

Introduction to semantics

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Abstract

This course is an introduction to the formal semantics of natural language. We introduce central concepts and issues in semantics, and develop a basic formal compositional model of meaning, extending it as we go to accommodate a wider range of empirical phenomena. An emphasis will be on students developing skills in semantic analysis and argumentation.

Topics

- Introduction and basic concepts (nature of meaning; meaning and truth; semantics vs. pragmatic; meaning relations)
- The formal representation of meaning (predicates and arguments; functions and sets; logical connectives; semantic types)
- Meaning composition (compositional rules; lambda abstraction; lambda conversion, modification)
- Quantification (logical quantifiers; quantifier scope; generalized quantifiers and their properties)
- Event semantics

Readings

- Kearns, Kate (2011). *Semantics* (2nd edition). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Coppock, Elizabeth & Lucas Champollion (2025). *Invitation to Formal Semantics*.
<https://eecoppock.info/bootcamp/semantics-boot-camp.pdf>