SYLLABUS

LIN 437: Semantics and Pragmatics

1 The course in a nutshell

This course examines how natural languages encode meaning and how speakers use them to convey it. Our core aim will be to develop a theory of semantic and pragmatic competence that addresses these deep, complicated, and potentially slippery questions with the rigor and precision contemporary linguistics aspires to. In doing so, we will encounter some of the technical tools that provide a framework for answering these questions in a precise way, but the emphasis will be on the empirical phenomena the theory is designed to model and on the proper place of such a theory in the architecture of the grammar.

2 Contact information

Me: Marcin Morzycki

Email: morzycki@msu.edu

Office hours: Wednesday 2:30–3:30 and Thursday 2:00–3:00

Office: B-404 Wells Hall

3 Requirements

The principal requirements for the course are:

- Ordinary take-home assignments, of which there will be probably three or four. Most of these will require you to devise solutions to empirical problems and present them in the form of a brief well-reasoned argument.
- Two longer take-home exams (a midterm and a final). They will essentially be long assignments.
- Contributing frequently and thoughtfully to class discussions. *This is not optional.*

Outside of class   You can—in fact, definitely should—discuss your work with other students. *You're encouraged to collaborate on a single write-up* in groups of up to three, but each group member must be able to defend the proposed solution. Other people's ideas must be properly cited. If you find any of this confusing, ask me for clarification.

In class   The course will revolve primarily around in-class discussion, and most of the progress we make will be made that way, so *coming to class is crucial*. If you miss classes, you are likely to miss information that will be necessary to understand the assignments and subsequent discussion. If you anticipate having to miss class frequently, do not take this course.

4 Grading

Each assignment and each exam will receive a grade on the MSU-style 4.0 scale. Your final grade will be the mean of the following:

- your grades on the assignments
- your grades on the exams, weighted double (that is, each will count as two assignments)
- a grade for what you contributed to class discussions (this will count as one assignment)

5 Review handouts and optional textbook

You will get occasional review handouts that go over some of what happened in class, and in a few cases may go a bit deeper in a few directions. You should of course take notes, but you definitely don't need to write down everything that appears on the board.

There is no required textbook for this course. There is, however, one that may be helpful as a supplemental resource:

Heim, Irene and Angelika Kratzer. 1997. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

This might help you in pursuing some topics in greater depth, getting a firmer grasp of the theoretical machinery, and exploring issues not covered in the course. It is, of course, *not a substitute for coming to class*—much of what we discuss will have no direct counterpart in the textbook, and where there is overlap, the conclusions will often have been arrived at differently.

6 Communication

You'll get handouts, assignments, and exams via D2L. You should turn them in that way too, in the form of a PDF file. Please *don't* submit files in Word or any other format. You'll get comments on your work in the form of annotations embedded in the PDF file. Please turn assignments in on the due date *before the start of class*.

7 A warning

Semantics uses mathematical tools that many people find difficult to master. More generally, the course is highly technical, more so than you might be used to from other linguistics classes at the same level. If you're not prepared for that, you should drop the course now.

8 Other notes & policies

Honors option   If you'd like to do an honors option—or you're not in the Honors College, but would like to do the equivalent of one—talk to me at some point during the first half of the semester. We can work out what exactly you would do, but at least part of it would be a short in-class presentation of your work at the end of the semester.

Disability?   Please notify me during the first two weeks of the course to make any special arrangements to accommodate a disability. If you haven't already done so, you should contact MSU's Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities for help with the process.

Academic integrity   Don't plagiarize. The structure of the course may make this a little trickier than it might seem. If someone that isn't actually a coauthor of your write-up gives you an idea that you use or build on, say in the write-up who it was.*Don't look for solutions to the problems on your assignments online*. In most cases, this isn't possible, but in all cases, it's a form of cheating. For more on the university's academic integrity policies, consult the website of the MSU Ombudsperson's Office.

Social media and copyright issues   Don't share course materials (handouts, assignments, etc.) with anyone outside of class. Don't record anything that happens in class without my prior approval.

9 Rough schedule

This schedule isn't really a schedule. It's a tentative overview of some of the topics we'll address in roughly the order we're likely to address them. The precise course we will take and its timing will depend primarily on in-class discussion. It's unlikely that we'll actually manage to get through all of these topics, but it can't hurt to be optimistic about our pace.

Aug. 29:	Preliminaries Logistics Some big questions and some small puzzles
Sept. 5:	The meaning machine Truth conditions A bit of lexical semantics
Sept. 10:	Models and natural language ontology Compositionality and functions
Sept. 12:	Meet the lambda Functions as meanings
Sept. 17:	Nouns, verbs, adjectives Types and type-driven interpretation
Sept. 19:	Multiple arguments and Schẫnfinkeling
Sept. 24:	Higher types Negation Passives
Sept. 26:	Presupposition Definite descriptions
Oct. 1:	Explaining presuppositions Definite descriptions Sensitivity to the discourse context
Oct. 3:	Presupposition and lexical semantics
Oct. 8:	Steps toward temporal semantics
Oct. 10:	Tense
Oct. 15:	Modification Vagueness and structural ambiguity
Oct. 17:	Aktionsart/lexical aspect Lexical semantics of verbs
Oct. 22:	Grammatical aspect
Oct. 24:	Quantificational adverbs
Oct. 29:	Quantificational determiners
Oct. 31:	Two problems with quantificational determiners
Nov. 5:	Pronouns and variables Movement and variable-binding *Midterm posted*[1]

---

[1]Again, this is an estimate. It may actually be a little earlier or later.

Nov. 7:	Generalized quantifiers and scope Architecture of the semantic module revisited
Nov. 12:	Cross-linguistic semantics Conservativity
Nov. 14:	Polarity and polarity-sensitivity
Nov. 19:	Temporal sensitivity across the grammar Two flavors of adjective and two ways to predicate
Nov. 21:	Some foundational puzzles Intensionality
Nov. 26:	Intensionality continued: modeling possibilities
Nov. 28:	Modals, modality, and conditionals
Dec. 3:	Pragmatics of discourse Discourse structure and information states
Dec. 5:	Conversational implicatures The morals of the story *Final exam posted (due on Friday of finals week)*