LING/ANTH 311 – General Linguistics

Section 01:  TTh 1:10–2:30, Psychology 102
Section 02:  TTh 2:40–4:00, Psychology 102

Course Syllabus
Fall 2006

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(or by appointment)

Prerequisites
There are no prerequisites for this course, other than an interest in language. Some familiarity with traditional grammar terms such as noun, verb, preposition, syllable, consonant, vowel, phrase, clause, sentence, etc., would be useful, but is by no means required.

Content and focus of the course
This course is an introduction to the scientific study of human language. Starting from the basic questions “What is language?” and “What do we know when we know a language?”, we proceed to examine the properties of language from a variety of perspectives. From a socio-cultural viewpoint, language may be understood as a social institution (albeit one with unique properties), and as the primary means through which symbolic value, and human society itself, is produced, maintained, and represented. From a cognitive viewpoint, language may be understood as a system of knowledge within the mind of the language user (a mental grammar), which can be studied empirically and modeled formally. As both a social and a cognitive science, linguistics is allied with a number of other fields, including anthropology, mathematics/logic, philosophy, and psychology. Since language is such a fundamental feature of human life, linguistic theory and methodology also have implications for the study of history, the humanities (literature, semiotics, poetics, rhetoric, etc.), language teaching, and computer science, among other fields.

The course is divided roughly into five units. We begin with a brief introduction to the field of linguistics and the goals and methods of linguistic analysis. The next three units deal with different ‘levels of organization’ in grammar: sounds (or gestures), words, and sentences (or utterances). We discuss how linguists identify and describe structural patterns at these levels, and how these patterns vary across space and time. Topics which we will discuss include:

(1) Sounds and sound systems

- **Phonetics**: The sounds of human languages, their acoustic and physiological properties, and how they are classified and described.
- **Phonetic variation**: How phonetic distinctions are used to differentiate among social groups (‘accents’, dialects and registers, etc.).
- **Phonology**: How speech sounds are organized in systems of contrast, and how sounds interact with each other when combined to form larger units (syllables, words, etc.).
- **Sound change**: How pronunciation of words changes over time, and how regularities of sound change can be used to determine relatedness among languages and to reconstruct earlier stages of a language.

(2) Words and word systems
• **Morphology**: The internal structure of words, how they are formed, their categories, and how they are related to other words in the speaker’s lexicon (‘mental dictionary’).

• **Morpho-phonology**: Alternations in the shapes of words (and parts of words) based on their phonological context.

• **Lexical semantics**: How words carry meaning, and how word meanings are instantiated in the minds of speakers.

• **Lexical variation**: How word choice both reflects and constitutes sociocultural differences (based on age, gender, class, ‘race’ and ethnicity, etc.).

• **Morphological change**: How words change their form and meaning over time, and how new words (and parts of words) are created.

(3) **Sentences and utterances**

• **Syntax**: How words are combined to form phrases and sentences.

• **Morpho-syntax/argument structure**: How syntactic relations among parts of sentences are expressed by changing the shape of words (case, agreement, etc.).

• **Compositional semantics**: How the meanings of sentences/utterances are computed on the basis of the meanings of their parts.

• **Pragmatics and discourse**: How speakers employ linguistic expressions to perform communicative tasks (making assertions, asking questions, issuing commands, etc.), and how utterances are organized into larger texts (conversations, narratives, etc.).

• **Prosody**: How elements of speech such as intonation, accentuation, speech rate, and rhythm are structured formally, how they relate to other linguistic structures, and how they help to produce utterance-level meaning.

We conclude the course by briefly considering some broader issues in the study of human language, such as the (possibly false) dichotomy between language as a socio-cultural institution and language as a cognitive system, and the question of what (if any) aspects of mental grammar are autonomous and innate (Noam Chomsky’s *Universal Grammar* hypothesis).

Naturally we won’t have time to explore any of these topics in depth. Our goal is to give you a very broad overview of the field, and to acquaint you with some of the research questions and debates with which linguists are currently engaged. Throughout the course, we will focus on developing sound argumentation and problem-solving skills—learning to identify and analyze real language data in order to construct productive, testable hypotheses (both about grammar itself, and about the relations between grammar and non-linguistic aspects of the socio-cultural universe). We hope to make you aware of the complexity and sophistication of your own (largely unconscious) linguistic knowledge, and in so doing, cause you to question some of your own preconceptions about what language is and how it works.

**Course requirements, grading, and policies**

**Participation**

Students are expected to attend every class meeting and participate on a regular basis. Participation will count for approximately 20% of the course grade.

**Final exam**

There will be a comprehensive take-home final exam, worth approximately 20% of the course grade. The exam will be closed book and closed notes, and consist of data analysis questions and one or two short essays. Additional details will be provided later in the course. Most likely the exam will be handed out the last day of classes and due one week later (there will be no time limit on the exam).

**Problem sets**

There will be 6 problem sets, handed out in class at regular intervals. Problem set answers may be submitted in hardcopy or electronic versions (*PDF only, please*). Hardcopy versions should be submitted in
class on the date due. Electronic versions should be submitted as email attachments before the beginning of class on the date due. Due dates are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>problem set</th>
<th>handed out</th>
<th>due in class</th>
<th>to be graded by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Tag questions</td>
<td>THURS, AUG 31</td>
<td>TUES, SEPT 12</td>
<td>Hibbard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Phonetics/phonemes</td>
<td>TUES, SEPT 12</td>
<td>TUES, SEPT 26</td>
<td>Hibbard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Morpho-phonology/reconstruction</td>
<td>TUES, SEPT 26</td>
<td>TUES, OCT 10</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) Morphology</td>
<td>TUES, OCT 10</td>
<td>THURS, NOV 2</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Syntax</td>
<td>THURS, NOV 2</td>
<td>THURS, NOV 16</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Semantics/pragmatics/prosody</td>
<td>THURS, NOV 16</td>
<td>TUES, DEC 5</td>
<td>Hibbard</td>
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</tbody>
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Problem sets must be turned in on time if you wish to receive full credit and comments. Late assignments will be penalized 10% of total possible points for each day they are late. Late assignments will not be accepted for credit if turned in after the problem set has been returned to students, or discussed in class, whichever comes first (moreover, late assignments will probably receive minimal comments, and may not be returned in a timely fashion).

Because it is impossible to do good science in a vacuum, you are encouraged—in fact, expected—to work on problem sets together, as long as you write up your answers separately and in your own words. So introduce yourself to your fellow students and form a study group today! You should also feel free to come see Matt or Steve during office hours if you’re having difficulty with the homework. (It is perfectly legitimate to seek help on an assignment before it is due—in fact, we encourage it!) We are always willing to talk about any aspect of the course, so please take full advantage of our services outside of class.

Course outline and readings

The following week-by-week schedule lists the order of the subjects we intend to cover, the readings for each week, and the deadlines for written work and other assignments. <SH> (= Steve Hibbard) and <MP> (= Matt Pearson) designate the discussion leader(s) for that day.

There is no textbook for this course. Instead we will read selections from different textbooks, along with articles and book chapters from various sources. All readings are available through the library on e-reserve or print reserve, from the web, or directly from us (call numbers for books on print reserve are given in square brackets, along with other instructions on how to obtain readings). Reading assignments are listed under the week in which they are to be completed, in the approximate order in which you should tackle them. Try to complete at least half of the reading for Tuesday’s class, and the remainder of the reading for Thursday’s class. Readings may be added, dropped, or shifted around as we go along, depending on the pace of the class.

WEEK 1

* Tues, August 29 – Introduction: Introducing linguistics. Basic linguistic analysis and the ‘form first’ principle. Overview of the course. <SH, MP>*

* Thurs, August 31 – Introduction (cont.): Linguistic analysis continued. What is language? Properties of Human Language. <SH, MP>*

Readings:

- Shopen (ed.), *Languages and Their Speakers*. / chapter 1, Craig, “Jacaltec: Field Work in Guatemala” (pp. 3-57). [P106.L318 1987]

**Homework:**
- Thursday: Problem set 1 handed out in class

**WEEK 2**

*Tues, September 5 –* Introduction (cont.): A brief history of linguistics. Language as a cultural system vs. language as a cognitive system. <SH>


**Readings:**
- Hanks, *Language and Communicative Practices*. / chapter 1, “Introduction: Meaning and Matters of Context” (pp. 1-17); chapter 2, “The Language of Saussure” (pp. 21-38); chapter 3, “From Signs to Sentences” (pp. 39-65); chapter 4, “North American Formalism and the Problem of Meaning” (pp. 66-87). [P106.H295 1996 / availability TBA]
- Ladefoged, *A Course in Phonetics*. / chapter 1, “Articulatory Phonetics” (pp. 1-15); chapter 2, “Phonology and Phonetic Transcription” (pp. 23-35); chapter 7, “Place and Manner of Articulation” (pp. 139-155). [P221.L2 2001 / e-reserve]

**Homework:**
- Before class on Thursday, learn the phonetic symbols on pp. 26 and 29 of Ladefoged, and be prepared to practice transcribing words of English into IPA (you can ignore the vowel symbols for British English and concentrate on the ones for American English).
- Examine the consonant chart on p. 35 of Ladefoged and learn the names for the different places and manners of articulation.
- Visit the on-line UCLA Phonetics Archive to listen to sound files of the world’s languages, and practice phonetic symbols using the self-pronouncing IPA chart: http://hctv.humnet.ucla.edu/departments/linguistics/VowelsandConsonants/. Also, visit http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/# to see flash animations of the human vocal tract articulating various sounds.

**WEEK 3**

*Tues, September 12 –* Sounds (cont.): Phonetic variation within the individual. Broad versus narrow transcription and phonetic detail. Contrastiveness. Phonemes and allophones. <MP>

*Thurs, September 14 –* Sounds (cont.): Phonetic variation across individuals. Sounds in sociolinguistic context. <SH>

**Readings:**

**Homework:**
- Tuesday: Problem set 1 due in class
- Tuesday: Problem set 2 handed out in class

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1 Concentrate on sections 1-3 of Hockett (pp. 163-179). Section 4 contains a number of technical terms which will be introduced later.
WEEK 4

Tues, September 19 – Sounds (cont.): More on sounds in sociolinguistic context. <SH>

Readings:
- Labov, Sociolinguistic Patterns. / “The Social Stratification of (r) […]” (pp. 43-69); “The Reflection of Social Structures in Linguistic Processes” (pp. 110-121). [P41.L26 1973 / e-reserve]
- Aronoff & Rees-Miller (eds.), The Handbook of Linguistics. / chapter 8, Cohn, “Phonology” (pp. 180-212). [P121.H324 2001 / in reference section of the library, or on e-reserve]
- Hayes, Introductory Phonology. / chapter 3, “More on phonemes” (pp. 49-68). [e-reserve]

WEEK 5

Tues, September 26 – Sounds (cont.): More on phonological rules and processes. Writing rules with features. <MP>
Thurs, September 28 – Sounds (cont.): Introducing diachronic linguistics and sound change. <SH>

Readings:
- Hayes, Introductory Phonology. / chapter 4, “Features” (pp. 69-103). [e-reserve]

Homework:
- Tuesday: Problem set 2 due in class
- Tuesday: Problem set 3 handed out in class

WEEK 6

Tues, October 3 – Sounds (cont.): Proto-languages and language families. Linguistic reconstruction and the comparative method. <SH>
Thurs, October 5 – Words: Introducing morphology. The morpheme. Morphological analysis. Types of word formation. <MP>

Readings:

WEEK 7

Tues, October 10 – Words (cont.): Morpho-phonology. Allomorphy and morphological analysis continued. <MP>
Thurs, October 12 – Words (cont.): Word meanings. Lexical semantics and the organization of the lexicon. <SH>

Readings:

Homework:
- Tuesday: Problem set 3 due in class
- Tuesday: Problem set 4 handed out in class

WEEK 8 – FALL BREAK

WEEK 9

Tues, October 24 – Words (cont.): Words in sociolinguistic context. Dialects and isoglosses. <SH>
Thurs, October 26 – Words (cont.): The diachronic study of words. Morphological change, grammaticalization, and internal reconstruction. <SH>

Readings:
- Chambers & Trudgill, Dialectology. / (pp. 3-57). [P367.C47 / availability TBA]

WEEK 10

Tues, October 31 – Sentences and utterances: Structural relations within the sentence. Word order, case, and agreement. <MP>
Thurs, November 2 – Sentences and utterances (cont.): Introducing syntax. Lexical categories. Constituent structure and ambiguity. Tests for constituent structure. <MP>

Readings:
- Aarts, English Syntax and Argumentation. / chapter 1, “Introduction” (pp. 3-7); chapter 2, “Function” (pp. 8-21). [PE1369.A2 2001 / e-reserve]
- Kroeger, Analyzing Grammar: An Introduction. / chapter 3, “Constituent Structure” (pp. 26-50); chapter 4, “Semantic Roles and Grammatical Relations” (pp. 51-65); chapter 5, “Lexical Entries and Well-Formed Clauses” (pp. 66-86); chapter 6, “Noun Phrases” (pp. 87-101); chapter 7, “Case and Agreement” (pp. 102-127). [P126.K76 2005 / availability TBA]
- Shopen (ed.), Languages and Their Speakers. / chapter 3, Keenan & Ochs, “Becoming a Competent Speaker of Malagasy” (pp. 113-158). [P106.L318 1987]

Homework:
- Thursday: Problem set 4 due in class
- Thursday: Problem set 5 handed out in class

WEEK 11

Tues, November 7 – Sentences and utterances (cont.): More on constituent structure tests. Practice tree drawing. <MP>
Thurs, November 9 – Sentences and utterances (cont.): Constituent structure and transformations. <MP>
Readings:

WEEK 12
- Tues, November 14 – Sentences and utterances (cont.): Sentence-level semantics. The principle of compositionality. Entailment and other semantic relations. Quantification. <MP>
- Thurs, November 16 – Sentences and utterances (cont.): Introducing pragmatics. Entailment versus implicature. The ‘rules’ of conversation. <SH>

Readings:

Homework:
- Thursday: Problem set 5 due in class
- Thursday: Problem set 6 handed out in class

WEEK 13
- Tues, November 21 – Sentences and utterances (cont.): Pragmatics and prosody. <SH>

Readings:
- Wennerstrom, *The Music of Everyday Speech.* / chapter 1, “Introduction: Prosody and Spoken Discourse” (pp. 3-14); chapter 2, “Intonational Meaning” (pp. 17-45). [e-reserve]

THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

WEEK 14
- Tues, November 28 – Language and culture. <SH>
- Thurs, November 30 – Language and the mind: Language acquisition and cognitive autonomy. The debate over Universal Grammar. <SH, MP>

Readings:

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2 Concentrate on the first half of the Ouhalla chapter, roughly pp. 61-76.
WEEK 15

Tues, December 5 - Conclusion: What is language? (revisited) Is language in society, or in the mind? The case of Nicaraguan Sign Language. <SH, MP>

Readings:

Homework:
- Thursday: Problem set 6 due in class