Ling 340 ~ Spring 2018  
C. Ussery  

Linguistics 340 λ. Topics in Semantics λ. Cherlon Ussery  

OVERVIEW  
This course is designed to be true to its name. We will explore various topics in semantics and its intersection with philosophy (only a tiny bit), syntax (quite a bit), and psycholinguistics (a little). Because this is both a 300-level course and the only semantics course offered in the department, we are charged with three tasks: (1) getting a sense for this particular sub-field of linguistics; (2) grappling with the complexity attached to investigating meaning; and (3) mastering some level of technical representations of meaning. We will accomplish all three of these tasks.  

Each of the following topics is broadly covered in the PowerPoint for Week 1. We will familiarize ourselves with the issues associated with each topic and then delve into each one more deeply throughout the term.  

- Some Philosophical Contemplation: Just what is “Meaning”  
- The Complexity of Word Meanings  
  - The Relationships That Words Have to Each Other  
  - A Look at the Copula  
- The Even Greater Complexity of Sentence Meanings  
  - C-selection and S-selection  
  - The meanings of embedded clauses  
  - Truth-Value Semantics and Type Theory  
  - The “Event” Argument and little v  
  - Formal Notations for Sentence Meanings - λ Abstraction  
  - “Extra” Verbal Arguments – i.e., Applicatives  
  - The Relationship Between Meaning and Morphology  
  - Scope and Logical Form  
  - Ditransitives  
- Pragmatics: Word and Sentence Meaning within Conversational Context  
  - Gricean Maxims  
  - Speech Act Theory  

COURSE OUTLINE  
Week 1: Thinking About Meaning  
- There’s no reading this week. Our goal is two-fold: (1) to familiarize ourselves with the big-picture semantic concepts; (2) to observe and think about how language is used.  
- My lectures for this week are designed to provide a broad overview of everything we’ll learn about this term. As the term unfolds, we will return to each topic and explore it in more detail.  

Assignment for Friday:  
- Part 1. Write 2-3 paragraphs in which you define chair. It’s not so easy and this will prepare us for Chapter 1 of the Elbourne reading. (You are not allowed to consult any sort of dictionary.)  
- Part 2. Do the same for book.  
- Part 3. Listen for instances of so being used sentence-initially, as in “So, I’d really like us to think deeply about the sentence-initial usage of the word so.”  
  - Document as many instances of sentence-initial so as you can, either in your own speech or in the speech of others.  
  - Describe how sentence-initial so is used. What is its meaning/purpose?
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- **Part 4.** Document as many instances as you can of a modal (can, should, would, might etc.) being used in conversation. What meaning does the modal have in the context it’s used in? For instance, does it mean that someone has the ability to perform some action; does it mean that someone has an obligation to perform some action; etc.?
- **Part 5.** Document any instances in which there is a communication “error”. Do you misunderstand what someone else says? Does someone misunderstand you? What is the source of the misunderstanding? Do you and your interlocutor have different concepts attached to the same lexical item? Do you or your interlocutor falsely assume that the other person has some relevant knowledge/background information? Is some “rule” of conversation disobeyed?

**Week 2: Some Philosophical Contemplation: What do words actually mean and how do we know what they mean?**
  - **Friday: Group Presentation on Indexicals**

**Week 3: How Many Be’s? An Examination of the Copula**
- Milstein, Sarah. 2015. To be or (k)not to be, that is the copula: a cross-linguistic look at the categorization and properties of copulas. Ms., Carleton College. Senior thesis.
  - **Response to this article is due the Wednesday of Week 4**

**Week 4: What do Sentences Mean and How do we Model Sentence Meaning and Argument Structure?**
  - **Friday: Group Presentation on Modality**

**Week 5: Argument Structure and Modeling Applicatives**
  - **Type Theory and Lambda Abstraction assignment is due the Wednesday of Week 6**

**Week 6: The Interpretations of Quantifiers**
  - **Monday, 04/30 – Midterm break**

**Week 7: Pragmatics: Meaning in Context**


Friday: Group Presentation on Pragmatics

Week 8: The Syntax and Semantics of Ditransitives


Bruening, Benjamin. 2010b. Double object constructions disguised as prepositional datives. LI 41:287-305.


Ditransitives assignment is due the Monday of Week 9

Week 9: Project Presentations

Week 10: Deconstructing Sarcasm


Final Papers due by midnight on Monday, June 4 (via email)

Grades will be determined according to the following:
Group Presentation: 10%
Copula Response Article: 20%
Type Theory and Lambda Assignment: 20%
Ditransitives Assignment: 20%
Final Project: 30%
  Presentation: 10%
  Paper: 20%

Office Hours: Mondays 4:30-6:30 p.m. (my office, Goodsell 203), Wednesdays 3:30-5:30 p.m., (Weitz Commons) and by appointment