

**24.900**

# **Introduction to Linguistics**

What are we going to learn in this class?

Briefly: we're trying to figure out what exactly it is that you know, when you know a language...and how you end up knowing that.

# Syntax

## *Study of how sentences are made up of words*

John walked up the stairs

Mary looked up the reference

## *Study of how sentences are made up of words*

N	V	P	D	N
John	walked	up	the	stairs
Mary	looked	up	the	reference

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--Up the *stairs*?!

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John	walked	[	up	the	stairs]
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*constituent*

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[up which stairs] did John walk?

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[up which stairs] did John walk?

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--Up the *stairs*?!

Mary looked up the reference.

\*--Up the *reference*?!

[up which stairs] did John walk?

\*[up which reference] did Mary look?

John walked up the stairs and up the hill.

Mary looked up the reference and up the vocabulary words.

## *Study of how sentences are made up of words*

N	V	P	D	N	
John	walked	[ up	the	stairs]	<i>constituent</i>
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[up which stairs] did John walk?

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John walked up the stairs and up the hill.

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# **Semantics**

the study of how the meaning of a sentence is computed from the meanings of the parts of the sentence.

Who did Biden ask to see him?

Who did **Biden** ask to see **him**?  
can ‘him’ be ‘Biden’?

Who did **Biden** ask to see **him**?

Why did **Biden** ask to see **him**?

how about now?

similarly...

**She** thinks that **Susan** is smart.

similarly...

**She** thinks that **Susan** is smart.

**Susan** thinks that **she** is smart.

why do you think it works this way?

similarly...

**She** thinks that **Susan** is smart.

**Susan** thinks that **she** is smart.

After **Susan** came to MIT, **she** was happy.

similarly...

**She** thinks that **Susan** is smart.

**Susan** thinks that **she** is smart.

After **Susan** came to MIT, **she** was happy.

After **she** came to MIT, **Susan** was happy.

similarly...

**She** thinks that **Susan** is smart.

**Susan** thinks that **she** is smart.

After **Susan** came to MIT, **she** was happy.

After **she** came to MIT, **Susan** was happy.

(if you speak another language—how do things work in that language?)

# **Phonology**

The study of speech sounds.

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cat      cats

dog      dogs

# **Phonology**

The study of speech sounds.

cat      catss  
dog     dogs

how are these pronounced?

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The study of speech sounds.

cat      catss

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how are these pronounced?

...and how about these?

dove    dovess

reef    reefss

# Phonology

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cat      catss

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...and how about these?

dove    dovess

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...so what's the rule?

**Syntax:** how sentences are put together

**Semantics:** how meanings are put together

**Phonology:** study of speech sounds

**Morphology:** how words are put together

other topics for the semester:

**Language endangerment**

**Signed languages**

**Neurolinguistics**

**Historical linguistics**

**Dialectology**

**Language acquisition**

## **General themes of the class**

There's all this fascinating, complicated linguistic stuff going on in your head, without you being aware of it.

**What exactly do you know, when you know a language?**

## **General themes of the class**

There's all this fascinating, complicated linguistic stuff going on in your head, without you being aware of it.

**What exactly do you know, when you know a language?**

**What are the basic differences between languages?**

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