

Course: LIN 438/538 Semantics
Term: Fall 2008
Instructor: Jürgen Bohnemeyer
Text: Saeed 2003 plus additional readings

Overview: This course offers an introduction to lexical semantics, the study of word meaning. It is designed to be complementary to LIN443/543 *Semantics II*, which focuses on sentence and utterance meaning. While there is arguably no clear “logical” order among the two courses, and you are in fact free to take them in any order you like, students commonly prefer to start with 438/538, perhaps among other things because it is the less technical of the two. Plus, because compositional semantics presupposes a solid grounding in syntactic theory and analysis, 443/543 has more entry requirements than 438/538.

Requirements: Students must complete LIN 205 *Introduction to linguistic analysis* before taking LIN 438.

Goals: Semantics is a core discipline of linguistics, in the sense that research in all other domains of language 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 concepts and analytical tools of semantics they require for research on word meaning in these fields. It also provides an overview of the field that enables students to seek answers to further questions about semantics and to start formulating and pursuing their own research interests.

At the center of LIN448/538 is the dominant family of approaches to lexical semantics (the study of word meaning) in contemporary linguistics: *representational* (or *conceptual, cognitive, or mentalist*) *semantics*, which views meaning as a mapping between linguistic utterances and the internal cognitive representations they invoke. Representational semantics contrasts with *formal* (or *truth-conditional, referential, or denotational*) *semantics*, which seeks to capture the contribution that the constituents of a sentence make to its meaning in terms of *truth conditions*. Truth conditions are constraints on what the world must be like in order for a given sentence to make a truthful statement about it. In this sense, formal semantics views meaning as a relation between utterances and the world, whereas representational semantics views it as a relation between utterances and mental states of speakers and hearers. Formal semantics is the predominant contemporary approach to compositional or sentence meaning.

The goal of lexical semantics (the study of word meaning) and compositional semantics (the study of sentence meaning) alike is to explain the semantic properties of utterances - such as entailments, ambiguity, and anomaly - in such a fashion as to be able to predict under what conditions utterances have these properties. Lexical semantics focuses on the contributions lexical items (words, stems, morphemes) make to these properties. Representational (= conceptual/cognitive/mentalist) semantics uses assumptions about the internal

workings of the mind as an explanatory tool to account for these properties. For illustration, one lexical source of ambiguity is *polysemy*, the presence of multiple related senses in the same word. An example is the word *peak*, which refers both to the summit of a mountain or hill and to the most advanced phase of some process, such as a fever or inflation. Representational semanticists explain the co-occurrence of these senses in terms of the first sense serving as a concrete spatial analogy of the second, more abstract sense.

The most important issue in representational semantics is the nature of the relation between linguistic meaning and “thought”. We will keep this question at the center of our attention throughout the course as we collect evidence from key problems and phenomena of lexical semantics. Three closely related questions that will come up again and again concern the extent to which word meanings are “decomposable” into conceptual “primitives” - atomic conceptual building blocks - the format of these primitives and the extent to which they are the same across languages and cultures.

Classes: T/R 3:30-4:50 PM in 220 Clemens

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Course work:

- Day-to-day reading assignments are listed in the syllabus below.
- Six homework assignments. Homeworks must be completed within a week. Students in 438 have a lower grade scale (i.e., require fewer points for the same grade) compared to grad students. You get one chance (a replacement, handed out at the end of the course) to make up for a missed or flunked assignment. After that, every additional missed or flunked homework counts as flunked.
- Final homework assignment. A longer homework assignment that reviews the entire course (based on problems that occurred in previous assignments, but with different data), handed out on the last day of classes in lieu of a final exam. To be completed within a week. Again, grading will be adjusted to undergraduate vs. graduate level.
- Term paper. Graduate students, and exceptionally, with permission of the instructor, students in 443 as well, have the opportunity to submit a short term paper (5-10 pages) instead of or in addition to the final homework assignment. The paper must present an original semantic or pragmatic analysis formulated within the theoretical frameworks introduced in the course.
- In-class participation. I grade participation as follows: Regular active participation – A; regular attendance and occasional active participation – B; regular attendance, no active participation – C; irregular attendance, no active participation: D; poor attendance, no active participation: F.
- Exercises. At the end of each lecture I will assign a few exercises which we will discuss at the beginning of the following meeting. I will not collect or grade these; you complete them for the sole benefit of your own training.

However, presenting the solution to an exercise in class is one excellent way of boosting your participation grade.

Assessment:

- Homework assignments: 60% (10% per assignment)
- Final assignment or term paper: 25%
- Participation: 15%

Syllabus

week	day	topics	reading ¹
1	Part I: Background - semantics as a discipline		
	T	Day 1: The domain of semantics - the empirical domain of semantics; semiotics: icons, indices, and symbols; semantic vs. encyclopedic knowledge; object language vs. metalanguage; lexical, compositional, and pragmatic meaning	ch. 1 (*CMG ch. 1.2.1-1.2.2; 1.3-1.4)
	R	Day 2: Approaches to semantics - referential and representational approaches to meaning; the semiotic triangle; sense vs. reference; intension vs. extension; denotation; the reference of names and noun phrases; lexicalization; the relation between lexical meanings and concepts: necessary and sufficient conditions, prototypes, frames, conceptual relations; HW #1 out	ch. 2.1-2.4 (*CMG ch. 1.2.3-1.2.4)
2	Part II: Background - truth-conditional meaning		
	T	Day 1: The data of semantics - HW #1 discussed; the data of semantics: entailment and anomaly; synonymy, tautology, and contradiction; meaning and truth conditions; propositional logic	ch. 4.1-4.2; *Cruse 1986: 8-20
	R	Day 2: Semantics and logic - propositional logic (cont.); the analytic-synthetic distinction; predicate logic; entailment, hyponymy, and paraphrase; HW #1 due	ch. 4.3-4.4
3	Part III: Background - pragmatics		
	T	Day 1: Pragmatic meaning I - presupposition - triggers, projection, defeasibility, common ground, accommodation; indexicality: spatial deixis, temporal deixis, person deixis, and social deixis; HW #1 back	ch. 4.5, 7.1-7.2;

¹ Unless otherwise stated, reading assignments refer to our text book, Saeed 2003, *Semantics*. Readings marked with * will be downloadable from the UBLearn/Blackboard system. **Readings in parentheses are optional, for people who want to further delve into the material.**

	R	Day 2: Pragmatic meaning II - deixis, textual deixis, anaphora, and other types of indexicality; context, information structure, conversational implicatures; HW #2 out	*JB 2001; ch. 7.3-7.7
4	T	Day 3: Pragmatic meaning III - HW #2 discussed; conversational implicatures (cont.); speech acts	8.1-8.3; (*PM ch. 1)
Part IV: The unitization problem in lexical semantics			
	R	Day 1: The formal side of the unitization problem - semantic constituents, collocational uniqueness, sound symbolism and onomatopoeia, idioms, collocations, constructions, opacity, dead metaphors; HW #2 due	*Cruse 1986: ch. 2
5	T	Day 2: The semantic side of the unitization problem - semantic transfer, literal vs. figurative meanings, metaphor and metonymy, analogical mappings, image schema, polysemy; lexical units vs. lexemes, modulation and contextual selection of senses, ambiguity tests, sense spectra; HW #2 back	ch. 11.2 - 11.5; *Cruse 1986: ch. 3
Part V: Semantic structures in the lexicon			
	R	Day 1: Representing meaning components - decomposition, componential analysis, features, selectional restrictions; accounting for entailment and anomaly in componential analysis; HW #3 out	ch. 9.1 - 9.3
6	T	Rosh Hashanah	
	R	Day 2: Lexical relations I - HW #3 discussed; synonymy, hyponymy, and compatibility	Cruse 1986: ch. 4; (3.5.3, 3.5.5)
7	T	Day 3: Lexical relations II – guest lecture by Dr. EunHee Lee: scales, opposites, polarity, gradation, vagueness (subject to confirmation); HW #3 due	Cruse 1986: ch. 9 (*Cruse 1986: ch. 10-11)
	R	Yom Kippur	
8	Part VI: Cross-linguistic semantics		
	T	Day 1: Semantic typology I - relativism vs. universalism; prototypes: kinship and color terms; HW #3 back	ch. 2.5; *U&S ch. 1.1; (*L ch. 9.4)
	R	Day 2: Semantic typology II - taxonomies and meronymies; HW #4 out	*U&S ch. 2.1; *ZAP
9	T	Day 3: Semantic typology III - HW #4 discussed; motion event descriptions and spatial frames of reference	ch. 9.5; *FoR

Part VII: Meaning components and the mind			
	R	Day 1: Decomposition and semantic primitives - decomposition revisited: from semantic features to semantics primitives; semantic primitives as atomic concepts; boundaries of decomposition: lexicalism; are semantic primitives universal and if so, in what sense?; HW #4 due	*L ch. 7.3 -7.6; (*JB 2003)
10	T	Day 2: Localism and Conceptual Structure - modality - image-schematic vs. algebraic representations - Conceptual vs. Spatial Structure; cluster concepts; conceptual functions and semantic roles; localism: the Thematic Relations Hypothesis; HW #4 back	*FoL ch. 11.1-11.8
Part VIII: Event structure and lexical aspect			
	R	Day 1: Lexical-aspectual classification - Vendler's "time schemata"; dynamic vs. stative, durative vs. instantaneous, atelic vs. telic descriptions; lexical vs. compositional properties of lexical aspect; HW #5 out	ch. 5.2.1 - 5.2.3
11	T	Day 2: Event structure - lexical aspect in Conceptual Structure - HW #5 discussed; boundedness, the count-mass distinction, plurality, and telicity; the state change calculus; plasticity: qualia structure, dot objects, and coercion	ch. 9.6.5 - 9.7; *FoL ch. 11.9 - 11.10
Part IX: Argument structure and thematic relations			
	R	Day 1: Predication - predicates, arguments, and referents; verbs as predicates: transitivity; nouns and adjectives as predicates; predicate calculus; thematic relations; HW #5 due	*L ch. 6.1 - 6.6
12	T	Day 2: Thematic relations - case, argument marking, and grammatical relations; argument structure; verb classes, alternations, and linking rules; HW #5 back	*L&RH ch. 1 (*JB 2004 section 2)
	R	Guest lecture or cancelation – t.b.a.	
13	T	Day 3: Categorizing thematic relations - lexeme-specific vs. generalized, atomic vs. decomposable, primitive vs. derived relations; proto-roles, macro-roles, and predicate decomposition; HW #6 out	*L&RH ch. 2-3
	R	Day 4: The conceptual basis of argument structure - frames and forces - HW #6 discussed Frame Semantics: frames, perspective, and attention; frames and scripts; force-dynamic concepts in lexical semantics; force-dynamic metaphors; the two-tiered approach to thematic relations	*U&S ch. 5.1; (*TCS 409-444) *SS ch. 7.1 - 7.3
14	T	Day 5: Argument structure across languages - verb classes and alternations revisited; morpho-lexical	*JB 2007a;

	vs. morpho-syntactic operations; complex predicates; Syntactic Bootstrapping, Semantic Bootstrapping, and Lexical Reconciliation; HW #6 due	(*JB 2007b)
	R Fall recess	
15	Part X: Wrap up	
	T Day 1: Semantic and conceptual representations - word meaning depends on conceptualization: metaphors, frames, and prototypes; word meanings differ from concepts: lexical gaps, pragmatic enrichment, indexicality; cultural and biological aspects; HW #6 back	*LEV; (*BIER)
	R Day 2: New frontiers - learning word meanings; the syntax-semantics interface; modality: signed languages and co-speech gesture; Final assignment out	*JB et al. 2007

Bibliography²

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- [JB 2007b] ---- The pitfalls of getting from here to there: Bootstrapping the syntax and semantics of motion event expressions in Yucatec Maya. In M. Bowerman & P. Brown (eds.), *Cross-linguistic Perspectives on Argument Structure: Implications for Learnability*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. 49-68.
<http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~jb77/pitfallsv3.pdf>

² All books are on reserve in the Undergrad Library; assigned book chapters outside Saeed 2003 and journal articles will be uploaded to UBlearns.

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