

Introduction to Linguistic Analysis (Linguistics 601)

Course Information

Spring 2006

Coordinates: MW 1:30-3:18
317 Dreese Lab

Instructor: Carl Pollard
Office: 202 Oxley Hall
Office Hours: T 3:30-5:30, F 1:30-3:30, and by appointment.
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Textbook: Language: Its Structure and Use (Fourth Edition)
by Edward Finegan

Course goals:

- to gain insight into the nature and structure of human languages
- to become aware of the diversity of human languages as well as the ways in which they are all fundamentally similar
- to get an idea what the various subfields of linguistics are and to take a close look at some of them
- to learn some techniques for linguistic analysis and practice using them to uncover the organizing principles of specific languages
- to acquire a solid foundation for pursuing linguistics further if you wish to do so

Course structure: Principally lectures, with ample flexibility for questions, comments, and discussion related to the subject matter of the lecture. After a two-day introduction and overview, the remainder of the course is divided into four (or possibly five, time permitting) instructional units devoted to different aspects of linguistic analysis: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, (and one more if time permits). Class time is also set aside for practice solving analytic problems.

Course requirements:

- assigned readings
- timely completion of problem sets and fieldwork assignments
- regular attendance
- no exams or term papers

Reading assignments are mostly from the textbook, though there will be occasional supplementary readings. The assigned chapters in the textbook provide introductory background to the material covered in class, and should be read **before** we start a topic in class, so that we can proceed as quickly as possible to a more interesting discussion and practice problems.

Problem sets and fieldwork assignments: Approximately one each per instructional unit. Practice problems will be done in class toward the end of each instructional unit before problem sets are assigned.

All assignments should be typed, double-spaced and with ample margins (at least one inch on all sides) for my written comments (figures, diagrams, and phonetic symbols can be written in by hand if they are problematic for your word-processing software). Assignments can be turned in as hard copy in class on the due date or emailed anytime that day (postscript or pdf attachments only, no HTML, Word or Mac files!). Exception: if submitted as hard copy, the last assignment is due by 5:00 p.m. Thu. Jun. 8 in my mailbox in the Linguistics office (222 Oxley Hall) if submitted as hard copy, and by midnight on that date if emailed.

I encourage you to form informal out-of-class study groups to discuss the fieldwork assignments and problem sets. **However, each of you must write up the work independently in your own words and submit your own written assignment. Cheating and plagiarism are considered academic misconduct, and I am required by my contract with the university to report suspected cases of academic misconduct to a University-level committee.**

Attendance is crucial because the content of the lectures is the heart of the course and the reading assignments are background for or supplementary to them, not the other way around. (The previous statement should **not** be interpreted as a go-ahead to skip the reading!). Skipping classes can result in missing in-class exercises and explanations necessary for fully understanding the graded assignments. If you miss a class you are responsible for piecing together what you missed from a classmate; I do not have time to summarize missed lectures during office hours. If you know in advance that you **must** miss a class, please let me know as soon as you do so we can make arrangements to minimize the disruption to your learning.

Grading is based primarily on the written assignments: tentatively five problem sets and five fieldwork assignments, 20 points each. There is also a fudge factor for participation (as judged subjectively by me) so that point totals within a point or two of a cutoff point can be raised to the next grade category.

A:	180-200	A-:	174-179	B+:	168-173	B:	162-167
B-:	156-161	C+:	150-155	C:	144-149	C-:	138-143
D+:	132-137	D:	126-131	D-:	120-125	E:	0-119

Late assignments will automatically receive reduced grades unless you either (1) have a doctor's excuse, or (2) have a compelling reason for the lateness and **clear it with me in advance.**

Questions: If there is anything you don't understand, **ask!** The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. I am not a telepath and cannot always guess which things I am failing to explain in a way that creates understanding in your mind. Likewise, if there are things in the reading you don't understand or disagree with, make a note of it and ask about it in class. It is always best to ask questions about the subject matter of the course **in class**, since if I have failed to explain something clearly to you, most likely there are others in the same situation. But if shyness, fear of appearing foolish, or laryngitis prevent you from asking in class, then ask me after class, in my office, by e-mail, at my office phone, or (only in desperation) at my home or cell phone. It cannot be said too many times: **there is no such thing as a stupid question, only stupid answers.**

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Syllabus

Spring 2000

Unit 1: Introduction and Overview

Mon. Mar. 27, Wed. Mar. 29.

Reading: Finegan Ch. 1 (*skim*), and Ch. 7 pp. 224-227 and 240-244.

First Assignment 1 due Wed. Apr. 5; Fieldwork Part 1 due Wed. Apr. 12.

Unit 2: Phonetics

Mon. Apr. 3, Wed. Apr. 5, Mon. Apr. 10, Wed. Apr. 12.

Reading: Acoustic Phonetics supplement and Finegan Ch. 3.

Phonetics Problem Set due Wed. Apr. 19; Fieldwork Part 2 due Wed. Apr. 26.

Unit 3: Phonology

Mon. Apr. 17, Wed. Apr. 19, Mon. Apr. 24, Wed. Apr. 26.

Reading: Finegan Ch. 4 *except* pp. 129-134, and Ch. 7, pp. 230-234.

Phonology Problem Set due Wed. May 3; Fieldwork Part 3 due Wed. May 10.

Unit 4: Morphology

Mon. May 1, Wed. May 3, Mon. May 8, Wed. May 10.

Reading: Finegan Ch. 2, and Ch. 4, pp. 129-134.

Morphology Problem Set due Wed. May 17; Fieldwork Part 4 due Wed. May 24.

Unit 5: Syntax

Mon. May 15, Wed. May 17, Mon. May 22, Wed. May 24.

Reading: Finegan Ch. 5, and Ch. 7, pp. 234-240.

Syntax Problem Set due Wed. May 31; Fieldwork Part 5 due Thur. Jun. 8.

Wrapup

Wed. May 31.

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Design Features of All Human Languages

- **Interchangeability:** all normal members of the community can both send and receive messages (bee dancing performed only by foragers; only male birds sing).
- **Cultural transmission:** Koreans learn Korean, etc. (There is not a proper subset of the cat communities whose members arch their backs to express fear/hostility.)
- **Arbitrariness:** there is usually no natural or inherent connection between the form of the signal and its meaning.
- **Discreteness:** complex signals can be broken down into distinct, repeatable, recombining, meaningful units. (Some birdsong has repeatable, recombining units, but don't express more complex messages.)
- **Displacement:** ability to communicate about things remote in time and/or space.
- **Productivity:** ability to express an infinity of messages (most of which have never been expressed before) about an unlimited variety of subject matters. (uniquely human)
- **Recursiveness:** whole complex signals can be incorporated as parts of more complex signals. (uniquely human)
- **Multi-level patterning:** meaningless units (phonemes) combine to form minimal meaningful units (morphemes), which in turn combine to form words, which in turn combine to form phrases (including sentences). (uniquely human)
- **Learnability:** organisms that know one variant of the system (L1) can learn another (L2). (uniquely human; mockingbirds are not a counterexample because they don't know the meanings of the songs)
- **Reflexiveness:** the messages can be about other messages, or even about the communicative system itself. (uniquely human)

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General Facts about Language

- The system of knowledge (**competence**) that a speaker has of his/her language is almost entirely unconscious. (See handout "You didn't learn this in school").
- No two members of a speech community make exactly the same grammaticality judgments, but the amount of agreement on seemingly subtle points is surprising. (See same handout again.) That is, competence is largely *shared* across a speech community.
- The competence system is extremely complex: it involves knowing (among a great many other things):
 - which sounds the language uses;
 - how the realization of these sounds is determined by the environments in which they occur;
 - which sequences of sounds are possible pronunciations of meaningful expressions;
 - how minimal meaningful elements can be combined to form words;
 - how the pronunciation of words depends on the environments in which they occur;
 - how words can be combine to form larger meaningful expressions;
 - how the meanings of these larger expressions are determined from the meanings of their parts and the ways that they are combined;
 - how the stress and intonation patterns of these larger expressions are related to the ways that they are combined;
 - how the context of utterance affects the interpretation of utterances.
- Languages are *diverse*, differing from each other not just in which words they have, but in the details of all the aspects of competence just mentioned.
- "Can't see the forest for the trees": the very complexity makes the systematicity of competence hard to see (much of what linguists do is try to uncover and describe this systematicity).
- Despite the complexity, all normal humans master the system by age five without explicit instruction (like learning to walk, but it takes longer), suggesting to many linguists that much of the system is innate (inborn, not learned).

- Much of the systematicity is shared across all languages (**linguistic universals**), e.g.
 - All languages have at least three vowels;
 - If a language has exactly three vowels, they are /i & u/;
 - If a language has voiced stops, it has voiceless stops;
 - If a language has dual pronouns, it has plural pronouns;
 - No language forms yes-no questions by reversing the order of the words in the corresponding declarative sentence.
- Every normal adult speaker commands a range of distinct **registers** of his/her native language (how to talk to babies; to children; to close friends; to an employer; to an audience; etc.), and knows unconsciously which kinds of situations to use them in.
- All languages change through time as a normal and inevitable process; this is not a sign of moral decay or cultural decline. We are mostly unaware of the change, and powerless to stop it.