

Linguistics 401: Introduction to Language

Instructor

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Course description

This course is designed to provide students with a general introduction to the scientific study of language. Our main goals include familiarizing you with linguistic terminology, teaching both the methods of linguistic analysis and how to apply them (to English and to other languages, including languages that you might know, and languages that you don't know). We also discuss theories and research on how both first and other languages are learned by children and adults, and encourage students to think about the social implications of language use.

In the first part of the course students will learn about the physical and mental aspects of sounds, or speech production. We then discuss how knowledge about the sound patterns of language can be applied in context, by learning about accents, dialects, and other types of patterned variation in languages. This can involve topics as varied as how English is spoken on the East and West coasts of the U.S., or in Britain vs. America; how ethnicity, gender and other social factors shape and are shaped by language variation; and stylistic variation, for example, what President Obama's different speech styles reveal about the way he wants to be seen by different social groups.

After this discussion of sounds, we move on to an examination of the linguistic structure of words and sentences, building towards the ability to extract regularities from linguistic data in unfamiliar languages. We discuss how this can be applied by learning about how language is acquired and processed by children and adults. This can involve topics like age and individual differences in cognition, for example, in working memory, as well as the study of how sentences might be processed in the brain.

In the last part of the course we focus on understanding the ways people use and interpret language in different contexts. With understanding "meaning" as a foundation, we move on to exploring a variety of issues in language and culture, for example, language and humor and social rules of politeness.

If you are majoring or minoring in linguistics, this course will provide you with the background you need to succeed in other linguistics courses. If you are studying a non-native language, this course will provide you with additional tools to facilitate the learning process. Linguistics, which is the scientific study of language, interfaces with a wide variety of other fields (e.g., anthropology, sociology, psychology, cognitive neuroscience, computer science, philosophy, politics and the law, and public policy), so you should be able to make exciting connections whatever your background and interests. This course also fulfills the social science requirement for undergraduates.

Textbook

Required: Fasold, R., & Connor-Linton, J. (Eds.). (2014). *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2nd Edition. 2nd Edition. ISBN: 978-1-107-63799-3.

Evaluation

- Participation (active attendance, reading, reading questions, Bb discussions, pop quizzes) 15%
- 6 homework assignments and 1 news item (lowest score dropped = 5% each) 30%
- 2 in-class tests (15% each) 30%
- Group final project:
 - Group presentation 10%
 - Final paper:
 - Individual Grade 10%
 - Group Grade 5%

Participation

Attendance: You will receive points for attending each class meeting. Being in class on time will help your grade, and not being in class on time will hurt it. Please complete the required readings, as well as any written assignments based on readings (e.g. reading questions), *before* class and contribute to the discussions and activities while you are in class. If you absolutely cannot avoid being absent, please inform us ahead of time. You are responsible for any material covered and any homework assigned during your absence. If you are absent four times during the semester your final grade will be lowered one letter grade (if you received an “A” in the class, but missed four classes, you will get a “B”). Your grade will continue to drop for each subsequent absence.

Blackboard discussions: Another way to gain participation points is to post comments or questions about reading assignments or class discussions on Blackboard (<https://campus.georgetown.edu>). In addition to asking about things you have not understood in the readings, please feel free to share musings, criticisms, alternative perspectives, and other comments about the readings that you think your classmates might find useful. Please check the discussion forum regularly and respond to your classmates when you can.

Linguistics Department Speaker Series: The faculty members in the Georgetown Department of Linguistics often invite researchers from other universities, as well as our own top scholars, to give talks on their research on Fridays from 3:30 – 4:45 in our Conference Room, Poulton Hall, 2nd floor. This is a wonderful way for students to gain exposure to a variety of topics in the field of linguistics, as presented by some of the world’s leading experts.

Homework and readings

Homework comprises almost a third of your grade. All assigned readings must be completed before class on the date listed, and homework assignments will be due at the beginning of class. Except under extraordinary and unavoidable circumstances, late work will not be accepted; however, your lowest grade will be dropped, so everyone gets one “free pass.”

You are welcome (in fact, encouraged) to collaborate with each other on the homework. If you meet outside of class to work together (in a study group), please make note of this on your assignment. If you

post homework-related questions and assistance on Blackboard, please do so in a way that scaffolds your classmates' learning process with hints as opposed to circumventing it with shortcuts. In other words, do not simply ask for or provide correct answers; instead, try to explain underlying concepts or methodological issues in ways that that will help people to solve the problems independently. (After all, everyone will have to do this independently on the tests.) If you have questions about how the homeworks are graded, please bring these questions to the attention of your instructor within two weeks of receiving your graded homework. Since one homework grade is dropped and any additional homeworks not turned in receive a grade of zero, please check on Blackboard before the final paper is due to make sure nothing is missing. It is your responsibility to make sure your work has been received.

News Items: In order to get a sense of how the media covers issues related to language and linguistics, and how the study of linguistics can provide insight into other fields, you must work in a group find one news article relating to a subfield of linguistics and prepare a PowerPoint presentation for the class. Early in the semester, you will sign up for a group to present an article relating to one of the topics listed below, on the designated date. The article should be relatively recent (i.e. from the past year or so) and from a popular news source such as The Washington Post, CNN.com, etc., not an academic journal or a blog. Your instructor **must** approve your article no fewer than two days before your presentation. On your topic's due date (see below), your group will present a timed, five-minute in-class PowerPoint presentation on your article.

Exact dates TBD

Date	Topic: Sound
Date	Topic: Dialects
Date	Topic: Form or Meaning
Date	Topic: Acquisition
Date	Topic: Discourse
Date	Topic: Policy

After your presentation, post the link to your article and your PowerPoint file to Blackboard for your classmates' reference.

Extra credit: You can receive an extra 5% homework extra credit up to three times in the course of the semester. Extra credit may be earned in one of two ways: (1) participate in a linguistics-related experiment being conducted by a student or professor in any department at Georgetown. Confirm first with your instructors that the experiment in which you are participating is appropriate for our class; after you have participated, please email your instructors with confirmation of your participation, as well as one or two sentences relating the experiment to topics covered in class. (2) Turn in a 2-page write-up of an additional news article. If interested, please clear the details with your TAs or instructors first.

Tests

There will be two timed, in-class tests each covering three broad topics on the syllabus. Each test will last one class session. The questions will be similar to those on the homework assignments and problems you have discussed and worked through in class, but you will not be allowed to collaborate during the tests. If at any point you feel concerned that you are struggling with one of the topics we are covering in class, **please come see us early on so that we can be sure you understand it before the test.** You must be in class to take the tests on the dates given.

Final project

The final project represents an opportunity for you to apply the knowledge you have gained to an area of linguistics that you find particularly fascinating and worthy of study. You will form a group with classmates who share your research interests. You will formulate a research question (or set of complementary research questions) that you would like to answer and then you will work together to investigate it (or them). At the end of the semester, you will give a presentation on your findings, and final papers will be due on the date set by the Registrar as the final exam date for this course. Each group will submit a single, coherent paper; however, each group member will have primary responsibility for 5 -7 pp. (double-spaced) of the final paper; more information regarding this project will be made available later in the semester. The length of the final paper will depend partly on group size and partly on the scope of the project.

Honor code

Members of the Georgetown University academic community are bound by the Georgetown University Honor Code:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

We are obliged by university rules to report any apparent violations of the Honor Code to the Honor Council. According to the University Honor Code (<http://www.georgetown.edu/honor>), "Without regard to motive, student conduct that is academically dishonest, evidences lack of academic integrity or trustworthiness, or unfairly impinges upon the intellectual rights and privileges of others is prohibited."

Violations of the honor system include cheating on exams or assignments, committing plagiarism, using false citations, submitting work for multiple purposes without prior permission of relevant instructors, submitting false data, falsifying academic documentation, abusing library privileges, and abusing shared electronic media. If you have any questions at all about the honor system, please contact us immediately.

Special accommodations

If you believe you have a disability that will affect your performance in this class, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.

Important dates (TDB)

Date	First day of class
Date	Personal interest statement due
Date	Sign up for news item

Date	HW #1 (phonetics) due
Date	HW#2 (phonology) due
Date	TEST (phonetics, phonology, & dialect variation)
Date	Post final project ideas on Bb
Date	HW#3 (morphology) due
Date	HW#4 (syntax) due
Date	HW#5 (SLA) due
Date	Project proposal due (<i>meet with one of us beforehand</i>)
Date	TEST (morphology, syntax, SLA)
Date	HW#6 (semantics/pragmatics) due
Date	Project references and outlines due
Date	In-class group project presentations
Date	In-class group project presentations
After final exam schedule is out	FINAL PAPERS DUE

Schedule - all dates TBD

Any changes will be announced & posted on Blackboard. Please check regularly.

Key:

Bb = Blackboard **R** = response (due before class on date listed)

HW = homework (due in class).

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS DUE	ASSIGNMENT
Topic 1: Introduction			
DATE (R)	Syllabus, introduction to the course and to each other, ground rules Discussion about “proper” language, prescriptive vs. descriptive approaches to language	Intro Ch. (pp. 1-13),	Verify access to Bb Purchase textbook TAs hand out Personal Interest Statements
Topic 2: Sound – Articulatory Phonetics & the IPA			
DATE (T)	Vocal tract anatomy & articulators	Ch. 1 (pp. 15-42) McWhorter (1998), Pinker (1994, pp. 382-396)	(Non-textbook readings are available on Bb under Course Documents.) Personal Interest Statements due
DATE (R)	Vocal tract anatomy & articulators, continued Palatography Activity or Acoustic Phonetics Activity	Ch. 1 (pp. 15-42)	
DATE (T)	IPA Day 1: Consonants	Ch. 1 (pp. 15-42)	Sign up for news item (in class) <i>HW #1 handed out</i>
DATE (R)	IPA Day 2: Vowels	Ch. 1 (pp. 15-42)	
Topic 3: Sound - Phonology			
DATE (T)	Phonemes & allophones; phonological alternations	Ch. 1 (pp. 42-58)	HW#1 (phonetics) due <i>HW #2 handed out</i>
DATE (R)	Phonological alternations & allomorphs Phonology practice exercises & prep for HW Presentation of news item	Ch. 1 (pp. 42-58)	News Items (sound)
Topic 4: Dialect variation			
DATE (T)	Dialects and “standards”, levels and types of variation <i>Do You Speak American</i> clips, discussion	Ch. 9 (pp. 321-337)	HW#2 (phonology) due

DATE (R)	African American English, attitudes & stereotypes, British and American English IPA transcription practice with dialects of English Presentation of news item	Ch. 9 (pp. 337-348) Wolfram & Schilling-Estes (2006)	News Items (dialects)
DATE (T)	TEST (phonetics, phonology, & dialect variation) INTERLUDE: Innateness debate , to motivate the study of morphology and syntax, which connects to acquisition		Study for test
Topic 5: Form - Morphology			
DATE (R)	Identifying morphemes, morphological operations Inflectional morphology & morphology activities	Ch. 2 (pp. 63-80, 87-98)	
DATE (T)	Derivational morphology Hierarchical structure of words	Ch. 2 (pp. 80-87)	<i>HW#3 handed out</i>
Topic 6: Form - Syntax			
Feb 19 (R)	Compositionality Constituency tests, tree diagrams	Ch. 3 (pp. 105-128)	Post final project ideas on Bb
Feb 24 (T)	Lexical & structural ambiguities, diagramming practice	Ch. 3 (pp. 105-128)	HW#3 (morphology) due
Feb 26 (R)	Syntax activities & prep for HW Presentation of news item		<i>HW#4 handed out</i> News Item (form)
Topic 7: Second Language Acquisition			
DATE (T)	Theories of SLA Individual differences in SLA	Ch. 13 (pp. 445-463)	
Topic 8: Semantics			
DATE (T)	Fundamental semantic concepts Lexical semantics	Ch. 4 (pp. 149-159)	
DATE (R)	Possible worlds and/or scope ambiguity – what is meaning?	Ch. 4 (pp. 159-169)	HW#5 (acquisition) due
Topic 9: Pragmatics			
DATE (T)	Gricean maxims, implicature Speech acts, politeness	Ch. 4 (pp.170-178)	Project topic/proposal due <i>HW#6 handed out</i>

DATE (R)	TEST (morphology, syntax, second language acquisition) Bridging pragmatics & discourse analysis OR Final project work session		Study for test
Topic 10: Discourse Analysis			
DATE (T)	Rules for conversational interaction (e.g., turn-taking, narrative structure) Planes of discourse	Ch. 5 (pp. 183-190; 206-212)	HW#6 (semantics/pragmatics) due
DATE (R)	Practice discourse analysis with transcripts Presentation of news item	Ch. 5 (pp. 190-206)	News item (Discourse)
Topic 11: Child Language Acquisition; Language Processing; Language and the Brain; First language acquisition and/or language disorders			
DATE (T)	See Topics for Customizable Weeks and add the appropriate information for the topic of your choice.		
DATE (R)			Final Project References & Outlines Due
Topic 12: Language Change, Language, culture, & identity; The politics of language; Writing			
DATE (T)	See Topics for Customizable Weeks and add the appropriate information for the topic of your choice. Presentation of news item		News Item (Policy)
Topic 13: Final project			
DATE (T)	Final project presentations*		
DATE (R)	Final project presentations*		Reading Responses Due
Final papers due (date scheduled by the Registrar for this course's final exam)			

*These class meetings may be replaced by a larger block of time if schedules permit.

Linguistic Learning Goals

	Students will gain knowledge of:	Students will be assessed by:
1	Seminal readings and approaches related to the analysis of language.	Demonstrated knowledge on HWs, tests, and news item analysis.
2	The equality of languages and language varieties and commonly held misconceptions about them.	Participation in Bb and class discussions on <i>prescriptive/descriptive</i> approaches to language; <i>language</i>

		<i>variation; language policy; language, culture and identity and performance on HW#5 (discourse analysis), TEST #1 (dialect variation) and TEST #2 (discourse analysis).</i>
3	The complexity and underlying systematicity of language.	HWs and tests on sound, form and meaning, involving <i>linguistic problems that show the complexity and underlying systematicity of language.</i> Discussion of <i>dialect variation</i> and performance on TEST #1 (<i>dialect variation</i>).
4	The role of variation in linguistic theory and application.	Participation in Bb and class discussions on <i>dialect variation</i> and performance on TEST#1 (<i>phonetics, phonology and dialect variation</i>).
5	The relationships between language and a variety of social contexts.	Participation in Bb and class discussions on dialect variation, <i>discourse</i> and performance on HW#5 (discourse analysis), HW #6 (semantics/pragmatics), TEST #1 (dialect variation), and TEST #2 (discourse analysis)
6	How first and second languages are learned.	Participation in Bb and class discussions on <i>L1 and L2 Acquisition</i>
7	How languages are structured and how they convey referential and social meaning.	Participation in Bb and class discussions on <i>semantics and pragmatics, morphological and syntactic structure</i> , and performance on HW # 3 (<i>morphology</i>), HW #4 (<i>syntax</i>), HW#6 (<i>semantics and pragmatics</i>) and TEST#2 (<i>morphology, syntax, and discourse</i>).

	Students will be able to:	Students will be assessed by:
8	How language is processed—cognitively and computationally.	Participation in Bb and class discussions on either <i>language processing or computational models</i> and performance on TEST#2 (<i>morphology, syntax</i>)
9	Analyze linguistic data at various levels of structure and use.	Completion of HWs and tests (see 3 & 7 above)
10	Analyze, critically evaluate, and integrate classic and current research in linguistics connected to contemporary theoretical and practical issues.	Completion of HWs and news item reports (see 2, 4, 5, 6, &8), and final research paper.
11	Craft clear and coherent linguistic analytic arguments.	This is a developing skill. Completion of HWs on sound, form and meaning will begin this process.
12	Design, carry out, and report a small original research project on a current issue.	Completion of final project.
13	Relate linguistic constructs to other academic fields.	Completion of final project.