

The Syntax of English

Linguist 121A

Spring 2023

Course Information

Class MWF 10:30am - 11:20am
 540-108

Section Th 1:30pm - 2:30pm
 Lathrop 190

Contact Information

Instructor Bonnie Krejci
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Website <https://canvas.stanford.edu/courses/171151>

Course Description

Syntax is the study of sentence structure and word order in human languages. This course introduces the generative approach to syntax; in order to explain the human capacity to acquire and use language, we will develop a formal model of grammar that describes and explains linguistic structures. We will examine a range of syntactic structures in English, and, over the course of the quarter, gradually construct a partial formal theory to model those structures. In this course, we will explore central aspects of the sentence structure of English, but the principles of theory and analysis extend to the study of the syntax of other languages.

You will learn how to work with natural language data, how to empirically test hypotheses about language, and how to use some of the primary tools of syntactic analysis. This course is writing intensive, and proceeds via daily-to-weekly homework assignments in the form of full prose essays. This course will help you develop strong writing and argumentation skills.

This course satisfies (i) the Formal Reasoning WAYS requirement and (ii) the WIM requirement

for Linguistics majors.

Course Goals

In this course, you will:

- Develop a formal theory to model syntactic structures in natural languages
- Gain experience working with natural language data
- Be able to generate, compare, and test hypotheses concerning linguistic structure
- Develop your analytical writing skills and practice linguistic argumentation

Textbook & Supplies

There is no textbook for this course and only one assigned reading. Handouts and assignments will be made available through Canvas.

You will want some way to draw phrase structure trees in this class. I recommend taking notes with a pen and paper or a tablet that you can draw on.

Assessment

• **Participation** (10%)

Active in-class participation is an essential component of this course. You are asked to attend every class session, on time, with your homework completed. Active participation consists of contributing to discussion in class by asking questions and/or preparing points for discussion ahead of time. Working with others on your homework assignments is encouraged; it demonstrates engagement with the course material.

• **Problem sets** (90% total)

This course proceeds via in-class discussion of assigned problem sets, which should be submitted via Canvas by the beginning of the class on which they are due. Problem sets consist of argumentation problems, which are written as full prose essays – see the handout called Guidelines for Written Work. In these essays you are asked to write a clear, concise description of the linguistic data, propose a hypothesis concerning the data, and argue that your proposal successfully accounts for the data. The problems are open-ended: there will not always be one correct answer. Instead, your work is evaluated based on how you present and support your proposal.

Since the course proceeds in large part through discussion of the homework assignments, turning in assignments after the due date dramatically reduces their utility. Late homework will receive a one letter grade deduction per day (that is, per 24 hours).

Your TWO lowest assignment grades will be dropped in the final calculation of your grade. Otherwise, all problem sets are weighted equally.

Only for Linguistics majors taking this course to satisfy the WIM requirement: Submit a revision of one graded assignment—please, consult with me about the choice of assignment to be revised. The revision must be submitted no later than 5:00pm on the last day of class, June

7th, on Canvas. The revision should focus on responding to the initial feedback you received on the assignment, and on improving the quality of argumentation and writing—we are happy to discuss all of this with you in person. The grade of the revision is independent of the grade of the original (and does not replace it) and it¹ cannot be dropped.

Class policies

- **Attendance**

Attendance at class meetings and active participation are critical components of this class and are evaluated as a part of your participation grade; for this reason, attendance is taken at each class session. If you have a scheduled, unavoidable conflict, email me as soon as you can. Missing class due to illness or medical emergencies will not be counted against your grade, but please email me as soon as you can.

- **Late work**

Late assignments are accepted, but they are subject to a penalty of one full letter grade per day.

- **Communication**

- **Canvas** will have announcements, assignments, and handouts.
- **EdDiscussion** is linked via Canvas. Please post all content-related questions here (rather than email). Questions about working together, course policies, advising-type questions, etc. are also all welcome on EdDiscussion. There is an option to ask your questions to us privately and another to post your question to everyone anonymously.
- **Office hours** are good for content-related questions or questions that concern you personally (e.g., absences, grades, specific requests).
- **Email** is also a good way to communicate with us about any matters that concern you personally.

- **Academic honesty and collaboration**

I will hold you to high standards of academic honesty, in accordance with the Honor Code (<https://communitystandards.stanford.edu/policies-guidance/honor-code>).

You are encouraged to work together on problem sets, and you may work out the technical details together—judgments, phrase structure rules, and phrase structure trees can be shared. However, the prose writing of your assignment must be completely your own.

Please include the names of your collaborators in any written work you submit and, if you make use of someone else's idea, give them explicit credit for it.

- **Accessible education**

If you need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. You should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coor-

¹The *revision* cannot be dropped. The original grade is dropped if it is one of your two lowest scores.

dinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 650-723-1066, URL: <https://oae.stanford.edu/>). If you have accommodations from the OAE, you are responsible for furnishing me with the OAE letter as early as possible.

- **Land acknowledgment** Stanford sits on the ancestral land of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe. This land was and continues to be of great importance to the Ohlone people. Consistent with our values of community and inclusion, we have a responsibility to acknowledge, honor, and make visible the University's relationship to Native peoples. (<https://www.stanford.edu/native-peoples-relationship/>)