

Meaning in Language

LING 260

Fall 2020
CRN 19568
Tu,Th 8:35am–9:55pm

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Office hours: W 10:00–11:00 (group meetings) or by appointment (one-on-one)

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1 Information about remote delivery

Lectures will be delivered remotely through Zoom. A portion of each lecture will be dedicated to students practicing and solving problems in groups, using Zoom’s “breakout room” function. Lectures will be recorded and recordings will be made available through myCourses. Lectures will be based on detailed handouts, which will be also be posted on myCourses. Other readings will be made available electronically on myCourses as well.

The myCourses “Discussions” tool will be used to invite offline discussion relating to class content. The instructor’s and TA’s office hours will likewise be conducted through Zoom. Office hours will be offered as group meetings (at the fixed weekly time slot given above) or one-on-one meetings (by appointment).

Students will be assessed on the basis of (i) frequent homework assignments—submitted through my-Courses—and (ii) class participation – during lectures, office hours, or via the myCourses discussion board. There is no final exam.

For general information about remote teaching, please read the Guidelines on Remote Teaching and Learning <https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/instructors/class-disruption/strategies/guidelines-remote>.

Regarding the recording of lectures, you will be notified through a “pop-up” box in Zoom if a lecture or portion of a class is being recorded. By remaining in sessions that are recorded, you agree to the recording, and you understand that your image, voice, and name may be disclosed to classmates. You also understand that recordings will be made available in myCourses to students registered in the course.

2 Course content

Overview

A hands-on introduction to the strategies that natural languages use to convey meaning. Requiring no previous background in linguistics, the course surveys fundamental properties of word and sentence meaning and their interdependence with context. It provides an overview of the grammatical mechanisms that languages employ to construct the literal meanings of sentences from word meanings, explores how meanings are anchored to real life situations, and analyzes how meanings are routinely enriched in context by language users to convey more than what is literally expressed.

Goals

You should expect to learn about: (i) what *sorts of questions* linguists ask about language, and about meaning, in particular; (ii) what *sorts of answers* that linguists have been given to questions about meaning-related phenomena; (iii) some of the *concepts and tools* that linguists often reference or use in their answers to questions about meaning; (iv) how evidence-based *argumentation* can adjudicate between competing answers to meaning questions about meaning in language.

Strategy

The course is hands-on in the sense that you will learn primarily by doing and practicing, as opposed to reading or memorizing. Problem sets in frequent homework assignments will invite you to think about content covered during class and presented in class handouts, sometimes by going through some of the same sorts of steps that professional linguists go through in their investigations. Problem sets may, for example, (i) require you to think of additional examples that make a particular point, (ii) let you practice notational devices used to describe aspects of linguistic meaning, or (iii) ask you to compare linguistic analyses and to develop and articulate your own argumentation.

3 Materials

Readings

There is no required textbook for the course. Required readings consist in detailed class handouts. (Please note that there are no suitable existing published texts, whether textbooks or articles, that cover the intended content in a way that is accessible to novices in linguistics.)

The class handouts will, however, provide pointers to optional readings that fit with the relevant class content (and that will be available in digital format through myCourses). While usually targeting an audience with more background in linguistics than you are likely to have, these readings maybe of interest to you if you would like to learn more about a particular topic or if you hope to get a sense of what linguistic literature is like. (However, optional readings are not likely to help you with the homework assignments! It would most certainly not be a good investment of your time to try to find

answers in the optional readings (or other literature), as opposed to doing your own thinking, based on what was covered in class and in the class handouts.)

Class handouts

For each class, there will be a handout that you will need to have access to in order to follow the lecture. Handouts will usually be posted on myCourses by 8am the day of the lecture.

Revised versions of handouts will sometimes be posted on myCourses after class. It is your responsibility to make sure that you always consult the latest version of the handout.

Course materials and copyright

© Instructor generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#).

4 Assessment

Homework assignments: 90%
Participation: 10%

Homework assignments

There will be approximately 8 homework assignments (see tentative schedule below). The assignment will usually be made available on myCourses one week before the due date. While each assignment will have equal weight in the final grade, assignments may vary to some extent in terms of length and difficulty.

Note about collaboration: Assignments may be discussed in groups. However, a group may contain a maximum of three students. Also, each student must turn in a separate assignment written up individually and independently. If you worked in a group, you must provide the names of the students who you worked with on the first page of your assignment.

No late assignments will be accepted and no make-up assignments will be offered unless you have a documented medical excuse and I have been notified within 24 hours of when the assignment was due. Any problem with grading on an assignment or exam must be reported within one week of when the assignment or exam was returned.

Participation

Apart from oral contributions in class, participation includes written contributions posted on the myCourses discussion board, as well as contributions during office hours. Written contributions

can be of a range of different sorts. For example, you may raise questions related to class content, propose an answer to a question raised by someone else, share relevant example sentences you may have thought of or encountered, share a cartoon that makes a point related to class content, etc.

5 Communicating

Email

You can expect the instructor and TA to respond to your e-mail questions and comments. However, please do not expect instant responses. We will try to respond within two working days (though we will be more vigilant closer to assignment due dates).

Office hours

The instructor and TA are available during hours via Zoom at the fixed times stated above (group office hours) or by appointment (one-on-one meetings).

6 Other course rules

Academic integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity>).

Right to submit in French

In accord with McGill University's [Charter of Students' Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Extraordinary circumstances

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

7 Getting additional help

Tutors

If you need more individual attention than the instructor or TA are able to provide, we encourage you to contact either the Student Tutorial Service (<https://www.mcgill.ca/tutoring/>) or SLUM (the Society of Linguistics Undergraduates at McGill; slum.linguistics@mail.mcgill.ca). Of course, it is understood that tutors help with the content of the course but do not help directly with assignments. Make sure that your tutor is knowledgeable about the course content, which can change from term to term.

Inclusiveness

As instructors of this course, we endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with us and [the Office for Students with Disabilities](#), (514) 398-6009.

Schedule (subject to possible revisions)

	TOPIC		
WEEK 1			
Th	09/03	I. The study of meaning: an example	
WEEK 2			
Tu	09/8	<i>All that glitters is not gold.</i> : the view from linguistics	
Th	09/10	What meanings do we find?	
WEEK 3			
Tu	09/15	II. Linguistic competence about meaning	
Th	09/17	Semantic relations, truth conditions,	Assignment # 1 due
WEEK 4			
Tu	09/22	other components and shades of meaning	
Th	09/24	III. Case study: talking about space	
WEEK 5			
Tu	09/29	Orientations, dimensions, frames of reference	Assignment # 2 due
Th	10/01	frames of reference and language variaton	
WEEK 6			
Tu	10/06		
Th	10/08		Assignment # 3 due
WEEK 7			
Tu	10/13	IV. More about context dependency	
Th	10/15	The pervasiveness of context dependency	
WEEK 8			
Tu	10/20	Case studies on gradable expressions	Assignment # 4 due
Th	10/22		
WEEK 9			
Tu	10/27	V. Presupposing and asserting	
Th	10/29	Presuppositions and their triggers; the common ground	Assignment # 5 due
WEEK 10			
Tu	11/03	the common ground theory of presupposition	
Th	11/05	presupposition failure and its effects	

WEEK 11		
Tu	11/10	
Th	11/14	VI. Case study: determiner meanings
		Assignment # 6 due
WEEK 12		
Tu	11/17	Determiners relate sets
Th	11/19	Conservativity and monotonicity
		Assignment # 7 due
WEEK 13		
Tu	11/24	
Th	11/26	
WEEK 14		
Tu	12/01	
		Assignment # 8 due