

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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John walked up the stairs.

--Up the *stairs*?!

Study of how sentences are made up of words

N	V	P	D	N	
John	walked	[up	the	stairs]	<i>constituent</i>
Mary	looked	up	the	reference	

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[up which stairs] did John walk?

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[up which reference] did Mary look?

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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

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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

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how are these pronounced?

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how are these pronounced?

...and how about these?

dove doves

reef reefs

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The study of speech sounds.

cat cats

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how are these pronounced?

...and how about these?

dove doves

reef reefs

...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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