

Polytechnic University of the Philippines

Graduate School

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES

COURSE TITLE	Semantics and Pragmatics	
COURSE CODE	ELS 602	
CREDIT UNITS	3 Units	
COURSE PREREQUISITE	None	
COURSE DESCRIPTION	This course provides students with an introduction to formal theories of compositional semantics and pragmatics or a wide range of issues of contemporary relevance to the study of meaning. Topics typically covered include how meaning is expressed in natural language and the principles that lie behind the interpretation of utterances in specific situations; how words and sentences (linguistic objects) relate to entities in the world; whether this relationship is mediated by concepts; how and why language differs from other communication systems; and how language is employed to communicate various types of meaning. Students are expected to have a firm grasp of studies that deal with semantics and pragmatics and produce an analysis out of a wide array of topics.	
Institutional Learning Outcomes	Program Outcomes	Course Outcomes
1. Creative and Critical Thinking Graduates use their imaginative as well as rational thinking abilities to life situations in order to push boundaries, realize possibilities, and deepen their interdisciplinary and general understanding of the world. 2. Effective Communication Graduates are proficient in the four macro skills in communication (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and are able to use these skills in solving problems. Making decisions, and articulating thoughts when engaging with people in various circumstances. 3. Strong Service Orientation Graduates exemplify the potentialities of an efficient, well-rounded and responsible professional deeply committed to service excellence. 4. Community Engagement Graduates take an active role in the promotion and fulfillment of various advocacies (educational, social and environmental) for the advancement of community welfare. 5. Adeptness in the Responsible Use of Technology Graduates demonstrate optimized use of digital learning abilities, including technical and numerical skills. 6. Passion to Lifelong Learning Graduates are enabled to perform and function in the society by taking responsibility in their quest to know more about the world through lifelong learning. 7. High Level of Leadership and Organizational Skills Graduates are developed to become the best professionals in their respective disciplines by manifesting the appropriate skills and leaderships qualities. 8. Sense of Personal and Professional Ethics Graduates show desirable attitudes and behavior either in their personal and professional circumstances. 9. Sense of National and Global Responsiveness Graduates' deep sense of national compliments the need to live in a global village where one's culture and other people culture are respected.	Graduates of the MAELS program are expected to: - demonstrate adept knowledge of the foundational and emerging theories in the field of English language studies through: - critical reading, analyzing, and inquiring applied to a wide array of texts; - creative approaches to problem assessing, interpreting, and solving; - apply knowledge gained from the discipline to research and community development programs; and - develop abilities to work and learn independently, and likewise foster and transfer these skills to other learners and professionals in and beyond the field.	At the end of this course, the students must be able to: - Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of basic semantic relations - Relate semantics to other levels of linguistic analysis; - Gain technical mastery over the tools of linguistic analysis in pragmatics; - learn the most important concepts and theories used by linguists to study meaning, and you'll learn how to apply them: i.e. how to analyze the meanings of words, sentences, and utterances; - Develop a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between language and meaning as it applies to words, sentences, and utterances; and - Apply semantic and pragmatic concepts to linguistic expressions or data and formulate a research plan in the field.

Course Plan					
Week	Topic	Learning Outcomes	Methodology	Resources	Assessment
Week 1	Course Overview & Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics	- Define the scope of semantics and pragmatics; - explain distinctions between linguistic and non-linguistic meaning; - outline the interplay between form, meaning, and use.	Lecture, guided discussion	Birner (2013); Griffiths (2014); Kroeger (2018); Portner (2012); Saeed (2016)	Diagnostic quiz and reflective journal entry on personal understanding of meaning
Week 2	Lexical Semantics - Word Meaning & Sense Relations	- Analyze sense relations (synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, polysemy); - apply componential analysis and prototype theory; - examine lexical meaning using corpus-based and distributional methods.	Mini-lecture, lexical data exercises	Cruse (2001); Murphy (2010); Pustejovsky (2006)	Short written exercise (lexical analysis task)
Week 3	Compositional Semantics & Predicate Logic - Sentence Meaning and Truth Conditions	- Apply compositionality; - represent meaning with predicate logic; - resolve quantification/scope ambiguity; - construct lambda calculus; - introduce event semantics.	Lecture, logical form analysis	Heim & Kratzer (2012); Jacobson (2014); Szabó (2024); Zimmermann & Sternefeld (2013)	Problem set (predicate logic and quantification exercises)
Week 4	Intensional Semantics - Possible Worlds, Modality, Counterfactuals	- Interpret modality & counterfactuals via possible worlds semantics; - apply modal logic; - explore applied contexts.	Problem-solving tasks, notation exercises	Kratzer et al. (2023); Palmer (1990); Portner (2009); von Stechow (2011)	In-class quiz and application task (possible worlds scenarios)
Week 5	Semantic Change, Lexical Innovation & Cognitive Semantics	- Identify mechanisms of semantic change; - analyze neologisms in digital discourse; - trace lexical shifts diachronically.	Corpus analysis workshop	Hocine (2024); Mosegaard Hansen & Visconti (2009); Traugott & Dasher (2002); Vanhove (2008)	Corpus-based mini-worksheet (analysis of a lexical innovation)
Week 6	Semantics-Pragmatics Interface - Where Literal Meaning Meets Context	- Distinguish truth-conditional content vs. implicature/presupposition; - analyze indexicals; - apply dynamic semantics to model context updates.	Contextual meaning exercises, DRT diagrams	Beaver (2001); Carston (2002, 2017); Levinson (1983)	Short essay (analysis of contextual meaning in discourse)
Week 7	Research Break 1 - Data Preparation & Analysis Planning	- Organize pilot data; - finalize methodology; - prepare for sustained literature review writing.	Independent research	–	Submission of methodology plan (graded formative task)
Week 8	Speech Act Theory	- Classify utterances (Austin/Searle); - analyze direct/indirect acts; - examine cross-cultural institutional discourse.	Discourse coding, role-play analysis	Austin (1975); Jucker & Taavitsainen (2008); Sadock (2006); Searle (1992)	Oral presentation (speech act analysis)

Week 9	Conversational Implicature	• Apply Grice's Cooperative Principle; • analyze scalar and particularized implicatures; • explore implicatures in AI/digital communication.	Transcript analysis, case studies	Grice (1975); Horn (2006); Levinson (1983, 2001)	Worksheet & short report (implicature analysis)
Week 10	Presupposition & Entailment	• Identify triggers; • distinguish presupposition from entailment; • apply projection and accommodation tests.	Seminar, diagnostics	Beaver, Geurts, & Denlinger (2024); Geurts (2016); Levinson (1983); Stalnaker (2022)	Diagnostic test on presupposition and entailment
Week 11	Research Writing Day	• Consolidate theories into writing; • refine literature review & methodology sections; • draft analysis framework.	Guided writing workshop, peer review	–	Draft submission of literature review & methodology
Week 12	Deixis - Context-Bound Reference	• Classify deixis types; • analyze deixis in multimodal & digital discourse; • apply deictic shift theory.	Video-based analysis, multimodal coding	Fillmore (1997); Levinson (1983); Sidnell & Enfield (2016)	Analytical essay (multimodal deixis analysis)
Week 13	Politeness Theory & Facework	• Apply politeness/facework theories; • examine impoliteness in online and cross-cultural contexts.	Discourse coding, intercultural comparison	Brown & Levinson (1987); Culpeper (2011); Kádár (2013); Leech (2014)	Group project (case study on politeness/impoliteness)
Week 14	Relevance Theory	• Apply cognitive & communicative principles; • distinguish explicature vs. implicature; • evaluate contextual effects.	Text interpretation, online discourse examples	Clark (2013); Sperber & Wilson (2001)	In-class interpretation task (graded participation)
Week 15	Cross-Cultural Pragmatics	• Compare pragmatic norms across cultures; • analyze intercultural variation in speech acts; • identify sources of pragmatic failure in digital and face-to-face contexts.	Comparative analysis, role-play	House & Kádár (2021); Kecskes (2022); Kecskes & Huang (2017); Wierzbicka (2003)	Final paper submission
Week 16	Research Break 2 - Writing & Data Analysis	• Conduct in-depth analysis; draft results section; • integrate findings into discussion.	Independent work	–	Submission of draft results section
Week 17	Research Presentations	• Deliver final oral presentation; • defend research during Q&A.	Formal presentation	–	Final presentation
Week 18	Research Presentations	• Deliver final oral presentation; • defend research during Q&A.	Formal presentation	–	Final presentation

Readings and References

- Austin, J. L. (1975). *How to do things with words* (2nd ed.). Harvard University Press.
- Beaver, D. I. (2001). *Presupposition and assertion in dynamic semantics*. CSLI Publications; FoLLI.
- Beaver, D. I., Geurts, B., & Denlinger, K. (2024). Presupposition. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2024 ed.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entries/presupposition/>
- Birner, B. J. (2013). *Introduction to pragmatics*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Carston, R. (2002). *Thoughts and utterances: The pragmatics of explicit communication*. Blackwell.
- Carston, R. (2017). Pragmatics and semantics. In Y. Huang (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 453–472). Oxford University Press.
- Clark, B. (2013). *Relevance theory*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cruse, D. A. (2001). *Lexical semantics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fillmore, C. J. (1997). *Lectures on deixis*. CSLI Publications.
- Geurts, B. (2016). Presupposition and givenness. In Y. Huang (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 180–198). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199697960.013.21>
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Speech acts* (Vol. 3). Academic Press.
- Griffiths, P. (2014). *An introduction to English semantics and pragmatics*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Heim, I., & Kratzer, A. (2012). *Semantics in generative grammar*. Blackwell.
- Hocine, N. (2024). Semantic change: Causes, forms, and scope. *Akofena*, 1(14), 91–98. <https://doi.org/10.48734/akofena.n014.vol.1.08.2024>
- House, J., & Kádár, D. Z. (2021). *Cross-cultural pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108954587>
- Jacobson, P. (2014). *Compositional semantics: An introduction to the syntax–semantics interface*. Oxford University Press.
- Jucker, A. H., & Taavitsainen, I. (2008). *Speech acts in the history of English*. John Benjamins.
- Kádár, D. Z. (2013). *Understanding politeness*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139382717>
- Kecskes, I. (Ed.). (2022). *The Cambridge handbook of intercultural pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108884303>
- Kecskes, I., & Huang, Y. (2017). Cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics. In Y. Huang (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
- Kratzer, A., Zalta, E. N., & Nodelman, U. (2023). Situations in natural language semantics. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2023 ed.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/situations-semantics/>
- Kroeger, P. (2018). *Analyzing meaning: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics*. Language Science Press.
- Leech, G. N. (2014). *The pragmatics of politeness*. Oxford University Press.
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Levinson, S. C. (2001). *Presumptive meanings: The theory of generalized conversational implicature*. MIT Press.
- Murphy, M. L. (2010). *Lexical meaning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Palmer, F. R. (1990). *Modality and the English modals* (2nd ed.). Longman.
- Portner, P. (2009). *Modality*. Oxford University Press.
- Portner, P. (2012). *What is meaning? Fundamentals of formal semantics*. Blackwell.
- Pustejovsky, J. (2006). Lexical semantics: Overview. In E. K. Brown & A. Anderson (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and linguistics* (2nd ed.). Elsevier.
- Saeed, J. I. (2016). *Semantics* (4th ed.). Wiley Blackwell.
- Sadock, J. (2006). Speech acts. In L. R. Horn & G. Ward (Eds.), *The handbook of pragmatics*. Blackwell.
- Searle, J. R. (1992). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sidnell, J., & Enfield, N. J. (2016). Deixis and the interactional foundations of reference. In Y. Huang (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 217–239). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199697960.013.27>
- Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (2001). *Relevance: Communication and cognition* (2nd ed.). Blackwell.
- Stalnaker, R. (2022). Pragmatic presupposition. In *Context and content: Essays on intentionality in speech and thought*. Oxford University Press.
- Szabó, Z. G. (2024). Compositionality. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2024 ed.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/compositionality/>
- Vanhove, M. (Ed.). (2008). *From polysemy to semantic change: Towards a typology of lexical semantic associations*. John Benjamins.
- von Fintel, K., & Heim, I. (2011). *Intensional semantics* [Unpublished lecture notes].
- Zimmermann, T. E., & Sternefeld, W. (2013). *Introduction to semantics: An essential guide to the composition of meaning*. De Gruyter.

Course Grading System

Your performance will be evaluated through **four major requirements** combining presentations, written research, and final reporting.

1. Topic Oral Presentation (20%)
 - Seminar-style presentation (30–60 minutes) on assigned topic.
 - PowerPoint-supported, covering definitions, theories, readings, examples, and research potential.
2. Research Proposal (20%)
 - A written proposal including Introduction, Research Questions, Literature Review, and Methodology.
3. Final Research Paper (50%)
 - Length: 5,000–7,000 words.
 - Sections: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussion, Conclusion.
 - Focus: Original research applying semantics or pragmatics to empirical data.
4. Final Oral Presentation (10%)
 - Conference-style presentation (15–20 minutes) with Q&A, based on the final paper.

Weighting Summary:

• Topic Oral Presentation	→	20%
• Research Proposal	→	20%
• Final Research Paper	→	50%
• Final Oral Presentation	→	10%
TOTAL	→	100%

Classroom Policy

1. Preparation and Readings
 - Complete all assigned texts and supplementary readings before each class.
 - Arrive prepared to discuss, analyze, and apply course concepts.
2. Academic Integrity
 - Maintain the highest standards of honesty in all academic work.
 - Submit only your own work and properly acknowledge all sources.
 - Understand that plagiarism and misconduct will result in disciplinary action.
3. Submission of Requirements
 - All assignments and tasks must be submitted through Google Classroom (or any other assigned means) by the stated deadlines.
 - Late submissions will not be accepted, unless prior approval has been granted for exceptional circumstances.
4. Accessibility and Support
 - Students with disabilities or special learning needs should inform the instructor as early as possible so that reasonable accommodations can be arranged promptly.
5. Professional Conduct and Communication
 - Treat classmates and the instructor with respect in all interactions.
 - Use professional and constructive language in discussions, presentations, and written feedback.
 - Practice proper email and digital communication etiquette:
 - Use clear subject lines.
 - Address the recipient appropriately.
 - Write in a professional and courteous tone.
 - Contribute to building a collaborative and inclusive learning environment.

Consultation Time
The available consultation time of the faculty member assigned to teach this course (outside the regular class meeting) shall be discussed during the first day of classes. Apart from face-to-face/synchronous consultations, faculty members shall make themselves available for online consultations by email or through other preferred communication channels.