

Linguistics 220/420: Introduction to Grammatical Systems

Spring 2007

When and Where

Class meetings: MW 2:00–3:15, CSB 209

Instructor: Lynsey Wolter

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Office hour: Monday 3:30–4:30, or by appointment.

Class website: <http://www.bcs.rochester.edu/people/lwolter/syntax.html>

Course Description

This introductory course examines the grammatical structure of words and sentences from the standpoint of modern linguistic theory. The course develops the basic techniques and concepts of morphological and syntactic analysis, placing particular emphasis on the ways in which semantic, morphological and lexical information interacts with the syntax. By the end of this course students will be able to provide complete syntactic analyses for many sentences of English; in addition, they will be able to formulate and defend hypotheses for the analysis of new data. No syntax background is assumed. This course is intended for majors and non-majors alike. Prerequisite: LIN 110, or permission of instructor.

Requirements and Grades

In this course we will work together to develop a grammar of Standard American English. There is no textbook: the course is driven by homework and class discussion. Therefore, the success of this course depends entirely on *your* investment in the material. If you decide to take the course, you should be committed to attending class regularly, participating in class discussions, and making a consistent effort on the weekly homework assignments, the two take-home exams, and the writing assignment.

Your grade will be calculated approximately as follows:

homework	50%
midterm and final	30%
writing assignment	10%
attendance and participation	10%

Homework Homework will be assigned on Wednesday and due the following Wednesday, except during midterm week. The homework assignments will set the scene for subsequent class discussion, and completing the assignments after the fact would serve little purpose. Therefore, homework is due promptly at the beginning of class, and *absolutely no late homework will be accepted!* I will drop the lowest two homework grades at the end of the semester.

Midterm and Final The midterm and final will be take-home exams. They are intended to give you an opportunity to show your mastery of the kinds of reasoning and argumentation that you will practice in your homework assignments.

Writing Assignment This class fulfills an upper-level writing requirement. By meeting this requirement, you show your ability to write a convincing argument that follows the conventions of linguistics papers. You will satisfy the writing requirement by doing the following:

- Choose an eligible homework assignment and pay special attention to the prose in your answer. Your write-up should be longer, more detailed, and more carefully written than usual, following the “Advice on Writing” below.
- Indicate clearly when you turn in the assignment that you have chosen it for your writing assignment. This will be my cue to comment more thoroughly than usual on the paper’s organization, argumentation, and clarity of writing, and to make some suggestions for further improvement.
- Revise the write-up at least once, taking into account the comments you received. The final draft is due on the last day of class.

You are required to complete the writing assignment even if you have taken another linguistics course which satisfies the upper-level writing requirement. If you do not pass the writing assignment, you will not pass the course.

If you have considerable writing experience in linguistics, you may be able to turn in a polished first draft that requires only minor revision. If you are new to writing in linguistics, you may write as many drafts of your writing assignment as you like before the last day of class. Your grade on the writing assignment will reflect what you accomplished in your final draft, not how many tries it took you to get there.

Attendance and Participation You can do two things to improve your attendance and participation grade:

1. Attend class regularly.
2. Make me aware that you are engaged with the course material. The easiest and best way to do this is to participate regularly in class discussion. However, if you find that you think of comments and questions only after the class discussion has moved on to a new topic, you could also bring your questions and comments to my office hours.

In this class, we will spend most of our time developing and testing hypotheses about the structure of English. I guarantee that we’ll all come up with hypotheses that will later turn out to be mistaken (including me!). And sometimes it is just as important to eliminate plausible but incorrect hypotheses as it is to find an answer that works. So please do not let a fear of “giving the wrong answer” or “sounding dumb” prevent you from contributing your ideas to the class discussion.

You are responsible for the material discussed in class. If you must miss a class, please get notes from a classmate. Not having been in class will not be accepted as an excuse for not knowing something.

Important Dates

Classes begin	Jan. 17
Last day to add/drop a course or change grading option	Feb. 13
First draft of writing assignment due	Feb. 28
Midterm due	Mar. 7
Spring break: no class	Mar. 10–Mar. 18
Last day of classes; Last day to withdraw from a course	May 2
Final draft of writing assignment due	May 2
Final exam due	May 11 (tentative)

Communicating with the Instructor

The most reliable way to communicate with me is by email. I will attend to class-related emails at least twice a day on weekdays, generally once around 9 a.m. and once around 5 p.m. I will not necessarily check email on weekends, unless an assignment happens to be due on Monday. It may take me up to a full business day to respond to your email.

You are welcome to stop by my office any time, even if you do not have an appointment. Of course, if you stop by outside of my regular office hours and you do not have a scheduled appointment, it is possible that I will be unavailable.

Academic Honesty

1. I strongly encourage you to discuss the problems on the homework assignments, the midterm and the final with your classmates. However, you must write your homework and exams entirely by yourself and in your own words. This is because one goal of this course is for you to learn how to present a linguistic argument, and you will only do so if you actually practice writing. Turning in an assignment which is not in your own words constitutes a violation of academic honesty.
2. It is also important for you to give credit where credit is due for ideas that are not your own. If you work with classmates on an assignment, please include a note about who you worked with on the top of the first page. In the text of your assignment, cite the source of each idea that is not your own, whether that idea came from discussion with a classmate or from a written source. (In general, because we will be developing our own grammar of English, it will not be very useful to consult written sources.)
3. You are responsible for understanding and abiding by the College policy on academic policy, available at <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>.
4. If you are ever in doubt about a matter of academic honesty, no matter how minor, please see me *before* turning in the relevant assignment.

Advice about Writing

Advice about Content

Here is some useful advice from Eric Potsdam, a professor at the University of Florida:

1. Unless specifically stated, your work should take the form of a coherent prose essay. An assignment will typically be stated as a series of questions about a set of data, leading you towards an appropriate analysis. Your response, however, should not be just a set of disjoint (one-word) answers to these questions. Fragmentary and telegraphic answers are to be avoided. The questions are there to guide you in thinking about the problem(s) and in organizing your solution. The essay will typically include 1) a very brief statement of the problem, 2) your solution, and 3) support and reasoning for your answer. This third point is particularly important (see below). At minimum, you should address the questions that are asked but, additionally, you should provide discussion to justify and explain your answers when appropriate. In many cases, you will be explicitly guided in doing this. A main goal of any paper is to convince the reader that you understand the material and are able to use it in discussing new phenomena. Overall, I'm looking for a well-organized, clear, and convincing paper that could be read without excessive dependence upon the assignment sheet.
2. As a rule, you will not be able to crank out an assignment an hour before class. Plan ahead! Start on the assignments as early as possible and allow yourself plenty of time to think about the problem and write up your solution. If you get stuck for ideas, this gives you the maximum amount of time to consult others, rethink your approach, or contact the instructor. The assignments are challenging and will generally require some thought and effort.
3. Clear writing typically reflects clear thinking and understanding. Conversely, muddled writing is often an indicator of unorganized thinking or plain confusion about the material. For some people, writing an outline of the assignment before beginning is a helpful step in organizing the material. This will help you to decide what order the material will be presented in, where particular data and analyses will be introduced, and when argumentation should/will be provided. [I also highly recommend that you leave enough time to write two drafts of your response. It's very common to discover problems with your analysis while you are writing your first draft.–LW]
4. It is suggested that you write in a *plain style*. Clarity, precision, and explicitness are welcome. Avoid using unnatural language: awkward vocabulary, poetic and flowery language, and convoluted grammar. In general, it doesn't hurt to keep sentences short, maybe one idea per sentence. For some people, it helps to try to write the way you would talk.
5. *Justify your answers*. It will usually be at least as important to give sound arguments for your answers as to come up with the "right" answer. Development and support for your conclusions indicate your control of the material and show a great deal more than a correct response alone does. It will often be the case that no single solution is indisputably correct so the reasoning behind your proposal(s) becomes particularly important. Try to anticipate and address any objections that a knowledgeable reader might have to your position.
6. *Linguistic conventions*. When discussing a particular example or piece of data from a language, you should treat it in one of two ways.
 - If it is just a word, short phrase, or something that you want to incorporate directly in the prose, underline it or italicize it. This indicates that the word or phrase should not be interpreted with its normal meaning. Instead, it should simply be interpreted as the italicized string. For example, if I want to talk about the word *word* and say, for example, that it has four letters, I italicize (or underline) it. Similarly, *four* and *Mary*

also have four letters. If I were to write instead that Mary has four letters, this indicates something like a person named Mary is in possession of four envelopes.

- If you are discussing a full sentence, it is often helpful to separate it from your text so that you can find it easily and refer to again it later on. Do this by leaving blank space around it and giving it a number on the left margin. Typically, sentences are numbered sequentially from the beginning of the paper. The sentence can later be referred to just by number without having to be repeated. For example, I want to discuss the sentence below.

(1) The gopher ate my rose.

Given these conventions, I can now talk about the sentence:

Example (1) is a grammatical English sentence. The subject in (1) is the noun phrase *the gopher*. *Ate* is the verb, which is in the past tense. The direct object of the verb is *my rose*. The passive sentence corresponding to (1) is *My rose was eaten by the gopher*.

Quotation marks are used in a text to indicate direct quotation. Use them only if you are representing an actual utterance of the word or phrase in question. Do not use them in place of italicization (underlining). For example,

I think my neighbor is having a bad day because I heard him scream “The gopher ate my rose.” As a linguist I thought this was an interesting sentence because...

Advice about Form

1. The text should be typed or legibly handwritten in dark blue or black ink.
2. Use only one side of the page, and leave at least one-inch margins, so that I have room to write comments.
3. Number your pages and staple. I am not responsible for unstapled pages that get lost.
4. Put your full name on the first page, and if relevant, list who you worked closely with.
5. I recommend that you draw tree diagrams by hand, as this involves the least effort. Please do not use a general-purpose graphics program to draw trees—in my experience, this tends to be very time-consuming and the results are not always legible. However, if you already have the Arboreal font you are welcome to use it. There is also apparently a special tree-drawing program <http://sourceforge.net/projects/treeform>—use at your own risk (I haven’t tried this).
 - You may either leave enough white space in the middle of your discussion to draw each tree where it becomes relevant, or include all of your trees at the end of the assignment.
 - Please don’t begrudge a few extra pieces of paper. Remember that I have to read every detail on every tree.
6. Check the details of your analysis carefully, proofread your text, and run spellcheck. Spelling mistakes and typos won’t directly affect your grade, but they will distract and irritate the reader.

Preliminary Assignment: Due Friday Jan. 19

Please send an email to lwolter@ling.rochester.edu with the following information:

1. Your full name
- 1a. What you would like to be called in class, if it is different from your first name
2. Your year
3. Your major
4. Other linguistics classes you have taken or are currently enrolled in
5. Your native language(s)
6. Other languages you have experience with, if any
7. One other fact about you
8. Optional: If there is anything else you would like to tell me about yourself that would help me be a better teacher for you, feel free to do so. You are also welcome to talk to me in person about this.

If I need to communicate with you in the future outside of class, I will use the return address on your email. Therefore, please send your email from an account that you check at least once a day.