

LINGUIST 410: Introduction to Syntax

Course # 72900

Fall 2016

Instructor

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Hours: Monday & Wednesday 3:30 PM – 4:30 PM

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Hours: Monday & Friday, 12:15 PM – 1:15 PM

Location & Time

Room: Integrative Learning Center N211

Days: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday

Time: 11:15 AM – 12:05 PM

Website: moodle.umass.edu

1 Overview

This course is an introduction to the study of SYNTAX (*i.e.* sentence structure) in natural languages. The main goal of this course will be to introduce students to the universal aspects of syntax that hold in all languages, and the major ways that languages differ with respect to their syntax. For practical reasons, we will focus on English at the beginning of the course and eventually look at data from other languages as well. The principles of theory and analysis should extend to the study of the syntax of other languages, and as we develop these we will begin to see how.

The way we will go about doing this is by building a theory of syntax, starting from the ground up. This will be a theory in the scientific sense: Ideally, a complete, internally consistent picture of how a naturally occurring system works. You might be asking: “This is *intro* to syntax. How can we build a theory of our own?” Part of becoming a theoretical syntactician (and a linguist in general) is learning how to develop new approaches to natural linguistic data. This course is structured to teach you how to do this by focusing on these skills from the beginning.

Because of this, we will assume that you have no previous knowledge of syntactic theory. We will assume, however, that you have taken LINGUIST 201 or a comparable class; that you have a basic understanding of the difference between descriptive and prescriptive grammar, and the irrelevance of the latter to linguistics; and that you know that no language or dialect is superior to any other, and every group speaks a real language with formal grammatical rules of syntax.

2 Textbook

There is no textbook for this course. Most of the course content will come from lectures and from handouts distributed in class. There may be occasional readings to supplement class discussions or accompany assignments, but these will be minimal and only assigned when instructive. Because we are building our own theory, however, we recommend that you do not consult other textbooks since there is no guarantee that what we do as a class will match what they tell you!

3 Discussion sections

There are no discussion sections for this course. Your TA, Rodica, will be grading assignments, holding office hours to help you, and occasionally teaching lectures.

4 Assignments

The bulk of the work in this course will come in the form of weekly homework assignments. Two of these assignments will be take-home exams (see below). Homework assignments will be assigned on Friday and due at the beginning of class the following Wednesday. We will try to return work by the following Monday.

The assignments will be fairly open-ended problem sets, and there will not always be one right answer. Part of the assignments, then, will consist of arguing for the solution you discover. We will use your responses to these assignments to drive the class discussion forward and to figure out which hypotheses we should adopt as a class. Thus, the quality of an assignment will not necessarily be based on getting the correct answer, but on giving a coherent and well supported answer.

4.1 Writing up assignments

It is recommended that you not turn in the first thing you write down. Rather, you should first work through the problem set, taking notes about potential answers, and then write up a final version of the assignment based on your notes. This will help ensure that your work is clear and give you a chance to find any potential mistakes. Having the notes left over will be useful for class discussions after you turn in the assignment.

Some of these assignments may be quite lengthy, so you should avoid waiting until the last minute to complete them. You might come up with a good solution, but if you do not explain it completely, this could damage your grade.

4.2 Working together

This course is inherently collaborative, since we will make decisions as a class about what hypotheses we adopt. You are therefore encouraged to work with others on assignments in this course. Some of the assignments may be quite complicated, and it will help to discuss your ideas with others.

However, you must turn in your own work, written up in your own words. You may not simply copy your work from another student, and you should not, under any circumstances, have somebody else's work in front of you while you write up yours. This counts as academic dishonesty ([see below](#)). Additionally, you must tell us who you worked with on each assignment.

It is fairly easy to avoid difficulties here. If you work with others, take notes during your discussion, and then write up your assignment on your own later. As mentioned above, it will be good to have the notes, anyway.

4.3 Grading

Regular homework assignments will receive a grade out of twenty points. Grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

Points	Percentage	Grade
18.5 – 20.0	93% – 100%	A
18.0 – 18.5	90% – 92%	A-
17.5 – 18.0	87% – 89%	B+
16.5 – 17.5	83% – 86%	B
16.0 – 16.5	80% – 82%	B-
15.5 – 16.0	77% – 79%	C+
14.5 – 15.5	73% – 76%	C
14.0 – 14.5	70% – 72%	C-
13.5 – 14.0	67% – 69%	D+
12.0 – 13.5	60% – 66%	D
00.0 – 12.0	0% – 59%	F

Final grades for the course will be calculated by averaging over assignment grades.

4.4 Exams

There will be two **take home** exams in this course. These will, for all intents and purposes, be just like regular assignments but lengthier and, perhaps, a bit harder. Consequently, each will be worth more than the typical assignment. The first will be worth 40 points and due 31 October, and the second will be worth 60 points and due Wednesday 21 December (during finals week).

4.5 Late Work

It is imperative that assignments are completed on time, since your responses to assignments will affect what course the course takes. Late work will not be accepted without prior arrangements, and work not turned in on the due date will receive a grade of 0/20.

You should notify Nick and Rodica ahead of time of any university-related sports travel or games, religious observances, or any other extenuating circumstance recognized by the university. If you think that you will not be able to get an assignment in on time for any other reason, please talk to us *before* the deadline and we can make other arrangements.

Exceptions to this policy will be made for medical and personal emergencies. You should be able to provide documentation for any medical excuses. The important thing is to talk to us.

5 Attendance

We will not take attendance in this course, but we expect you to show up. Remember we are building a theory as a class. There will be no textbook to refer to, and changes to this theory will be made during class discussions. Missing even a few classes can cause you to fall behind. If you do find you must miss class, be sure to confer with your fellow students to find out what you missed!

6 Communication

You should feel free to communicate with us if you have any questions or concerns about the course. Both of our emails are listed on the first page, as are our office hours. If you cannot make these hours, for whatever reason, you can schedule an appointment at a different time.

We want every student to do well in this course. If you find you are having trouble or you think you are falling behind, please get in touch with us. And don't put it off! The longer you wait, the harder it will be to get back on track.

7 Academic Honesty

We take cheating very seriously. Cases of suspected cheating or plagiarism will be handled in accordance with the university's policy on academic honesty, which can be found at:

<http://www.umass.edu/honesty/>

For a first-time offense, students caught cheating on an exam or an assignment (*and any collaborators*) may receive a zero grade on that assignment and will be reported to Academic Honesty Office. A similar policy applies to exams. Repeat offenders will fail the course.

8 Calendar

There is no set calendar for this course, since the trajectory of the course will be determined, in part, by what we decide to do as a class. The hope is that by the end of the course you will know a lot about the syntax of English, a bit about the nature of language in general, and something about how to investigate and argue in an area that is very human, very formal, and at the same time very empirical.

Some of the topics we will hopefully cover:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constituency & Phrase Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constituency tests • Phrase structure rules • Selection and subcategorization • X-bar theory 2. A-movement and its kin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive • Raising | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising vs. Control • Tough movement <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. A few puzzles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double objects • Internal subjects • A'-movement • Binding • Ellipsis |
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Some important dates:

- 10 October is a holiday; we meet on the 11th.
- 31 October: Exam 1 due
- 11 November is a holiday; Friday schedule on the 16th.
- 25 November is a holiday.
- 21 December: Exam 2 due