Introduction to General Linguistics  
Elizabeth Bogal-Allbritten

1. General course description

This course has four primary goals:

(i) To explore the question of what it means to ‘know’ a language.

(ii) To explore characteristics held in common across human languages, and points of cross-linguistic variation.

(iii) To introduce you to the methodologies, discoveries, and broader contexts of linguistic research.

(iv) To develop your skills of critical and abstract thinking, scientific writing, and analytic reasoning.

The broad outline of the course is as follows:

- Overview of linguistics as a science  
  Week 1 – 2
- Phonetics and phonology (sound structure)  
  Weeks 2 – 5
- Morphology (word structure)  
  Weeks 5 – 7
- Syntax (sentence structure)  
  Weeks 8 – 11
- Semantics (word and sentence meaning)  
  Week 12
- Language Contact (code-switching, borrowing, outcomes)  
  Week 13-14
- Language Acquisition (child and adult language learning)  
  Week 15-16

Throughout the course, we will investigate these topics using primary linguistic data – where possible, from understudied languages – and consider points of crosslinguistic universality and variation. We will also incorporate discussion of recent work in experimental linguistics.

2. Course requirements

There are four main course requirements, three of which will directly determine your grade.

- Class attendance and participation

- Homeworks (40% of final grade)
  - You are highly encouraged to collaborate on assignments! However, all students must write up homeworks individually. If you collaborate, please write all names of your group members at the top of your assignment.
  - Occasional ‘challenge’ homeworks will be given out and can replace one regular homework assignment. These assignments will be more open-ended and are designed to introduce you to active puzzles in linguistics.
• **Quizzes (20% of final grade)**
  o There will be 10 short quizzes scheduled to take place at the beginning of class.
  o You must take seven quizzes. Your lowest three quiz grades will be dropped.
  o Quizzes will be short and will test material covered in the most recent classes.

• **Tests (40% of final grade)**
  o You will have two **cumulative** tests: one midterm and one final. The midterm is worth 15% of your final grade. The final is worth 25% of your final grade.

3. **Course materials**

• There is no required textbook for the course. However, I will occasionally assign readings from the following resources:
  
  

• Additionally, optional reading from primary sources will occasionally be suggested.

4. **Schedule of topics**

**Weeks 1 – 2: Overview of linguistics as a science**

  o What is linguistics?
  
o What do you know when you know a language?
    ▪ Grammar (rules), lexicon (expressions)
  
o Language as an instinct: poverty of the stimulus
  
o Prescriptivism vs. descriptivism
  
o Language puzzles (practicing making generalizations, hypotheses):
    ▪ Chuvash affixes
    ▪ Chickasaw sentences

**Weeks 2 – 5: Phonetics and phonology (sound structure)**

  o Articulatory phonetics:
    ▪ Physiology of sound producing system
    ▪ The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)
    ▪ Consonant and vowel features
Phonotactics:
- Syllable structure
- Syllabification algorithm
- “Exceptions” and puzzles for the algorithm
- Crosslinguistic variation in syllabification

Phonology:
- Phonemes and allophones
- Writing a phonological rule
- Crosslinguistically frequent phonological processes
- Practice with data sets:
  - Swampy Cree
  - Kikongo
  - Zoque
  - Russian

Extra: Sign Language Phonology

**Weeks 5 – 7: Morphology (word structure)**

- Structure of the mental lexicon
- Free morphemes vs. bound morphemes
- Suffixes, prefixes, infixes, circumfix

- Writing morphological rules
  - First examples from English: -er, -ness, -able, un-, re-
  - Crosslinguistic examples
    - Navajo nominalization, Navajo reversative prefix
    - Infexion in Tagalog
    - Reduplication in Indonesian

- Drawing morphological trees
  - Right Hand Head Rule and crosslinguistic variation

- Derivational vs. inflectional morphology

- Morphology and its interfaces with phonology and phonotactics
  - English plural morphophonology
  - English infixation: *freakin’*-infixation, *diddly*-infixation
    - Discussion of experimental evidence for linguistic intuitions.
Morphological compounds
- Adjective-Noun, Noun-Noun, etc.
- Stress as diagnostic for compound structure vs. phrase structure

Challenge problems: meaning carried by affixes in other languages?
- Plains Cree, return to Chuvash affix problem from first section of class

Midterm Exam

Weeks 8 – 11: Syntax (sentence structure) (mid-semester break intervenes)

- Syntactic categories: nouns, verbs, adjectives, determiners, prepositions
  - Determining categories via distribution

- Phrase Structure Rules: Sentence rule, Noun Phrase rule, Verb Phrase rule, Prepositional Phrase rule
  - Rule notation and tree notation
  - Parentheses (optionality) notation
  - Conjunction Rules: writing ‘meta rules’

- Recursion: why is it important? How do our rules exhibit recursion?

- Structural ambiguity (prepositional phrase attachment)
  - Discussion on language processing: processing attachment ambiguities, the role of context, and garden path sentences

- Tests for constituency: Proform substitution, quizzical intonation, conjunction

- Figuring out syntactic rules given crosslinguistic data
  - Relating morphological (headedness) rules to syntactic (headedness) rules

- Introduction to syntactic movement and crosslinguistic variation
  - *Wh*-words in English vs. Mandarin

Week 12: Semantics (word and sentence meaning)

- Sentential meaning vs. speaking meaning
  - Implicature, presupposition, truth conditions

- Nouns, verbs, and adjectives as sets
  - Set intersection and set union

- Challenge problem: conventional implicatures (*or*, numerals)
Week 13-14: Language Contact  

(Thanksgiving recess at this time)

- Mechanisms to be discussed:  
  - Borrowing  
  - Code-switching  
  - Interference (‘brain internal’ language contact)

- Issues to be discussed for each mechanism:  
  - Social and cultural contexts  
  - Linguistic influence on mechanism, e.g.:  
    - Which classes of words are most frequently borrowed?  
    - How do borrowed words change semantically, morphologically, and phonologically?  
    - Frame vs. embedded language distinction in code-switching

- Class discussion of attitudes towards language contact and language change  
  - Class viewing of selected YouTube videos which illustrate contact languages in action and which present the views and stories of speakers.

- Some outcomes of language contact: linguistic characteristics and social and historical contexts for their formation  
  - Mixed Languages: Bilingual mixed Navajo, Urban African Vernaculars (Sheng, Iscamtho, Tsotsitaal), Michif, Media Lengua  
  - Creoles and pidgins

Week 15-16: Language Acquisition, Universal Grammar, and wrap-up

- Acquisition as the creation of rules  
  - Review of phonological, morphological, and syntactic rules discussed throughout course  
  - Process of acquisition: when does it begin? What happens at each stage?  
    - How children learn phonemes  
    - How children learn morphemes  
    - How children learn syntax  
  - Experimental evidence for language acquisition  
  - Overgeneralization in language acquisition

- Evidence from acquisition for ‘language instinct’?

- Universal Grammar  
  - Review crosslinguistic typological generalizations  
  - Parameters: constrain linguistic variation and space of language learning

Final Exam