

SYLLABUS

## Linguistics 401: Introduction to Linguistics

### 1 In a Nutshell

This course is an introduction the basic methodology and results of contemporary linguistics. Above all, the goal is to get a sense of how to develop, evaluate, and improve hypotheses about language in a precise and rigorous way. In order to do this, a significant proportion of the course will be devoted to collectively developing an explicit theory of syntax (sentence structure). We will then consider other core subfields of linguistics, including phonetics (how sounds are made and perceived), phonology (how sounds pattern together), and semantics (the structure of meaning).

### 2 Contact Information

Me: Marcin Morzycki<sup>1</sup>  
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Office hours: Monday 5:00–6:00 and Thursday 3:00–4:00  
or by appointment  
Office: A-634 Wells Hall

Email is your best bet for reaching me, and will generally also be fastest. If you must call, though, my office phone is 355-5171. (Expect me to be distracted and disoriented.)

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<sup>1</sup>Phonetic transcription: [ˈmɑːrɪsmɔːrˈzɪki]. This splotch of typographical weirdness will be interpretable to you by the end of the course.

### 3 Course Requirements

The principal requirements for the course are:

- Two take-home exams (a midterm and a final), done collectively in groups of three people. They will essentially be long assignments.
- Additional take-home assignments, of which there will be four or five. These too will be done in groups of three people. Most of these will require you to devise solutions to empirical problems and present them in the form of a brief well-reasoned argument.
- An in-class phonetics test.
- Contributing frequently and thoughtfully to class discussions. *This is not optional.*

You will collaborate on your take-home work with two other people and turn in a joint assignment, but each collaborator must be able to defend the proposed solution. The group you work with will change twice over the course of the semester. You may discuss your work with other students not in your group, however. Of course, other people's ideas must be properly cited. If you find any of this confusing, ask.

The course will revolve primarily around in-class discussion, and most of the progress we make will be made that way, so *coming to class is genuinely crucial*. If you miss classes, you are likely to miss information that will be necessary to understand the assignments and subsequent discussion. If you anticipate having to miss class frequently, do not take this course.

If it will be difficult for you to meet these requirements due to a disability, please notify me during the first two weeks of the course so we can make appropriate arrangements.

### 4 Grades

Each assignment and each exam will receive a letter grade. Your final grade will be the average (mean) of the following:

- your grades on the assignments
- your grades on the exams, weighted double (that is, each will count as two assignments)
- your grade on the in-class phonetics test (weighted as much as an assignment)

- a grade for what you contributed to class discussions (in other words, participation will count as one assignment)

## 5 Suggested Supplementary Reading

There will be no textbook for the course. But you may want to read this:

Pinker, Stephen. 1994. *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*. William Morrow & Company, New York.

This is written in an informal and often entertaining style, and it presents some of the subject matter of contemporary theoretical linguistics from the perspective of broader issues in cognitive science—it's a popularization, not a textbook.

You may be alarmed by the absence of a textbook. Don't be. If you really cannot bear the thought of being without one, you may want to use either of the following as an intellectual security blanket:

Akmajian, Adrian, and Richard A. Demers, Ann K. Farmer, Robert M. Harnish. 2001. *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.

*Language Files: Materials for an Introduction to Language and Linguistics*. 1998. Dept. of Linguistics, The Ohio State University. OSU Press, Columbus.

Each of these has disadvantages, and reading them may actually make things harder (because of inconsistencies in terminology and the like). They might be useful if you would like to know more about topics we won't be talking about in any depth, though. These textbooks will *not* be helpful to make up for missing classes—some of what we talk about in class can't be found there, and what can is often approached in a different way.

## 6 Agenda

A disclaimer: The rate at which we proceed, and to a smaller extent the path we take, will depend on what happens in class, so the temporal claims made here should not be taken very seriously. This is a rough overall agenda, not a fixed schedule.

- What is linguistics? (today)

- **Syntax**: how words come together (about six weeks)
  - prescriptive rules and why they aren't interesting
  - the notion of a grammar as a mental machine
  - phrase structure
  - recursion
  - complementation and subcategorization
  - transformations
  - syntactic variation
- Midterm exam
- **Phonetics**: how meat makes sound (about two weeks)
  - mildly humiliating public exploration of one's own vocal tract
  - English speech sounds
  - phonetic transcription
  - dialect variation
  - the cross-linguistic phonetic menagerie: non-English speech sounds
- Phonetics test (in class)
- **Phonology**: how sounds interact (about four weeks)
  - phonemes
  - assimilation
  - underlying representations
  - phonological rules
  - syllable structure
  - borrowing
- **Semantics and pragmatics**: how does language manage to *mean* things? (about two weeks)
  - flavors of meaning
  - conveying without saying
  - the tacit rules of conversation
  - compositionality: how meanings are assembled
  - truth-conditional semantics
- Whirlwind tour of one or two other areas of linguistics apart from the core subfields (if there's time<sup>2</sup>)
- Final exam

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<sup>2</sup>There is *never* time.