ENGL 511/LING 531: Semantics

Course: ENGL 511 = LING 531
Semester: Fall 2014
Time: 6:30-9:20 (Heavilon 227)
Instructor: Prof. Dr. Victor Raskin (form of address, Victor)
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Office hours: T 3:00-4:20, and by appointment.

Description:

An introduction to and survey of current semantic theories and methods with an emphasis on English. Basic concepts of linguistic semantics and its relation to other semantics. Compositional (transformational), model-theoretical (truth-conditional), pragmatic, and contextual semantics.

Sample Syllabus

Text: Raskin (1983) as an introduction to the course; Raskin (1987) as basic information; Lyons 1977 may still be marginally used as a reference book for the entire course. Otherwise, see references under the specific subjects.

Assignment: One 15-20-page paper by the end of the semester or a special arrangement. The paper can be in an adjacent area but clearly informed by this course, i.e., to contain a meaning analysis of words, sentences, or texts.

I. Introduction to Semantics

1. Basic Concepts
   a. Semantic entities
   b. Semantic relations
   c. Semantic terminology
   d. Semantic concerns
2. Brief Survey of the History of Semantics
   a. Prehistory of semantics
   b. Traditional semantics
   c. Classical semantics
   d. Structural semantics
3. Linguistic and the "Other" Semantics
   a. Logical semantics
   b. Philosophy of Language
   c. General semantics
   d. Pop semantics and lexicography

References: Raskin 1983

II. Compositional Semantics

1. Transformational and Related Semantics
   a. Interpretive semantics
   b. Generative semantics
   c. Case grammars
2. Later trends
   a. Neointerpretive semantics
   b. Neogenerative semantics
   c. Prototype semantics
   d. Fuzziness

III. Truth-Conditional Semantics

1. Logic in Linguistic Semantics
   a. Predicate calculus
   b. Categorial approach
   c. Montague grammars
   d. Belief contexts
2. Natural logic
   a. Natural vs. formal logic
   b. Linguistic relativity
   c. Metaphors


IV. Pragmatical Semantics

1. Presupposition
   a. Circumstantial sentences
   b. Logical, pragmatical, and other presuppositions
   c. Semantic recursion
   d. Inference and entailment
   e. New and given and the functional perspective of the sentence
2. Speech Acts
   a. Direct speech acts
   b. Indirect speech acts
   c. Applications and misapplications of speech-act theory
3. Implicature
   a. Bona-fide communication
   b. Co-operative principle
   c. Maxims of bona-fide communication
   d. Non-bona-fide communication (humor, lying)
4. Conversational structure and discourse analysis
   a. Connectives
   b. Discourse structure and its discovery
   c. Shifts of subject


V. Postcompositional Contextual Semantics

1. Language and World
   a. Language and thought
   b. Dictionary and encyclopedia
   c. Linguistic vs. encyclopedic knowledge
2. Script-Based Semantics
   a. Lexicon
   b. Combinatorial rules
   c. Non-compositional elements
   d. Frame semantics and the semantics of understanding

References: Bar-Hillel 1960, Raskin 1985a,b; Raskin 1984, 1985c and 1986a,b

VI. Ontological Semantics

1. Ontology
2. Lexicon
3. Text meaning representation

4. Analysis

5. Acquisition

References: Nirenburg and Raskin 2004

Bibliography: (Raskin 1983, 1987 and Nirenburg and Raskin 2004 are available online; the rest is in the Library—not on reserve, so be considerate!)


