The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
First Term, 2026-27

1. Course Code: LING2006

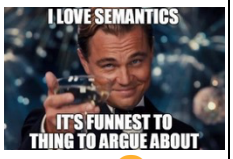
2. Title in English: Semantics

3. Title in Chinese: 語義學

4. Course description

Semantics explores how meaning is structured, expressed, and interpreted in human language. This course investigates the cognitive capacity that enables humans to produce and comprehend limitless novel linguistic expressions. We will develop theoretical frameworks to analyze how utterances convey meaning in specific contexts, addressing core questions such as:

- How linguistic expressions relate to entities in the world;
- Meaning relations between words (e.g., ambiguity, synonymy, entailment);
- The interplay between semantics and syntax;
- Truth conditions and logical foundations of meaning;
- The role of context and pragmatic principles (e.g., implicatures, presuppositions) in interpretation;
- Applications to non-verbal and multimodal communication (gestures 💪, emojis 😂, and memes, etc.).



Through this exploration, students will gain systematic tools to analyze meaning across diverse linguistic phenomena.

5. Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, you are expected to:

i) Recognize and appreciate the importance and complexity of semantics in everyday experience
ii) Understand and clarify fundamental concepts of linguistic meaning
iii) Describe and critically analyze meaning in natural languages
iv) Evaluate linguistic theories of meaning in languages
v) Apply semantic and pragmatic concepts to linguistic and non-verbal data from different languages and communication systems.

6. Course syllabus

Topic	Contents/fundamental concepts
Reference	Sense, reference, denotation
Lexical relations	Homonymy, polysemy, synonymy, opposites, hyponymy
Thematic relations	Theta roles, verbs, theta grids
Sentence semantics	Truth value, truth table, compositionality, entailment, contradiction
Pragmatics	Cooperative principle, Gricean Maxims, implicatures, presuppositions
Speech acts	Performatives, direct and indirect speech acts, illocutionary forces
Multimodal communication	Speech acts, presuppositions, and implicatures in multimodal communication

7. Course components (Teaching modes and Learning activities)

Teaching Modes and Learning Activities	
On-site face-to-face	Percentage of time
Lectures (hybrid no)	20%
Interactive tutorial (hybrid no)	10%
Out-of-classroom	
Homework assignments	35%
Readings	30%
Consultations & Office hours (hybrid yes)	5%

8. Assessment type, percentage and rubrics

Assessment type	Percentage
Homework assignments • There will be a total of **4** take-home written homework assignments. • The assignments are graded by the TAs and supervised by the instructor.	12.5 % * 4 = 50%
Exams • There will be 1 in-class **mid-term** exam on Oct 26 (Week 8). • There will be 1 **cumulative final** exam on Dec 8, Tue. • The exams are graded by the TAs and supervised by the instructor.	40% = 15% + 25%
Participation • Consistent and active participation in lectures and tutorials is required. • For each missed class meeting without a documented family or medical emergence, 2% will be taken off.	10%

Late Submission Policy

Assessment task	Extension allowed (Y/N)	Descriptions of late submission policy
Homework assignments	Y	Unless an extension is granted, late submissions will result in **a deduction of 10% of the marks awarded per day**, with no marks to be given for a delay beyond 5 calendar days. Extension requests, supported by appropriate documentation, should be submitted to the course teacher for **at least 5 working days** or **7 calendar days before the deadline in writing**. Requests submitted late or without valid reasons and supporting documents will not be accepted. Only unforeseen or exceptional circumstances beyond a student's control will be considered.

Make-up Test Arrangements

Assessment tasks	Extension allowed (Y/N)	Descriptions of make-up test policy
Mid-term	Y	Students must submit a **written application** to the course teacher **on or before the scheduled test date**, together with appropriate supporting documentation, to be considered for a make-up test. A penalty of **10% deduction** from the full mark of the

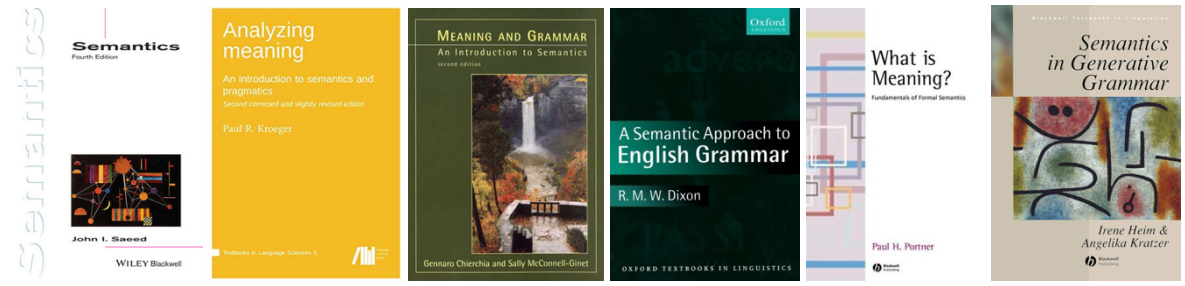
		test will be applied, **regardless of the reason** for the absence. Only **one make-up test** will be scheduled for the entire class, to be held within **5 working days** or **7 calendar days** after the originally scheduled examination date.
Final exam	Y	Students must submit a **written application** to the course teacher **on or before the scheduled test date**, together with appropriate supporting documentation, to be considered for a make-up test. A penalty of **10% deduction** from the full mark of the test will be applied, **regardless of the reason** for the absence. Only **one make-up test** will be scheduled for the entire class, to be held within **5 working days** or **7 calendar days** after the originally scheduled examination date.

Assessment rubrics	
Grade	Overall course
A	The student shows excellent and thorough mastery of the course materials. Work demonstrates the ability to apply the theories or subject matter to familiar and novel bodies of linguistic data in a clear and cogent manner that would surpass the normal expectation at this level.
A-	The student shows substantial and very good mastery of the course materials. Work demonstrates the ability to apply the theories or subject matter to familiar and some novel bodies of linguistic data in a logical and clear manner.
B+ B B-	The student shows general and sufficient mastery of the course materials. Work demonstrates the ability to apply the theories or subject matter to most (but not necessarily all) familiar and novel bodies of linguistic data in an accurate and comprehensive manner.
C+ C C-	The student shows general mastery of the course materials. Work demonstrates the ability to apply the theories or subject matter to most (but not necessarily all) familiar and standard linguistic data, but with occasional errors.
D	The student shows partial mastery of the course materials. Work demonstrates the ability to state and apply the theories or subject matter to some simple linguistic data only.
F	The student shows little or no evidence of mastery of the course materials, or fails to meet specified assessment requirements.

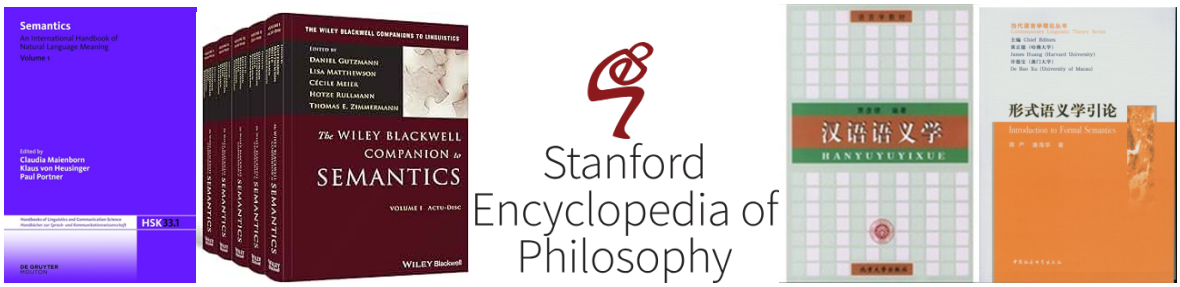
9. Required and recommended readings

- **Required readings**:
  Semantics (Forth Edition), John I. Saeed. Wiley Blackwell. 2016.

- **Recommended readings**:
  - Textbooks:
    1. *Analyzing meaning: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics (Second Edition)*, Paul R. Kroeger. Language Science Press. 2019.
    2. *Meaning and grammar: an introduction to semantics* (Second Edition), Gennaro Chierchia and Sally McConnell-Ginet. The MIT Press. 2000.
    3. *A Semantic Approach to English Grammar (Second Edition)*, R. M. W. Dixon, Oxford University Press. 2005.
    4. *What is Meaning?: Fundamentals of Formal Semantics*, Paul H. Portner. Wiley Blackwell. 2005.
    5. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*, Irene Heim and Angelika Kratzer. Blackwell. 1998.



- Research handbooks and encyclopedia:
  1. *Semantics: An international handbook of natural language meaning*, ed. by Maienborn, Claudia, Klaus von Heusinger, and Paul Portner, Walter de Gruyter, 2011, 2012. (Online access is here)
  2. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Semantics*, ed. by Daniel Gutzmann, Lisa Matthewson, Cécile Meier, Hotze Rullmann, and Thomas Ede Zimmermann. Wiley Blackwell. 2020. (Online access is here)
  3. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, and Uri Nodelman
  4. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics, ed. by Mark Aronoff



- Chinese semantics
  1. 《漢語語義學》賈彥德，北京大學出版社，1999.
  2. 《形式語義學引論》蔣嚴、潘海華，中國社會科學出版社，2005.
  3. Pan, H., & Feng, Y. (2017). Chinese Semantics. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. (Online access is here).

- Lecture handouts will be posted on the Blackboard website for download before class.

- The relevant concepts and techniques will be introduced and discussed in class. They include - but are not limited to - materials found in the textbook. Disclaimer: In case of any conflict, in-class instructions always have precedence over the textbook.

10. Feedback for evaluation

- In addition to the standard final course evaluation, starting from Week 3, we will also set up **an anonymous Google form** for you to ask questions or make suggestions throughout the entire term. Your feedback will be incorporated accordingly.

- Meanwhile, you are also more than welcome to share your thoughts and concerns by emailing your feedback or questions to us, or making in-person/virtual appointments with us.

- Whenever you feel that you are falling behind and have content questions, please also do not hesitate to ask us for help!

- When you contact us via emails, please kindly put "LING2006 Semantics" in the subject line and allow us **24 hours (on weekdays)** to respond.

11. Course schedule (subject to change)

Class/week	Date	Topic	Requirements/comments
1	Sep 7	Introduction	Saeed2016, pp. 1-17
2	Sep 14	Meaning, denotation, reference	Saeed2016, pp. 1-17, 22-29
3	Sep 21	Lexical meaning I: Ambiguity, vagueness, indeterminacy	Saeed2016, pp. 51-67, 69-75
4	Sep 28	Lexical meaning II: Lexical sense relations	Saeed2016, pp. 51-67, 69-75
5	Oct 5	Thematic relations: Theta-roles and participants	Saeed2016, pp. 149-164
6	Oct 12	Sentence semantics I: Truth	Saeed2016, pp. 84-91
7	Oct 19	No class: Public holiday	
8	**Oct 26**	**Mid-term exam**	
9	Nov 2	Sentence semantics II: Entailment, presupposition	Saeed2016, pp. 94-105)
11	Nov 9	Conversational implicature and Grice's maxims of conversation	Saeed2016, pp. 210-217
12	Nov 16	Speech acts I: Performatives	Saeed2016, pp. 229-237
13	Nov 23	Speech acts II: (In)direct speech acts	Saeed2016, pp. 237-247
14	Nov 30	Multimodal communications I: Meanings of gestures 💪 and emojis 😂	
15	Dec 7 (Make-up class	Multimodal communications II: Meanings of memes; Course wrap-up	3:30-5:15pm, location TBA
	Dec 8	**Final exam**	**4-6pm, location TBA**

12. Teachers' and TA's contact details

Instructor:	
Name:	CHEN Zhuo 陳卓
Office Location:	G27 Leung Kau Kui Building, https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/5652900145
Email:	zhuochen[AT]cuhk.edu.hk
Teaching Venue:	Lecture: Mon 3:30-5:15pm, Y.C. Liang Hall 103 Tutorial 1: Mon 5:30-6:15pm, Y.C. Liang Hall 103 Tutorial 2: Mon 5:30-6:15pm, William M W Mong Eng Bldg 713
Office hours:	TBA

Teaching Assistant/Tutor:	
Name:	ZANG Yunhao, ZHU Shiqi
Office Location:	
Email:	1155842351[AT] link.cuhk.edu.hk, 1155275317[AT]link.cuhk.edu.hk
Office hours:	TBA

13. Details of course website

- We will use the course Blackboard website to post course materials (lecture handouts and optional readings), assignments, and announcements.
- We will also send out email reminders once we post assignments and make announcements, please make sure to check your email regularly.

14. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in teaching, learning and assessments

All use of AI tools is prohibited

In any kind of learning activity or assessment that will be counted towards the final course grades (or used for evaluating attainment of the desired learning outcomes), students are not allowed to submit work which is produced with the collaboration of or supported by the use of any AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Grok, Claude, Gemini, etc.).

Improper/unauthorized use of AI tools in learning activities and assessments will constitute acts of academic dishonesty and will be handled according to the University's *Procedures for Handling Cases of Academic Dishonesty*.

In case of queries, students should seek advice from the course teacher.

15. Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/.

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

- In the case of group projects, all members of the group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible and liable to disciplinary actions, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the problematic contents.

- For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment.

- Students are fully aware that their work may be investigated by AI content detection software to determine originality.

- Students are fully aware of the AI approach(es) adopted in the course. In the case where some AI tools are allowed, students have made proper acknowledgment and citations as suggested by the course teacher.

Assignments without a properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers.

Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submissions. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

The copyright of the teaching materials, including lecture notes, assignments and examination questions, etc., produced by staff members/teachers of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) belongs to CUHK. Students may download the teaching materials produced by the staff members/teachers from the Learning Management Systems, e.g. Blackboard, adopted by CUHK for their own educational use, but shall not distribute/share/copy the materials to a third-party without seeking prior permission from the staff members/teachers concerned.

16. Guideline on sharing lecture recordings

Attention is drawn to the following:

- The copyright of any lecture recordings shared in the course, whether they are produced by teachers, students, or peer note-takers, belongs to the University.
- Students should not share these recordings with others without obtaining prior written consent from the teacher(s).

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