Date: 27.09.2026

Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course

Meaning and Use

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37591-01

Course Type:	course
Semester:	2026-2027, Semester B
Day & Time:	Tuesday, 8:00-11:30
Office hours:	by appointment
Lecturer Email:	mariia.esipova@biu.ac.il

Course description and learning goals

Course Abstract

This course teaches students how to do research in semantics with a relatively simple formal toolkit. The course focuses on several topics that go beyond what students learn in Introduction to Semantics, but it does so with less formal machinery than is introduced in Advanced Semantics. Sample topics include: event semantics, degree semantics, focus and focus-sensitive expressions, speech acts, expressive meanings.

Learning objectives

1. The students will master a heuristic approach to doing research in semantics whereby:
    a. We use data to identify gaps in an existing semantic theory.
    b. We then develop enrichments to the theory allowing to capture the challenging data.
    c. We then apply the new enriched theory to further relevant data.
2. In the process, the students will develop familiarity with some of the core analytical concepts and insights in formal semantics, without having to fully master the formal machinery used to cash out those insights.

Course structure (subject to change)

Week No.	Lesson topic
1-3	Refresher on the basic model-theoretic semantics
3-4	Event semantics
4-5	Degree semantics
6	Focus and focus-sensitive expressions
7-9	Speech acts
10-12	Expressive meanings
13-14	Buffer/bonus topics

Final grade

Description of the product	Weight in the final score
Pass/fail homework assignments	25%
In-class tests	75% of final grade (4 in-class tests throughout the semester, with dates announced in advance; the

	worst grade will be dropped, the remaining 3 tests will contribute equally to this grade component)

Course requirements

Attendance: you can miss two classes without an explanation. Additional absences require justification for a passing grade, but contact the instructor if you need more flexibility.

Test policies

On the tests, you will be allowed to use any physical notes, but no electronic devices.

Collaboration policy

You're allowed—and encouraged—to collaborate on pass/fail homework assignments, but (i) each of the collaborators must still submit their copy of the assignment on Lamda, even if it's exactly the same as their collaborators'; (ii) you must always indicate all your collaborators. Collaboration on tests is not allowed.

Plagiarism policy

Any instance of plagiarism in any of your assignments will immediately result in you failing this course and will be reported to the administration. Please consult the department's guidelines on what constitutes plagiarism:
https://english.biu.ac.il/sites/english/files/shared/what_is_plagiarism_biu_english_literature_and_linguistics.pdf

If you use generative AI (such as ChatGPT) to assist you in your assignments, you should properly report doing so by submitting a full record of your prompts and the AI's outputs. Failure to do so will be treated as an instance of plagiarism.

Prerequisites

Course number	Course name
37-289 OR 37-987	Semantics Introduction to Syntax and Semantics

Bibliography: Up-to-date reading, viewing, and listening content items

The readings will be made available to the students electronically throughout the course.

Sample readings:

- Coppock, Elizabeth & Lucas Champollion. 2025. Invitation to formal semantics. Ms. https://eecoppock.info/bootcamp/semantics-boot-camp.pdf (selected chapters)
- Farkas, Donka F. & Kim B. Bruce. 2010. On reacting to assertions and polar questions. *Journal of Semantics* 27(1). 81–118. https://doi.org/10.1093/jos/ffp010
- Potts, Christopher. 2007. The expressive dimension. *Theoretical linguistics* 33(2). 165–198. https://doi.org/10.1515/TL.2007.011