

LANGUAGE AND STRUCTURE
LNGS 301, Fall 2015
M W 2:00 pm-3:15 pm
Flagg 206

Instructor Information

Dr. Lydia Rodriguez

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Office hours: W 3,30 pm-4,30 pm, F 11am-1pm

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Course Description

An introduction to the field of Linguistics and its core sub-disciplines, this course follows a bottom-up approach to the study of linguistic structure, from the smallest units that make up language – sounds – to how language is organized in conversation and discourse. We begin with a general introduction to the empirical study of language, which includes topics such as what is language, how it differs from animal communication, and the difference between prescriptive and descriptive approaches to language. Following this introduction, the rest of the course is structured around the classic areas of linguistic inquiry:

1. Phonetics: the study of sounds, their features, and how they are produced and perceived.
2. Phonology: the study of sound systems, sound patterns, and the rules that govern the distribution of sounds in any given language.
3. Morphology: the study of morphemes (the smallest units of language that carry meaning), and how morphemes are combined to make up words.
4. Syntax: the study of the how sentences are put together, or how words and phrases are combined into sentences.
5. Semantics: the study of how meaning is created and interpreted, and the meaning relationships between words, between phrases, and between sentences.
6. Pragmatics: the study of language in context, and the rules that govern conversational exchanges.

We will also devote some time to talk about language change, how change occurs at all levels of linguistic structure, and how linguists reconstruct the history of languages, and group them into families. This course is characterized by a "hands-on" approach to the analysis of linguistic structure. By analyzing linguistic data from a variety of languages around the world, the course seeks to enhance the students' analytical, problem-solving, and argumentative skills.

Instructional Goals

In LNGS 301 students will:

1. Discuss how linguists define language, what are its core properties, and familiarize themselves with the descriptivist approach to language.
2. Study the different levels of linguistic structure and learn about the research questions and analyses that are relevant to each level of linguistic structure.
3. Develop an understanding of how languages change over time and what are the main processes at work in language change.
4. Focus on developing analytical and problem-solving skills.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

Required Textbook (Available for purchase at the University Bookstore)

Mihalizek, Vedrana and Christin Wilson (eds.) *Language Files. Materials for an Introduction to Language and Linguistics*. 11th Edition. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. I will be taking attendance everyday in class. Every unexcused absence will result in the loss of 1 point of your final grade. If you cannot come to class because of a real problem, let me know *beforehand*. Absences for illness or university-related activities must be properly documented by written notice.

Grade Breakdown

Problem sets (4): 60%
Midterm exam (1): 15%
Final exam (1): 20%
Participation: 5%

Grading Scale

93 – 100 4.0 (A)
89 – 92 3.7 (A-)
86 – 88 3.3 (B+)
83 – 85 3.0 (B)
79 – 82 2.7 (B-)
76 – 78 2.3 (C+)
73 – 75 2.0 (C)
69 – 72 1.7 (C-)
66 – 68 1.3 (D+)
63 – 65 1.0 (D)
60 – 62 0.7 (D-)

Problem sets

There will be 4 problem sets, each is worth 15% of your final grade. These are take-home, open-book assignments, but you must do the work on your own. Problem sets will be posted on Moodle and will be due in class (see the calendar of weekly topics and assigned readings below).

Mid-term and Final Exam

There will be a midterm and a final exam. Check the course calendar and the course website for updates on the date and location of the final exam. Please do not ask for make-ups, unless you have a *very* compelling reason (e.g., serious illness) which can be adequately documented by written notice.

Participation

Participation is worth 5% of your final grade. Here is how to earn a high participation grade:

- 1) Come to all the classes, and in time.
- 2) Demonstrate that you have adequately prepared for class – that you have done your readings or assigned homework – by asking questions about the readings and engaging in class discussions.
- 3) We will be doing many problem sets in class. Many times, you will work in a group. Please engage in group work and volunteer to share your answers in class.
- 4) “Participating” also means “paying attention,” and therefore, the (mis)use of media in class is strongly discouraged. I strongly prefer that you do not bring/open laptops in class, and that you practice old-fashion note-taking by hand. If this represents a serious problem for you, please let me know privately.

Academic Honesty

You are expected to comply with the SUNY Potsdam standards of academic integrity. For further information about what this means and for plagiarism guidelines, please check the SUNY Potsdam Academic Honor Code website: <http://www.potsdam.edu/studentlife/studentconduct/honorcode/>

Calendar of Weekly Topics and Assigned Readings

Please continue to check this page during the semester: updates will be provided periodically

Readings that are not from the textbook (Language Files) will be posted on Moodle. References for other book chapters or articles not included in the textbook are noted below.

Date	Lecture topics	Assignments
Aug 31	Introduction, review of syllabus.	n/a
Sept 2	Defining language. Design features of language.	File 1.1: 3-5 File 1.3.3: 14-16 File 1.4 17-23
Sept 7	Competence/performance. Descriptive/prescriptive grammar. Language modality.	File 1.2.1: 6 File 1.5.1-1.5.3: 24-27
Sept 9	Phonetics. Place and manner of articulation. Introduction to IPA.	File 2.0: 36 File 2.1: 38-43
Sept 14	Phonetics. English consonants and vowels.	File 2.2:44-52 File 2.3: 53-57
Sept 16	Non-English sound systems. Suprasegmental features. Phonetics practice. Problem set #1 posted on Moodle.	File 2.4: 58-62 File 2.5: 63-67
Sept 21	Phonology. Phonemes, allophones. Minimal pairs. Contrastive/complementary distribution.	File 3.0: 102 File 3.2: 108-115 Problem set #1 due
Sept 23	Phonological rules. Natural classes.	File 3.3: 116-123
Sept 28	Phonology practice.	File 3.5: 128-134
Sept 30	Phonology practice.	No readings assigned
Oct 1	Problem set #2 posted on Moodle.	
Oct 5	Morphology. Morphemes (free/bound), derivation, inflection.	File 4.0: 148 File 4.1: 149-156 Problem set #2 due
Oct 7	Morphological processes. Affixation, compounding, reduplication, alternations, suppletion.	File 4.2: 157-164
Oct 12	Recess, no class.	
Oct 14	Allomorphs. Morphological types of languages. Morphology practice.	File 4.3: 165-169 File 4.5: 174-177
Oct 19	Midterm review	No readings assigned
Oct 21	Midterm Problem set #3 posted on Moodle	
Oct 26	Morphology practice. Grammar. The parts of speech. Syntax. Syntactic properties. Word order, co-occurrence, agreement. Arguments versus adjuncts.	Yule, George. The Study of Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010: 80-84 File 5.0: 196 File 5.2: 201-210

Oct 28	Syntactic categories in English.	File 5.4: 215-221 Problem set #3 due
Nov 2	Constituency. Phrase structure rules. Syntax practice.	File 5.3: 211-214 File 5.5: 222-229
Nov 4	Film: <i>Colorless Green Ideas</i> .	No readings assigned
Nov 9	Introduction to Typology. Case marking. Nominative-Accusative and Ergative-Absolutive systems Tense and Aspect	Whaley, <i>Introduction to Typology</i> . Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997: 155-158, 203-206, 210-214
Nov 11	Language change. Introduction to historical linguistics. Language relatedness. Sound change.	File 13.1: 523-526 File 526:527-529 File 13.3: 532-536
Nov 16	Morphological change. Syntactic change. Semantic change.	File 13.4:537-541 File 13.5: 542-544 File 13.6: 545:547.
Nov 18	Language reconstruction. The comparative method. Language change and historical linguistics practice.	File 13.7: 548-555
Nov 19	Problem set #4 posted on Moodle	n/a
Nov 23	Film: <i>The phenomenon of conversation</i> .	Problem set 4# due
Nov 25	Thanksgiving recess	
Nov 30	Semantics. Meaning relationships. Hyponymy, synonymy, antonymy. Propositions. Truth values. Entailment. Introduction to Pragmatics. Conversation.	File 6.2: 243-250 File 6.3: 251-254 File 7.2: 275-280
Dec 2	Grice's conversational maxims. Implicature. Speech-Act Theory.	File 7.3: 281-285 File 7.4: 286-293
Dec 7	Discourse and beyond.	TBA
Dec 9	Final exam review.	No readings assigned
Dec 17	Final exam 8:00-10:00 am	