Linguistics 437:
Semantics and Pragmatics

Instructor:	Curt Anderson	**Email**:	ande1472@msu.edu
Class time:	TR 12:40pm–2pm	**Classroom**:	A226 Wells Hall
Office hours:	Tuesday 11am–noon	**Office**:	B320 Wells Hall
	Wednesday 3:00pm–4:00pm		(knock on the door)
	and by appointment		

1   Course Outline

This course examines how natural languages encode meaning and how speakers use them to convey it. Our core aim will be to develop a theory of semantic and pragmatic competence that addresses these deep, complicated, and potentially slippery questions with the rigor and precision contemporary linguistics aspires to. In doing so, we will encounter some of the formal tools that provide a framework for answering these questions in a precise way, but the emphasis will be on the empirical phenomena the theory is designed to model and on the proper place of such a theory in the architecture of the grammar.

2   Textbook

There is no required book for this course. However, there is a supplementary book.

Heim, Irene and Kratzer, Angelika. (1998). *Semantics in generative grammar*. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.

The book can be useful for providing additional background and getting a firmer grasp on the theoretical machinery. It's not a substitute for coming to class — much of what we do in class won't have a direct counterpart in the book. In places where there are rough counterparts, the way we reach our conclusions and the technical implementation will likely be somewhat different.

Any readings will be distributed as PDFs via email.

3   Grading and Requirements

There are several requirements for this course.

- At most six take-home assignments. Most of these will require you to devise solutions to empirical problems and present them in the form of a brief, well-reasoned argument.

- Two take-home exams (a midterm and a final). Essentially long assignments.

- Contributing frequently and thoughtfully to class discussions. This is not optional.

Each assignment and each exam will receive a grade. Your final grade will be the mean of the following:

- Your grades on the assignments

- Your grades on the exams, weighted double (in other words, exams count as two assignments)

- A grade for what you contributed to class discussion (this counts as one assignment)

4   Course Policies

Outside of class: You can and in fact are encouraged to discuss your work with others. You can work in groups of at most three for the assignments, but each group member must be able to defend the final analysis. Other people's ideas must be cited. If there's confusion about this, come see me.

In class: The course will revolve primarily around in-class discussion, and most of the progress we make will be made in that way, so coming to class is crucial. If you miss a class, you are likely to miss information that will be necessary to understand the assignment and any subsequent discussion. If you anticipate missing class frequently, do not take this course.

Warning!   Semantics uses mathematical tools that many people find difficult to master. The course is highly technical, more so than you might be used to from other linguistics classes at the same level. If you're not prepared for this, you should drop the course now.

Disability?   If it will be difficult for you to meet these requirements due to a disability, please notify me during the first two weeks of the course so we can make appropriate arrangements.

Honors option: If you'd like to do an honors option — or you're not in the Honors College, but would like to do the equivalent of one — talk to me at some point during the first half the semester. We can work out what exactly you would do, but at least part of it would be a short in-class presentation of your work at the end of the semester.

Email: Make sure you check your email regularly. Handouts, readings, assignments, and class announcements will be sent to your MSU email.

5   Schedule

This is a tentative overview of the topics we'll address, in roughly the order we'll address them. The specifics of this schedule will depend on our in-class discussions and how much time we devote to particular topics, so this schedule is likely to be overly ambitious.

Week 1: January 8th
Introduction to semantics and pragmatics
Guest lecturer: Adam Gobeski (I'm out of town)

Week 1: January 10th
No class. Out of town.

Week 2: January 15th and January 17th
Outlining the scope of a theory of meaning
Truth-conditions and entailment

Week 3: January 22nd and January 24th
Models and natural language ontology
Compositionality and functions

Week 4: January 29th and January 31st
Predicate abstraction and lambdas
Type-driven interpretation
Schönfinkeling and multiple arguments

Week 5: February 5th and February 7th
Definite descriptions
Presupposition and some lexical semantics
Context-sensitivity

Week 6: February 12th and February 14th
Temporal semantics, tense and aspect

Week 7: February 19th and February 21st
Aktionsart and lexical semantics of verbs
A surprising connection (detour: mass and count)?

Week 8: February 26th and February 28th
Modification and vagueness and ambiguity
Midterm handed out. (Tentative)

Spring break: March 5th and March 7th
No class. Spring break.

Week 9: March 12th and March 14th
Quantificational adverbs, quantificational determiners
Problems with quantificational determiners

Week 10: March 19th and March 21st
Pronouns and variables
Movement and variable binding
Generalized quantifiers and scope

Week 11: March 26th and March 28th
Cross-linguistic semantics (and semantic universals?)
Generalized quantifiers and conservativity

Week 12: April 2nd and April 4th
Polarity and polarity-sensitivity
Two flavors of adjectives, Copulas
Temporal sensitivity

Week 13: April 9th and April 11th
Some foundational puzzles
Intensionality and modality

Week 14: April 16th and April 18th
Pragmatics of discourse
Discourse structure and information states
Conversational implicatures

Week 15: April 23rd and April 25th
Semantics in child language acquisition and psycholinguistics
The final (incomplete) picture
Final handed out (due Friday of exam week)

Exam week: April 30th
No class. Final due Friday of exam week.