

Topics in Linguistics: Language and Mind

Linguistics 4389

General Information

Instructor: Joey Sabbagh
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Class Time & Location: 11:00PM-12:20PM,
TH 119
Office Hours: Monday 11:00-12:00PM or by
appointment, Hammond Hall 126

Course Overview

The publication of Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* in 1957 provoked a dramatic change in the discipline of linguistics. More importantly, the effects of this intellectual change had an significant impact still felt to this day far beyond linguistics. In particular, Chomsky's proposals have had effects on all disciplines which try to understand the 'mental life' of human beings.

This course will try to chart some of the central lines of Chomsky's research program and map the ways it has influenced other areas of thoughts. It will try to clarify what the main problems Chomsky's research program was originally proposed to address, and to investigate what new puzzles and mysteries arise when those views are taken seriously.

By the end of this course, you will have a critical understanding of a particular set of answers to the following questions:

- A. **The Chomskyan Program for the Study of Language.** What is a language?
- B. **The Intellectual Context.** What made Chomsky's program a "revolution" in Linguistics?
- C. **Language and Thought.** What relationship, if any, exists between language and thought?
- D. **Language Acquisition.** What is involved in acquiring language, and how is it done?
- E. **Language and the Brain.** How are linguistic abilities physically realized in the brain?

- G. **Language Evolution.** Is the Chomskyan view of language compatible with what is otherwise known about evolution and natural selection?
- F. **Language and Communication.** What is the relationship, if any, between language and communication?

Course requirements

1. **Leading discussion of course readings.** The course will proceed primarily by way of classroom interaction and discussion centered around the list of readings supplied on this syllabus. Roughly each week will be devoted to one of these papers, and you will be responsible for leading the class discussion of the reading for that week (graduate students will present on their own once over the course of the semester, and undergraduate students will present in groups of two twice throughout the semester). Leading the discussion will involve addressing a set of general and specific questions that I will prepare for you in advance, as well as the questions and observations that you come up with on your own. In order to facilitate the discussion, you will also be asked to prepare a short handout summarizing the main points of the reading and enumerating your discussion questions.
2. **Written work.** There will be two, closed-book/note and non-cooperative, in-class midterm exams which will test your understanding of the readings and what has happened in class. There will also be two short papers to write (a range of topics will be provided to you in advance, from which you will be able to choose one that suits your tastes and interests). These papers should be no shorter than 4 pages and no longer than 8 pages. The written work will be evenly spaced out throughout the semester and each will count equally towards your final grade.

Grading

Each assignment will be worth 20% of your grade. In calculating your final grade, each letter grade you earn will be converted to a numerical value between 0 and 4 as follows: A = 4, A- = 3.5, B = 3, B- = 2.5, C = 2, C- = 1.5, D = 1, D- = 0.5 and F = 0. At the end of the semester, grades will be averaged and weighed based on the percentages stipulated below to determine your final grades. Final grades will be assigned as follows: 100-90% = A, 89-79% = B, 78-68% = C, 67-57% = D, 56-0% = F.

- Discussion leading = 15%
- Midterm exams = 40% (20% each)
- Short papers = 40% (20% each)
- Active engagement (participation) = 5%

Class Policies

Attendance: Attendance is required. If you miss more than 2 classes, your grade may be dropped an entire letter grade. Make up exams will not be permitted. Any absences should be discussed with me in advance of the absence.

Grade Issues: You should always feel free to discuss your grades and progress in this course with me. In fact, you should do so, early and often! If you receive a grade on an assignment that is less than you were expecting, you should also always feel free to discuss this issue with me. To do so, please schedule an appointment to visit me in person to review your assignment. Do not approach me with grade issues immediately after a class, and do not wait until the end of the semester to discuss an assignment from a much earlier point in the semester.

Electronic Devices: Electronic devices (laptops, cell-phones, etc.) are not to be used during class. If you think that you have a compelling reason why you must use an electronic device such as your laptop during class, then feel free to bring this reason to me. Otherwise no electronic devices are allowed. If you need to use your phone, etc. please leave the classroom to do so. Failure to comply with this class policy will negatively affect your participation grade, and will create an unpleasant distraction in the class.

Course readings

These are the core readings that we plan to cover in this course. Some additions or subtractions may be made as appropriate. All of the readings will be made available on Blackboard.

1. Chomsky, Noam (1986) *Knowledge of Language: Its nature, origin, and use*. Preface, Chapter One ("Knowledge of Language as a Focus of Inquiry") and Chapter 2 ("Concepts of Language"), pp. 1-50.
2. Newmeyer, Frederik (1986). *Linguistic Theory in America*, Second edition. Academic Press: Chapter 1 ("The State of American Linguistics in the mid 50's") and Chapter 2 ("The Chomskyan Revolution"), pp. 1-53.
3. Devlin, Keith (1997) "The Science of Language," and "Language in the Mind," Chapters 5 and 6 (pp 96-142) of *Goodbye, Descartes*, John Wiley & Sons.
4. Chomsky, Noam (1959) "Review of Verbal Behavior by B. F. Skinner," *Language* 35:26-58.
5. Skinner, B. F. (1977) "Why I am Not a Cognitive Psychologist," *Behaviorism* 5: 1-10, reprinted in *Skinner for the Classroom*, Selected Papers, edited by Robert Epstein, Research Press, Champaign, Illinois: 177-190.
6. Pinker, Steven (1994) *The Language Instinct*, Chapter Three ("Mentalese"), Harper Perennial Books, pp 55-82.

7. Pinker, Steven (1994) *The Language Instinct*, Chapter Nine (“Baby Born Talking| Describes Heaven”), Harper Perennial Books, pp 262-296.
8. Jackendoff, Ray (1994) *Patterns in the Mind—Language and Human Nature*, Chapter Eleven (“Language and the Brain”), Harper Basic Book, pp 141-155.
9. Jackendoff, Ray (1995) *Languages of the Mind—Essays on Mental Representation*, Chapter Eight (“The Problem of Reality”), Bradford Books, MIT Press, pp 157-176.
10. Searle, John (1984) *Minds, Brains and Science*, Harvard University Press: Chapter One (“The Mind-Body Problem”) and Chapter Two (“Can Computers Think?”), 13-41.
11. Hauser, Marc D. (2000) “Gossip on the Ark,” Chap. 8 (pp 175-209) of *Wild Minds, What Animals Really Think*, Henry Holt & Co.
12. Hauser, Marc, Noam Chomsky, and W. Tecumseh Fitch (2002) “The Faculty of Language: What is it, Who has it, and How Did it Evolve?” *Science*, Vol. 298, November 2002.

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Grade Grievances: Any appeal of a grade in this course must follow the procedures and deadlines for grade-related grievances as published in the current undergraduate catalog.

Drop Policy: Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/ses/fao>).

Americans with Disabilities Act: The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA). All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Academic Integrity: All students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.

I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.

Student Support Services: UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to resources@uta.edu, or view the information at www.uta.edu/resources.

Electronic Communication: UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to

communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation

Student Feedback Survey: At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as lecture, seminar, or laboratory shall be directed to complete a Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate.

Final Review Week: A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week unless specified in the class syllabus. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.