LING 20301: Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics

Spring 2021, the University of Chicago

Instructor: Yenan Sun (yenansun@uchicago.edu)
Time & Place: Tu Th 11-12:20pm, on Zoom
Office Hours: M 4-5pm (or by appointment)

Course description

This course introduces students to the study of meaning in natural language. By "meaning", we refer to both the part that is determined by the conventional aspects of language (the lexical content of words, and how they are put together), and the part that arises from how speakers use language in specific contexts. The course aims to familiarize students with the following aspects:

- Theoretical tools in the field of semantics and pragmatics (model-theoretic approach, set theory, predicate logic, lambda-notations, type theory, etc);
- Basic topics related to the meaning (entailment, presupposition, implicature, modification, quantification, monotonicity, intensionality, modality, speech act, information structure, etc);
- General research skills in Linguistics such as performing diagnostics, making generalizations, developing and falsifying hypotheses, forming argumentations.

Evaluations

- Readings and participation (10%): You will have to do the assigned readings prior to lecture, attend the class, and make at least one post on Canvas each week. It can be a question or thought on the readings, or a comment about the class or assignment.
- Problem sets (65%): Seven problem sets (6 × 10% + 5%) will be assigned during the quarter, each pertaining to a topic in the Schedule (see below).
- Take-home Final (25%): A take-home cumulative final will take place in the 10th week, covering material from the lectures and readings over the quarter.

Special accommodations

If you need some special accommodation for coursework, or for lecture or section, please let me know as soon as possible, so we can coordinate with the Student Disability Services office.

Academic Honesty

You must write up the assignments individually; you can work with others on the assignments (except for the take-home final) but you should acknowledge any collaboration and credit others. The university's Academic Honesty & Plagiarism policy is active here:
https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/

Tentative Schedule

Readings will be made available in electronic form (PDF) on canvas. You should finish them before the lectures. All slides and assignments will be available there as well.

		Topic	Before class
W1	Tu (Mar 30)	Syllabus and introduction Preliminaries	
	Th (Apr 1)	Different types of inferences [HW1 assigned: 5%]	Kearns ch1; C&C ch1
W2	Tu (Apr 6)	Set theory, functions Their applications in Semantics	C&C ch2.3, 2.5 [HW1 DUE]
	Th (Apr 8)	Propositional logic Truth tables Predicate logic [HW2 assigned: 10%]	Kearns ch2, ch3.1-3.2
W3	Tu (Apr 13)	Lambda notation Type theory Basics of composition I	Kearns ch4.1-4.4 [HW2 DUE]
	Th (Apr 15)	Basics of composition II [HW3 assigned: 10%]	Kearns ch4.5-4.6
W4	Tu (Apr 20)	Nominal modifiers Predicate Modification	Kearns ch3.3 [HW3 DUE]
	Th (Apr 22)	Relative clauses Variable binding [HW4 assigned: 10%]	C&C ch6.3
W5	Tu (Apr 27)	Wrap-up for composition	
	Th (Apri 29)	TBD (Degree/Event semantics)	[HW4 DUE]
W6	Tu (May 4)	Generalized quantifiers Pluralities [HW5 assigned: 10%]	Kearns ch6.1-6.3, 6.7-6.8
	Th (May 6)	Quantifier Raising Scope ambiguity	Kearns ch6.10
W7	Tu (May 11)	Nominal expressions Type shifting	TBD [HW5 DUE]
	Th (May 13)	Monotonicity Negative polarity items [HW6 assigned: 10%]	Kearns ch6.9
W8	Tu (May 18)	Modality	Kearns ch5.1-5.2 [HW6 DUE]
	Th (May 20)	Opacity Propositional attitudes [HW7 assigned: 10%]	Kearns ch7
W9	Tu (May 25)	Speech act	Huang ch4 (TBD)
	Th (May 27)	Information structure	TBD [HW7 DUE]
W10	TBD	Review session for final	
	TBD	Take-home final exam assigned [25%]	[Deadline TBD]

References

- Kearns, Kate. 2011. Semantics [2nd ed]. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Coppock, Elizabeth and Champollion, Lucas (C&C). 2019. Invitation to Formal Semantics.
- Huang, Y. H. 2014. Pragmatics [2nd ed]. Oxford University Press.