

# Introducing Semantics

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LING 405: Semantics and Pragmatics

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# What we'll cover today...

Cameras on, please!

1. Introductions
2. What is semantics?
3. Syllabus review
4. Using the class site

# Introductions

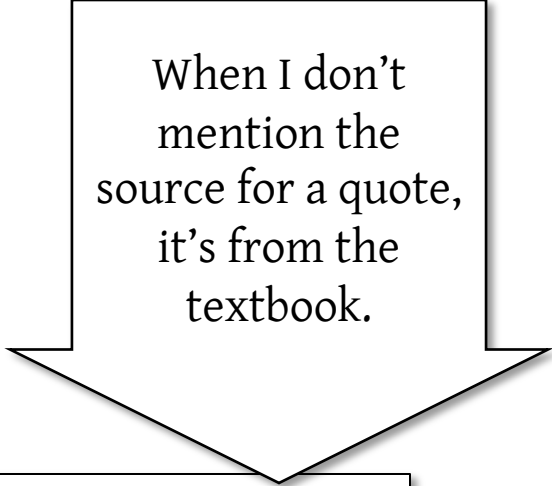


- My name is Joseph Pentangelo. I also go by Joe.
- I am a linguist and folklorist.
- I have a PhD in linguistics from the Graduate Center, CUNY.
- I went to Macaulay Honors College at CSI as an undergrad, class of 2012.
- I live on Staten Island with my wife, Rebecca, and our cat, Babycat.
- Our TA this semester will be Emmanuel Bawa.

Introduce yourselves: name, major, any hobbies.

# What is semantics?

- Semantics is the study of *meaning*.
- So what is pragmatics?
- ...also the study of meaning.



When I don't mention the source for a quote, it's from the textbook.

The study of meaning in human language is often partitioned into two major divisions, and in this context the term *semantics* is used to refer to one of these divisions. In this narrower sense, semantics is concerned with the inherent meaning of words and sentences as linguistic expressions, in and of themselves, while *pragmatics* is concerned with those aspects of meaning that depend on or derive from the way in which the words and sentences are used. (p.3)

# Playing with meaning...

- What does “good” mean?

He’s a good dog.

This is good pizza.

She’s too good for you.

Good for you!

Good for you.

Good.

- What does “the city” mean?

I’m going to the city.

I’ve never been to the city.

Staten Island is part of the city.

The city is New York.

The city is Philadelphia.

I like the city better than the country.

# Playing with meaning...

There are three different levels of meaning:

- Semantics {
1. Word meaning
  2. Sentence meaning
- Pragmatics — 3. Utterance meaning (or “speaker meaning”)

When a speaker uses a sentence in a specific context, he produces an utterance. [...] The term *sentence meaning* refers to the semantic content of the sentence: the meaning which derives from the words themselves, regardless of context. The term *utterance meaning* refers to the semantic content plus any pragmatic meaning created by the specific way the sentence gets used. (p. 5)

# Playing with meaning...

Good for you! (sincerely)

Good for you. (sarcastically)

- The sentence meaning of these two is the same, but the utterance meaning is different.
- Sarcasm often depends upon using sentences to have the opposite utterance meaning from what would be expected:
- “I’m so happy to be here,” “Great,” “Woohoo,” etc. can be earnest expressions of joy... or expressions of displeasure and disappointment.



# Discussion Question

What are some utterances whose meaning does not follow from the words themselves? (For example, “God bless you!” is a meaningless utterance used to acknowledge someone sneezed.)



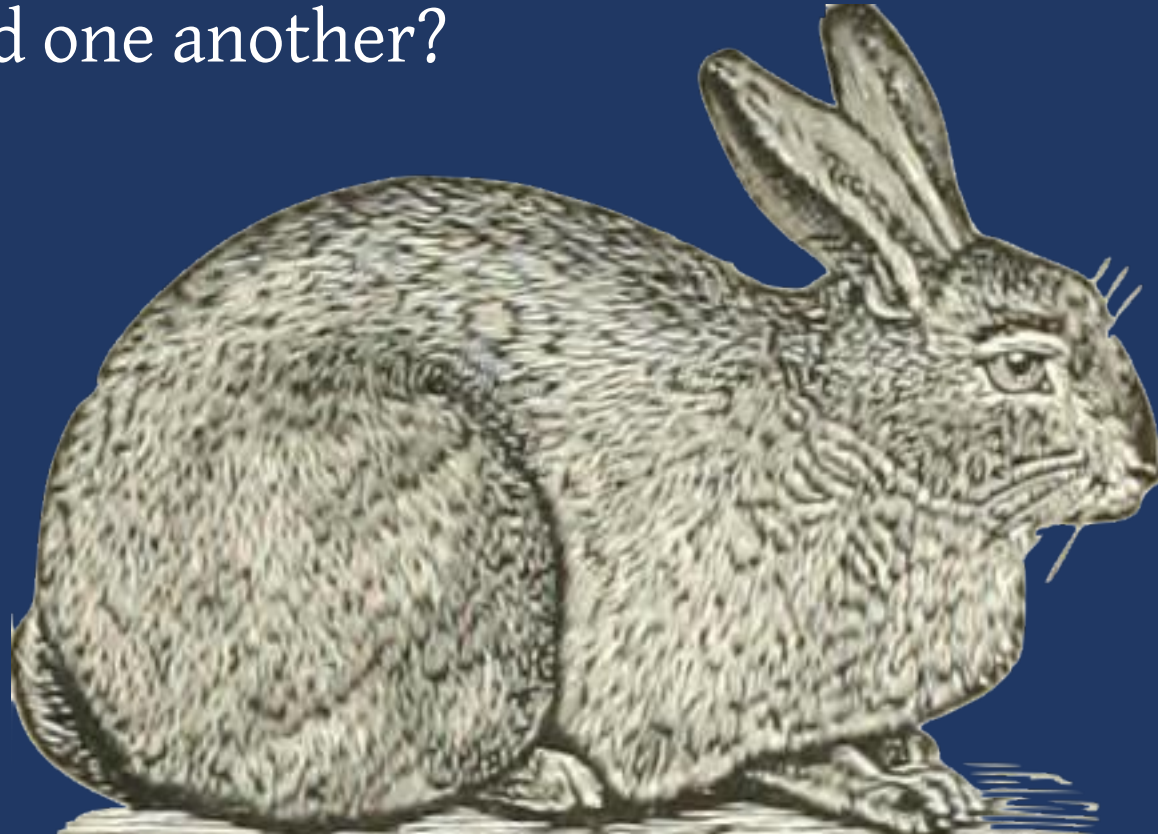
# Gavagai



«GAVAGAI» - the philosophical thought experiment by SRF Kultur

# Discussion Questions

- How *do* we know my “rabbit” means your “rabbit”?
- How do we know we understand one another?
- *Do* we understand one another?



# This semester

- These are the sorts of questions and topics we'll be exploring in this class
- To give you a better idea of what's to come, we'll now cover the syllabus, then the class website.
- But first, here's what's due next week...

# For next week...

- Read chapter 2 in the textbook, which you can find on the site!