Linguistics 120b
Syntactic Theory
Course Information and Syllabus — as of August 29, 2018

Lecture: MWTh, 10:00-10:50am [Block C], Volen 119
Obligatory Discussion Section: Fridays 2-2:50pm, Volen 119

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course provides an introduction to the process of syntactic analysis, to generative syntactic theory, and to many major syntactic phenomena of English and other languages. Topics covered include a detailed examination of the basic clausal architecture, the lexicon, and various types of syntactic movement, focusing primarily on A-Movement (also called NP Movement)—including passives. We will finish with an examination of a portion of English infinitival structures.

Evaluation of work in this course will be through solutions (written up in full prose) to weekly problem set assignments—the lowest of which will be dropped in calculating final course grades—plus longer problem set assignments which will be the Midterm Exam and Final Exam.

Homework solutions will be evaluated equally on their empirical and analytic content. Both should be laid out fully, explicitly, and clearly, in full-paragraph prose format. Within the grading for analytic content, equal weight is given to the actual content of the proposal as to the clarity and logic with which it is motivated and argued for. For more information, please see the detailed handout on writing up homework solutions to be given out soon!

Learning Goals: As a result of taking this course and fully engaging with the material and required work, students will:

· significantly deepen their understanding of the descriptive (rather than prescriptive) approach used in linguistics; the sorts of knowledge that speakers have of the syntactic patterns in their native language, usually without being aware of it; the defining empirical traits of English syntax, and of the major syntactic phenomena of English; the ways in which syntactic structures vary from one language to another;

· attain a solid foundation in the analytic approaches to natural language syntax used in modern generative linguistics, including the fundamental tenets and assumptions of Chomskyan generative syntactic theory (i.e. of generative theories of natural language syntax that use movement);

· strengthen and deepen their ability to identify and clearly articulate the patterns and generalizations present in a given set of syntactic data; to formulate reasonable next questions to ask, or identify the

sort of additional examples that would need to be gathered and examined, in order to fully discover the empirical generalizations present in a set of syntactic data, or to choose between competing hypotheses about the data;

· develop and refine the ability to formulate well-reasoned hypotheses and analyses of the facts present in a set of syntactic data; to demonstrate how well a given analysis does or does not work to fully capture the facts that it aims to explain; to evaluate competing analyses as to which should be chosen as the best account available, in terms of both empirical adequacy and theoretical merits;

· improve and deepen their ability to write clearly and concisely, in the scientific style of writing used throughout linguistics (and in many other scientifically oriented fields)—with prose that is precise, careful, and complete in its empirical descriptions, and lucid and methodical in developing the analysis proposed and arguing for it over plausible alternative analyses.

Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 12 hours of study and working time per week in preparation for class (going over your notes, working out solutions to the course work, writing these solutions up, etc.). Note that this is just a *minimum* expectation of outside class time.

<u>*Prerequisites*</u>: This course has no prerequisites. For undergraduate students, having taken LING 100a– Introduction to Linguistics is strongly recommended, but not required.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Course Component	Percent of Final Grade
Average of Homeworks (lowest dropped)	55%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	25%
Final Course Grade	**100%**

All grades for the course are on a scale of 6 total points, broken down as follows:

<u>A range = 5 to 6</u>:   <u>C range = 2.5 and up</u>:   <u>F = below 1.5</u>
5.3 and up: A   3.2 up: C+
5.0 up: A-   2.8 up: C
                    2.5 up: C-

<u>B range = 3.5 and up</u>:
4.5 up: B+   <u>D range = 1.5 and up</u>:
4.0 up: B   2.2 up: D+
3.5 up: B-   1.8 up: D
                1.5 up: D-

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND THINGS TO NOTE

- **Homeworks**
  Homework assignments are due at the start of class the day they are due. No late work is accepted, since we will generally discuss the content of the assignment in class on the day it is due. You must contact me **<u>before</u>** an assignment is due if illness or other extraordinary circumstances prevent you from having your assignment handed in on time.

- **The Importance of Lectures**
  There is no textbook for this course. Lectures, and not readings, present all of the course content. You are responsible for the content of the entire lecture, at every class meeting—whether or not you are class when it occurs. It is therefore **<u>crucial</u>** that you arrange to copy another student's notes anytime you come to class late, leave early, or miss a class.

  This also means that it will not be possible to pass the course without attending and absorbing the material from class meetings. This course involves learning about natural language syntax—and about how to make generalizations and form theories about natural language syntax—not from me telling you about it, but instead by teaching you how to do this yourself. Thus, it is not possible to recover class material from outside reading. Your final grade may be lowered by 5-10% for failure to attend and/or participate regularly (and note that any credit/no credit assignments I may give are considered part of this assessment of your attendance and participation).

- **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.

- **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 as section 4 of the *Rights and Responsibilities* handbook. 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 other linguistics courses, you are allowed (and encouraged) to work on homework assignments with other students in our class, listing their name(s) at the top of your assignment. But you must then *leave the group*, and plan out and write up your answer entirely on your own, all in your own words, in full adherence to the Brandeis policies on academic integrity.

  This means that it is **<u>not</u>** permitted to share (whether by hard copy or electronically, e.g. via email or Facebook) some or all of your written-up assignment or assignment draft with any other student(s). Handing in work as your own that has been reworded from the work of another student is a violation of academic honesty, and is not permitted.

  It is also not permitted to consult outside books, readings, websites, or students outside our class for assigned work in this course, unless explicitly permitted. For each homework assignment, I am interested in *your* solution—and the thought process that went in to it.
  If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask!

· **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.

SYLLABUS

Dates for Week	Topics Covered, with Exact Dates Subject to Change
1: WTh – Aug 29,30	Grammaticality and ungrammaticality; non-standard, informal, ambiguous, and semantically bizarre sentences; the concept of a formal grammar – what it does (and doesn't) aim to capture, and its basic workings; trees
2: WTh – Sept 5,6 *[M 9-4=Labor Day]*	
3: WTh – Sept 12,13 *[M 9-10=Rosh Hashanah]*	Constituency and tests for it; establishing a basic system of phrase structure; the lexicon and subcategorization
4: MTh – Sept 17,20 *[W 9-19=Yom Kippur]*	
5: TuWTh – Sept 25,26,27 *[M 9-24=Sukkot, Tu 9-25=Brandeis Mon]*	The auxiliary system; VP Ellipsis; more on the architecture of the clause
6: WTh – Oct 3,4 *[M 10-1=Shmini Atzeret]*	
7: MWTh – Oct 8,10,11	Yes-No Questions; *Wh*-Questions; (more on) subcategorization
8: MWTh – Oct 15,17,18	
9: MWTh – Oct 22,24,25	Passive; Semantic (θ-) Roles; expletive *it* subjects
10: MWTh – Oct 29,31; Nov 1	
11: MWTh – Nov 5,7,8	Reflexive and other pronouns; infinitival structures and other clause types (plus even more on θ-Roles and the lexicon)
12: MWTh – Nov 12,14,15	
13: M – Nov 19 *[WTh 11-21,22=Thanksgiving]*	
14: MWTh – Nov 26,28,29	
15: MWTh – Dec 3,5,6	Wrap-up of infinitival structures and of the course
15: M – Dec 10	