

# Introduction to Semantics

Fall 2023 (Version of September 24, 2023)

**Lecture** LING-UA 4, M/W 2:00–3:15, 10Wash, room 104

**Obligatory recitation** LING-UA 4-002, R 11:00-12:15, 10 Wash, room 104

**Prerequisite** LING-UA 1, 2, 3, or 13, or permission of the instructors

## Instructors

Chris Barker

email: [cb125@nyu.edu](mailto:cb125@nyu.edu)

Office hours: M 11–12, W 3:30–4:30  
or by appointment  
10 Washington Pl, Rm 204

Nigel Flower

email: [nf2102@nyu.edu](mailto:nf2102@nyu.edu)

Office hours: R 1–2, or by appointment  
10 Washington Pl, Rm 603

**Final exam: TUES 12/19 2pm-3:50pm**

## Subject and goals

This course is an introduction to the scientific study of **meaning**—more specifically, the meaning of expressions and sentences in natural languages like English. What sort of things could meanings be? How do the meanings of words differ from the meanings of larger phrases? What is the role of context in enriching the meaning conveyed by a sentence? What is the difference between literal meaning, implied meaning, and metaphorical meaning?

The approach will be analytic and data-driven, using the methods of theoretical linguistics. Our main goal will be to propose explicit and precise hypotheses about how the meanings of phrases are determined by the meanings of the words that they contain, and to test these hypotheses by comparing the predictions that they make with what various phrases actually mean.

## Requirements

- **There is no textbook**
- So it is essential that you participate fully in both lecture and recitation
- At least 10 problem sets (i.e., homework assignments), roughly one per week
- One midterm and one final.

Weight of the requirements in the final grade: homeworks, 60%; participation, 10%; midterm, 10%; final, 20%. The vast majority of the material covered in the course will be available only in **lecture**. Likewise, the **recitation section** is required. Graded homeworks will be handed back and discussed in section. Attendance will be a factor in the participation grade.

## Policy on cheating

Allowing the work of another person to appear as if it is your own work is unethical and wrong, and will not be tolerated. Likewise, allowing someone else to present your work as if it is their own is also wrong, and will not be tolerated. We encourage you to discuss the homework assignments with other people, including other classmates, including strategies and ideas for solutions. However, **you must write up your homework on your own**. In particular, that means it is expressly forbidden for you to have access of any kind to anyone else's homework unless you have already handed in your answers.

## Tentative schedule

Week		Monday	Wednesday
1	Sep 4	[NO CLASS: Labor Day]	What is meaning? [NO RECITATION]
2	Sep 11	Ambiguity	Implicature
3	Sep 18	Entailment	Presupposition
4	Sep 25	Tense	Aspect
5	Oct 2	Inference	Denotation
6	Oct 9	[TUES] Conservativity	Existential <i>there</i>
7	Oct 16	[Review]	[In-class MIDTERM]
8	Oct 23	Negative Polarity	Negative Polarity
9	Oct 30	Questions	Focus
10	Nov 6	Quantifier Raising	Scope
11	Nov 13	Intensionality	Adjectives
12	Nov 20	Free Choice	[NO CLASS: Fall break]
13	Nov 27	Modals	Conditionals
14	Dec 4	Performatives	Sarcasm
15	Dec 11	Metaphor	Review

## Help

Your instructors are committed to helping you succeed in this course. Please don't hesitate to contact either of us. **For questions about content or homework, please send email to both of us.** If our office hours are not convenient for you, we would be happy to schedule an appointment. **Additional assistance** for this class is available to you free of charge at the University Learning Center located in University Hall at 110 East 14th Street, phone 212-998-8047. Website: [www.nyu.edu/ulc](http://www.nyu.edu/ulc)

## Disabilities

Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980.

NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor New York, NY 10003-6675 Telephone: 212-998-4980 Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114 Web site: [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd)