

Module title: Meaning in the Real World

Module code: LIN6046

Credit value: 15

Level: 6

Pre-requisite modules:

Content Description

The study of linguistic meaning has many real-world applications. In the areas of law, healthcare, politics and other domains of public life, one must grapple with issues such as ambiguity, vagueness, and context-sensitivity. This module will investigate how analytical tools from formal semantics can be applied in order to highlight and address a diverse range of problems in these areas. We will apply the tools from the Level 5 module Aspects of Meaning to a set of real-world cases. Examples might include legal cases involving an ambiguity in the wording of a contract, the expression of pain in healthcare settings, and recent controversies over the use of racial slurs by politicians. By conducting your own investigation of a real-world case study that raises issues about the nature of linguistic meaning, you will learn about the ways in which linguistics can shed light on contemporary societal and political issues.

Module Aims

1. To gain experience of applying formal tools to real-world cases involving linguistic meaning.
2. To gain experience of working independently to conduct a case study on a topic identified by the student.
3. To develop an appreciation of the relevance of linguistics to contemporary societal issues.
4. To learn to think critically about contemporary issues across a variety of domains of public life.

Learning Outcomes

Academic Content:

A1 An appreciation of the relevance of linguistics to contemporary societal issues.

A2 An understanding of the role of formal semantics within linguistics and beyond.

A3 An understanding of the formal and empirical techniques of formal semantics.

Disciplinary Skills – able to:

B1 Apply formal semantic tools to examples involving linguistic meaning.

B2 Understand technical texts in the areas of semantics and pragmatics.

B3 Write precise descriptions of linguistic phenomena and the problems that they pose.

Attributes:

C1 Ability to work independently to conduct a case study on an original topic.

C2 Ability to think critically about contemporary issues across a variety of domains of public life.

C3 Ability to synthesize knowledge across a range of disciplines (linguistics, law, healthcare, politics).

Activity Hours

Activity Type	Time spent (hours)
Lecture	11
Seminar	11

Guided independent study	128
Total	150

Indicative Reading List

- Brooks, Peter (2005) The plain meaning of torture? Literary deconstruction and the Bush administratin's legal reasoning. Slate Magazine February 9, 2005:
http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/jurisprudence/2005/02/the_plain_meaning_of_torture.html
- Camp, Elisabeth (2014) The semantics of slurs: A dual speech-act analysis. Ms., Rutgers University.
- Solan, Lawrence M. (1993) The Language of Judges. Chicago University Press.
- Solan, Lawrence M. & Peter Tiersma (eds.) (2012) The Oxford Handbook of Language and the Law. Oxford University Press.
- Tiersma, Peter (1999) Legal Language. University of Chicago Press