

24.903 Syllabus – Spring 2022

Kai von Fintel

Time MW 11-12:30

Location Room 4-265

Instructor Kai von Fintel (fintel@mit.edu, kaivonfintel.org)

Teaching Assistant Omri Doron (omrid@mit.edu)

Canvas <https://canvas.mit.edu/courses/13498>

Piazza <https://piazza.com/mit/spring2022/24903/home>

Prerequisites

Introduction to Linguistics (24.900), or equivalent. If you're not sure, please get in touch with us directly.

About Kai

I'm the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Linguistics here at MIT, in the Department of Linguistics & Philosophy. I work on meaning. I have taught at MIT since 1993. I received my PhD from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. I have a wife, two adult children, two cats, and a dog. I live in an intentional community (Mosaic Commons Cohousing) in Berlin, Massachusetts. I am a runner. I like soccer, a lot. I was born on a very cold winter's night in a small village on the Lüneburg Heath in Northern Germany. My pronouns are he/him/his.

About Omri

I'm a third year grad student in the Department of Linguistics & Philosophy. I was born in Jerusalem and live now by Davis Square in Somerville with my wife. Before coming here I studied math and linguistics at the Hebrew University. Right now I'm into Sergei Dovlatov, Joni Mitchell and Michael Pagliarini.

How this course will work

One of the overarching goals of (generative) formal linguistics is answering the question *what do we know, when we know a language?*. In this class, we'll be focusing on *knowledge of meaning*. We'll develop a framework for investigating the semantics of natural language, using mathematical tools such as set theory, logic, and the lambda calculus.

Main topics

- Introduction (meaning, compositionality, truth-conditions)
- Basics of formal compositional semantics (predicates, connectives, sets, function, lambdas)
- Meaning in context (presupposition, implicature, context-dependency)
- Quantification (higher order relations, scope, variable binding)
- Modality and conditionals

Vehicles for learning

- in class lectures/discussions
- handouts/slides
- your note-taking
- your active participation
- consultations with instructor and/or TA (piazza, meetings, optional TA sessions)
- problem sets

Materials

There is no textbook for this class. When appropriate, we will make available supporting material on Canvas.

Problem sets

There will be a pset posted on Canvas almost every week. There will always be at least 7 days from setting the pset to the due date. You may collaborate with other students on the psets, and in fact this is actively encouraged. You can use the *pset partners* website (psetpartners.mit.edu) to find collaborators.

If you collaborate on a pset, you **must**:

- State who you worked with somewhere in your submission
- Write up solutions individually

Copying solutions is considered a form of plagiarism (integrity.mit.edu).

Don't be nervous about collaborating; you won't receive less credit than working alone.

Participation

Active participation and attendance is a *requirement*. If for any reason you can't attend a class meeting, please contact us directly beforehand (not after the fact, please!).

Grading

- 10% participation (class, piazza)
- 90% psets

The lowest scoring pset will be dropped. You cannot get an A if you don't participate actively (attendance, contributions of questions/comments in class and on piazza).

Flexibility

Given the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, we'll aim to do everything we can to accommodate your needs. Specifically, there will be flexibility regarding deadlines and attendance requirements. All we ask from you is that you keep us in the loop (ideally, via email) about anything that may affect your ability to fulfill the requirements of this class. You can expect a sympathetic response.

Sickness

If you are sick, you should immediately seek medical attention at medical.mit.edu. Let us know and contact S3. They can contact all your instructors to either postpone any work that is due, or make other arrangements.

Issues

Personal and medical issues can make it hard to focus on academics. If you find that something is getting in the way of your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an exam, you should contact a dean in Student Support Services (S³). The deans will provide you with support and help you work with us to determine next steps. We ask that you go to S³ so we know you have had a chance to talk through your situation with someone and to connect with any resources you might need. You can reach out to a dean you have worked with in the past, join their virtual help queue (<https://sicc-s3.mit.edu/queue>), or e-mail s3-support@mit.edu.

Recording

If all goes well technically, the class meetings will be recorded in case students with excused absences (via S³) need to catch up on a meeting. Let us know if you have a problem with the meetings being recorded.

Calendar

- 26 lectures
- 13 weeks
- special dates:
 - 02/21 M: no class (Presidents Day)
 - 02/22 T: Monday schedule
 - 03/21 M: no class (Spring Break)
 - 03/23 W: no class (Spring Break)
 - 04/18 M: no class (Patriots Day)