Course: LIN438/538 Semantics
Term: Fall 2011
Instructor: Jürgen Bohnemeyer
Text: Riemer 2010 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 LIN205 *Introduction to linguistic analysis* before taking LIN438.

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 there own research interests.

At the center of LIN438/538 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 90 Alumni
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Course work:
- Day-to-day reading assignments are listed in the syllabus below.
- Twelve short weekly homework assignments, involving mostly analysis of data provided with the assignments. Performance on the best ten accounts for 60% of the overall grade. **No replacements/make-ups.** Students in 438 have a lower grade scale (i.e., require fewer points for the same grade) compared to grad students.
- A take-home final exam, essentially a longer homework assignment that reviews the entire course (based on problems that occurred in previous assignments, but with different data). The exam will be assigned in the final week of classes and must be completed within two weeks. Again, grading will be adjusted to undergraduate vs. graduate level.
- Term paper. Graduate students, and exceptionally, with permission of the instructor, students in 438 as well, have the opportunity to submit a short term paper (5-10 pages) instead of or in addition to the take-home exam. 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. **Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every lecture.** Attendance counts as irregular if the student missed more than one lecture unexcused and as poor if more than three lectures were missed unexcused.

Rolling assignment schedule: Assignments are released every Tuesday except during the first and last week and fall break. They will be discussed in class the following Thursday, are due the Tuesday after that, and will be returned two weeks after their release.

Assessment: Best 10 HW assignments – 60%; final exam – 25%; in-class participation – 15%.

Paperless class: Lecture notes will be posted on UBlearns/Course Documents two hours ahead of class. Additional readings will be posted on UBlearns/Course Documents two days ahead of class. Assignments will be posted on UBlearns/Assignments. Students upload their home works to UBlearns/Assignment Tool. Please upload as PDF if you can. Be sure to click on "Send", not on "Save", to post! Annotated and graded home works will be returned via UBlearns/Assignment Tool. The same holds for the final exam.

Outline: Readings in parentheses are optional. All readings not out of Riemer 2010 will be downloadable from UBlearns.

Unit	Week	Day	date	Topics	readings (page numbers refer to Riemer 2010 unless otherwise noted)
I: Semantics as a discipline	1	T	8/30	Welcome! * The meaning of 'meaning' * Semantics as the scientific study of meaning * The principle of compositionality	1-13, 19-21, 22-24 (*CMG 6-11)
		R	9/1	The domain of semantics * Lexical, compositional, and pragmatic meaning	13-19, 21-22; 90-98 (*CMG 17-52)
	2	T	9/6	Referential and representational approaches * Semantics and semiotics	24-44 (*CMG 11-17)
II: Meaning and reference		R	9/8	Meaning and truth * The empirical basis of semantics * Meaning and context * Meaning and logic	(90-94); 173-178; Cruse 1986: 8-20
	3	T	9/13	Propositional calculus	178-186
		R	9/15	Predication and argument structure	189-196; *L 99 -113
III: Utterance meaning	4	T	9/20	Pragmatics * Meaning relativized to context: Indexicality * Speech acts	98-100, 107-113; (*JB 2001)
		R	9/22	The relation between sentence meaning and utterance * Implicatures	113-134
	5	T	9/27	Levinson's three heuristics * Presupposition	*PM ch1; 203-204

		R	9/29	**ROSH HASHANAH**	
IV: Semantic structures in the lexicon	6	T	10/4	The formal side of the unitization problem in lexical semantics: what are the structural units of lexical meaning?	50-57
		R	10/6	Guest lecture Dr Lee: Scales, opposites, polarity, gradation	135-140; Cruse 1986: ch9; (Cruse 1986: ch10-11)
	7	T	10/11	The semantic side of the unitization problem: polysemy, monosemy, vagueness, underspecification	57-62, 160-169
		R	10/13	Deconstructing semantic relations: synonymy, hyponymy, compatibility, taxonomy, meronymy	140-146, 150-154
V: Cognitive/conceptual semantics	8	T	10/18	Semantics and categorization	223-237
		R	10/20	Conceptual and semantic transfer; embodiment; idealized cognitive models	238-260
	9	T	10/25	Talmy's Cognitive Semantics	400-407 (*TCS II: 210-146); *TCS I: 409-430, 455-456; (*TCS I: 438-452; 456-470)
		R	10/27	Decomposition – what for? * Componential analysis * Katz' interpretative semantics	100-105, 154-160; *Saeed 2003: 250-254
	10	T	11/1	Wierzbicka's quest for universal semantic primitives * Decomposition in Generative Semantics and the Minimalist Program	70-79; *JB 2003; (*SS 73-106)
		R	11/3	Jackendoff's Conceptual Semantics * Lexical conceptual structure	261-270; (*FoL 333-356)
VI: The syntax-semantics interface	11	T	11/8	Lexical aspect	314-329
		R	11/10	Lexical aspect in Conceptual Semantics	Jackendoff 1996
	12	T	11/15	Thematic relations	335-352; (*FoL 356-369; *VVLP 82-183)
		R	11/17	Argument structure, alternations, and the linking problem * Lexeme-specific roles, role types, and the basis for generalization * Multi-tiered representations	352-367; (*VVLP 139-196; *LRH 7-77)
	13	T	11/22	Computational semantics * Enriched composition	270-285; (*FoL 396-375)
		R	11/24	**FALL RECESS**	
VI: Crosslinguistic semantics	14	T	11/29	Relativism * The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis * Ethnosemantics * Etic grids * Kinship terminologies * Color terminologies * Prototypes	390-399, 411-415
		R	12/1	Ethnobiological classification * Berlin's generalizations	147-150; *Foley 1997: 115-124

	15	T	12/6	Spatial frames of reference * Crosslinguistic variation * Cognitive consequences	407-411; 415-422; (*Bohnemeyer & Levinson ms.)
IX: Grand finale: semantic and conceptual		R	12/8	Issues and positions * More background on language and thought * Where linguistic meaning depends on internal representations * Where linguistic meaning differs of internal representations * Some sort of summery	Levinson 1997; Bierwisch 1987

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[1] All books are on reserve in the Undergrad Library; readings not from Riemer 2010 will be uploaded to UBlearns.

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