

LNGT0101: Introduction to Linguistics/Fall 2011

Course Goals

1. **Content-wise:** Introducing linguists' findings over the last 50 years or so regarding the study of human language in the areas of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, cross-linguistic variation, first language acquisition, sociolinguistics, language change, historical linguistics, pidgins and creoles, and language endangerment.
2. **Learning skills involved:**
 - Problem-solving skills: Find patterns in a set of data from familiar and unfamiliar languages; draw generalizations from a set of data; make a hypothesis to explain a linguistic pattern and revise it in light of further data;
 - Formalize linguistic facts into concise rules and diagrams.
 - Argue for or against a view using objective and empirical evidence;
 - Critically think and question popular beliefs about language and determine whether they have any scientific validity,
 - Lead discussions about some of these popular 'language myths,' and
 - Read and write about linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of an unfamiliar language.

Nature of human language

3. Design features of human language.
4. Evidence for language as a biological system.
5. Do we learn language by imitation? Analogy? Based on input only?

Phonetics and phonology

6. Spelling and speech.
7. The vocal tract.
8. Consonants vs. vowels/diphthongs.
9. Consonants: place of articulation, manner of articulation, and voicing.
10. Vowels: tongue height, tongue advancement, lip rounding, and tenseness/laxness of the vocal tract.
11. Narrow phonetic transcription: Marking aspiration, devoicing, nasalization, vowel lengthening, and syllabic consonants.
12. Suprasegmental features: Stress, tone, and intonation.
13. Syllable structure and phonotactics.
14. Articulatory processes (e.g., assimilation, epenthesis, metathesis, etc.).
15. Phonemes vs. allophones, and associated concepts such as minimal pairs, complementary distribution, and underlying forms.
16. Representing phonological operations in terms of formal phonological rules.

Morphology

17. Morphemes: free vs. bound; inflectional vs. derivational; affixes.
18. Morphological structure (the puzzle of the "undoable").
19. Morpheme vs. allomorph.
20. Processes of word formation.
21. Morphological typology: isolating vs. synthetic; agglutinative vs. fusional; head-marking vs. dependent-marking languages. Case and agreement systems.
22. Cross-linguistic variation in tense, aspect, mood, modality, and evidentiality.

Syntax

23. Constituency (including constituency tests).
24. Heads, complements, and specifiers.

25. Phrase structure rules.
26. Accounting for ambiguity (the puzzle of “*Anne hit the man with an umbrella.*”)
27. Transformational rules: mapping D-structures to S-structures.
28. ***Principles and parameters theory:***

Principles:

29. Structure-dependency (why structure-independent rules fail).
30. C-command (why hierarchy does matter).
31. Binding Conditions A, B, and C.
32. Island Constraints on wh-movement.
33. How principles can explain to us why certain meanings “vanish” sometimes.

Parameters:

34. The head directionality parameter (English vs. Japanese).
35. The verb movement parameter (English vs. Welsh/French).
36. The subject placement parameter (English/French vs. Welsh).
37. The V2 parameter (English vs. German/Dutch/Scandinavian).
38. The null subject parameter (English/French vs. Italian/Spanish/Arabic).
39. The wh-parameter (English wh-fronting vs. Chinese wh-in-situ).

First language acquisition

40. Stages of first language acquisition.
41. Children’s phonological, morphological, and syntactic development.
42. Theories of language acquisition.
43. Testing theories of language acquisition by running experiments, e.g., “wug tests”.

Sociolinguistic diversity

44. The language-dialect distinction.
45. Aspects of dialectal variation: lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic.
46. African American English.
47. Popular myths about language and linguistic variation.
48. Factors in sociolinguistic variation: region, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, gender, bi- or multi-lingualism: Labov’s and Nichols’ studies.
49. Situation-based sociolinguistic diversity: style, slang, jargon, euphemisms.
50. Language and culture/thought/worldview (this week’s readings).
51. Language endangerment (*The Linguists* movie and this week’s readings).

Language change

52. Lexical change: word loss and word gain (processes of word-formation).
53. Semantic change: Broadening, narrowing, and shift (elevation and degradation).
54. Morphological change and its processes (e.g., grammaticalization).
55. Syntactic change (in word order, negation, question formation, etc).
56. Phonological change (assimilation, metathesis, phonological shifts, etc.).

Historical linguistics

57. Indo-European family. Grimm’s law (the first Germanic consonant shift). The second Germanic consonant shift.
58. Cognates; reconstruction and the comparative method.
59. Phonetic plausibility and the majority rules strategies.
60. Causes for language change.

Language contact: Pidgins and Creoles

61. Characteristics of pidgins and creoles.
62. Origin of pidgins and creoles.
63. The post-creolization continuum.