

Semantics 2

LING 460

Winter 2025
Tu,Th 11:35–12:55
1085 Penfield, R. 002

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Office hours: W 2:00-3:00pm (or by appointment)

Goals

The course provides background enabling students to appreciate central themes of contemporary research in semantics. Given the technical nature of the literature in semantics, our focus will not be on reading, but on engaging with puzzles that emerge from content presented in class. At the same time, final projects will provide an opportunity for some individual exploration of relevant literature, and to potentially take initial steps in developing an independent research project.

Content

Building on background in logic and set theory of the sort assumed or reviewed in LING 360 *Introduction to Semantics*, this course offers an in-depth and hands-on introduction to how lexical meaning, syntactic structure, and principles of semantic composition can conspire to give rise to sentence meanings. We will focus in particular on puzzles of composition relating to DP. Elements of grammar that introduce such puzzles prominently include modification by relative clauses, the grammar of quantification, and definiteness.

Prerequisites

LING 360 Introduction to Semantics, or similar

Requirements

5 homework assignments, presentation, final paper

Evaluation

homework assignments:	60%
presentation:	8%
paper:	32%

Homework assignments

Homework assignments are primarily intended to consolidate students' understanding of material covered in class, often by presenting problems that invite students to apply class content in somewhat novel ways. The types of answers to questions in homework assignments include short texts, but also technical exercises, such as line-by-line derivations detailing hypothesized steps of semantic composition.

For homework assignments, **collaboration in groups of two is permitted**, that is, each student may team up with one other student. If you do work with another student, **you must submit a single joint assignment**. No collaboration across different teams is permitted.

Final projects

Normally in teams of up two, you will choose and investigate a topic of your interest for your final project that is related to course material. You will give a class presentation and write a short paper on that topic. The paper will typically include a critical review of one or more research papers, but it may also focus on the outcome of your own research—e.g., propose an analysis of certain data collected data from native speakers or the internet, etc. The presentation is intended as a stepping stone towards the paper, and must be based on a handout or slides. There will be more information about final projects as the term progresses.

Schedule (subject to possible revision)

The circled numbers in the schedule indicate projected due dates for homework assignments (subject to possible revision). Assignments are normally made available one week before the due date.

	TOPIC	SUPPORTING READING
WEEK 1		
Tu 01/07	Sentence meanings: truth conditions, possible worlds	Cresswell (1988) Larson (1995)
Th 01/09		
WEEK 2		
Tu 01/14	Composition: Functional Application (predicates, arguments)	Heim & Kratzer (1998, ch. 2)
Th 01/16		
WEEK 3		
Tu 01/21		
Th 01/23 ①		

WEEK 4		
Tu 01/28	Composition: Predicate Modification (modification by PP and AP)	Heim & Kratzer (1998, ch. 4)
Th 01/30		
WEEK 5		
Tu 02/04 ②	Determiner meanings: definiteness and quantification	Heim & Kratzer (1998, chs. 4, 6)
Th 02/06		
WEEK 6		
Tu 02/11	Composition: Predicate Abstraction (modification by relative clauses)	Heim & Kratzer (1998, ch. 5)
Th 02/13 ③		
WEEK 7		
Tu 02/18		
Th 02/20		
WEEK 8		
Tu 02/25	Composition: covert movement (object quantifiers)	Heim & Kratzer (1998, ch. 7)
Th 02/27 ④		
WINTER READING BREAK (03/03-03/07)		
WEEK 9		
Tu 03/11	Puzzle: “degree definites”	Alonso-Ovalle & Schwarz (2023)
Th 03/13		
WEEK 10		
Tu 03/18 ⑤	Puzzle: “functional definites”	Palucci (in press)
Th 03/20		
WEEK 11		
Tu 03/25		
Th 03/27 ⑥		
WEEK 12		
Tu 04/01	Student presentations	
Th 04/03		
WEEK 13		
Tu 04/08	Student presentations	
Th 04/10		

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>).

Inclusiveness

As instructors of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss these with us and [Student Accessibility and Achievement](#).

References

- Alonso-Ovalle, Luis, and Bernhard Schwarz. 2023. Structural ambiguity in pseudo-partitives: the case of quantity nouns. In *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) 33*, ed. Juhya Kim and Burak Oney. Linguistic Society of America.
- Cresswell, M.J. 1988. Semantic competence. In *Semantical Essays*, volume 36 of *Studies in Linguistics and Philosophy*, 12–33. Springer Netherlands.
- Heim, Irene, and Angelika Kratzer. 1998. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Larson, Richard K. 1995. Semantics. In *An Invitation to Cognitive Science: Language*, ed. Lila Gleitman and Mark Liberman, volume 1, chapter 12, 361–380. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Palucci, Jonathan. in press. Pseudo-scoping out of relative clauses: an ‘individual concept’ approach. In *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) 34*.