Introduction to Semantics

LIN 4307
Oakland University
Winter 2024

TR 10:00a – 11:47a
Human Health Building 2023

Professor:
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Course Website:
https://joverfelt.net/teaching/lin-4307-5507/

Office:
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Office Hours:
by appointment

Password:
funtivities

DP $: \langle et, t \rangle$
$[\lambda f : f \in D_{\langle et \rangle}$. there is an x such that
x is a course and x is on semantics and $f(x) = T]$

D$^0 : \langle et, \langle et, t \rangle \rangle$
$[\lambda g.[\lambda f$. there is an x such that
$g(x) = T$ and $f(x) = T]]$
a

NP $: \langle et \rangle$
$[\lambda x \, . \, x$ is a course and x is on semantics $]$

N$^0 : \langle et \rangle$
$[\lambda x : x$ is a course]
course

PP $: \langle et \rangle$
$[\lambda y \, . \, y$ is on semantics $]$

P$^0 : \langle et, et \rangle$
$[\lambda x \, . \, [\lambda y \, . \, y$ is on $x]]$
on

NP $: \langle et \rangle$
$[\lambda x : x$ is semantics]

N$^0 : \langle et \rangle$
$[\lambda x : x$ is semantics]
semantics
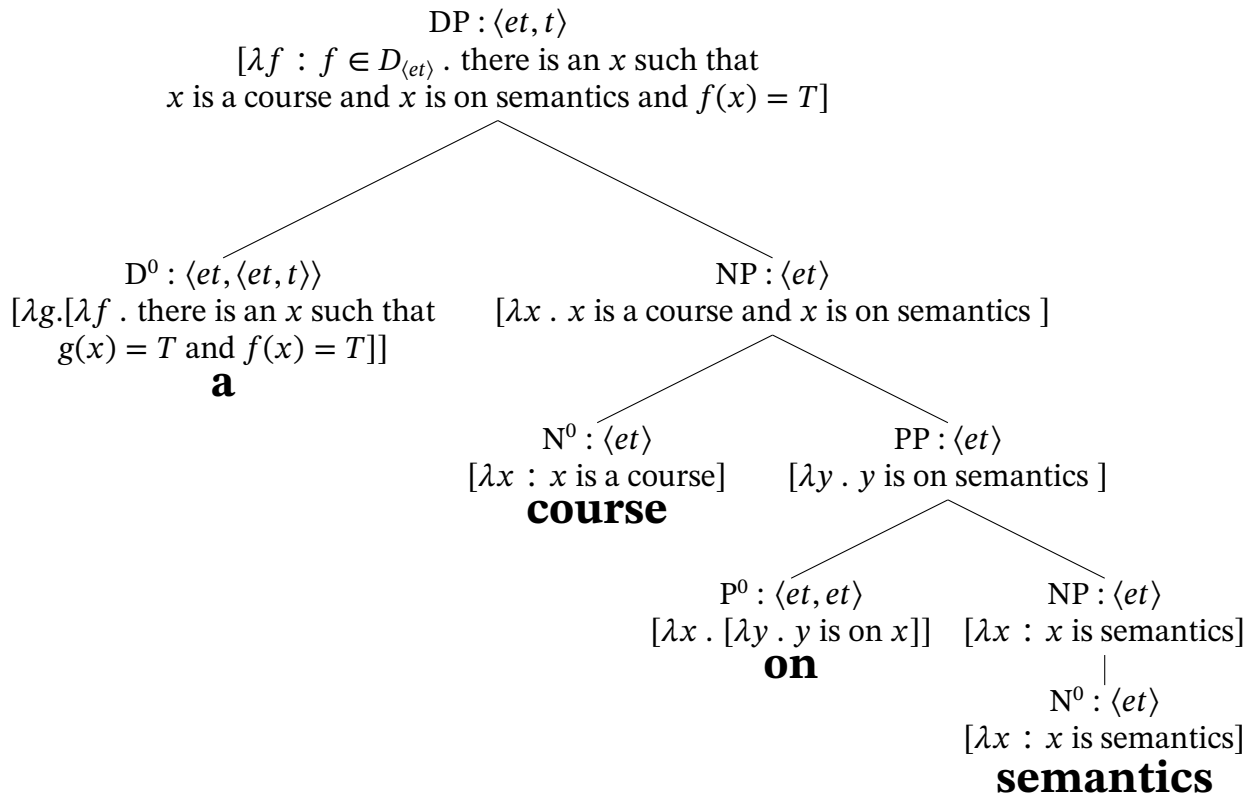
Contents

1   General Course Overview

The primary outcome of this course will be an explanatory understanding of our empirical knowledge of natural languages. That is, we're going to build a theoretical model of our competence of Language (i.e., the Human Language mechanism).

We will start by taking some time to motivate this project of constructing a semantic theory of Language competence. We will then review some foundational issues in semantics, pragmatics, and logic to provide an equal base from which we might all move forward.

The primary learning goal of this course is to engage you in the formal reasoning involved in constructing a theory of grammar. Thus, the majority of the course will attempt to:

   i) expose you further to the empirical domain of modern semantic theory,

  ii) guide you from forming empirical generalizations to providing theoretical formalizations, and

 iii) push you to continuously revise a theory of grammar.

This will involve providing a basic introduction to the following topics while focusing on a variety of different languages and language families:

- **Dimensions of Meaning:** What kinds of meanings are conveyed by natural language expressions?

- **Modes of Composition:** How is the asserted meaning of an utterance computed?

- **Modes of Inference:** How are the non-asserted meanings of an utterance computed?

- **Context-Dependence:** How does context influence or determine the meaning of an utterance?

2   Course Website

Your primary interface with course material outside of class will be through the course website, which can be accessed at the following url:

https://joverfelt.net/teaching/lin-4307-5507/

The password to access the site is *funtivities*.

I will use this space to post assignments, supplemental readings, and handouts. I will also maintain an up-to-date schedule with due dates and the agenda. Before e-mailing me about materials, check the website.

3   Course Requirements

Your grade will be calculated as a weighted average of your performance on three components: assignments, a midterm, and a final.

$Grade = (0.7)\overline{assignments} + (0.1)midterm + (0.2)final$

The grading scale for the course is as follows.

	D+	67.0 – 69.9	C+	77.0 – 79.9	B+	87.0 – 89.9			
F 0 – 59.9	D	63.0 – 66.9	C	73.0 – 76.9	B	83.0 – 86.9	A	93.0 – 100
	D−	60.0 – 62.9	C−	70.0 – 72.9	B−	80.0 – 82.9	A−	90.0 – 92.9

There will be no extra credit.

3.1 Assignments

You will have 7 graded assignments over the course of the semester that are meant to make you engage yourself with the material and employ and push the tools that you gain in lecture. Each assignment will be worth 100 points. (Grading out of 100 points gives me room to give you partial credit.)

Homework assignments are due as posted on the schedule. **I will not accept assignments left in my departmental mailbox or sent via e-mail**. Assignments must be submitted through Google Classroom, which can be accessed at the Submit Coursework link provided here, and on the course webpage.

You must turn assignments in before the meeting in which they are due.

All assignments must be typed to be submitted. I have provided various resources in section 4.3 that will help you do this while adhering to all guidelines and formalisms presented in lectures.

3.2 Midterm Exam

There will be a cumulative take-home midterm exam that will be made available after lecture on **Tuesday, February 20th**. The midterm exam must be submitted by **Friday, February 23rd** through the Submit Coursework link provided here, and on the course webpage.

I will give you more information about the exam as it approaches. The meeting before the midterm exam will be dedicated to review and preparation.

3.3 Final Exam

There will be a cumulative take-home final exam to be completed between **7:30am Thursday, April 18th** and **10:00pm Wednesday, April 24th**. The final exam must be submitted by **10:00pm on Wednesday, April 24th** through the Submit Coursework link provided here, and on the course webpage.

I will give you more information about the exam as it approaches. The meeting before the final exam will be dedicated to review and preparation.

3.4 Attendance

Attendance and participation in lectures is key to succeeding in this course and, therefore, in future courses. Participating means that you are awake, you are engaging with the material, and you are contributing to discussion.

Information regarding university COVID-19 policies can be found at the following website:

https://www.oakland.edu/return-to-campus/

4   Materials

4.1   Supplemental Reading

There is no required textbook for this class. All of the material that you will be responsible for will be presented during lecture.

However, this course is based primarily on the following textbook:

- Heim, Irene and Angelika Kratzer. 1998. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Supplemental readings listed on the syllabus correspond with the material discussed during the lecture on which they are posted.

When you notice a discrepancy between the reading and the lecture notes, defer to the lecture notes and feel free to ask me about it.

If you are looking for additional materials or materials that go into more detail than we will in this course, I would recommend the following textbooks:

- Chierchia, Gennaro and Sally McConnell-Ginet. 2000. *Meaning and Grammar: An Introduction to Semantics*, 2nd edition. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

- Coppock, Elizabeth and Lucas Champollion. 2023. *Invitation to Formal Semantics*. Ms., Boston University and New York University.

- Portner, Paul. 2005. *What is meaning? Fundamentals of formal semantics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

4.2   Assignments and Handouts

The material for which you are responsible in this course will be presented during lectures with accompanying handouts. I will make handouts available on the course website before the relevant lecture.

Assignments will be announced in class and will also be made available on the course website and the Google Classroom page.
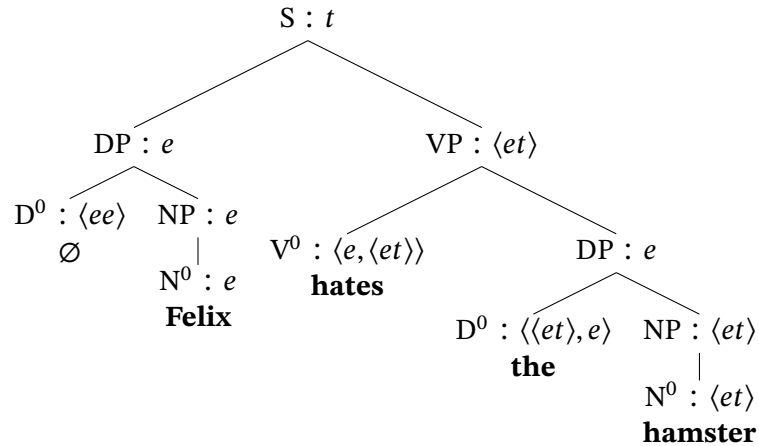
4.3   Tree-Drawing Resources

We will eventually be generating representations like in (1) on the following page.

The course website contains links to the following syntactic tree drawing software and applets:

- TreeForm: https://sourceforge.net/projects/treeform/

- Syntactic Tree Designer: https://sourceforge.net/projects/syntactictree/

- Syntax Tree Generator: http://mshang.ca/syntree/

- jsSyntaxTree: http://ironcreek.net/syntaxtree/

(1)

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                              S : t
                   ┌──────────┴──────────┐
                DP : e                  VP : ⟨et⟩
             ┌─────┴─────┐          ┌─────┴─────┐
        D⁰ : ⟨ee⟩    NP : e     V⁰ : ⟨e,⟨et⟩⟩      DP : e
           ∅           │          hates        ┌─────┴─────┐
                    N⁰ : e                 D⁰ : ⟨⟨et⟩,e⟩   NP : ⟨et⟩
                     Felix                    the            │
                                                          N⁰ : ⟨et⟩
                                                           hamster
```

If you use LaTeX, everything you see in (1) can be produced with the `linguex` and `qtree` packages. Overleaf (https://www.overleaf.com/) provides an on-line TeX editor.

5 Course Policies

5.1 Collaboration

Collaboration with your classmates is permitted and highly encouraged, but only on homework assignments. Please feel free to do assignments together and talk about any issues related to the course material.

If you do collaborate on an assignment, make sure to list the names of all the people you worked with and submit your own write-up of the assignment. You are not permitted to submit direct copies or to jointly author assignments.

5.2 Lateness Policy

Excepting circumstances surrounding unforeseeable emergencies, late assignments and exams will not be accepted without prior arrangement.

5.3 Academic Dishonesty

The Oakland University Student Conduct Code governs every aspect of this course. There will be zero tolerance or leniency for violations of this code. More information about the Student Conduct Code can be found through the Dean of Students website:

https://oakland.edu/deanofstudents/student-code-of-conduct/

5.4 Sexual Harassment

Oakland University is committed to taking prompt and effective steps intended to end sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, relationship violence, and related retaliation, prevent their recurrence and, as appropriate, remedy their effects. All University members are prohibited from engaging in, or assisting or abetting another's engagement in, sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and related retaliation.

There will be zero tolerance or leniency for violations of this policy. More information, including contact information for the Title IX coordinator, can be found through the Human Resources website:

https://oakland.edu/deanofstudents/sexual-assault-and-violence-initiative/

5.5 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Oakland University provides equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

For more information, you can consult the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiative website:

https://oakland.edu/diversity/

Note that speaking English natively is not a requirement in this class. However, we will have exercises that rely on native speaker intuitions about English. If you are not a native English speaker, you may consult your own intuitions anyway or you can ask me for my intuitions.

6 University Resources

6.1 Accessibility Services

If you have a documented need for accommodations, please see me immediately after class.

If you have not yet requested a letter from the Disability Support Services, do so immediately by contacting them at any of the following:

North Foundation Hall 102A

(248) 370-3266

DSS@oakland.edu

https://oakland.edu/dss/

6.2 Multilingual Services

Oakland University does *not* offer services for multilingual students (neither foreign nor domestic) who feel they could benefit from English language support.

If you feel like you could benefit from these services, you should report this to your dean, then you might look into the services offered by the International Students and Scholars Office:

O'Dowd Hall 328

(248) 370-3358

isso@oakland.edu

https://oakland.edu/isso/

6.3   Mental Health and Stress Management

Oakland University services are available to assist students experiencing barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation.

You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the OU Counseling Center website:

https://oakland.edu/oucc/

7   Schedule

We will attempt to adhere to the schedule below. It is possible, and in fact likely, that we will deviate from this schedule. It simply depends on the kind of feedback I get from you and how we, as a class, feel we should budget our time.

Week	Date	Lect.#	Topic	Reading	Due
			INTRODUCTION		
1	01/04	1	Semantics as a Cognitive Science	CMG (1–17)	
			FOUNDATIONS		
2	01/09	2	Dimensions of Meaning	CMG (17–33)	
	01/11	3	Truth-Conditional Meaning	P (12–27)	
3	01/16	4	Set Theory and Functions	HK (1–12)	HW1
			FORMALIZATION OF MEANING		
	01/18	5	Compositional Semantics	HK (13–20)	
4	01/23	6	Deriving Truth-Conditions	HK (20–23)	HW2
	01/25		**NO CLASS**		
5	01/30	7	Transitive Verbs	HK (26–29)	
	02/01	8	Lambda Notation	HK (34–39)	
			NONVERBAL PREDICATES		
6	02/06	9	Adjectival Predicates	HK (61–63)	
	02/08	10	Common Nouns	HK (61–63)	HW3
			SEMANTICS OF ADJECTIVES		
7	02/13	11	Adjectival Modification	HK (63–66)	
	02/15	12	Subsective Adjectives	HK (66–73)	
			MIDTERM		
8	02/20		**Review for Midterm**		HW4
	02/22		**Midterm**		MT (02/23)
9	02/27		**NO CLASS**		
	02/29		**NO CLASS**		
			SEMANTICS OF DPs		
10	03/05	13	Definite Descriptions	HK (73–75)	
	03/07	14	The Uniqueness Presupposition	HK (75–82)	
11	03/12	15	Quantificational DPs	HK (131–138)	
	03/14	16	Quantificational Ds	HK (140–147)	
			CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES		
12	03/19	17	Implicational Meanings	CMG (239–255)	HW5
	03/21	18	Gricean Theory	CMG (239–255)	
13	03/26	19	Deriving Some Implicatures	CMG (239–255)	
	03/28	20	Deriving More Implicatures	CMG (239–255)	
			PRONOUNS		
14	04/02	21	Variables and Assignment Functions	HK (239–244)	
	04/04	22	Presuppositions of Phi-Features	HK (244–245)	HW6
			ADVERBIALS		
15	04/09	23	Event Semantics	CC (427–432)	
	04/11	24	Existential Closure		
			REVIEW		
16	04/16		**Review for Final Exam**		HW7
	04/18–24		**FINAL EXAM**		FE