Semantics
Meaning

Semantics is concerned with the literal meaning of sentences of a language.

Pragmatics is concerned with what people communicate using the sentences of the language, the speaker’s meaning.

Thanks to Bruce Hayes and Daniel Büring for use of their lecture materials and examples.
Word meaning

How do words get their meaning?
dog
Prototype
Word meaning

How do proper nouns and pronouns get their meaning?

1. Brinley is glad.

2. She is holding the baby.

3. Brinley is glad she is holding the baby.
We indicate meaning with indices

7. Brinley\textsubscript{i} is glad that she\textsubscript{j} is holding the baby.

8. Brinley\textsubscript{i} is glad that she\textsubscript{j} is holding the baby.
Meaning

- This type of meaning is referred to as reference.
  - “Stuff out there”
- Language also allows us to express our inner thoughts.
  - “In our heads”
Lexical relationships

What a lexeme adds to a language is always partly a function of its relationship to other lexemes:

1. identity of sense = synonymy
2. inclusion of senses = hyponymy
3. oppositeness of senses = anytonymy
Synonymy

- No 2 words have the exact same meaning, otherwise there would be no reason to have both words.
  - beautiful/pretty
  - wealthy/affluent

1. near synonyms may differ in what they imply about how the speaker is judging the situation
  - assertive/pushy
2. The differences may also depend on social context
Regional Variation

- soda
- pop
- coke
- cola
- soda pop
- tonic
Hyponymy & Antonym

- Hyponymy = Word A is a subset of word B.
  - examples?

- Antonymy
Compositionality

We understand the meaning of the sentence but understanding what each individual word means.

7. Brinley is glad that she is holding the baby.
Idioms

Idioms are expressions that get their meanings not from the combined meaning of their individual parts but rather from the expression as a whole.

Type 1 = V+O (sentence 13)

12. Jeter stepped up to the plate and awaited the pitch.
13. He's really stepped up to the plate.

You can change the subject (14) but not the object.

14. She's really stepped up to the plate.
15. She stepped up to home plate.
Idioms

Type 2 = S+V+O

You can change neither the subject nor the object.

16. The cat is out of the bag.
17. The cat is out of the sack.
18. The feline is out of the bag.
19. The secret is out of the bag.

However, it is ok to change tense.

20. The cat will be out of the bag by then.
21. The cat was out of the bag at that point.
Proposition

- The most basic sort of thought is a proposition.
- A proposition is something that can be true or false.
- Propositions are defined by their truth conditions: the conditions that have to hold for them to count as true.
- A full clause expresses a full proposition
  - Halloween is the most fun holiday.
  - Halloween
Statements are true or false in a given situation.

Bart is standing. = true
Bart is sitting. = false
Bart is wearing a red shirt. = true
Statements are true or false in a given situation.

Bart is standing.
Bart is sitting.
Bart is wearing a red shirt.
Bart has a cast.
Bart has a skateboard.
Entailment

- Sentence A entails sentence B if whenever A is true, B must be true.

Sideshow Bob killed Bart.
Bart is dead.

Willy is a wearing blue overalls.
Willy is wearing overalls.

Kent is pointing his finger.
Kent is pointing.
Contradiction

- Sentence A contradicts sentence B if both cannot be true in the same situation.

Bart regrets going on a bike ride.  Bart didn’t go on a bike ride.

The Simpsons are sitting.  The Simpsons are standing.

Everyone is singing.  Homer isn’t singing.
Presupposition

- A presupposition is background belief, relating to an utterance.

Bart regrets going on a bike ride.
There is a person named Bart.
Bart can ride a bike.
Bart went on a bike ride.
Entailment and presupposition

• Although we want to distinguish entailments from presuppositions, note that presuppositions are technically a species of entailment: if A is true then B must also be true. But they are entailments that “are taken for granted”.

1. Homer left work early again.
   • Entails that at the reference time, Homer left work early.
   • Presupposes that Homer left work early at some time before the reference time.

2. Homer didn’t leave work early again.
   • Doesn’t entails that at the reference time, Homer left work early.
   • Presupposes that Homer left work early at some time before the reference time.
Some sentences/phrases are ambiguous
Ambiguity

Chester Morrill, 92, Was Fed Secretary

Enraged Cow Injures Farmer with Ax

Henshaw Offers Rare Opportunity to Goose Hunters

Hershey Bars Protest

Lawmen from Mexico Barbecue Guests

Time for Football and Meatball Stew

Two Sisters Reunited After 18 Years in Checkout Counter
Ambiguity

Each reading has a different syntactic structure:
- when a PP modifies a verb, it’s part of the VP
- when a PP modifies a noun, it’s part of the NP
Quantifiers

A quantifier is a determiner that expresses an NP’s number or amount.

Quantifiers
1) take scope (an area in which something acts or operates)
Interpretation of quantifiers

Every boy ate the cake.

Harry ate the cake. = true
Ron ate the cake. = true
Draco ate the cake. = true

For every x, x a boy (x ate the cake)
Interpretation of quantifiers

Some boy ate the cake.

Harry ate the cake. = false
Ron ate the cake. = true
Draco ate the cake. = false

There is some x, x a boy (x ate the cake)
Sentences with more than 1 Q

Every boy kissed some girl.

for every $x$, $x$ a boy  $x$ kissed $y$  there is some $y$, $y$ a girl

Ambiguity comes from the scope of the quantifier.
Scope affects meaning

Every boy kissed some girl.

There is some $y$, $y$ a girl (for every $x$, $x$ a boy ($x$ kissed $y$))
Scope affects meaning

Every boy kissed some girl.

For every x, x a boy (there is some y, y a girl (x kissed y))