

## SYLLABUS

**LIN 401: Introduction to Linguistics****1 The course in a nutshell**

This course is an introduction to the basic methodology and results of contemporary linguistics. Above all, the goal is to get a sense of how to develop, evaluate, and improve hypotheses about language in a precise and rigorous way.

In order to do this, a significant proportion of the course will be devoted to developing an explicit theory of syntax (sentence structure) collectively, building step-by-step from the ground up. We will then consider other components of natural language at a brisker pace, including phonetics (how sounds are made and perceived), phonology (how sounds pattern together), and semantics (the structure of meaning). Along the way, we will encounter questions that cut across all of these domains, such as how people learn language (language acquisition), how the mind processes it (psycholinguistics), and how it fits into and reflects society (sociolinguistics).

**2 Contact information**

	<b>Marcin Morzycki</b> <sup>1</sup> (professor)	<b>Xiayimaierdan Abudushalamu</b> <sup>2</sup> (TA)
<i>email:</i>	morzycki@msu.edu	abudusha@msu.edu
<i>office hours:</i>	Thursdays 2:00–3:00 Fridays 12:00–1:00	Thursdays 3:00–4:00
<i>office:</i>	B-404 Wells Hall	B-320 Wells Hall

<sup>1</sup>Phonetic transcription: [ˈmɑːsɪnmɔːrˈzɪki]. This splotch of typographical weirdness will be interpretable to you by the end of the course.

<sup>2</sup>Phonetic transcription: [çaimɛrdanabdusalam].

**3 Requirements**

The principal requirements for the course are:

- Take-home assignments. These will be done in groups of three people. They will ask you to devise solutions to linguistic problems and present them in the form of a brief well-reasoned argument.
- Two take-home exams (a midterm and a final). They will essentially be long assignments.
- An in-class phonetics test.
- Contributing frequently and thoughtfully to class discussions. *This is not optional.*

**Outside of class** You will collaborate on your take-home work with two other people and turn in a joint write-up, but each collaborator must be able to defend the proposed solution. The group you work with will change occasionally (probably twice) over the course of the semester. You may discuss your work with other students not in your group, but other people's ideas must be properly cited. If you find any of this confusing, ask.

**In class** The course will revolve primarily around in-class discussion, and most of the progress we make will be made that way, so *coming to class is genuinely crucial*. If you miss classes, you are likely to miss information that will be necessary to understand the assignments and subsequent discussion. If you anticipate having to miss class frequently, do not take this course.

**4 Grading**

Each assignment and each exam will receive a grade. Your final grade will be the average (mean) of the following:

- your grades on the assignments
- your grades on the exams, weighted double (that is, each exam will count as two assignments)
- your grade on the in-class phonetics test (counts as much as an assignment)
- a grade for what you contributed to class discussions (counts as much as an assignment)

## 5 Reading

There will be no textbook for the course. You will get occasional review handouts that go over some of what happened in class, and in a few cases may go a bit deeper. You should of course take notes, but please don't attempt to write down absolutely everything that appears on the board.

You may also want to read this:

Pinker, Stephen. 1994. *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*. William Morrow & Company, New York.

This is an informal and often entertaining popular-science discussion of some of the big issues surrounding language and linguistics, written by a psychologist. It leaves out a great deal, of course, but it's helpful in situating theoretical linguistics in the context of cognitive science more broadly.

You may be alarmed by the absence of a proper textbook. Don't be. If you really cannot bear the thought of being without one, you could use either of the following as an intellectual security blanket:

Akmajian, Adrian, and Richard A. Demers, Ann K. Farmer, Robert M. Harnish. 2001. *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.

Reading this may actually make things harder (because of inconsistencies in terminology and the like), but it might be useful if you would like to know more about topics we won't be talking about in any depth, though. It will *not* be helpful as a substitute for missed classes. Some of what we talk about in class can't be found there, and what can is often approached in a different way.

## 6 Communication

You'll get handouts, assignments, and exams via D2L. You should turn them in that way too, in the form of a PDF file. Please don't submit Word (.doc) files. You'll get comments on your work in the form of annotations embedded in the PDF file.

## 7 Other notes and policies

**Honors option** If you'd like to do an honors option—or you're not in the Honors College, but would like to do the equivalent of one—talk

to me at some point during the first half of the semester. We can work out what exactly you would do, but at least part of it would be a short in-class presentation of your work at the end of the semester.

**Disability?** Please notify me during the first two weeks of the course to make special arrangements to accommodate a disability. If you haven't already done so, you should contact MSU's Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities.

**Academic integrity** Don't plagiarize. The structure of the course may make this a little trickier than it might seem. If someone that isn't actually a coauthor of your write-up gives you an idea that you use or build on, say in the write-up who it was. *Don't look for solutions to the problems on your assignments online*. In most cases, this isn't possible, but in all cases, it's a form of cheating. For more on the university's academic integrity policies, consult the website of the MSU Ombudsperson's Office.

**Social media and copyright issues** Don't share course materials (handouts, assignments, etc.) with anyone outside of class. Don't record anything that happens in class without my prior approval.

## 8 Agenda

The exact rate at which we proceed, and to a smaller extent the path we take, will depend on the solutions you—the students—say in class, especially what propose to the problems we'll encounter and what further questions that leads us to. For this reason, this is a rough overall agenda, not a fixed schedule.

- linguistics, linguistic knowledge, and linguistic intuitions (today)
- **syntax**: how words fit together (about six weeks)
  - prescriptive rules and why they aren't interesting
  - grammar as a mental machine
  - phrase structure
  - recursion
  - morphosyntax
  - complementation and subcategorization
  - transformations
  - syntactic variation
- *midterm exam*
- **phonetics**: how meat makes sound (about two weeks)
  - mildly embarrassing public exploration of your own vocal tract

- English speech sounds
- transcription
- phonetic variation across dialects and sociolinguistics
- phonetic variation across languages
- *phonetics test* (in class, not take-home)
- **phonology**: how sounds interact (about four weeks)
  - phonemes
  - assimilation
  - morphophonology
  - phonological rules and underlying representations
  - child phonology (phonological acquisition)
  - historical linguistics and reconstructing languages
  - syllable structure
  - borrowing
- **semantics and pragmatics**: how does language convey and encode ideas? (about two weeks)
  - what kind of meanings are there?
  - compositionality: how meanings are assembled
  - implicatures: conveying without saying
- language and the mind and a taste of psycholinguistics
- *final exam*