognitive sciences, in particular, psychology, cultural anthropology, and the computer sciences (artificial intelligence). This course aims at familiarizing the students with those concepts and analytical tools of semantics they require for research in these areas. In addition, it attempts to provide an overview of the field that enables students to seek answers to further questions about semantics and to start formulating and pursuing there own research interests.

Assessment: Five assignments, consisting of problem sets – 18% each; participation – 10%.

Syllabus

Week 1: Basics

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 1
Optional/Advanced:[1]	Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet 1990: ch. 1
Exercises:[2]	1.2

The goals of semantics within linguistic theory * Semantics in structuralism vs. in cognitive/generative approaches * Semiotic foundations: **icons**, **indexes**, **symbols** * The **metalanguage** problem * **Sense** vs. **reference** – the **semiotic triangle**: from symbols to referents via **concepts** * Linguistic knowledge vs. encyclopedic knowledge * Levels of meaning: **lexical meaning**, **sentence meaning**, **utterance meaning**; the **principle of compositionality**; semantics and **pragmatics**

Week 2: Meaning and reference I – The aboutness dimension

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 2.1-2.3
Optional/Advanced:	Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet 1990: ch. 2
Exercises:	2.1 – 2.2

The aboutness dimension: **intension**, **extension**, **denotation**, **reference** * Some types of referring expressions: **proper nouns**, **common nouns**, **deictic** and other **indexical** expressions; **definite descriptions** and **presupposition** * Reference and **quantification** * Expressions denoting **properties** and **events**

---

[1] "Optional/advanced" means follow-up reading for those interested – you won't need to have read any of this to participate or complete assignments!
[2] These are voluntary exercises out of Saeed 2003 some of which we'll discuss in class. You're not expected to write up formal solutions; just ponder them!

Week 3: Meaning and reference II – Denotation and truth conditions

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 4
Optional/Advanced:	Löbner 2002: ch. 4
Exercises:	4.1 – 4.4

What is logic, and why and how does it matter in linguistics? * Frege and Tarsky on meaning, denotation, truth, and **truth conditions** * Criticism of truth-conditional semantics * Basics of **propositional logic** * **Synthetic** and **analytic** inferences * **Predicate logic** and quantifiers * **Entailment**, **equivalence**, **contrariety**, **contradiction**, and the semantics-pragmatics divide * **Presupposition**, **common ground**, and **accommodation**

First assignment, to be completed by week 5

Week 4: Meaning and cognition I - Categorization

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 2.4; 2.6
Optional/Advanced:	Löbner 2002: ch. 9; Ungerer & Schmid 1996: ch. 1-3
Exercises:	2.3 – 2.5

Evidence for the semiotic triangle: the meaning of words for colors, sounds, smells, tastes, and emotions * **Categorization** and structured extensions: **attributes**, **necessary** and **sufficient conditions**, **prototypes**, **family resemblances**, **conceptual networks**, and **gestalt**; **good examples**, bad examples, and **category boundaries** * **Idealized cognitive models**: context-dependence, **frames**, and cultural models; naïve models and expert models

Week 5: Meaning and cognition II – Pros and cons of mentalism

Reading:	Saeed 2003: 11.1-11.2
Optional/Advanced:	Lakoff 1987: ch. 1-4

Levels of categorization, **folk taxonomies**, and **basic level categories** * **Metaphor** and **metonymy**: the cognitive basis of **semantic transfer** and **semantic change** * The concept of **polysemy** * Subordinate categories, composite terms, and word formation * **Rigid designators**, **direct reference**, and other problems for the semiotic triangle – and the mentalists' response

Second assignment, to be completed by week 7

Week 6: Meaning and interaction I - Context

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 7.1-7.5
Optional/Advanced:	Clark 1996: ch. 1-4; Fillmore 1997; Levinson 1983: ch. 2
Exercises:	7.1 – 7.5

Meaning relativized to **context**: **indexicality** * Types of indexicality: **deixis**, **anaphora**, **definiteness**, **textual** and **recognitional deixis** * Deictic expressions vs. deictic use * Context dependence in semantic transfer * Dimensions of deixis: **space**, **time**, **person**, **politeness** * The role of **joint attention** * **Common ground**: discourse and shared knowledge * Structured background knowledge: **scripts** * Anchoring utterances in linguistic context: **information perspective**

Week 7: Meaning and interaction II – Inferences and speech acts

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 7.6-8
Optional/Advanced:	Levinson 1983: ch. 3, 5; Levinson 2000: ch. 1
Exercises:	7.5 – 7.7; 8.1 – 8.6

The design of the language faculty and the need for **pragmatic enrichment** * Conversation as **rational goal-directed action**: **maxims** and **heuristics** * **Defeasibility**, **implicature**, and Grice's notion of '**meaning$_{nn}$**' * **Conventional** vs. **conversational** implicatures * **Particularized** vs. **generalized** conversational implicatures (**GCI**s) * GCI celebs: **scalar implicatures**; **clausal implicatures**; **conjunction buttressing**; **bridging inferences**; **manner implicatures** * Grice and the representational-referential divide * Conversation as **joint activity**: things we do with words * **Speech acts, illocutionary force**, and **sentence type** * **Performative acts** and **felicity conditions** * **Indirect** speech acts

Third assignment, to be completed by week 10

Week 8: From lexical semantics to syntax I – Lexical meaning relations

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 3
Optional/Advanced:	Löbner 2002: ch. 3, 5
Exercises:	3.1 – 3.10

The formal side of the unitization problem: **words**, **word forms**, **stems**, **roots**, **lemmas**, **idioms**, **complex predicates** * The semantic side of the unitization problem: **ambiguity**, **vagueness**, **polysemy**, **homonymy** * The **monosemy bias** * **Taxonomic** relations (**hyponymy**) and **merological** relations (**meronymy**) * Logical relations in the lexicon: **antonyms**, **reverses**, **converses** * **Semantic fields**

Week 9: From lexical semantics to syntax II – Meaning components

Reading:	Saeed 2003: 9.1-9.3; 9.7-9.8
Optional/Advanced:	Löbner 2002: ch. 7
Exercises:	9.2

Lexical **decomposition** in structuralism: **componential analysis** * Lexical relations in componential analysis: **semantic features** and **redundancy rules** * Katz's decompositional approach to the lexicon-syntax interface: **markers**, **distinguishers**, **selection restrictions**, and **projection rules** * **Generative Semantics**: where it came from, why it failed, and how it changed the field forever * **Derivation**, decomposition, the principle of compositionality, and **lexicalism** * Wierzbicka's quest for universal **semantic primitives**

Week 10: From lexical semantics to syntax III – Event semantics

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 5.1-5.2
Optional/Advanced:	Frawley 1992: ch. 4; 7-8
Exercises:	5.1 – 5.6

Semantic **ontology** and denotational **types** * Vendler's strategy: syntactic reflexes of ontological distinctions * Evidence for **event semantics** * Classifications of **situation types** and the **lexicon-syntax interface** * The plasticity of lexical semantics: **coercion** * Situation types in reference: **tense** and **aspect** * Dowty's decomposition of the Vendler classes

Week 11: From lexical semantics to syntax IV – Thematic relations

Reading:	Saeed 2003: 6; 9.4
Optional/Advanced:	Frawley 1992: ch. 5; Löbner 2002: ch. 6
Exercises:	6.1 – 6.8; 9.2-9.5

Classifying **event participants** and **case relations** * The impact of general knowledge and **cultural frames** * **Lexeme-specific** roles, **role types**, and the basis for generalization * Decompositional approaches to thematic relations * **Argument structure**, **alternations**, and the **linking** problem * **Grammatical relations**, **thematic hierarchies**, **macroroles** and **protoroles** * **Construction meaning**

Fourth assignment, to be completed by week 13

Week 12: Applications of mentalism I – Spatial relations and localism

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 9.5-9.6
Optional/Advanced:	Jackendoff 1983: ch. 9; Talmy 2000 Vol. I: ch. 3, 5; Vol. II: ch. 1
Exercises:	9.6-9.9

Figure and **ground** * Geometry and **topological** relations * **Path** relations * **Coevents**: **Manner**/**Cause** * **Conflation patterns** * Jackendoff's **conceptual semantics** – basic assumptions: **representational modularity**; the **Grammatical Constraint**; the **Cognitive Constraint**; **algebraic** format * An ontology for conceptual structures: **THINGs**, **PLACEs**, **PATHs**, **STATEs**, and **EVENTs** * Conceptual structures as **functions** * Representations for locative and motion semantics * Tiers * A brief history of **localism**

Week 13: Applications of mentalism II – Force dynamics; mental spaces

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 11.3-11.7
Optional/Advanced:	Fauconnier 1997: ch. 1-2; Talmy 2000 Vol. 1: ch. 7
Exercises:	11.1-11.4

Image schemas, **gestalt structures**, and **ontological metaphors** * **Force Dynamics** schemas: compulsion, blockage, and removal of restraint * **Causation**, **letting**, and **enabling dynamics** * Sweetser's force-dynamics analysis of **modal verbs** * **Deontic** and **epistemic** senses * **Mental spaces** * **Trigger**, **target**, and the **Identification Principle** * **Propositional attitudes** and **belief contexts** * **Referential opacity** * **Specific** and **non-specific** readings * **Counterfactuals** and **presupposition projection** in mental space theory

Fifth assignment, to be completed by week 15

Week 14: A peek at model-theoretic semantics

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 10
Optional/Advanced:	Bach 1989: lectures I-II; Löbner 2002: ch. 10
Exercises:	10.1-10.5

Meaning, truth conditions, the **correspondence theory** of truth, and **model theory** * **Predicate logic** as a metalanguage * **Constants**, **variables**, **quantifiers**, **binding**, and **scope** * **Using set theory** to model extensions: **sets**, **relations**, **functions** * Model-theoretic interpretation: **domain** and **assignment function** * **Intensionality** and **possible world semantics** * Truth conditions for **discourse representations**

Week 15: Universalism, relativism, and semantic typology

Reading:	Saeed 2003: ch. 2.5
Optional/Advanced:	Lakoff 1987: ch. 18; Löbner 2002: ch. 8

Relativism – Whorf's vision: languages as frames of reference for thinking * "Thinking" before and after the **cognitive revolution** * An extreme antithesis: Fodor's **Language of Thought** hypothesis * Conceptual Structure as a more realistic version * How much of cognition is universal anyway, and what impact can language have on it? – From Berlin & Kay (1968) to Kay & Kempton (1984) * A case of deep relativism: **spatial frames of reference** * Jackendoff's Mayan cousin discovers Conceptual Structure * The role of pragmatics * Evidence for relativistic effects on **concept formation** * Mapping out semantic diversity across languages: **perception verbs**, **topological relations**, and **motion events** * So what does it all mean?

Reading list

Bach, Emmon. 1989. *Informal lectures on formal semantics*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Chierchia, Gennaro & McConnell-Ginet, Sally. 1990. *Meaning and grammar*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Clark, Herbert H. 1996. *Using language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Fauconnier, Gilles. 1997. *Mappings in thought and language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Fillmore, Charles. 1997. *Lectures on deixis*. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.

Frawley, William. 1992. *Linguistic semantics*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Jackendoff, Ray. 1983. *Semantics and cognition*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Lakoff, George. 1987. *Women, fire, and dangerous things*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Levinson, Stephen C. 1983. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

---- 2000. *Presumptive meanings*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Löbner, Sebastian. 2002. *Understanding semantics*. London, UK: Arnold Publishers.

Saeed, John I. 2003. *Semantics*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell. [Second, revised edition; original edition published 1997.]

Talmy, Leonard. 2000. *Toward a cognitive semantics*. Two volumes. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Ungerer, Friedrich & Schmidt, Hans-Jörg. 1996. *An introduction to cognitive linguistics*. London, UK: Longman.