

Date: 22.06.2024



Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course

Meaning and Use

Masha Esipova | Department of English Literature and Linguistics

37591-01

Course Type:	course
Scope of credits:	—
Year of study:	—
Semester:	2023-2024, Semester B
Day & Time:	Thursday, 12-4pm, room 404-102
Office hours:	Thursday, 10:45-11:45am, room 404-066
Lecturer Email:	mariia.esipova@biu.ac.il
Moodle Site:	https://lemida.biu.ac.il/course/view.php?id=90129



Course description and learning goals

Course Abstract

This course gives students a relatively informal introduction to foundational concepts, phenomena, and tools in semantics and in the semantics-pragmatics interface, which are essential to both continued research in semantics and as background to further study in other areas in linguistics. Sample topics covered include adverbial modification, tense and aspect, modality, gradable predicates, focus and focus sensitivity, and context-dependent expressions.

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
1-2	Introduction. A simple version of model-theoretic semantics: a simple ontology (individuals and truth values) + set theory + first-order predicate logic.
3	Adding events to our theory: adverbial modification and quantification.
4-5	Adding times to our theory: tense and aspect.
6-7	Adding possible worlds to our theory: modality and propositional attitudes.
8	Adding degrees to our theory: gradable predicates, degree modification, comparatives and superlatives.
9	Adding alternatives to our theory: questions; focus and focus sensitive operators.
10	Adding contexts to our theory: context-dependent expressions, indexical shift, expressives.
11	Buffer/bonus topic.

Note on the course format

By default, **the classes will be held in hybrid format (in person + on Zoom)**, but please contact the instructor in advance if you expect to be joining over Zoom with a justification. The classes will also be recorded, and the recordings will be made available to the students. Look out for additional

announcements about the format of individual classes. Please contact the instructor if you need an alternative participation format.



Formative Assessment

Description of the product	Weight in the final score
Homework assignments	Must be submitted, but not graded (answer keys/model answers provided for self-assessment)
Midterm take-home exam	50% of final grade
Final take-home exam	50% of final grade



Final grade

Midterm take-home exam: 50%

Final take-home exam: 50%



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.

Ungraded homework assignments: 80% must be submitted for a passing grade, but contact the instructor if you need more flexibility.

Collaboration policy

You're allowed—and encouraged—to collaborate on ungraded 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 you collaborators.

Collaboration on graded assignments is not allowed.

Plagiarism policy

Any instance of plagiarism in your assignments (graded or ungraded) 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	Semantics
OR	
37-987	Introduction to Syntax and Semantics

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



No required readings; optional background readings will be made available to the students electronically throughout the course.

Sample background readings:

- Portner, Paul. 2005. What is meaning? Fundamentals of formal semantics. Oxford: Blackwell. (selected chapters)
- Coppock, Elizabeth & Lucas Champollion. 2022. Invitation to formal semantics. Ms. <https://eecoppock.info/bootcamp/semantics-boot-camp.pdf> (selected chapters)