

Semantics II (16:615:531, Spring 2018)

Class time: M, Th: 9:50–11:10
Location: Room 108
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Office hours: M, Th: 11:30–12:30 (**and by appointment!**)
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About this course

This course is about learning to read the primary literature in semantics, capitalizing on the skills you developed in Semantics I. You'll be exposed to a diverse host of empirical phenomena central to modern research in formal semantics, and to new formal tools — some of them state-of-the-art. You'll develop your ability to approach and critically engage with new — and possibly unfamiliar — research. The reading we'll be doing is fairly diverse topic-wise — I've tried to put together a happy melange of accessible papers on core topics — though in the end, each of our topics pushes us beyond the basic truth-conditional paradigm you focused on in Semantics I.

Our units and the corresponding readings are given in Table 1. Some of the readings will be more central than others — I'll flag these as we go. Note: the separation in this list is somewhat artificial; many readings cross-cut topics (modality and event semantics, dynamics and modality, and so on). I hope this creates some nice resonances as we go.

Meetings	Topic	Key readings
Weeks 2–3	Intensionality, modals, conditionals	von Stechow & Heim (2011: Chs. 1–4) von Stechow & Gillies (2007)
Weeks 4–5	Event semantics and aspect	Parsons (1990: Chs. 1–3), Champollion (2015) Kratzer (1996, 1998) Hacquard (2010) Szabó (2004)
Weeks 6–7	Interrogatives, indefinites, and scope	Krifka (2011), Heim (2011) Groenendijk & Stokhof (1989) Reinhart (1997) Dayal (1994, 2002)
Weeks 8–9	Type-shifting, scope, and binding	Partee (1986) Szabolcsi (2011) Jacobson (1994), Charlow (2017) Barker & Shan (2008)
Weeks 10–11	Dynamic interpretation	Gamut (1991: Ch. 7.4) Groenendijk & Stokhof (1991a,b) Dekker (1994) Szabolcsi (2003)
Weeks 12–13	(Scalar) implicature	Sauerland (2004) Chierchia, Fox & Spector (2012) Potts et al. (2016)

Table 1: Outline of the course. Provisional, ambitious and subject to change, depending on your comfort levels and interests.

Requirements

Most importantly, I ask you to keep up with the reading, which will be steady but manageable — on the order of 2 key readings per week. Come to class prepared with your questions and ready to discuss the reading. Each enrolled student will give 1–2 short presentations on an assigned reading (the precise number will depend on enrollments, scheduling vagaries, and interest).

As for written work, there will be periodic problem sets to help you get comfortable when new formal techniques are introduced (e.g., problem sets on the basics of intensional semantics, event semantics, dynamics, and so on). Each enrolled student will write a short squib-like term paper (10–12 pp) at the conclusion of the course: plan to meet with me no later than the end of March to discuss possible topics. Our last two meetings will be devoted to squib presentations.

References

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