

Syllabus

Jan 10

1 Class Coordinates

Instructor: Florian Schwarz	Office: 311-C, 3401-C Walnut
Class times: M/W 9:30-11am	Email: florians@ling.upenn.edu
Class location: 326C, 3401-C Walnut	Office hours: Wednesdays 3:30-5pm & by appt.

2 Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the study of meaning in natural language. The first part of the course introduces a formal perspective on meaning in terms of truth conditions as well as the basic analytical tools necessary for this, primarily building on set theory and logic. The main part of the course covers a range of empirical investigations of phenomena related to meaning using experimental methods from psycholinguistics. Topics include a selection of issues on the semantics-pragmatics interface, such as conversational implicatures, presuppositions, reference resolution and perspective taking, and quantifier scope. Students will carry out a class project, possibly in groups, to develop (and, if possible, carry out) an experimental study of meaning-related phenomena of their own. Relevant tools for experimental design and the implementation of such studies will be introduced along the way. This provides students with the opportunity to engage in a scientific investigation of their own early on in their undergraduate career in a domain that is easily accessible and yet central to the general enterprise of the cognitive sciences.

3 Requirements

- Do assigned readings & actively participate in class
- Complete homework assignments on time
- Mid-term exam
- Semester project & term paper
- In-class presentations:
 - 2-3 class presentations on
 - * a survey paper,
 - * an article from the primary literature,
 - * and your project
 - final project presentation
- Participate in 2 hours worth of experiments through the Psychology Department's subject pool: <https://upenn.sona-systems.com/> (Preferably in language-related studies)
- Alternatively, you can write a brief summary (1-2 pages) of a paper reporting experiments related to meaning that was not discussed in class, to earn the equivalent of 1 hour of experimentation (to satisfy the requirement solely through article summaries, you need to write two of them). You you have to consult with me to make sure your choice is appropriate.

The work throughout the semester - homework assignments, presentations, and gradual development of project - are central for the class. In order to really understand the basic concepts of both formal semantics

and experimental work on meaning, you have to apply them yourself. Homework has to be turned in on time to make sure that you don't fall behind. in-class exercises which will prepare you for the homework.

You will embark on a research project during the semester, which can be carried out individually or together with another student. The topic can build on topics covered in the course or address other suitable issues in the study of meaning (to be approved by instructor). Projects will typically involve designing an experiment that addresses a question about meaning in natural language and collecting and analyzing at least some pilot data. If you have good reasons to pursue a project that doesn't quite fit that description (e.g., related prior work using slightly different methodologies, e.g., computational modeling or corpus data), come talk to me as soon as possible. Resources and references for project topics will be made available. Investigations of phenomena in languages other than English are especially welcome, in particular if you are a native speaker of another language or have easy and reliable access to one. The projects will be presented in class at the end of the semester and written up as a term paper.

4 Grades

Your grade for the class will be based on your homework (30%), your midterm (15%), your project and paper (30%), your oral class presentations (15%), and class participation (10%).

5 Textbook

Zimmermann, T.E. and W. Sternefeld. 2013. *Introduction to Semantics*. DeGruyter.

Original articles from the current research literature will be made available through Canvas for the specific topics to be covered.

Some further helpful background readings:

- Bach, E. 1989. *Informal Lectures on Formal Semantics*. State University of New York Press.
- Chierchia, G., and McConnell-Ginet, S. 1990. *Meaning and Grammar: An Introduction to Semantics*. MIT Press.
- Elbourne, P. 2011. *Meaning. A slim guide to semantics*. Oxford University Press.
- Kadmon, N. 2001. *Formal Pragmatics*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Levinson, S. 1983. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Levinson, S. 2000. *Presumptive Meanings*. MIT Press.
- Sedivy, J. 2014. Language in Mind. *An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*. Sinauer.
- Portner, P. 2005. *What is Meaning?* Blackwell.

Lecture notes and further readings will be made available online.

6 Preview of (some of the) topics to be discussed

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| • Basics of Formal Semantics | • Presuppositions |
| • Basics of Experimental Design | • Reference & Pronouns |
| • Quantifiers and Scope | • Genericity |
| • Conversational Implicatures | • A selection of further topics from current research literature |