

Syllabus - LING S110E - Introduction to Linguistics

Course Information

Term	Summer 2025, Session A (June 30-August 1)
Class times	Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 9:00-11:15am
Location	TBD
Office hours	TBD
Instructor	Squid Tamar-Mattis (he/him)
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Course Description

This is a course about language as a window into the human mind and language as glue in human society. Nature, nurture, or both? Linguistics is a science that addresses this puzzle for human language. Language is one of the most complex of human behaviors, but it comes to us without effort. Language is common to all societies and is typically acquired without explicit instruction. Human languages vary within highly specific parameters. The conventions of speech communities exhibit variation and change over time within the confines of universal grammar, part of our biological endowment. The properties of universal grammar are discovered through the careful study of the structures of individual languages and comparison across languages. This course introduces analytical methods that are used to understand this fundamental aspect of human knowledge. In this introductory course students learn about the principles that underlay all human languages, and what makes language special. We study language sounds, how words are formed, how humans compute meaning, as well as language in society, language change, and linguistic diversity.

Upon successful completion of this class, students will

- Be able to think analytically about language structure
- Know more about the world's linguistic diversity
- Understand how to use multiple methods to collect linguistic data
- Have a firm foundation for further study in linguistics
- Have developed problem solving skills around language

Expectations

Prerequisites: This is an introductory course with no prerequisites. You do not need to have proficiency in any language other than English to be able to take the class.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. Class meets every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, including on the Fourth of July. Because this class only meets fifteen times, skipping even a single lecture means you're missing almost 7% of the class. We will frequently discuss material in class that is not covered in the readings. Additionally, we will have quizzes at the beginning of some class periods.

Readings: The readings are chosen to help you improve your understanding of linguistic concepts, which is (hopefully) the reason you're in this class. Please do each one before the date it is listed for on the syllabus, so that you are ready to discuss it in class.

Problem sets: There will be five problem sets. The first four will be due on the Sunday following each of the first four weeks, and the final one (which will be shorter) will be due on the Wednesday of the final week. Problem sets will primarily focus on material from the same week, but may incidentally involve material from previous weeks. These should be submitted on Canvas as PDFs. I strongly recommend typing these, but if you choose to write by hand, make sure that your handwriting is legible and the pages are scanned well. I can't give you credit for an answer that I can't read.

Quizzes: There will be two in-class quizzes, which will take forty minutes each. The first quiz will cover material from all previous classes. The second quiz will focus on material covered after the first quiz, but may incidentally involve earlier material.

Final exam: The final will be given on the last day of class, and will cover material from all five weeks. You may refer to your handwritten notes, but not any other materials.

Grading Breakdown

Problem sets: 50%

Quizzes: 20%

Final exam: 20%

Participation: 10%

Academic Integrity

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. You must cite all sources consulted in any way, whether quoted directly or not. The following is a non-exhaustive list of examples of what counts as cheating/plagiarism:

- Copying work from another student, with or without that student's knowledge, or collaborating on work with another student without acknowledging this
- Allowing another student to copy from your work
- Using other people's words, ideas, or arguments without citation
- Using an AI to answer homework problems

Violations of the academic integrity policy will result in a failing grade on the relevant quiz or assignment, and violations will be reported to the University. If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, or what the consequences are, go to:

catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/regulations/academic-dishonesty/

Course Policies

Late work: Late homework assignments will incur a penalty of 2 percentage points per hour late (or portion thereof). Extensions may be granted at my discretion, but you must ask for the extension before the assignment is due, except under exceptional circumstances.

Absences: Absences may be excused due to illness or other exceptional circumstances. Please notify me of the absence before the absence occurs if at all possible. Unexcused absences will affect your participation grade proportionately. If you have an unexcused absence on the day of a quiz, you will receive a zero on that quiz. If you have an excused absence on a quiz day, we will find a time for you to take the quiz outside of class. You are responsible for making up for missed lectures by reviewing the slides and/or discussing the material with your classmates.

Collaboration: You may discuss homework assignments with other students, but all work you turn in must be your own. If you collaborate on an assignment, you should note who your collaborators are on the assignment.

Commitment to Diversity

It is my intent that students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives be able to engage with this course, that students' learning needs are addressed both in the class and outside of it, and that the diversity that students bring to this class is viewed by everyone as a resource, strength, and benefit. My goal is to create an atmosphere of mutual respect among everyone. I intend to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know of ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.

Readings

There is no textbook required for this course. Readings will be posted to Canvas as PDFs.

Course Website

The course website can be found at canvas.yale.edu. Readings, slides from homework assignments, grades, and announcements will be posted there. You will also turn in assignments by uploading them to Canvas.

Schedule

The schedule is subject to change, but we will adhere to it as closely as possible. There will be readings for every class except the first class and days with a quiz or final exam. Readings should be completed before the day for which they are listed on the syllabus. Homework assignments are due at 11:59PM on the listed due date.

(Continued on next page)

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment
6/30	What is linguistics? Overview of the world's linguistic diversity		
7/2	Speech sounds	TBD	
7/4	Sound patterns	TBD	PS1 (due 7/6)
7/7	Word formation	TBD	
7/9	Sentence structure: the basics	TBD	
7/11	Sentence structure: movement	TBD	Quiz 1 PS2 (due 7/13)
7/14	Sentence structure: agreement and case	TBD	
7/16	Literal meaning	Coppock and Champollion (2022) (pages TBD)	
7/18	Social meaning	Grice (1975)	PS3 (due 7/20)
7/21	Writing systems	TBD	Quiz 2
7/23	Historical linguistics and language change	TBD	
7/25	Language variation and sociolinguistics	Yale Grammatical Diversity Project	PS4 (due 7/27)
7/28	Language and the Internet	McCulloch (2019) (pages TBD)	
7/30	Constructed languages	Adams (2011)	PS5 (due 7/30)
8/1	Final Exam		Final Exam