

## Topics in Semantics: The Semantics of Degree

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### Course Description

This seminar will investigate the expression of gradability, comparison and degree in natural language. The course will address the following major issues, though we may also include other topics according to the interests and direction of the class:

- The underlying semantic representation of expressions of degree and the linguistic significance of scalar representations
- The logical form of comparative constructions, and the implications of comparatives for other aspects of the grammar
- The semantics of degree and the role of scalar representations in grammatical categories other than gradable adjectives

### Requirements

Students enrolled in the course are expected to do the assigned readings and to participate fully in the classroom discussion, and they will also be required to write a research paper for the course. The topic should be selected in consultation with the instructors no later than the tenth week of the course. We will set aside the final week of the course for a research seminar in which students can present their work.

### Schedule

The following is a tentative schedule for the semester, which we will adjust as we go along depending on the interests of the participants. Additional topics and readings may be added, and some of the ones listed may be deleted.

An up-to-date listing of the topics and readings for upcoming classes will be posted on the course website at: <https://ocw-int.mit.edu/24/24.979/f02/index.html>.

Hardcopies of the readings for the course will be made available outside Irene's office, and electronic versions (when available) will be put on the web. Optional background readings are listed in parentheses.

**NB:** 9.23, 10.14, and 11.11 are holidays, so there will be no class. We will also need to reschedule the class that is supposed to meet on 11.18.

#### *Class 1: Introduction*

The semantics of grading and degree	Kennedy 1999, pp. 3-57; (Sapir 1944)
Vague predicates	Klein 1980; (Kamp 1975)
Degrees relations	Cresswell 1977; (Bierwisch 1989, pp. 73-139)

#### *Class 2: A semantic typology of gradable predicates*

Scale structure and degree modification	Kennedy and McNally 2002
Relative vs. absolute gradable adjectives	(Unger 1975, ch. 2)

*Class 3: The grammar of vagueness*

What exactly is the standard of comparison and how is it determined? Ludlow 1989; Kennedy 2002; (Graff 2000) (Barker 2002; Kyburg and Morreau 2000)

*Class 4: Comparison and logical form 1*

Scope ambiguities in comparatives and the semantic type of gradable adjectives Kennedy 1999, pp. 58-108; Heim 2000 (von Stechow 1984; Heim 1985)  
Scope and superlatives Sharvit and Stateva 2000; (Farkas and Kiss 2000)

*Class 5: Comparison and logical form 2*

Quantification and comparison and the structure of degrees Schwarzschild and Wilkinson 2002 (Lerner and Pinkal 1992)

*Class 6: Polarity*

Comparison and polar opposition Kennedy 2001; (Bierwisch 1989, pp. 139-175;)  
Comparison and negative polarity Rullmann 1995, ch. 2

*Class 7: Comparative NPs*

Comparative quantifiers Hackl 2000

*Class 8: The grammar of measurement*

Partitives and related matters Schwarzschild 2002  
Amount relatives Grosu and Landman 1998; (Carlson 1977; Heim 1987)

*Class 9: Aspect and degree*

Telicity and degree of change Kennedy and Levin 2002

*Class 10: Student presentations*

**References**

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