Assessment guidelines for ENG4157, Autumn 2023

The course
This course is an introduction to language and meaning for master's students studying language or linguistics.

Students look into these questions (and more):
- How do we communicate with each other?
- What can we express in language?
- How can we say one thing and mean another?
- What does the structure of language have to do with the thoughts we use language to express?

The first part of the course is an introduction to the study of semantics on both word and sentence level. The second part gives insights into theories of language use, particularly the part of pragmatics dealing with how speakers communicate more than they literally say or write.

Learning outcomes
The exam tests the following general learning outcomes as specified in the course description (https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ilos/ENG4157/):

After completing this course you will have:
- developed an understanding of the relationship between language and meaning on word, sentence and utterance level.
- learned semantic theories about the understanding of different aspects of meaning in words, how they can be described, and how grammar and syntax contribute to meaning.
- learned pragmatic theories about how language users achieve their goals in verbal interaction with others.

Topics covered

How do we communicate?
How do humans communicate? How does it compare with animal signalling? What's the role of language? What's the evidence that we communicate more than the meaning of the words we use? Relatedly: Why do we have two terms, 'semantics' and 'pragmatics'? What's the difference? Includes brief previews of several topics that we will look at in depth later.

Key concepts: semantics, pragmatics, the distinction between sentences and utterances, properties of natural language or language use (arbitrariness, stimulus independence, displacement, systematicity, productivity, compositionality), the code model of communication (and why it can't be the whole story), implicatures.

Word meaning I: sense and reference
How can we use language to describe the world? How do words relate to concepts and how do they relate to the things that we use them to talk about? A crucial theoretical point today is that a purely denotational approach can't work. So words must also have *senses*.

Key concepts: denotational theories of meaning; the distinction between sense and reference; ambiguity; referring and non-referring expressions and uses; definite and indefinite descriptions; descriptive and expressive meaning; deixis.

Word meaning II: sense relations
Relations between word meanings. Lexical ambiguity is widespread, but what are its limits? Is *cousin* in English ambiguous between "female cousin" and "male cousin"? What's the difference

between homonymy (as with financial *bank* and river *bank*) and polysemy (e.g. the different senses of *book*)? Are words like *tall* and *bald* ambiguous? What other sense relations are there?

Key concepts: proposition; statement; entailment; compositionality; scope; synonymy; paraphrases; complementary terms; antonyms; converseness; hyponymy;sense (again); lexical ambiguity; indeterminacy; vagueness; zeugma and the zeugma test; the identity test; the test of contradiction; homonymy (homonym, homophone, and homograph); polysemy.

Sentence meaning and truth
A key part of what speakers of a language know when they understand a sentence is how it describes the world. We can understand this in terms of 'truth conditions': i.e. what the world would have to be like for the sentence to be true. Speakers also know about meaning relations between sentences: e.g. if some sentence *p* is true, then some other sentence *q* must be true (or can't be true). These relations have been studied by logicians, in a simple system called 'propositional logic', so we look at that. This system also sheds light on the meanings of certain logical words: *and*, *or*, i*f… then*, and *not*.

Key concepts: truth values and truth conditions; propositions; relations between propositions: entailment, tautologies, contradictions, paraphrases, inconsistent, contradictory and independent propositions; truth and validity; truth-functional and non-truth functional operators; logical operators: conjunction, disjunction, material 'implication', the biconditional, negation; truth tables

Adjectives
We return to adjectives (which we looked at in week 3) and look at their meanings in more detail. We look at two interesting features of adjectives: i) their tendency to express different degrees, or levels, of a quantity; and ii) the different ways that different types of adjective meanings combine with noun meanings. In both cases we will also see how contextual factors influence the interpretation of adjectives. (This prefigures the second half of the course, on pragmatics: meaning in context)

Key concepts: complementary pairs and gradable antonyms (again); non-gradable adjectives; tests for gradability; intersective adjectives; non-intersective adjectives, including modal adjectives and privative adjectives; relative adjectives

Situation type, tense and aspect
Languages allow us to talk about how events are positioned in time and how they 'occupy' time. Verb phrases generally refer to situations and there are various situation types: language distinguishes between states and processes, between processes that have an inherent end-point and those that are open-ended, and between temporally extended and point events. Situation type is related to (but not determined by) the lexical meaning of verbs. In addition, grammar encodes information about time in the tense and aspect systems, and we will look at Reichenbach's system for classifying these.

Key concepts: situation types: states, dynamic situations, stative verbs, durative/punctual distinction, telic/atelic distinction, semelfactives, iterative readings, 'activities', 'accomplishments', 'achievements', tests for semelfactives, tests for stativity, tests for telicity, tests for durativity; tense; aspect, progressive/simple distinction, perfect/simple distinction, perfective/imperfective distinction; Reichenbach's reference point theory.

Modality, scope and quantification
So far we have mostly discussed sentences that categorically state facts about the world: that is to say, they assert that something is true. In practice, we often want to communicate less categorically than this: for instance, to assert that something is possibly true, or that it ought to be true, or that it is permissible for it to be true. We use the term ***modality*** to refer to the ways in which we can use language to qualify statements of fact like this. The expression of modality often gives rise to

ambiguity. One way in which this can happen is when a modal expression interacts with another expression, such as negation – in this case, we need to understand the ***scope*** relations between the two expressions. We also look at quantifiers this week: words like *all*, *some*, and *none*. ***Quantification*** has a lot in common with modality, not least that quantifiers can also enter into complicated and sometimes ambiguous scope relations.

Key concepts: modality; interaction of modality with tense; deontic and epistemic modality; semantic scope; scope ambiguity; neg-raising; quantification; sets; the empty set; subsets; proper subsets; cardinality of a set; the union of two sets; the intersection of two sets; the complement of a set; the English quantifiers *all*, *some* and *no…* ; numerical quantifiers; proportional quantifiers; distributivity and collectivity; quantifier scope

Speaker's meaning and implicatures
What a speaker means by her utterance is not in general identical to the meaning of the sentence she has uttered. But how does this work? How can speaker and addressee coordinate on a meaning which is different from the linguistically encoded meaning? We look at the most influential proposal, which launched the study of pragmatics: Grice's theory of conversation. We also look at another component of utterance meaning, presupposition, and some diagnostic tests for working out whether something is an entailment, a presupposition or an implicature.

Key concepts: conversational implicatures, the Cooperative Principle, the conversational maxims, violation of a maxim, apparent violation, maxim clashes, flouting of a maxim, the generalised/particularised distinction, conventional implicatures and non-truth-conditional meaning; properties of conversational implicatures: calculability, cancellability, nondetachability, reinforcability, presuppositions; distinguishing between components of utterance meaning.

Speech acts
Languages typically encode in their grammar a distinction between declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives, sentences whose main purpose is (respectively) to make statements, ask questions and give orders. But the connection between grammatical mood and the 'force' of a speech act is not straightforward: not every use of a declarative makes a statement, and there are many more types of speech act, including promising, betting, and requesting. We look at the distinction between constatives, speech acts which describe the world, and performatives, speech acts whose main purpose is to change it, such as promises and namings. This distinction was introduced by JL Austin, as a way to draw attention to different kinds of action performed by utterances: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. We read an extract from Austin's book, and also look at the most important refinements of the theory including the distinction between direct and indirect speech acts.

Key concepts: performatives, constatives, felicity conditions, misfires and abuses, explicit and implicit performatives, illocutionary force, locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, perlocutionary acts, , the distinction between direct and indirect speech acts, Searle's distinctions between preparatory, sincerity, and essential conditions.

Politeness
It's obvious that social factors influence language use. For example, why do speakers use implicatures and indirect speech acts, when we could just say what we mean directly? Sometimes the motivation is to avoid being rude or impolite. So we look at the most influential work in sociopragmatics: Penelope Brown and Staphen Levinson's politeness theory. They propose that the driving force is the desire not to lose 'face' and not to cause loss of 'face' to others.

Key concepts: face, positive and negative face, Face Threatening Acts, politeness strategies, the 'on the record'/'off the record' distinction, positive and negative politeness redress; objections to Brown & Levinson's theory.

Pragmatics after Grice
The most important development in pragmatics since Grice is the following: What a speaker states/says/asserts/directly expresses is not fixed by the meaning of the sentence she utters. Consider a parent who says to a hurt child, *You're not going to die*. Intuitively, what she states or asserts is that the child is not going to die from her injury. We distinguish between different kinds of pragmatic contribution to the proposition expressed by the speaker, looking at Robyn Carston's defence of a pragmatic enrichment theory of some cases.

Key concepts: the linguistic underdeterminacy thesis, explicatures (and implicitures); pragmatic processes: disambiguation, reference assignment, saturation, enrichment; 'saturation' theories; sub-sentential utterances, the scope test

Lexical pragmatics (optional extra topic)
Speakers can and often do use words to express meanings that are not the same as their linguistically encoded meanings. There's metaphor –*My lawyer's a shark*; metonymy – *The collector recently bought two more Picassos;* loose use – *That bottle is empty;* hyperbole – *I haven't had any food since breakfast. I'm starving!*; and cases without traditional names: e.g. *Buying a house is easy if you've got money.*
We look at Deirdre Wilson and Robyn Carston's theory, which treats many of these cases as outcomes of a single process of narrowing or broadening the meanings of lexical items. As we will see, this is closely related to last week's topic.

Key concepts: established and non-established senses; metaphor (including the distinction between conventional and creative metaphors), hyperbole, loose use, category extension; lexical broadening and narrowing; lexical entries: encyclopaedic and logical properties; the relevance-theoretic comprehension heuristic; metonymy

Language, meaning and thought
The second half of this course focusses on connections between language and communication. Another perspective on language asks about its connection with thought. We consider the following questions: Does the language we speak influence the way we think? If so, does it make certain thoughts unthinkable? Does (much of) our thought take place in a language-like medium of some sort? If so, do we think (mainly) in natural language? We see that these aren't purely theoretical questions; we look at evidence from recent work.

Key concepts: The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: weaker and stronger versions; the Language of Thought hypothesis

Reading
Students have to read selected excepts from these two textbooks:

Book: Griffiths, P., & Cummins, C. (2023). *An Introduction to English Semantics and Pragmatics* (3rd ed.). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

E-book: Kroeger, P. (2022). *Analyzing Meaning: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics* (3rd ed.). Language Science Press. (Available free at: https://langsci-press.org/catalog/book/359)

In addition, students are required to read a selection of papers and book chapters made available on Canvas:

Allott, N. How do we communicate? (online document) (15 pages)
§§ 2.1 & 2.2, pp. 32–37, from Kearns, K. (2011). *Semantics* (2nd ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (5 pages)
Austin, J. L. (2006). How to Do Things With Words [Excerpted from 1962 book]. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds.), *The Discourse Reader* (2nd ed., pp. 55-65). Abingdon: Routledge. (10 pages).
Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (2006). Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds.), *The Discourse Reader* (2nd ed., pp. 311-323). London: Routledge. (22 pages).
§§1, 2, 3.1, 3.2, & 6 of Carston, R. (2004). Relevance Theory and the Saying/implicating Distinction. In L. R. Horn & G. L. Ward (Eds.), *The Handbook of Pragmatics* (pp. 633-656). Malden, Mass: Blackwell. (14 pages)
Ch. 8, "Meaning and thought" of Elbourne, P. D. (2011). *Meaning : a Slim Guide to Semantics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (15 pages)
Grice, P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax & Semantics 3: Speech Acts* (pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press. (14 pages)
Lomas, T. (2020). 12 words for experiences we can't name in English. *Harvard Business Review* website. https://hbr.org/2020/10/12-words-for-experiences-we-cant-name-in-english
Chapter 5, pp. 112–122 & chapter 8, section 8.3, from Saeed, J. I. (2016). *Semantics* (4th ed.). Malden, Mass.: Wiley. (13 pages)

Optional reading:
Wilson, D., & Carston, R. (2007). A unitary approach to lexical pragmatics: Relevance, inference and ad hoc concepts. In N. Burton-Roberts (Ed.), *Pragmatics* (pp. 230-259). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (27 pages)

The exam

The exam tests students'

- knowledge of theories and the associated terminology (the key concepts listed above)
- ability to analyse data by applying theories
- ability to explain clearly both theoretical claims and their analysis of data.

The exam also gives students the opportunity to show that they can extract and summarise claims and arguments from research papers.

The exam aims to give the students a chance to demonstrate both the breadth and depth of their knowledge and analytic skills.
Students have to answer one in-depth question on semantics and one in-depth question on pragmatics.

The quality of the candidates' own written academic English is also assessed, with focus on clarity and on the correctness of terminology that is specific to semantics and pragmatics.

The submitted exam must comply with the normal rules for correct use of sources and citations, except that a bibliography is not required.

Grades are awarded according to the national qualitative descriptions of letter grades (https://www.uio.no/english/studies/examinations/grading-system/index.html):

Symbol	**Description**	**General, qualitative description of evaluation criteria**
A	Excellent	An excellent performance, clearly outstanding. The candidate demonstrates excellent judgement and a high degree of independent thinking.
B	Very good	A very good performance. The candidate demonstrates sound judgement and a very good degree of independent thinking.
C	Good	A good performance in most areas. The candidate demonstrates a reasonable degree of judgement and independent thinking in the most important areas.
D	Satisfactory	A satisfactory performance, but with significant shortcomings. The candidate demonstrates a limited degree of judgement and independent thinking.
E	Sufficient	A performance that meets the minimum criteria, but no more. The candidate demonstrates a very limited degree of judgement and independent thinking.
F	Fail	A performance that does not meet the minimum academic criteria. The candidate demonstrates an absence of both judgement and independent thinking.