Semantics

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Course Description

This is an introduction to semantics for students new to the subject. The aim of the course is to provide students with access to the central ideas in the field and introduce them to some of its most important writers. By the end of the course, students will be prepared to proceed to more advanced and specialized material in the primary literature.

Course Objectives

The goal of the course, broadly stated, is to reflect upon the nature of linguistic meaning and the necessity and conditions of interpretation from within an integral worldview. Our objectives include the following:

- To introduce students to contemporary questions and discussions of contemporary semantics, opening up horizons for further reflection and research.

- To critically evaluate different theories and interpretation and constructively consider the broader implications for our understanding of language and interpretation.

Course Requirements

- Regularly attend class. Attendance in class is required, and essential for doing well in this course.
- Come to class prepared. Take notes on the readings and prepare questions in advance.
- Participate in class. There will be plenty of opportunity during class time to ask questions, make comments, and engage in discussion.

Grade Distribution

Grades will be determined roughly as follows:

- Assignments and participation 10%
- Mid-term : 30%
- Final essay: 60%

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Part I: Preliminaries

- Semantics in Linguistics
- Meaning, Thought, and Reality

Part II: Semantic Description

- Word Meaning
- Sentence Relations and Truth
- Sentence Semantics 1: Situations
- Sentence Semantics 2: Participants
- Context and Inference
- Functions of Language: Speech as Action

Part III: Theoretical Approaches

- Meaning Components
- Formal Semantics
- Cognitive Semantics