Course Description and Objectives

Linguistics, in a broad sense, is a discipline that studies the general nature of human language, almost always with respect to some aspect of its structure. This course introduces what is called “theoretical” linguistics, in which we aim to understand what it is that a person knows when they know their native language (i.e. the language they began speaking when they first began to talk).

We address questions such as what elements of structure are common to all languages; how, in what ways, and in what domains other elements vary; and why this should be so. These issues are studied from the perspective of generative grammar, an approach to the linguistic sciences that is widespread in its use and influence across much of North America, many parts of Europe, and elsewhere.

The study of linguistics is broken up into four basic sub-areas, and introducing each of these will form the bulk of the course's content: the study across the world's languages of sound traits and sound patterns (phonetics and phonology), of word structures (morphology), of sentence structures (syntax), and of meaning and its use in context (semantics and pragmatics). In this course, each of these four areas will be approached largely from a synchronic perspective, comparing the traits present in a broad range of languages currently spoken around the world.

We will also reference major areas in which linguistics interfaces with other disciplines. These include computational linguistics, which involves computational uses of language ranging from search engines, speech recognition and synthesis, and machine-aided translation; sociolinguistics and dialectology; and language acquisition. And we will touch on issues of language evolution and change, and language endangerment, death, and revitalization.

The majority of these tasks will be accomplished by working out solutions to sets of data from various languages of the world, involving sound, word, sentence, and/or meaning structure patterns—during class lectures, in homework assignments, and on the midterm and final exams.

Learning Goals: As a result of taking this course and fully engaging with the material and required work, students will:
• gain a general familiarity with the types of knowledge that speakers have (usually without being aware of it) of their native language; the differences between languages and dialects; how languages are acquired; the sorts of patterns found in natural language word, phrase, and sentence structure, and how these can vary from one language to another;

• gain a strong understanding of the descriptive (and not prescriptive) approach used in the field of linguistics;

• learn the basic articulatory traits of the consonant and vowel sounds found in the world's spoken languages, and how the traits of these sounds can vary from one language to another; learn the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and to read and create transcriptions of English into IPA; understand IPA transcriptions of data from other languages;

• begin acquiring the ability to identify and clearly articulate the patterns and generalizations present in sets of sound, word, phrase, and sentence data from a given language or languages; to formulate reasonable next questions to ask, or identify the sort of additional examples that need to be gathered and examined, in order to fully discover the empirical generalizations present in a set of data; and to choose between competing hypotheses about a set of facts in terms of their empirical and explanatory adequacy;

• Begin learning the analytic approaches and theoretical frameworks used in modern linguistics to study and model phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic data, including generative syntax and phonology, and model-theoretic semantics.

Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

**Prerequisites:** This course has no prerequisites. No prior knowledge of linguistics, grammatical analysis, or grammatical terms is assumed or required.

**Basic Course Requirements**

1. Come to each class, and participate in what happens there. This includes coming prepared, having done the assigned reading, practice problems, or assignment. I reserve the right to lower your final grade by 5-10% for failure to attend or participate in class regularly.

   This requirement means that you are responsible for all material covered in class, including any announcements made there, whether or not you are in class when they are covered or stated. It is thus your responsibility to get the notes from another student in our course if you miss part or all of any class meeting.

2. Take-home work:

   • over the course of the term, there will be approximately 2 full-length homework assignments (one primarily on phonology and a bit of morphology, and one primarily on syntax and semantics) and one phonetics quiz. These three together are worth 40% of the final course grade, so that each of the three assignments and the quiz is worth about 13.3% individually.

   • There will also be between 3-4 smaller 'Practice Problem' assignments, including one on roughly the same topic as that of each quiz or full assignment. The average of all of your grades on all Practice Problem assignments as a whole will comprise 10% of the final course grade.
All work must be turned in at the START of lecture on the day it is due, and no late work is accepted. You must get in touch with me before an assignment is due if illness or other extraordinary circumstances prevent you from getting your work handed in on time.

3. The midterm exam is worth 20% of your final grade, and will be taken during class (probably over two distinct class meetings) on or near November 4. The Final Exam is worth 30% of your final course grade, and will be held in the day/time slot during Finals Week that the Registrar's Office assigns to our course.

More details on both exams will be given out in class, as they approach. Remember that it is your responsibility to arrange your end-of-term travel plans so that you will be here to take the Final Exam on the day and time in which the Registrar’s Office schedules it.

To sum up the components of your grade in the course:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Course Component</th>
<th>Percent of Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Full-Length Homework Assignments, 1 Phonetics Quiz</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-4 ‘Practice Problem’ sets, averaged together</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Grade</td>
<td>100%</td>
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**COURSE READINGS**

The course textbook is *Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction* (2010), 6th edition, by William O’Grady, John Archibald, Mark Aronoff, and Janie Rees-Miller, and is available in the campus bookstore (as well as at the Reserves desk at the Library). Supplementary required readings will be posted online, on our Latte site.

**SYLLABUS** (Dates are subject to change as we proceed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates for Week</th>
<th>Topics Covered</th>
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| 1: Th – Aug 27  
       MWTh – Aug 31, Sept 2,3 | Course Introduction  
                                  Reading:  
                                  • Pinker selection (on Latte)  
                                  • Textbook ch. 1, *Language: A Preview* |
| 2: WTh – Sept 9,10  
       [M 9-7=Labor Day] | Phonetics  
                                  Reading: Textbook ch. 2, *Phonetics: The Sounds of Language* |
| 3: WTh – Sept 16,17  
       [M 9-14=Rosh Hashanah] | |
| 4: MTh – Sept 21,24  
       [W 9-23=Yom Kippur] | |
| 5: TuWTh – Sept 29,30, Oct 1  
       [M 9-28=Sukkot/ Tu 9-29=Brandeis Monday] | Phonology  
                                  Reading: Textbook ch. 3, *Phonology: The Function and Patterning of Sounds* |
| 6: WTh – Oct 7,8  
       [M 10-5=Shmini Atzeret] | |
| 7: MWTh – Oct 12,14,15 | |
| 8: MWTh – Oct 19,21,22 | |
## Course Information and Syllabus — Intro to Linguistics, Fall 2015

### Dates for Week | Topics Covered
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9: MWTh – Oct 26,28,29 | Morphology  
Reading: Textbook ch. 4, *Morphology: The Analysis of Word Structure*
10: MWTh – Nov 2,4,5 | Syntax  
Reading: None
11: MWTh – Nov 9,11,12 |  
12: MWTh – Nov 16,18,19 |  
13: M – Nov 23  
[Th 11-25,26=Thanksgiving] | Semantics and Pragmatics  
Reading: Selection from Saeed *Semantics* textbook (on Latte)
14: MWTh – Nov 30, Dec 2,3 |  
15: MW – Dec 7,9 |  

*The Midterm Exam will be taken in class, on or near November 4*

*The Final Exam will be taken during Finals Week, at the time posted by the Registrar's Office*

### Important Policies and Points to Note

- **Students with Disabilities**
  If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

- **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**
  You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually in the “Maintenance of Academic Integrity” section of the Student Rights and Responsibilities handbook, [http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srcs/rr/index.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srcs/rr/index.html). Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University.

As in many linguistics courses, some assignments in this course will allow you to discuss your solution to the problems involved with other students in the class, listing their names at the top of your assignment. However, you must then go away from the group, and work out and write up your entire assignment on your own, all in your own words, in full adherence with Brandeis University’s policies on academic honesty.

On these assignments and all other work for the course, you **MAY NOT** discuss assignment content with anyone outside our class (whether they are linguistics students or not), nor attempt to find solutions in any books or websites.

If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

- **Policy on Laptops and Other Electronic Devices**
  It is very important to me that students who come to class be able to be here and engage fully with the class material and discussion throughout our entire class meeting. Therefore, no laptops or other electronic devices are allowed to be open or used during class. Exceptions are granted for students who have a compelling reason (such as difficulties taking notes by hand) to use a laptop to take notes—in which case the **only** program that can be open while our class is meeting is the text or word processing program used to take notes. Students with such requests should see me immediately. Absolutely no web browsing is allowed during class, with no exceptions.