

Syllabus for CG41

Introduction to Linguistic Theory

Mark Johnson

Fall Semester, 2007

The handouts for this class will be available on mycourses.brown.edu.

The ability to speak and understand a language involves mastering (quite unconsciously) an intricate rule-governed system. Linguists investigate this rule system which all speakers of a language unconsciously “know” and which enables them to use the language. This course introduces the principles underlying phonology (which govern how sounds are put together), syntax (the principles underlying sentence structure) and semantics (which relates sentences to meanings).

Class will consist of readings, lectures, and roughly bi-weekly hands-on experience solving linguistic problems from a variety of languages. This class will be useful for anyone wanting to know more about the structure of human languages.

Because it describes the ways that languages can vary in their sound systems and syntactic structures, foreign language students may find that it makes them more aware of the properties of the languages they are studying. Students with a mathematical inclination often find this course exciting, as the intricate structures that arise in natural languages result from the interaction of a number of simple underlying principles. CG41 is a required course for Cognitive Science majors and for Linguistics majors, and is a prerequisite for many more advanced courses in Linguistics and Language Processing.

1 Instructor, Class time and Location

Instructor:

Mark Johnson (Professor)
Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences, Box 1978
Metcalf Research Building, Room 231
190 Thayer Street
Phone: 863 1670, email: Mark_Johnson@Brown.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 10am-noon.

Class time and location:

Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 11:00–11:50am.

Location: Wilson 101

Section meetings:

To be announced

Teaching Assistants:

Emma Cunningham, office hr Tuesday 12:30-1:30pm, Metcalf Research 135

Brendan Shean, office hr Thursday 12-1pm. Metcalf Research 121

Simon Charlow (undergraduate TA)

2 Homework, Grading and Texts

There is a required textbook for the course, which will be supplemented by handouts and readings as appropriate. The course includes material not covered in the text, so *it is necessary to attend classes!*

Required text:

V. Fromkin, editor (2000) *Linguistics: An Introduction to Linguistic Theory*. Blackwell Publishers.

Recommended reading:

S. Pinker (1994) *The Language Instinct: How the Mind creates Language*. Morrow.

Coe (1992) *Breaking the Maya Code*. Thames and Hudson.

There is no final exam, but there will be approximately 7 homework assignments (this may change); one on morphology, two on syntax, two on semantics and two on phonology. In general, the second homework assignment on a topic is weighted more than the first assignment.

Your homework answers must be your own work. It's fine study and discuss course topics and materials other than homework problems with others, but the homework problems should be your own work, and done without any assistance from others.

3 Syllabus

Week 1: What is linguistics about? What is a language? How many languages are there? What kinds of languages are there? What is linguistics? What do linguists do? (Chapter 1)

Week 2: Morphology and word structure. What are words? What are the parts of words, and how are they built? (Chapter 2)

Week 3: Phonetics, acoustics and articulation. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Natural classes of sounds. (Chapter 11)

Week 4: Phonology, phonemes and phonetic alternations. Describing generalizations about phonetic distributions with phonological rules. (Chapter 12)

Week 5: Phonology. Phonological representations. Features and natural classes of phonemes. (Chapter 13)

Weeks 6 and 7: Optimality theory. Phonotactic constraints. Syllable structure. Phonological generalizations. (Handout)

Week 8: Morphology and phonology. The interaction of morphological structure and phonological alternation.

Week 9: Syntax. How words are put together to build phrases and sentences. Phrase structure, subcategorization and selectional restrictions. (Chapter 3).

Week 10: Syntax. Cross-linguistic variation. Non-local “movement” dependencies. (Chapter 4)

Week 11: Syntax. A case study: verbal dependencies in English and other languages. (Chapter 5)

Week 12: Semantics. Entailment and presupposition. Generalized quantifiers. (Chapter 7)

Week 13: Semantics. Negation and negative polarity items. Quantifier scope. (Chapter 8)

Week 14: Semantics. Count and mass nouns. Telic and Atelic events. (Chapter 9)

4 Readings for Friday Week 1

- Chapter 1 of Fromkin (2000).
- (Recommended) “An Instinct to Acquire an Art”, Chapter 1 of Pinker (1994).
- (Recommended) “The Language Mavens”, Chapter 7 of Pinker (1994).
- (Recommended) “Chatterboxes”, Chapter 2 of Pinker (1994).

5 Readings for Week 2

- Chapter 2 of Fromkin (2000).
- (Recommended) “Words, Words, Words”, Chapter 5 of Pinker (1994).