COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the systematic evaluation of linguistic meaning. A basic overview of the different theoretical approaches to semantic investigation will be provided, but the emphasis will be placed on the so-called “Cognitive” approaches. The 7 sections each examine a specific aspect of meaning. The first one introduces the field. The second one is concerned with the organization of the lexicon, as well as with the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations which compose it. The third section is devoted to “objectivist” semantics, or in other words the description of the world in terms of reference, truth, and logic. The fourth section is concerned with the description of meaning and introduces notions such as semantic decomposition, feature analysis, compositionality, as well as alternative views such as semantic primitives. The fifth section explores the connection between meaning and concepts and is devoted to issues of categorization and category structure, cognitive models, frames, and blends. The sixth section considers lexical semantics, with particular emphasis on the meaning of everyday terms (colors, kinship and artifacts).

Section 1: Introduction. Semantics: The systematic study of meaning

This section constitutes a preliminary investigation of the different kinds of positions theorists have proposed of linguistic meaning. Issues of reference, extension, denotation, are considered, as well as the relation between concepts and words. The cognitive linguistics theory of meaning is introduced and discussed.

Readings.

Section 2: An organized lexicon

This section is concerned with the definition of a word, and with the characterization of the lexicon as an organized system. The different relations that hold between the different lexical items (synonymy, homonymy, antonymy, etc.) are systematically investigated. The notions of "semantic fields" and "frames" are also presented. As a first attempt to characterize the systematic relations that obtain throughout specific frames, the fundamentals of the componential analysis will be presented and critiqued.

Readings:

Section 3: Elements of meaning

This section presents the different proposals concerning the lexical decomposition of words. Particular emphasis is placed on feature attribute models, but also on Wiezbicka’s Semantic Metalanguage, notions of Cognitive Models and frames.

Readings:
Section 4: Meaning and concepts

This section is concerned with the categorizing function of language. The componential analysis introduced in the preceding section illustrates a specific view of categories usually referred to as the "classical model". This section presents the limits of that model and introduces research from psychology that validates a different view according to which categories are organized around prototypical members. The linguistic consequences of this prototype model are considered, and specific examples of "radial categories" are introduced.

Readings:


Section 5: Colors and natural kinds: The semantics of everyday terms.

Where does the meaning of some terms everyone uses every day come from? This section considers the meaning of color terms, as well as artefacts and natural categories.

Readings:


**Section 6: Describing the outside world**

This section is concerned with the description of the world as an outside entity. The emphasis is placed on issues of the reference of an entity (the entity in the world a linguistic expression describes), as well as on the description of the truth condition of a sentence and more generally the relation between meaning and propositional logic.

**Readings:**


**Section 7: Semantic change.**

This section considers the semantic shift from lexical to grammatical meaning.

**Readings:**


**OVERVIEW OF ASSIGNMENTS**

Homework 1. Due February 4.
MIDTERM. In class: February 18.
Homework 2. Due February 27.
Homework 3. Due April 8.
Homework 4. Provide a complete outline of your final paper.
Final paper: Due on the last day of finals.

ADA STATEMENT:

Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in the course is encouraged to contact me after class or during office hours. Additionally, students should contact Disability Support Services in the Ley Student Center.

EVALUATION:

The students in LING/PSYC 315 will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Four homework assignments due at the times indicated on the syllabus (35%)
2. Two in-class midterm exams (35%)
3. One sort final paper (5-8 pages) that elaborates on one of the topics of the course (20%)
4. Attendance and participation to weekly discussions of assigned readings (10%)

Important note: All assignments in this course are subject to the terms and conditions of Rice's Honors Code.

COURSE SCHEDULE

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<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>TOPIC COVERED IN CLASS and HOMEWORK DUE</th>
<th>READINGS</th>
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<td>March 1-9</td>
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| 8: March 11-13 | **Meanings and concepts** (continued) Radial categories | -Croft, William and Alan Cruse. 2004. Chapter 4 of *Cognitive Linguistics*.  
| 9: March 18-20 | **Meanings and concepts** (continued) Problems with the notion of prototype The semantics of everyday terms Dictionaries and encyclopedias | -Wierzbicka, Anna. 1996. "Prototypes and Invariants." Chapter 4 of *Semantics Primes and Universals*.  
Wierzbicka, Anna. 1985 "Oats and Wheat: The Fallacy of Arbitrariness". |
| 12: April 8-10 | Describing the objective world: Reference, truth conditions, entailment. HOMEWORK 3 DUE ON APRIL 8 | Cruse, Alan. 2011. Chapter 2 of *Meaning in Language*. |
| 14: April 22-24 | **Semantic change** (continued)  
**Lexicalization patterns**  
**HOMEWORK 4: Outline of the paper**  