Semantics 1

Instructor: Chris Kennedy (`ck@uchicago.edu`)
Office: Classics 306
Phone: 834-1988 (t), 834-2074 (f)
Class website: http://semantics.uchicago.edu/kennedy/classes/w09/sem1/
Office hours: MW 9-10

Couse assistant: Peter Klecha (`klecha@uchicago.edu`)
Office hours: W 1.30-2.30 (Landahl Center)
Section: F 3-4.30 (Landahl Center Seminar Room)

Course Description   This is the first of two courses in formal semantics, designed to introduce students to the core empirical domain of natural language semantics and to familiarize them with the analytical tools involved in the investigation of this domain. The focus of this class is truth-conditional aspects of meaning and the compositional interpretation of phrases and sentences. Students will develop skills in semantic analysis and argumentation by focusing on semantic questions that arise in the context of a particular empirical domain: ellipsis. In the course of our exploration of ellipsis, we will also develop explicit hypotheses about a course set of semantic phenomena, including argument structure, quantification, binding and anaphora.

Assignments   The written work for the course will consist of weekly homework assignments and a take-home final. These will range from technical exercises designed to develop familiarity with the formal tools we will use, to more open-ended and substantial problems in semantic analysis. The assignments will both test your understanding of what we have covered and also serve to introduce new issues that will be discussed in subsequent classes. In some cases, you will not yet have the tools to handle a particular problem; your task here will be to figure out how to extend our system to deal with it. It is important to remember that there is often no single correct answer; your goal in writing up the assignments should be to produce at least well-reasoned discussions of the problems you encounter in the exercises, and at best well-argued and clearly explained proposals for how to solve them.

Assignments will be handed out on Thursday and due at the beginning of class the following Tuesday. Late assignments will not be accepted. Some of the problems will be purely formal exercises, and will not require prose write-ups. However, most of the problems will require analysis and argumentation (as well as derivations), and you will be expected to write them up with appropriate exposition, as though they were short papers. Finally, you are expected to do the work on your own.

'Model answers' to the assignments will be posted on the website after they are handed in.

Evaluation   Your evaluation will be based on your performance on the assignments and the final, and on participation in class. The assignment with the lowest grade will be dropped at the end of the quarter.

Textbook   Heim, Irene and Angelika Kratzer. 1998. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell: Malden, Mass.

The text should be available at the Seminary Coop. The classroom discussion will presuppose familiarity with the text, so it will be important to do the reading in advance. At the same time, much of what we do in class will be independent of the book, and some of our assumptions will modify or go beyond the framework described in Heim and Kratzer.

The Plan The following is a rough week-by-week plan for the course. Note that we may end up diverging from it a bit depending on the progress we make. I may also add some supplementary readings as we go along. In some cases, I have assigned only parts of chapters from Heim and Kratzer (HK), but you are of course encouraged to read beyond what I assign.

Additional background readings (such as the sections on set theory, functions and relations from Partee, ter Meulen and Wall 1993) will be made available on the class website.

Week 1: January 6

Introduction

Week 2: January 13-15

Building a compositional theory of truth-conditional meaning   HK ch. 1

Week 3: January 20-22

Type theory, function application and the lambda notation   HK ch. 2-3

Week 4: January 27-29

Modification and interpretability   HK ch. 4

Week 5: February 3-5

Variables and the semantics of long-distance dependencies   HK ch. 5

Week 6: February 10-12

Quantification   HK ch. 6

Week 7: February 17-19

Logical Form   HK ch. 7

Week 8: February 24-26

Scope ambiguities   HK ch. 8

Week 9: March 3-5

Ellipsis, binding and coreference   HK ch. 9

Week 10: March 10

TBD