

Semantics I Winter 2002

- Instructor: Olga Arnaudova
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- Office hours: Monday 4-5 p.m., Thursday 11-12 a.m., or by appointment.
- The web-page for this outline is <http://aix1.uottawa.ca/~oarnaou/semantics.htm>
- The web-page for the weekly syllabus is <http://aix1.uottawa.ca/~oarnaou/sem.htm>

Content of the course

- This course is an introduction to **basic concepts of semantics**, lexical semantics and the interpretation of sentences. It will also include an **independent project (squib)**, to be discussed in more detail later.
- Topics include:
- sense, reference and truth conditions
 - links between syntax and semantics
 - thematic roles, quantifications, anaphora
 - introduction to formal semantics.

Timetable

- **Lecture**
Monday 14:30-16:00
Simard 430
 - **Lecture**
Thursday 16:00-17:30
Simard 430
- No tutorial but some quizzes (not graded) will be given in class. Come prepared!**

Mark breakdown

- Independent assignment (squib) *topic* -due Feb. 28 (Thursday)
5%
- Independent assignment (squib) *final version* - due Apr. 8 (Monday)
25%
- Attendance (based on 5 random attendance lists distributed in class)
5%
- Mid-term exam
30%
- Final exam
35%

Important!

- If any work is late without making prior arrangements with the instructor, you will lose 2% for every day late.

Textbook

Saeed, John I. *Semantics*. Blackwell publishers (University bookstore)

- **Section I** deals with the place of semantics in relation to other disciplines such as philosophy and pragmatics and within linguistics.
- **Section II** examines in detail several topics concerning word and sentence meaning.
- **Section III** reviews current theoretical approaches. We will use from this section *only* the part on *formal semantics* (chapter 10) as an introduction to

Semantics and philosophy

- The study of language originated within philosophy and only later became part of the new discipline of linguistics.(but it is still part of philosophy as all the sciences and liberal arts in a traditional sense).
- Semantics in particular was influenced by philosophy at various stages of its development in this century.
- Analytical philosophy: had the most obvious influence on its development (Gottlob Frege, 1892 "Über Sinn and Bedeutung" (On sense and reference), Bertrand Russell, early 20th century)
- Analytic philosophy is an approach which relies on detailed analysis, notions and problems are broken down into smaller units

Semantics and semiotics

Other arbitrary signs and sign systems are used to communicate meaning. Semantics can be viewed as subordinate to **semiotics**.

Ferdinand de Saussure, Swiss linguist (1857-1913) :
the study of meaning is part of a more general study, called **semiotics**. **Signifier (sign) and signified (object)**. Study of meaning bearing elements - signs- within the framework of social life.

SIGN (signifier).....Object(signified)

Semantics and semiotics

Types of Signs (how does the sign represent the object?)

* Non-linguistic

Icon: portrait, diagram (close resemblance)

Index: smoke>fire;clouds>rain (resemblance, causal relationship) A lot of clouds in the sky means rain.

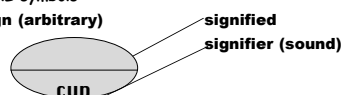
Symbol: insignia in military ranks, bird, pumpkin (conventional link between the sign and the signified)

• Linguistic

• Language; sign language

Words are VERBAL symbols

• Linguistic sign (arbitrary)



Semantics and semiotics

Traffic signs are

Forms of politeness are

High temperature and other symptoms of illness are.....



- There is a connection between non-linguistic and linguistic meaning but semantics is interested *only* in linguistic meaning.
- Language is man's most sophisticated use of signs.

Semantics and psychology

- **Psychology: the science of mind and behavior**
- **The very nature of language is psychological, cognitive**
- **Cognition=knowledge**
- **Chomsky (transformational grammar) views grammar/language as an autonomous (modular) cognitive system**

Semantics and formal logic

The field of semantic investigation attempting to transfer principles of artificial languages to natural (human) languages is called **Formal semantics (or logical semantics)**

Richard Montague (1932-71), American logician starts out from the premise that formal and human languages are practically the same.

Formal logic: mathematics; artificial languages.

Some terms (to be used in this course later):

Negation, conjunction (logical connective), operator, truth conditions

Semantics and grammar

Definition:

Study of meaning (=semantic knowledge) communicated through language.

- Part of grammar (phonology and syntax are other parts).
- part of speakers' linguistic competence (grammatical knowledge).

Meaning is part of the speaker's linguistic knowledge. Semantics is a field of linguistics because this is something speakers know about their
