GET1036 The Logic of Language

National University of Singapore
2018–2019 Semester 2

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Lectures: Wednesdays 10:00–11:35, LT9
Tutorials: See CORS; starting Week 3

Description

Our capacity for language is a defining aspect of what it means to be human and is central to both thought and communication. This course investigates the rules that underlie what we say, how meaning is encoded, and how we reason with language. We will apply mathematical tools of pattern description and logic to describe and better understand human language, with the goal of developing logical explanations for linguistic phenomena. Comparison to artificial and programming languages will be discussed. Emphasis will be placed on clear, precise descriptions and their accessible communication through writing and oral presentation.

Assessment

- **Tutorials**
  - Attendance and participation 10%
  - Quizzes 10%
    Each tutorial will include a five-minute quiz on the week's lecture. The lowest grade will be dropped.
  - Oral presentation 10%
    Every week, one group of students will present the recent problem set, related to the preceding week's lecture. Assessment will emphasize effective communication of the thought process, as well as the validity of answers.
  - Problem set notes 5%
    Each group must then upload their slides or other written material covering the problem set solutions to IVLE, after making necessary corrections. Notes must be uploaded by the end of the week to IVLE > Files > Tutorial materials > *Your group*.
- **Essay** 15%
  Students will choose from a list of suggested reading and write a short (1000 words), accessible piece introducing a key idea from the reading for a non-specialist audience, perhaps appropriate for a newspaper column. *Due Friday, March 8 (Week 7)*
- **Midterm exam** (open book): *Wednesday, March 20 (Week 9)* 20%
- **Final exam** (open book): *afternoon of Wednesday, May 8* 30%

Website

- All course materials will be available on IVLE. Make sure you have access.
- All submitted assignments must be submitted on IVLE.
- You are responsible for checking IVLE and your email regularly for announcements and new materials.

Schedule — see also Lesson Plan on IVLE

Jan 16	Introduction	
Jan 23	Words and rules	
Jan 30	Sentences as patterns	*Tutorials begin Week 3*
(Feb 6)	*No class: Chinese New Year*	*No tutorials this week*
Feb 13	Grammar as machines	
Feb 20	Reflexes of structure	
(Feb 27)	*No class: Recess week*	
Mar 6	Sentence meanings	*Essays due Friday, March 8*
Mar 13	Quantifiers	
Mar 20	Midterm exam	*No tutorials this week*
Mar 27	Exceptives and triviality	
Apr 3	Cooperative conversations and implicature	
Apr 10	Negative polarity items	
Apr 17	Ellipsis	
May 8	Final exam	

Rules of note

- **Electronic devices:** Laptops and phones are not allowed in class. If you know that such devices are actively helpful or essential for your learning or concentration in class, write me a brief (100 words or less) email to let me know and you will most likely receive permission to use your device.
- **Cooperation:** You may discuss your work with other students (except in exams); in fact, it is encouraged! However, you must always submit your own write-up, and you should list the students who you worked with, if any.
- **Integrity:** The use of others' ideas or expressions without citation is plagiarism. You must declare all sources in submitted work. Citations don't need to be in any particular format, but they have to be there. Plagiarized work will receive a zero grade.
- **Talk to me:** I want you to succeed in this class. If any material or requirement is unclear, let me know. In extreme cases, alternative arrangements can be made for some of the course requirements, but only by talking to me first.