

210 Introduction to Linguistics
GFS220 – Tu/Th 9:30 – 10:50 a.m.

Syllabus for Linguistics 210
Introduction to Linguistics
Fall 2012

Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30 – 10:50 a.m.
Place: GFS 220

Instructor: Prof. Sandra Ferrari Disner
GFS 301n
e-mail: sdisner@usc.edu

Office hours: [Tentatively] Mondays noon - 2 p.m. and by appointment

Course Website on: <https://blackboard.usc.edu/>

Course description:

The ability to speak and understand a language (an often simply referred to as **Language**) is unique to humans and universally represented within the species. In conjunction with other faculties of the mind, it affords us the ability to achieve levels of abstract thinking and social organization that are unparalleled in the animal kingdom. Language is therefore one of the most characteristic features of the human species, and its study is centrally important to understanding what it is to be human.

This course provides a selective overview of the scientific study of human language that is Linguistics. **Linguistics** is properly understood as a sub-discipline of Cognitive Science, and indeed, is one of the richest disciplines therein. As you will come to learn in this course, speaking and understanding a language is a complex and multi-layered cognitive ability that interacts with other cognitive systems such as perception (e.g., hearing, vision), motor control, memory, and various systems of thought (e.g. concept formation, problem solving) in intricate ways. We will examine certain important aspects of the structure of human languages, with examples drawn from English and other languages of the world.

Some of the questions to be discussed include: What is a language? What do we know when we know a language? How can we investigate the central properties of human language? Is language unique to humans? This course will also integrate linguistic research with the study of language development; we will look at how young children acquire the central properties of human language.

Textbook:

Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction, W. O'Grady, J. Archibald, M. Aronoff and J. Rees-Miller. Sixth Edition, 2010. [CL]

Course requirements:

1. Attendance and participation. Class meetings will involve both lecture and discussion. Class attendance and participation are very important, and will determine a portion of your grade. **When an absence is due to a valid reason, such as illness, you should contact the instructor** (preferably by e-mail) on or before the day of the missed class. Medical documentation may be required before the absence is excused, especially in the case of frequent absences.
2. Readings. The reading assignments are mainly from the textbook [CL], but occasionally you will be asked to read articles from linguistic journals or chapters from other textbooks. These will be available on Blackboard. Read all assigned chapters carefully in order to understand the lectures and participate in class discussion.
3. Problem sets. **Linguistics is best learned by doing problem sets.** Approximately seven or eight times per semester you will be assigned a problem set based on the material in the textbooks and the lectures. Problem sets will usually be handed out on Thursdays and will be due the following Thursday. The problem sets will be corrected but **not graded** – i.e., full points will be given as long as *every part of the assignment* is completed and handed in on time. The problem sets are always due at the beginning of class, because that is when they will be discussed. If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to find out whether a problem set has been assigned.

A note on collaboration: General discussion of the assignments with other students is acceptable and encouraged (e.g. "Remind me, how do I know if something is an allophone?"), but you must arrive at the actual solutions to problems on your own and write them up on your own. Certain indicia make it quite apparent to an instructor when two students have collaborated. (Note that the instructor is a forensic linguist.)

Lateness policy: Points will be deducted from problem sets which are handed in late, at the rate of 30% of the total score per day. (A problem set handed in during the class discussion will have 10% taken off). Points will not be taken off when there is a valid and documented reason for the lateness, such as illness.

4. Exams. There will be three exams covering different portions of the material: two in-class midterms and a final. They will include questions in a variety of formats, such as problem solving, multiple choice questions, and identification. These exams are *not cumulative*; the material tested in one exam will not be revisited in another.

Grading plan:

Attendance and participation: **10%**

Problem sets: **15%**

Midterm 1: **25%**

Midterm 2: **25%**

Final: **25%**

Academic integrity:

Students are expected to uphold the USC Student Conduct Code (<http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/university-student-conduct-code/>). Violations of the code (see <http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>) harm every student in the class. Any student who is found cheating on an exam or homework, or who facilitates cheating by another student, will receive no credit for that work. Further action will also be taken if necessary.

Students with disabilities:

Students needing special accommodations (e.g., longer exam time) due to a physical or learning disability should contact the instructor as early in the semester as possible, and should also contact Disability Services and Programs (DSP) (see their webpage at http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html)

Linguistics 210: Introduction to Linguistics

[Tentative schedule of topics and reading assignments]

August 28, 30: The scientific study of language

Organizational matters, overview of the course

What is language? Linguistic competence vs. linguistic performance.

Descriptive vs. prescriptive grammars. Universal Grammar. Innateness of lg.

Readings: CL: Chapter 1; Pinker "The Language Instinct" article on Blackboard

September 4, 6, 11, 13: Phonetics

Speech production. Anatomy & articulators. Classes of sounds.

Readings: CL Ch. 2, sections 1-6 and 10

The International Phonetic Alphabet. Transcription.

Readings: CL Ch. 2, sections 7-8

Articulatory processes

Readings: CL, Ch. 2, section 9

September 18, 20, 25, 27: Phonology

Phonemes and allophones.

Readings: CL: Chapter 3, sections 1-3

Phonological processes. Phonological rules. Phonological analysis.

Readings: CL Ch. 2, sections 4-6

October 2:	<i>Review session</i>
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October 4:	<i>First Exam</i>
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	General issues. Phonetics & Phonology
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October 9, 11, 16, 18: Morphology

The structure of words. Morphemes. Inflectional & derivational morphology and compounding. Other morphological processes.

Readings: CL: Chapter 4, sections 1-5

Morphophonemics: Interactions between phonology and morphology.

Readings: CL: Chapter 4, section 6

October 23, 25, 30: Syntax (Part I)

How words are combined to form sentences. Constituency. Phrase structure and X²-theory. Subcategorization.

Readings: CL: Chapter 5, sections 1 and 2

The use of modifiers.

Readings: CL: Chapter 5, section 5.2

November 1:	<i>Second review session</i>
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November 6:	<i>Second Exam</i> Syntax (Part I) and Morphology
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November 8: A post-exam pause for Animal Communication

Guest speaker: Mona Lindau, Ph.D.

November 13, 15, 20: Syntax (Part II)

Transformations (Cont.)

Readings: CL: Chapter 5, sections 3 and 5

Syntax. Language variation. Principles and parameters in X²-theory

Readings: CL: Chapter 5, section 4

November 27, 29: Semantics

The study of meaning. Sentence meaning and compositionality.

Relations between sentences. Truth-conditions.

Readings: CL: Chapter 6, sections 1, 3 and 4; additional material on Blackboard.

December 4: Language Acquisition

First language acquisition. Babbling, phonetic processes, vocabulary development.

Readings: CL: Chapter 11, sections 1, 2, and 4.

December 6:	<i>Third review session</i> Syntax (part II), Semantics and Language Acquisition
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December 13, 11 am:	<i>Third exam</i> (in GFS 220)
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