Introduction to Syntax

Linguistics 401
Spring 2016

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courses.umass.edu/kbj/ling401/401.html

We are going to be syntacticians. The course will consist of us working on sets of examples of sentences and coming up with a description of what we find. For the first four or five weeks of the course, we will do this as a class and I will give you weekly assignments that give you practice at using what we've learned. The descriptions will form a grammar, and as this grammar is built, I will put it on the website as handouts and lecture notes.

Once we have gotten past this preliminary stage, the course will be divided between lectures and working on problems. There will be a series of "domains," from which you must choose to specialize in. Those domains are specific topics in syntactic theory, and you will be tasked with becoming an expert on that topic. They are:

- Head Movement
- Argument Movement
- Wh Movement
- Binding Theory

The lectures will give a sketch of each of these domains, and then there will be lecture notes on the website that give more in depth information. For each of these domains, there are four problems that increase in difficulty. Your grade depends on how far into these problems you get. Every time you solve a problem, you will turn it in and if the solution holds, you will be allowed to go to the next problem. If it doesn't, then you will try again. Working through the problem sets for different domains will earn you a certain rank in that domain.

novice:	at least one problem in a domain
linguist:	at least half of the problems in a domain
specialist:	all four problems in a domain
expert:	complete the collaborative problem

The collaborative problem is one that can be done only by some one person, or group of people, that have earned the rank of specialist in more than one domain. It is a problem that brings material from different domains together. It can be done by a team (and this is encouraged).
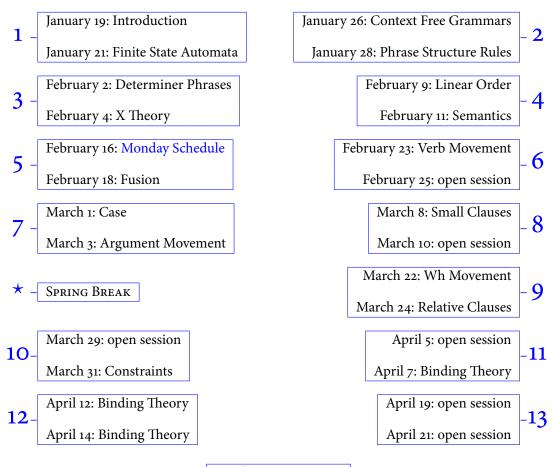
Your grades depend on the rank you achieve in domains, and how well you do on the assignments at the start of the class.

	novice	linguist	specialist	expert	assignments
A	4 domains		1 domain	yes	at least 50% of the points
A-	4 domains		1 domain	yes	at least 40% of the points
B+	3 domains		1 domain	yes	at least 50% of the points
B	3 domains		1 domain	no	at least 40% of the points
B-	4 domains	1 domain		no	at least 50% of the points
B-	4 domains		1 domain	no	at least 40% of the points
C+	3 domains	1 domain		no	at least 40% of the points
C+	3 domains		1 domain	no	at least 30% of the points
C	2 domains	1 domain		no	at least 40% of the points
C	4 domains			no	at least 40% of the points
C-	2 domains	1 domain		no	at least 40% of the points
C-	3 domains			no	at least 40% of the points
D	2 domains	1 domain		no	at least 20% of the points
D	3 domains			no	at least 30% of the points

As you can see, there is more than one way of earning grades below B. If you are below 40% of the assignments and wish to get better than a C+, then you can compensate by becoming a linguist is 3 domains. Note that if you are a linguist or specialist in some domain, you are also a novice. This means, for instance, that to get an A you must be a specialist in some one domain and then at least a novice in all the others. To get better than a B, you must do a collaborative problem, which requires that you gain specialist status in at least one domain.

A rough schedule of topics is shown on the next page. This is subject to change as we go along, of course. Consult the website for those changes, and for announcements and supplementary material.

The Schedule

1 | January 19: Introduction
January 21: Finite State Automata

2 | January 26: Context Free Grammars
January 28: Phrase Structure Rules

3 | February 2: Determiner Phrases
February 4: X Theory

4 | February 9: Linear Order
February 11: Semantics

5 | February 16: Monday Schedule
February 18: Fusion

6 | February 23: Verb Movement
February 25: open session

7 | March 1: Case
March 3: Argument Movement

8 | March 8: Small Clauses
March 10: open session

★ | Spring Break

9 | March 22: Wh Movement
March 24: Relative Clauses

10 | March 29: open session
March 31: Constraints

11 | April 5: open session
April 7: Binding Theory

12 | April 12: Binding Theory
April 14: Binding Theory

13 | April 19: open session
April 21: open session

April 26: open session

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