

# LING 323 : Introductory Syntax

MW 3:10–4:30, Vollum 110

## Course Syllabus Spring 2008

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### PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for this course, other than an interest in language. An introductory linguistics course (LING 311 or equivalent) is recommended, but by no means required. Some familiarity with basic 'school grammar' terms like *noun*, *adjective*, (*in*)*transitive verb*, *preposition*, *clause*, *sentence*, etc., would also be useful. If you would like to brush up on these terms, I recommend James Hurford's *Grammar: A Student's Guide* <PE1112 .H857 1994>, which I have placed on reserve for this course.

### READINGS

Assigned readings will come from the following books:

- **Haegeman**, Liliane and Jacqueline **Guéron**. (1999) *English Grammar: A Generative Perspective*. Blackwell Publishing. <PE1106 .H27 1999>
- **Radford**, Andrew. (1988) *Transformational Grammar: A First Course*. Cambridge University Press. <P158 .R29 1988>

Haegeman & Guéron (abbreviated "HG" in the course outline at the end of the syllabus) is the required textbook for this course, and is available for purchase in the bookstore. At the beginning of the course we will also be reading chapters from the Radford book, available on 2-hour print reserve at the library (additional readings may be added as we go along).

### FOCUS OF THE COURSE

Syntax is a branch of *linguistics*, and thus deals with the scientific study of human language. In particular, syntax is concerned with sentence structure. Syntacticians seek to characterize the (largely unconscious) rules that determine how speakers of a language combine words into larger units such as phrases and sentences, and how speakers parse (i.e., assign a structural analysis to) the phrases and sentences which they hear or read. Most syntacticians adopt a *universalist* perspective: that is, they are concerned not only with determining the sentence rules for some particular language (say, English), but also with determining what structural generalizations hold across *all* languages, and what these generalizations tell us about the nature of language as a property of the human species.

There are various types of syntactic theories. Here we follow linguists like Noam Chomsky in adopting an explicitly *Generative* orientation. In Generative Linguistics, the goal of a theory of syntax is not to explain how speakers actually produce and parse sentences (*linguistic performance*); instead, the goal is to understand the system of knowledge that enables speakers to do this (*linguistic competence*). A fundamental assumption of Generative Syntax is that speakers' competence involves a coherent system of highly abstract *principles* (also known as *constraints* or *filters*) which can be discovered empirically and modeled

formally. These principles are argued to be at least partially innate, and at least partially independent of other cognitive domains.

In this introductory course we will engage in basic analysis of syntactic data, mostly from English, and develop theories to account for patterns in those data. The general goals of the course are twofold:

- (1) To learn how to construct a syntactic argument. This involves determining what counts as evidence in syntax, and learning how linguists use that evidence to argue for or against a particular analysis of some phenomenon.
- (2) To become acquainted with some of the basic terms, concepts, and formalisms of contemporary Generative Syntactic theory.

Of these, (1) is the more important goal. Most of our attention in this course will be focused on learning how to 'do' syntax. This will involve reading about and discussing the application of scientific methodologies to language data, as well as working together to construct analyses of actual fragments of English (including many phenomena for which no universally agreed-upon analysis exists).

Regarding goal (2): There are a number of different versions of Generative Syntax which we could investigate, each with its own terminology and formal notation. Here we will concentrate on *Government and Binding* theory (or GB for short), a framework which developed in the 1980s and early 1990s out of prior work by Chomsky and many others. The reasons for this choice are largely practical: GB is a highly influential and well-developed theory, with a good deal of empirical coverage. Most current research in syntax assumes the GB framework or one of its off-shoots—or explicitly argues *against* this framework and its off-shoots. It is therefore useful to have some familiarity with GB jargon and notation in order to be able to read widely in the field.

## EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

Students will be expected to attend class and participate in discussion on a regular basis. In addition, students will be required to complete problem sets and a final exam. Problem sets will count for approximately 60-70% of the course grade, while participation and the exam will count for 15-20% each.

**Participation.** This course is structured more like a lecture/lab course than a standard seminar course. Reading assignments will tend to be short and rather technical, while in-class discussion will center on working through problems together. Some of these exercises will originate as informal 'homework' assignments, where I ask you to think about a body of data (taken from the textbook or elsewhere) and come to class with a set of generalizations or the beginnings of an analysis. Regular attendance and participation are therefore crucial to the success of the class.

**Final exam.** The final exam for this course will be comprehensive. It will be an untimed take-home exam, and you will be given a week to work on it. The exam will be handed out at the end of reading week and due one week later (exact dates TBA). The format of the exam will be similar to that of the problem sets, except of course that you will have to work on it individually rather than in groups.

**Problem sets.** There will be 10 problem sets, which together will count for the bulk of the course grade. Dates when assignments will be handed out and collected are given in the table on the next page (these dates are tentative; I will notify you of any changes as we go along). Problem sets will be handed out and collected on Thursdays.

Problem sets must be turned in to me by **5:30 PM** on the date they are due. You may draw trees by hand, but all other portions of the assignment must be *typed*. You may submit your assignments in either hardcopy or electronic versions (hardcopy preferred). Electronic versions should be submitted as email attachments in PDF. Written work must be turned in on time if you wish to receive full credit and comments. Late assignments will be penalized 10% of total possible points for each day they are late, unless you receive an extension from me in advance. Late assignments will not be accepted for credit if turned in after the problem set has been returned to students, or discussed in class, whichever comes first. More-

over, late assignments will probably receive minimal comments, and may not be returned in a timely fashion.

|       | <i>handed out<br/>on Wednesday</i> | <i>due by 5:30 PM<br/>on Wednesday</i> |
|-------|------------------------------------|--|
| PS 1  | January 30                         | <b>February 6</b>                      |
| PS 2  | February 6                         | <b>February 13</b>                     |
| PS 3  | February 13                        | <b>February 20</b>                     |
| PS 4  | February 20                        | <b>February 27</b>                     |
| PS 5  | February 27                        | <b>March 5</b>                         |
| PS 6  | March 5                            | <b>March 12</b>                        |
| PS 7  | March 26                           | <b>April 2</b>                         |
| PS 8  | April 2                            | <b>April 9</b>                         |
| PS 9  | April 9                            | <b>April 16</b>                        |
| PS 10 | April 16                           | <b>April 23</b>                        |

I believe that written work should give students the opportunity to extend and develop what they have learned, rather than simply functioning as review. Consequently, I try to make my assignments challenging, and sometimes include previews of material which we have not yet been covered in class or in the reading. Crucially, I do *not* expect that you will be able to complete the problem sets on your own without help. It is perfectly acceptable to consult me *before* an assignment is due if you are having trouble working it out. In addition, you are encouraged – indeed, expected – to work on problem sets in groups, *so long as you write up your answers in your own words*. So find yourself a study partner (or two, or three) as soon as you can!

## COURSE OUTLINE

Below is a numbered list giving the reading assignments for the course, and the topics covered in each. This outline is subject to change, depending on how quickly we get through the material. You will notice that I have not assigned specific dates for the readings: I will let you know in class which readings you should be working on for the following week. It makes more sense to me to set the pace as we go along, rather than trying to stick to a predetermined schedule; however, in general we will try to get through between one and two reading assignments per week.

### *Introduction: Grammar and grammaticality*

- (1) **HG** Introduction (pp. 1-13), ch 1 § 0 (pp. 14-21); **Radford** “Transformational Grammar”, ch 1 (pp. 1-46) / *The generative grammar position – Innateness, modularity, and Universal Grammar – Acceptability judgements and grammaticality – Theory building and criteria of adequacy – Economy and parsimony (Occam’s Razor)*

### *Basic phrase structure: Categories, constituency, and case-licensing*

- (2) **HG** ch 1 § 1 (pp. 21-44) / *Predicate-argument structure and grammatical relations – Selection (subcategorization restrictions) – Thematic roles – The Theta Criterion and its consequences – Expletives and empty categories – Locality of theta role assignment*
- (3) **HG** ch 1 § 2.1 (pp. 45-63); **Radford** “Transformational Grammar” ch 2 (pp. 50-105) / *Lexical categories – Constituent structure – Tests for constituency*

- (4) **HG** ch 1 § 2.3–2.4 (pp. 64–81) / *Projection: heads and phrases – Intermediate projections and XP-layers – The X-bar format*
- (5) **HG** ch 1 § 2.5 (pp. 81–112) / *Extending the X-bar format to the sentential level – The nature of INFL – Auxiliaries and auxiliary raising, lexical verbs, and affix lowering – CP and IP – Binary branching – Subjunctives and selection – Small clauses*
- (6) **HG** ch 1 § 3 (pp. 112–137), chapter summary (pp. 137–145) / *More on covert subjects and expletives – CP and PP subjects – Objects – Case Theory and the Case Filter – Locality of Case-assignment*

***Movement: Head and specifier positions***

- (7) **HG** ch 2 § 0–1.1 (pp. 169–184) / *Question formation: Wh-movement and I-to-C movement – Constraints on wh-movement – Successive cyclicity – Subject and adjunct extraction – Island constraints*
- (8) **HG** ch 2 § 1.2 (pp. 185–199) / *Wh-movement outside of questions – Relative clauses – Empty operators – Parasitic gaps*
- (9) **HG** ch 2 § 1.3 (pp. 199–211) / *NP-movement: Passivization – Raising – NP-movement and Case*
- (10) **HG** ch 2 § 1.4 (pp. 211–227) / *Properties and types of movement – C-command and traces – Locality and movement – A- vs. A'-movement – Heavy NP-shift – Negative inversion – Topicalization*
- (11) **HG** ch 2 § 2–3 (pp. 227–245) / *More on NP-movement: Argument structure and the internal structure of VP – The VP-internal subject hypothesis – Unergatives and unaccusatives – The existential construction*
- (12) **HG** ch 2 § 4 (pp. 245–268), chapter summary (pp. 268–272) / *More on head movement – The verb-particle construction*

***Unpacking the clause: More on movement and functional projections***

- (13) **HG** ch 3 § 0–1 (pp. 287–306) / *“Have” and “be” – Subjects across categories: More on small clauses and existential constructions*
- (14) **HG** ch 3 § 2 (pp. 306–326) / *Finiteness and verb movement in English and French – The Split-INFL hypothesis – The position of negation*
- (15) **HG** ch 3 § 3–4 (pp. 326–347), chapter summary (pp. 347–351) / *Extended projections and functional categories – More on A'-movement: The Split-CP hypothesis – Negative inversion and topicalization again – Focus movement in Hungarian – Wh-movement in embedded clauses and relative clauses*

***Binding theory and empty categories***

- (16) **HG** ch 4 § 0–1 (pp. 361–383), chapter summary (pp. 465–466) / *Binding theory – Anaphors, pronouns, and R-expressions – C-command and locality conditions on binding – Binding and the A/A'-movement distinction*
- (17) **HG** ch 4 § 2 (pp. 383–406), chapter summary (p. 466) / *Empty categories: Traces – Null subjects (PRO and pro) – Empty categories and binding – The Empty Category Principle (ECP)*

### ***Unpacking the noun phrase***

- (18) **HG** ch 4 § 3 (pp. 406-464), chapter summary (pp. 467-472) / *Possessors, determiners, and quantifiers – Argument structure, binding, and control relations within the noun phrase – The DP hypothesis – Head movement within DP and the position of noun modifiers – The D head (possessors revisited) – DP versus CP – Demonstratives*

### ***Covert movement: Logical Form and the syntax-semantics interface***

- (19) **HG** ch 5 § 3 (pp. 538-567), chapter summary (pp. 569-570) / *Quantifiers and scope relations – Quantifiers and pronoun binding – Wh-phrases and scope – Covert wh-movement – Reconstruction – Expletive replacement – Covert movement and word order variation – Checking theory*

### ***Syntax and language variation***

- (20) **HG** ch 6 § 0-2 (pp. 581-597) / *Principles, parameters, and Universal Grammar – Word order variation: V-movement and N-movement – Constituent order: Headedness parameters versus movement – Language change*
- (21) **HG** ch 6 § 3-4 (pp. 597-626) / *The pro-drop parameter and its consequences – Morphology-driven syntax – Null subjects and register variation in English*