Date: 25.11.2025

Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course

Speech Acts

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9120

Course Type:	seminar
Scope of credits:	___
Year of study:	___
Semester:	2025-2026, Semester A
Day & Time:	Thursday, 12-3:30pm
Office hours:	by appointment
Lecturer Email:	mariia.esipova@biu.ac.il
Moodle Site:	TBA

Course description and learning goals

Course Abstract

In this class, we will learn about some major speech act types: assertions, questions, directives, and exclamations. The students will get introduced to some standard accounts for each speech act type and the various challenges that these accounts face. We will cover how different speech act types can be operationalized at different levels of representation and their interfaces: semantics, pragmatics, syntax, and prosody. We will also look at various "non-canonical" cases, where the borders between the different types get blurred.

Learning objectives

1. The students will get familiarized with the standard semantic accounts for some of the major speech act types, in the process deepening their understanding of semantic theory at large.
2. The nature of the topic will also allow the students to get a better understanding of how different linguistic phenomena are operationalized at different levels and how these levels interact with one another, allowing them to become more well-rounded linguists.
3. While working on their final paper, the students will hone their independent research skills (such as identifying a research question that is appropriate in scale, situating their research question within the existing research, making empirical generalizations in ways that lead to analytical insights, etc.), as well as their academic presentation and writing skills.

Course structure (subject to change)

Week No.	Lesson topic	Obligatory readings
1-2	Introduction. Overview. Assertion.	Wiltschko 2021, ch. 2; Stalnaker 1978
3-7	Questions and responses. Table-based model. Response particles. Non-canonical questions.	Farkas & Bruce 2010; Farkas 2024
8-9	Directives. Overview of the accounts for directives. Non-canonical imperatives.	Portner 2016; Esipova 2024a; Jeong & Condoravdi 2017
10-12	Exclamations. Overview of the accounts for exclamations. Degree constraint. Do we need the exclamatory force?	Rett 2011; Esipova 2024b,c; Esipova 2025
13-14	Student presentations. Buffer.	

Final grade

Description of the product	Weight in the final score
Paper proposal (formative assessment)	20% of final grade
Paper presentation (formative assessment)	20% of final grade
Paper write-up	60% of final grade

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.

Plagiarism policy

Any instance of plagiarism in your work 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

Using generative AI (such as ChatGPT) to assist you in writing up your paper proposal, presentation, or final write-up is not allowed and, if discovered, 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

All required and optional readings will be made available to the students electronically.

Obligatory readings:

- Esipova, Maria. 2024a. Prosody across sentence types. In Yao Zhang, Fengyue (Lisa) Zhao, Youngdong Cho & Yifan Wu (eds.), *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) 34*, 68–87. https://doi.org/10.3765/pe3dtd58
- Esipova, Maria. 2024b. The things that we can(not) exclaim! *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America 9(1)*. 5723. https://doi.org/10.3765/plsa.v9i1.5723
- Esipova, Maria. 2024c. What I will tell you about "matrix" wh-"exclamatives"! In Robert Autry, Gabriela de la Cruz, Luis A. Irizarry Figueroa, Kristina Mihajlovic, Tianyi Ni, Ryan Smith & Heidi Harley (eds.), *Proceedings of West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics (WCCFL) 39*, 519–527. Somerville, MA, USA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. https://www.lingref.com/cpp/wccfl/39/paper3668.pdf
- Esipova, Maria. 2025. In defense of exclamatory force. Theoretical Linguistics 51(1-2). 79–105. https://doi.org/10.1515/tl-2025-2007
- Farkas, Donka F. 2024. Canonical and non-canonical questions in discourse. In Regine Eckardt, George Walkden & Nicole Dehé (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of non-canonical questions*, Oxford University Press. To appear.
- 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
- Stalnaker, Robert C. 1978. Assertion. In Peter Cole (ed.), *Syntax and semantics 9: Pragmatics*, 315–332. Cambridge, MA: Academic Press.
- Jeong, Sunwoo & Cleo Condoravdi. 2017. Imperatives with the calling contour. In *Proceedings of the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society (BLS 43)*, 185–209.
- Wiltschko, M. (2021). *The Grammar of Interactional Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.