Course unit: NMB_AN115G2 Clausal Semantics

Number and type of classes: seminars, 2 hours each

Assessment: continuous, seminar mark

Course in the curriculum (the semester in which the course is taught): 8

Offered: every Spring semester

Language of instruction: English

Prerequisites (if any):

Instructor: Dr. Csaba Czeglédi, Institute of English and American Studies, Building B, room 318, czegledi.csaba@uni-eszterhazy.hu

Office hours: as on the Department’s website (http://anglisztika.ektf.hu/new/index.php?aktualis/aktualis), on my office door, Building B, room 318, and by appointment

Course description

Designed for students who have had their introduction to linguistic theory and the grammar of English, this course offers students an opportunity to deepen their understanding of semantic theory and questions of meaning more generally. The course focuses on the study of sentence meaning and meanings expressed by utterances in the use of language. Topics discussed include: aspects of the study of meaning, the syntax–semantics interface, lexical meaning vs. sentence/phrase meaning, the compositionality of sentence meaning, linguistic meaning vs. communicative meaning, semantics vs. pragmatics, understanding sentence meaning and understanding the illocutionary force of utterances, the theory of presuppositions, aspects (or “layers”) of sentence meaning, the semantics of English nonfinites, epistemically neutral vs. epistemically positive perceptual reports, contrastive implications of sentences. The course offers students plenty of opportunity to practice critical reading, thinking, and logical reasoning, and to improve their ability to construct and understand rational arguments. It is assumed that students are familiar with general concepts of language, grammar, and communication. Assessment is based on participation in class discussions and an argumentative home paper on a topic relevant to the content of the course and to TEFL, subject to approval by the instructor.

Students will better understand

- the nature of natural language
- how the study language is the study an aspect of the human mind
- the nature of meaning
- how meanings are expressed and understood in language and language use
- how syntactic structure interacts with conceptual structure
- how the meanings of complex linguistic expressions are computed in part from their structure
- the difference between linguistic meaning and meanings expressed in language use
- the concept of a speech act
- how human verbal (as well as nonverbal) communication involves interlocutors’ theory of mind
- how both sentences and utterances are “loaded” with implicit meanings
the role of our inferential capacity in working out the meaning of sentences and utterances
etc.

Students will be better able to
- think and express what they think in speech and in writing in English
- critically read and understand descriptive grammars of English (and of other languages they may be studying)
- critically read and understand the technical literature in linguistics, foreign language teaching, etc.
- appreciate and anticipate EFL students’ difficulties in acquiring rules of grammar and meaning
- critically assess the adequacy of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic rules presented in descriptive grammars of English and books intended for students of EFL in schools
- evaluate hypotheses and arguments
- construct arguments for themselves
- discriminate between ordinary questions and problems, and understand what it means for a problem to arise
- appreciate the value and significance of, and the difficulties involved in, theoretical understanding
- discover and express their own ideas, knowledge, and beliefs about language, syntactic structure, communication, etc.
- etc.

Most of the knowledge and skills acquired and developed in this course, such as the ability to construct and analyze arguments, etc. can be easily transferred by students to many other courses they take, and beyond.

Assessment
Students should be able to complete the seminar successfully and acquire a pass term-final grade if they have attended all the seminars, completed all the reading assignments, completed the written homework assignment, and actively participated in class discussions in the seminars.
The home paper is designed, in a constructivist spirit, to give students an opportunity to produce a coherent piece of argumentative writing in which they discuss some phenomena and problems that arise in the areas of the study of language addressed during the course. The home papers, not longer than 10 regular pages, shall be written in English and must be submitted electronically (in a Word document attached to an e-mail message sent to my account, see above) not later than two weeks after the last seminar.

Attendance
Students should attend all the seminars. Any class any student misses is entirely their own responsibility.

The schedule below is a plan, not a promise. I promise to discuss all of these topics one way or another, but some may take longer or shorter than planned, depending in large measure on the pace of work in the seminars. And the pace of work in the seminars
depends on how well-prepared (reading etc.) you come to class.

1 Aspects of the study of meaning; linguistic meaning vs. communicative meaning, semantics vs. pragmatics. Reading: Austin (1975/1990), Szabolcsi (1983), É. Kiss (2003)

2 The syntax–semantics interface. Reading: Chomsky (2005)

3 Lexical meaning vs. sentence/phrase meaning. Reading: Kiefer (2007)

4 The compositionality of sentence meaning. Reading: Kiefer (2007)

5 Aspects (or “layers”) of sentence meaning. Reading: Kiefer (2007, 1983)


7 The semantics of English nonfinites. Reading: Czeglédi (2007)

8 English nonfinites with and without factive presuppositions. Reading: Czeglédi (2007)


10 Sentence meaning vs. utterance meaning; the illocutionary force of utterances. Reading: Austin (1975/1990), Searle (1997a, b)

11 If all utterances are performatives, then what is a constative utterance? Reading: Austin (1975/1990), Szabolcsi (1983), Czeglédi (1993, 1994)

**Required Reading**


**Further Reading**


Czeglédi, Csaba. 2007. *Issues in the Syntax and Semantics of Infinitives and Gerunds in English.* Eger: Líceum K.


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other study aids</th>
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<td>Lecture notes, some further reading, etc. are available on the English Department’s website: <a href="http://anglisztika.ektf.hu/new/index.php?kezdo">http://anglisztika.ektf.hu/new/index.php?kezdo</a> and on the university’s learning platform: <a href="https://elearning.uni-eszterhazy.hu/">https://elearning.uni-eszterhazy.hu/</a></td>
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| Lecturer responsible for the course: | Dr. Csaba Czeglédi CSc |

| Other lecturers involved if any: |