Semantics

Linguistics 325 (01:615:325), Rutgers University, Fall 2021

Time: **Mondays & Thursdays 11:00am–12:20pm**
Location: Zoom (online synchronous)
Course website: https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/134726

Instructor: **Dorothy Ahn** (dorothy.ahn@rutgers.edu)
Office Hours: Thursdays 2:00pm–4:00pm (zoom; sign up on Calendly)

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1   Course Description

This course is an introduction to the field of natural language semantics, which is a branch of linguistics concerned with **meaning**. What does it mean to know the meaning of a sentence? How do different parts of a sentence compose to form a sentence meaning? We will start by looking at sentence-level meanings and relations between them. Then, we will investigate how the meanings of sentence-internal elements (like verbs, subjects, and adjectives) are composed to form sentence meanings. During the process, we will cover some formal tools that allow us to talk about language in a precise way: set theory, propositional logic, predicate logic, and lambda notation. We will consider how the formal tools apply (and not apply) to natural languages.

Prerequisite Introduction to Linguistic Theory (01:615:201)

Textbook

- There is no official textbook for this class. Readings will be made available as pdfs on Canvas.

Course Learning Goals

- Be introduced to the range of topics covered in natural language semantics

- Learn the formal tools needed to model natural language meaning

- Connect linguistic theory to broader cognitive, social, and cultural issues

Department Learning Goals

- Reason about language

- Evaluate popular views on the nature of human languages and their speakers

- Investigate linguistic data and analyze it demonstrating strong problem-solving skills

- Apply the techniques of linguistics that they have learned in the core courses to new topics, and access current research in the field

- Demonstrate knowledge of cross-linguistic variability and universal patterns in language

2 Requirements

Attendance & Participation   10% You will be graded based on attendance and your overall level of participation in class. Participation is measured by overall engagement demonstrated by answering questions raised in class, asking questions, and participating in discussion.

> [Zoom] For a lively discussion, I ask that you join the class in a setting with minimal disruptions, with your video on. Please get in touch with me in the first week if you foresee any problems.

Absences

- University policy excuses absences due to religious observance or participation in Rutgers-approved activities, and permits students to make up work missed for these circumstances.

- If you anticipate that you will be absent for whatever reason, particularly religious or medical reasons or for an emergency, you must notify me in writing as soon as possible AND report your absence via this link: https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/.

- If your absence is not excused prior to class, you will receive a zero on any in-class assessment or exam for which you are absent, and your overall grade will be affected.

Assignments   50% Weekly assignments will be posted on the Canvas site a week before they are due. Please type up your work and submit a pdf via Canvas.

- Late assignments will not be accepted without a valid excuse

- You are encouraged to work together on the assignments, but you must a) indicate who you worked with, and b) write up your own responses.

- You can resubmit a corrected assignment to receive half of the missing credit back if you have submitted the original assignment on time

- **Extra Credit:** Up to 2% of extra credit can be earned by participating in research studies. Your name is automatically added to the online experiment system, SONA, and you will be notified via email when a new study is available.

Midterm Exam   20% The midterm will be a take-home exam, and you will need to complete it in one sitting. It will be posted a week before it is due.

Final Exam   20% Like the midterm, the final exam will be a take-home assignment, and you will need to complete it in one sitting. It will be posted a week before it is due.

	A	$\geq$90
	B+	85-89
	B	80-84
Grading	C+	75-79
	C	70-74
	D	60-69
	F	<60

3 Other specifics

Please see the Department policies here: https://ling.rutgers.edu/academics/undergraduate-mainmenu-139/department-learning-goals-and-policies

Class meetings This class will be conducted synchronously over Zoom. This means that your attendance at the scheduled time is expected. If the meeting is ended due to technical problems or disruptions, the instructor will contact students using the Canvas announcement or email.

Recording Students are not allowed to record, copy, reproduce, or distribute any portion of this course.

Course Materials Course materials are the instructor's intellectual property. Sharing or posting online any part of the course materials without explicit permission from the instructor may qualify as an academic integrity issue and/or violation of copyright.

Canvas All class materials, including readings and relevant handouts will be uploaded and shared on Canvas. I will make use of the Announcements feature on Canvas exclusively to make announcements so that we have all the necessary information for the course in one place. Please make sure you have email/push notifications enabled if you would like to be notified!

- If you have questions or have problems with course access, downloading content, or navigating, Canvas Support which is available 24/7 at [https://canvas.rutgers.edu/canvas-help/].

Academic integrity Students in this class and in all courses at Rutgers University are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Cheating, plagiarism in written work, receiving and providing unauthorized assistance, and sabotaging the work of others are among the behaviors that constitute violations of the Academic Integrity Policy. You are expected to be familiar with this policy. If you have questions about specific assignments, be sure to check with the instructor.

Respect for diversity: It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. I intend to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: race/ethnicity, gender identities, gender expressions, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, disabilities, religion, regional background, veteran status, citizenship status, nationality and other diverse identities. Coercive, intimidating, harassing, abusive, derogatory or prejudicial actions or speech will not be accepted in this class. Please don't hesitate to let me know of any concerns you might have, or ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups.

4 Weekly schedule

*The course website supersedes the tentative schedule outlined in this document.

Week	Dates	Topic	Content	Assignment
1	9/2	Introduction		Survey
2	9/8	no class		
	9/9	Sentence Meaning	Propositional Logic	
3	9/13	Inferences 1	Entailment	Assignment 1
	9/16		Presupposition	
4	9/20	Inferences 2	Implicature	Assignment 2
	9/23			
5	9/27	Formal tools 1	Sets, Relations	Assignment 3
	9/30			
6	10/4	Formal tools 2	Functions	Assignment 4
	10/7			
7	10/11	Predicate Logic	Syntax	
	10/14		Semantics	
8	10/18	Review		
	10/21	MIDTERM EXAM		
9	10/25	Compositional Semantics	Compositional Rules	
	10/28		λ-notation	
10	11/1	Nouns	Nominal modification	Assignment 5
	11/4			
11	11/8	Verbs	Events and verb modification	
	11/11			
12	11/15	Reference	NP Meanings	Assignment 6
	11/18		Pronouns	
13	11/22	Quantifiers	Generalized quantifiers	Assignment 7
	11/25	(no class; Thanksgiving)		
14	11/29	(no class; W schedule)		Assignment 8
	12/2	Presupposition	Definiteness	
15	12/6	Intensional Semantics		
	12/9	Review		Final Exam
16	12/13	Review		