

# Formal Syntax

Linguistics 5330  
Fall 2017

## General Information

Instructor: Joey Sabbagh  
Email: sabbagh@uta.edu

Class Time & Location: T, Th, 2PM-3:20PM, UH 321  
Office Hours: Monday 11AM-12PM or by appointment, Hammond Hall 126

## Course Overview

This course is intended to be an introduction to Formal (theoretical) Syntax. Syntax, broadly, is the branch of linguistics that is concerned with the arrangement of words and phrases that form sentences in natural languages. Formal Syntax, in particular, is concerned with developing a precise, *prediction-making* model of the system of rules and principles that constitute a speaker's tacit *knowledge of language*, specifically relating to sentence structures. In this course, we ask and attempt to address questions such as:

- What are the “atoms” that make up sentences?
- What are the rules for combining these “atoms” to form grammatical sentences?
- Why are certain combinations of the “atoms” impossible in a given language?

These (as well as many other) questions will be addressed over the course of this semester by successively and concurrently observing facts and developing a precise prediction-making model that both describes but also aims to explain the observed facts. The model that we develop will draw from the formal tools employed by a popular generative syntactic theory commonly referred to as *Minimalism*.

*Minimalism* is the contemporary generative syntactic theory that has its roots in the work by Noam Chomsky<sup>1</sup>, who pioneered the generative approach to linguistics

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<sup>1</sup>See, in particular – Chomsky, Noam. 1995. *The Minimalist Program*.

(and syntax in particular) in his 1957 publication, *Syntactic Structures*. Since this work, his theories have gone through several critical changes and incarnations, with *Minimalism* being the most recent of these. While this course will not be able to provide a comprehensive survey of all of the theoretical concepts that are part of the current *Minimalism*, we will cover some of the core concepts that are part of the *lingua franca* of contemporary research.

## Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students will:

- Demonstrate ability to carry out syntactic analysis, both descriptively as well as analytically.
- Demonstrate ability to make and test predication based on their formal analyses of syntactic phenomenon, and therefore – more generally:
- Demonstrate ability to argue for a specific analysis of syntactic phenomenon, and against other (logically possible) analyses of the same phenomenon.
- Demonstrate ability to use the basic formal tools that form the basic foundation of the *Minimalist* approach to syntactic theorizing.

## Textbook

The required textbook for this course is:

- *Core Syntax: A Minimalist Approach*, by David Adger (2003, published by Oxford University Press).

Although this is a required textbook, it is important to note that this text is primarily intended as a reference, not as authority or substitute for the class. In fact, the further into the semester we get, the more we our in class discussion will depart (and occasionally disagree or contradict) specific details and analyses presented in this text. Still, it is expected that you will take the reading assignments seriously, and incorporate them in our in-class discussions appropriately.

## Course Requirements

The primary work for this course will consist of roughly 9 problem sets. Problems sets will generally be handout out on a Thursday and due the following Thursday **in class** (you will always be given at least one week to work on these problem sets). The sequencing of assignments and due dates are listed on the schedule below. Solutions to these problem sets must be typed and should have a meaningful, essay style structure

(specific guidelines will be handed out with the first assignment). All problem sets will be weighted equally (10%) in terms of how they will contribute to your final grade.

In addition to problem sets, participation in this class is required. Participation includes, but is not limited to: Attendance at each class meeting; working in a group on homework assignments.

## Grading

Problem sets, the midterm and the final will receive narrative feedback and a letter grade. In calculating your final grade for the course, 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. A grading rubric will be handed out with the first assignment, which will define the basis upon which grades are assigned. 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.

- Problem sets, midterm, and final exam = 90% (10% each).
- Participation = 10%

## Course Schedule: Topics

The following is a sequential list of topics to be covered. NOTE: Though we will try to keep to the following schedule, expect some flexibility. Reading assignments are expected to be completed by the following week (for example, *Adger Ch. 1 and 2* should be completed by Week 2, *Adger Chapter 3* should be completed by Week 3, etc.). NOTE ALSO,

**Week 1. Aug. 24:** Syntax – Questions and Puzzles. (Reading: Adger, Chapter 1 and 2)

**Week 2, Aug. 29, 31:** Constituent structure & Phrase Structure. (Reading: Adger, Chapter 3)

—*Assignment 1 handed out Aug. 31, Due Sept. 7*

**Week 3, Sept. 5, 7:** Phrase Structure (cont.); Semantic roles, C-command, Discuss Assignment 1 (Reading: Adger, Chapter 4)

—*Assignment 2 handed out Sept. 7, Due Sept. 14*

**Week 4, Sept. 12, 14:** Week 3 topics continued (review), Exercises, Discuss Assignment 2. (Reading: Continue/review: Adger, Chapter 4, begin Adger, Chapter 5)

**Week 5, Sept. 19, 21:** Functional Categories – TP & Auxiliaries & Negation. (Reading: Adger, Chapter 5)

—*Assignment 3 handed out Sept. 21, Due Sept. 28*

**Week 6, Oct. 3, 5:** Week 4 topics (continued), Discuss Assignment 3, Special Topic: VP Ellipsis. (Reading, begin Adger Chapter 6)

—*Assignment 4 handed out Oct. 5, Due Oct. 12*

**Week 7, Oct. 10, 12:** Subjects and Objects — Intransitive Sentences & Passive Sentences, Discussion of Assignment 4. (Reading: Adger, Chapter 6; begin Adger Chapter 8 – Sections 8.1.1; 8.2 (through 8.2.7))

**Week 8, Oct. 17, 19:** Week 6 topics continued, Exercises.

—*Assignment 5 handed out Oct. 19, Due Oct. 26*

**Week 9, Oct. 24, 26:** Discuss Assignment 5; Functional Categories – CP & Embedded Clauses.

—*Assignment 6 handed out Oct. 26, Due Nov. 2*

**Week 10, Oct. 31\*, Nov. 2:** Week 8 topics continued (review), Discussion of Assignment 6, Finite & Non-Finite Clauses.

— No Class on October 31.

**Week 11, Nov. 7, Nov. 9:** Subject Raising & Subject Control.

—*Assignment 7 handed out Nov. 9, Due Nov. 16*

**Week 12, Nov. 14, Nov. 16:** Discussion of Assignment 7.

**Week 13, (Nov. 21, Nov. 23\*):** Review – No class on Nov. 23, optional review class on Nov. 21 (pending a majority of student interest)

—*Assignment 8 handed out Nov. 21, Due Nov. 30*

—No class of November 23.

**Week 14, (Nov. 28, Nov. 30):** Discussion of Assignment 8, Existential sentences.

—*Assignment 9 handed out Nov. 30, Due Dec. 7*

**Week 15, (Dec. 5, Dec. 7):** Questions & Wrap-Up, Outstanding Topics

## Class Policies

The following “class policies” are intended to help foster a friendly and collegial environment in the classroom so that we can focus on learning. Please respect these policies throughout the semester.

**Working together:** You are encouraged and *expected* to work together on all assignments for this course, including the midterm and final exam. However, unless otherwise specified, what you turn in must be your own work. If you do work with others on assignments, always identify your collaborators on your write-up. Working collaboratively on assignments is practically a guarantee of greater success in this course (i.e. a better grade), and will also help establish a fun and collegial environment in the classroom.

**Attendance & Late Assignments:** Attendance is required. Since this is a small class, your absence will be noticed (and noted) even if attendance is not formally taken. If you miss more than 3 classes, you will likely not receive credit for participation. More importantly, since each class period will typically build on the previous one, *missing even one class can put you seriously behind*. If you absolutely must miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed (what was discussed in class, if there was a hand out or assignment that was passed out, etc.). Because assignments will be discussed in class, typically on the day they are due, late assignments will generally not be accepted for credit after the due date. You may still turn in an assignment even if it is late if you desire feedback on your work.

**Grade Related Matters:** 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 earn 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, just schedule an appointment to visit me in person to review your assignment. Please do not wait until the end of the semester to discuss an assignment from a much earlier point in the semester.

**Electronic Devices:** To ensure the best possible classroom environment, cell-phones should be turned off and completely out of site. If you appear to be texting, you will be called on.

## University Policies

**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://wwwb.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

**Disability Accommodations:** UT 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), The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. 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 disability. Students are responsible for providing the instructor with official notification in the form of a letter certified by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD). Students experiencing a range of conditions (Physical, Learning, Chronic Health, Mental Health, and Sensory) that may cause diminished academic performance or other barriers to learning may seek services and/or accommodations by contacting: The Office for Students with Disabilities, (OSD) [wwwb.uta.edu/disability](http://wwwb.uta.edu/disability) or calling 817-272-3364. Counseling and Psychological Services, (CAPS) [wwwb.uta.edu/caps/](http://wwwb.uta.edu/caps/) or calling 817-272-3671.

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 [wwwb.uta.edu/disability](http://wwwb.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

**Title IX:** The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, **sexual orientation**, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit [uta.edu/eos](http://uta.edu/eos). For information regarding Title IX, visit [wwwb.uta.edu/titleIX](http://wwwb.uta.edu/titleIX).

**Academic Integrity:** Students enrolled all UT Arlington courses 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.*

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System Regents' Rule 50101, Section 2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in

accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

**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. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

**Student Feedback Survey:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as "lecture," "seminar," or "laboratory" shall be directed to complete an online 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. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

**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.

**Emergency Exit Procedures:** Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.