

Narrative Semantics and Pragmatics (A006626)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 1) English Gent

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

Taverniers, Miriam LW06 lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

	crdts	offering
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject Linguistics)	5	A
Exchange Programme Linguistics and Literature	5	A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

Narrative semantics; narrative pragmatics; meaning-making; functional linguistics; storytelling and discourse; perspective and alignment; metaphor and framing; storyworlds; transformative storytelling; narrative and context.

Position of the course

This course is part of the mandatory thematic course units within the Linguistics specialisation. Together with the modules on sound structure, syntax, and language change, it offers a complementary perspective, centred on meaning-making in discourse. The focus lies on semantic and pragmatic processes in narrative language use, with particular attention to language as a form of social and contextual action.

Contents

The first part of the course lays the foundations for analysing narrative meaning through language. We begin with a **functional linguistic framework**, focusing on systemic-functional linguistics and its three metafunctions — ideational, interpersonal, and textual — as a way of understanding how meaning is construed in narrative discourse. Building on this, we engage with a range of complementary perspectives from **structuralist narratology**, **philosophy** and **psychology** (e.g. Ricœur's theory of mimesis, Goodman's worldmaking, Turner's conceptual metaphor theory, Freedman & Combs' narrative therapy) to deepen our insight into how narratives structure experience. Special attention is given to the interpersonal, social, and psychological functions of storytelling — including narrative identity, conflict resolution, and therapeutic reframing. These foundational tools prepare students for the more exploratory second half of the course.

The second part of the course is designed as an **exploratory seminar**, with a responsive, student-centred structure that allows students to pursue applications relevant to their own interests. In small groups, students investigate narrative practices in a domain of choice, such as oral history, legal storytelling, political discourse or social media. Each group shares their insights through a short teaching segment for their peers. Collaborative learning is central in this phase, reflecting the co-constructed nature of narrative meaning itself.

The course ends with a **story lab**, in which students begin working on their final,

individual project. For this final assignment, students can choose between a theoretical paper, a discourse-based descriptive analysis, or a creative project such as the development or reconstruction of a transformative story. This flexible format supports individual interests while building on the shared foundations and insights developed throughout the course.

The course embraces a wide range of narrative genres and encourages students to work with data in English or other languages (with English translation provided). Students will be invited to develop their own analysis and reflect critically on how narratives construe meaning — in texts, in interactions, and in lives.

Initial competences

A foundational knowledge of linguistic — and especially grammatical — concepts is expected. Students from diverse academic backgrounds are encouraged to address any gaps in their prior knowledge through the assigned readings and supporting materials.

Final competences

- 1 Explain how narrative meaning is construed from semantic, pragmatic, and functional-linguistic perspectives.
- 2 Apply the three metafunctions of systemic-functional grammar to the analysis of narrative texts.
- 3 Analyse meaning construction in narrative texts, with attention to perspective, alignment, metaphorical framing, and linguistic resources such as evaluation, reference, and thematic structure.
- 4 Explain how metaphorical framing and storyworlds contribute to meaning construction in narrative discourse.
- 5 Relate narrative choices to the ideational, interpersonal, textual, social, psychological, or philosophical functions of storytelling.
- 6 Design an individual narrative project (theoretical, descriptive, or creative) that investigates meaning-making in context.
- 7 Collaborate in small groups to explore an applied narrative theme and communicate findings to peers.
- 8 Utilise digital methods to work on projects in one or more phases of a research process, either collaboratively with fellow students or individually.
- 9 Effectively communicate about complex grammatical concepts and analyses, both orally and in writing, to an academic audience.
- 10 Reflect on the value of the course for future professional and academic development.
- 11 Act with academic integrity (to respect authorship and to not commit plagiarism; to correctly refer to previous scientific literature; to take into account ethical dimensions of scientific research; to use generative AI in a responsible way and report and reflect on this in a transparent manner).

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is unrestricted: the student takes into consideration the conditions mentioned in 'Starting Competences'

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Group work, Seminar, Lecture, Independent work, Peer teaching

Extra information on the teaching methods

In the first part: interactive *lectures*, supported by *independent work* (reading and processing).

In the second part: *group work* and *peer teaching* on a selected application domain.

In the final part: *independent work* on an individual project, with optional feedback moments organised as part of the *tutorial* component.

No lecture recordings are provided for this course (interactive teaching format).

Study material

Type: Slides

Name: Lecture slides

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Available on Ufora : Yes

Type: Handouts

Name: Lecture handouts

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Available on Ufora : Yes

References

Halliday, M.A.K. & Matthiessen, C.M.I.M. 2014. *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 4th edition. Routledge.

Herman, David. 2004. *Story Logic: Problems and possibilities of narrative*. U of Nebraska Press.

Lakoff, George & Mark Johnson. 2003. *Metaphors We Live By* (revised edition). U of Chicago Press.

Turner, Mark. 1996. *The Literary Mind: The origins of thought and language*. Oxford UP.

Course content-related study coaching

Content-related support is provided during class sessions, via the Ufora platform, and by appointment. During the supervision period in the final weeks of the semester, additional guidance is available for the final project.

Assessment moments

continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Participation, Presentation, Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

not applicable

Extra information on the examination methods

The assessment consists of three components:

- Project/paper (individual final assignment).
- Presentation (peer teaching session in group during the second part of the course).
- Participation (active engagement during lectures, seminars and group work).

Calculation of the examination mark

Participation: 20%

Presentation: 30%

Project/paper: 50%

Facilities for Working Students

- Active participation in class sessions is essential, but individual situations can be discussed with the lecturer.
- Exam dates can be rescheduled in consultation within the academic year.
- Feedback sessions can be arranged by appointment during office hours, possibly also online.