

# Concepts and Compositionality Syllabus

Ling/Phil 596D

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## Course Home Pages:

Polis (for connecting to E-reserves):

[http://www.u.arizona.edu/ic/polis/spring02/Course-Homesite.cgi?LING\\_522-001](http://www.u.arizona.edu/ic/polis/spring02/Course-Homesite.cgi?LING_522-001)

Home page (for lecture notes etc.):

<http://w3.arizona.edu/~ling/hh/522>

## General description:

The present (rapidly changing) scene, both in linguistics and in the philosophy of language, witnesses a variety of attempts to go beyond, and possibly combine at a higher level, two contrasting ideas: (1) The lexicon is a mere list of items, the repository of all that is peculiar and idiosyncratic in a language; (2) The (mental) lexicon is a highly organized, content-rich structure, possessing a remarkable degree of systematicity and generativity—in short, compositionality. This course will attempt to reconstruct, and critically evaluate, the leading theories of lexical meanings and conceptual structures in their historical context, combining syntactico-semantic and philosophical analyses.

## Course Requirements:

30 %: midterm

20 %: 2 in-class presentations

50 %: final paper

sometime in late february/early march

also discussion, questions, etc.

due the last day of class

## Readings & password:

Readings will be available on line through the electronic reserve service of the library. The student password to access the readings is **meaning**. Reading assignments will be announced at each class; they will be fairly substantial, as they constitute the main out-of-class work for the course. (There is no textbook).

To get started, read the article *The Problem of Meaning in Generative Grammar*, by Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini and Carlo Cecchetto.

## Topics:

Below is a list of topics for the course, with some of the relevant readings mentioned (not all the readings on the e-reserves are mentioned, and not all of the ones mentioned will be required reading; reading assignments will be clarified from week to week). Additional topics and digressions may be introduced as we go along; some topics may be dropped.

- A brief history of the problematic definition of “word” (Graffi, 2001; Williams and Di Sciullo, 1981)
- A brief history of lexical meanings (from K.O. Erdmann’s *Die Bedeutung des Wortes* to Ogden and Richards’s *The Meaning of Meaning*, 1930)
- A history of lexical meanings in Generative Grammar (from LSLT to present-day Minimalism)
- The demise of the “meaning is use” thesis (from Wittgenstein to Searle’s paradox)
- Critique of Dummett’s meaning “collectivism”
- Putnam’s Twin Earth: Why meanings are “not in the head”, and Fodor’s critique (in *Psychosemantics*)
- Further arguments to the effect that meanings are “not in the head”: Tyler Burge’s puzzles (brisket, arthritis, contract), Saul Kripke’s puzzle (London/Londres) and Chomsky’s dismissal.
- The mishaps of Generative Semantics, and Putnam’s “cats-are-not-necessarily-animals” paradox
- The interface of the lexicon with topology and “bare physics”: Cognitive Semantics (from Gruber to Talmy’s 2 volumes, 2000)
- The algebra of events, from Donald Davidson to James Pustejowski and Ray Jackendoff
- Theta roles: the very idea (Edwin Williams, 1994; Jane Grimshaw, 1990; Hale and Keyser, 1995)
- Contra theta roles: Fodor’s lexical atomism and Fodor and Lepore’s critique of classical meaning holism.

- Central facts and theories about the acquisition of the lexicon: The demise of empiricism, and the rise of cognitivism: Bootstrapping and the theory of mind (L. Naigles and L. Gleitman, P. Bloom et al.)
- Deictics and indexicals (from David Kaplan's *Dthat* to the present day)
- The dynamics of meaning: Discourse Representation Theory (DRT) and File Change Semantics (FCS) (Kamp, 1981; Chierchia, 1995; van Benthem, 1989; Heim, 1982; latest papers of the Amsterdam gang)
- Ontological restrictions on possible classifier systems (Lasnik and Uriagereka, in press; Uriagereka and Mori, 1999)

**February 20** Lecture: Fodor's theory of concepts  
Presentation: Block on conceptual role semantics

**February 27** Lecture: Hale and Keyser and Fodor's critique  
Presentation: Higginbotham's 'On Semantics'

**March 6** Lecture: Bloom on acquisition and Goodman's paradox  
Presentation: Gleitman vs. Pinker — syntactic vs. semantic cues

**March 13** SPRING BREAK

**March 20** MIDTERM  
Lecture: Categories (Rosch and Mervis)

**March 27** Lecture: Kripke's puzzle and Jackendoff-Pustejowski  
Presentation: Fodor and LePore against Pustejowski

**April 3** Heidi: Vendler's event classes(15 mins)  
Folli on telicity + Heidi and MPP comments  
Presentation: Chomsky on reference

**April 10** Lecture: Heidi's own theory & Kaplan on indexicals, Burge on collective  
meaning  
Presentation: Kratzer on adjectival passives

**April 17** Fodor & LePore against holism + Schein's recent paper  
Presentation: Chierchia & Heim on dynamic semantics

**April 24** Wrap up: What lexical semantics should/could be