LING 371: Syntax 1

Winter 2024

Instructor: Prof. Martina Martinović
Call me: Martina, or Prof./Dr. Martinović
Contact: email via MyCourses
Lecture: M/W/F 11:35pm–12:25pm, MCMED 1027
Office hours: Wednesdays, 3-5 pm

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Office hours: TBD (No office hours in the week of March 11)

Course description: This is an introduction to syntax and syntactic theory, within the general framework of a transformational grammar. Most of the data we will discuss is from English, though we will occasionally look at other languages. **No textbook will be used.** This course employs the *Discovery Learning Method* – an active, hands-on style of learning. The goal of the class is not to memorize the concepts and rules of a particular theory of syntax, but to develop the ability to approach language data in a scientific manner, develop argumentation skills, understand how a theory is built and how its predictions are tested. This is, first and foremost, a **science class**.

For each new topic, a problem set will be posted on myCourses in advance. Your job is to prepare for every class by working through the problem set, using the tools and methods that we develop in class. We will then work together through the problem set in class, look at additional data, and adopt an analysis. Although a number of different analyses and approaches can account for a particular set of data, we will work within the general framework of *Principles and Parameters*. **Throughout the course we will often change our theory in order to account for new data. This is normal, and how science works in general.** There is therefore no final and fully worked out theory for you to learn. Though most of the major syntactic structures of English will be analyzed, the presentation of the course is designed to illustrate theoretical concepts, teach you how to work inside a theoretical framework, and to provide practice in syntactic analysis, rather than to present (and have you memorize) a complete analysis of English.

Active engagement and participation is crucial for your success in this class. If you are not used to science classes, this method of learning may be challenging at the beginning. Make sure to ask for help and clarification whenever you don't understand something, even if you are not certain exactly which part (e.g., finding and understanding generalizations from the data, or some details of the theory) you are struggling with. The class progresses quickly, and it will be difficult to catch up if you are not continuously working.

Conferences: Starting in Week 3 (on January 19), Friday sessions will be held as conferences run by the TA (except where noted otherwise). Conference attendance is **obligatory**. You are responsible for the material covered in conferences, just as you are responsible for the material covered in lectures. **You must sign up for a conference on Minerva.** Once you have signed up for one section, you cannot switch to another. Once a section has reached its cap, no more students will be accepted into that section. Conference times are:

Time	TA
F 10:35 pm - 11:25 pm	Katya Morgunova
F 11:35 pm - 12:25 pm	Katya Morgunova

Course materials All problem sets, handouts, assignments, quizzes, and exams will be posted on myCourses. **You are not allowed to consult textbooks or any outside sources for this class.** Problem sets (class prep) for each topic will be posted 48 hours before class. Assignments will be posted 5-7 days before their due date. Please refer to the schedule for the due dates and availability of assignments, quizzes, and exams.

Grading Grade inflation at the secondary school level can sometimes lead to unrealistic expectations of grades at the university level. Assessments in this course are graded using the full available scale, from A to F:

A	85-100	C+	60-64.9
A-	80-84.9	C	55-59.9
B+	75-79.9	D	50-54.9
B	70-74.9	F	49.9 or less
B-	65-69.9		

On any given assessment, a "good" answer (i.e., one that answers the question reasonably well) will receive a score ranging from B to A-. This leaves room at the top to reward especially thorough and nuanced work, which takes into account both the particular puzzle addressed in the assignment, how the proposed solution fits within the theory we are developing, and what kinds of predictions it makes. There are no pre-set limits on how many students can receive an A (on an assessment and/or overall), and in fact, the average final grade in this class is usually around B+/A-. But you should not expect A to be the default grade.

Your written work will be graded using the following metric. Please note that your final assigned grade is **not** an average of the columns below. Rather, the assigned grade is a subjective measure that takes all factors into account but may weigh them differently in different cases, based on my/the TAs judgment. Each criterion is explained below.

Criteria	**Exemplary**	**Accomplished**	**Adequate**	**Deficient**	**Unacceptable**
Presentation of the puzzle					
Accuracy of the analysis					
Structure of argumentation					
Clarity of form and presentation					

Presentation of the puzzle: The assignment will present you with data that will require you to understand how they either challenge or are not explained by the theory we have built up to that point. This criterion measures how clearly you articulate the puzzle in your write-up.

Accuracy of the analysis: This is not about writing, but about reasoning. Are your conclusions reasonable based on the facts and background you present? Are you (arguably) correct in what you conclude? Does your analysis contradict a part of the theory that we have already built, and if so, can it be modified to account for the old data, as well as the new?

Structure of argumentation: Beyond simply presenting evidence, academic writing must also use the evidence to show that the claims made are accurate, reasonable, and supported. Argu-

mentation is the process of logically reasoning from evidence to conclusions.

Clarity of form and presentation: This is a broad category that covers everything from formatting, spelling, vocabulary choice, formatting of examples, and structural aspects of the write-up not covered in the above categories. Language should be clear, and should avoid vagueness, unnecessary jargon, and undefined concepts.

NB! Every submitted assignment must be a stand-alone piece of writing. This means that all the data that need to be accounted for should be included in the assignment, and the assignment should clearly articulate the puzzle, even if this means repeating some of the language from the problem set itself. Anyone should be able to read and understand what your write-up is about, even if they have not seen the problem set.

Questions concerning grading: We make every effort to fairly and consistently evaluate student work. We are happy to correct any errors we made in grading but we will not alter our grading rubric. We are also happy to discuss feedback to provide more context.

Written assignments in this course will be graded by the TA. Grade appeals will only be entertained if there appears to have been a major issue with grading, and the procedure outlined below must be followed.

If you would like to discuss the comments and grades, you must:

1. Wait at least 24 hours after receiving your grade. Do not e-mail the TA or the instructor until after this waiting period has passed.
2. Carefully re-read your paper/assignment in light of feedback provided.
3. Within 7 days of receiving the grade, arrange to discuss the matter with a TA.

After having followed this procedure, you are welcome to schedule a meeting with your instructor to further discuss your grade, but keep in mind that your grade will not change unless there are major issues with how your assignment was graded.

Requirements and evaluations:

Pop-up quizzes	8%
4 scheduled Quizzes	10% (4 x 2.5%)
3 Problem sets	45% (3 x 15%)
Midterm exam	12%
Final exam	25%

Course rules and procedures

Class prep and pop-up quizzes: For each new topic, a problem set will be posted on myCourses. As preparation for class, you should work out the problem set. **You do not need to turn this in.** The goal is to come to class with the understanding of the data, some descriptive generalizations, and concrete (even if not fully worked out) proposals of how to account for the data. We will then discuss the data in class and together formulate an analysis. As the class progresses, this will allow us to build a theory of (a fragment of) English syntax.

In order to make sure that you are actually working through the problem sets, occasional in-class, unannounced pop-up quizzes will be given. **The number of quizzes and their individual**

weight are at the discretion of your instructor. The main purpose of the pop-up quizzes is to ensure that you are preparing for class, so you will not be graded on accuracy, but you are expected to show that you have mastered the material already covered.

Keep in mind that we are building a **theory**. This means that there is no one correct and true analysis, and there may be different ways to account for any given phenomenon. The crucial thing is to build a theory that has the best coverage, given the available data. We will almost certainly be wrong in the details of our theory; that's okay, that's how science works. Theories are continuously evolving and changing as new data become available. What's important is that we are correct in our general approach, and maximally explicit about the assumptions we make.

Quizzes There will be four quizzes (see schedule), available on myCourses. These quizzes will include short questions or exercises to help determine whether the basic material of the course is being understood. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Assignments There will be three problem sets, which will be submitted through myCourses. The problem sets will **not test you on the analysis of the data you have already seen**, rather, you will be asked to **apply** the skills and knowledge you acquired up to that point to a **new problem**. The assignments will be of the same format as the problem sets you will be given as class prep. It is therefore crucial that you work through class prep problem sets, as this will help you prepare for graded assignments. Late assignments will not be accepted, as answers to assignments will be discussed in class. If you have a legitimate excuse for having missed an assignment (e.g. illness, a doctor's note is required), contact us.

Problem sets must be typed and submitted as PDFs; no hand-written answers will be accepted. For syntactic trees, the use of a tree drawing program is required (e.g. `http://mshang.ca/syntree/`, or `https://yohasebe.com/rsyntaxtree/`).

If you think it would aid your learning, problem sets may be done in pairs (i.e., max. 2 students). Each pair should submit a single assignment. Both members will receive the same grade. Note that you are not required to work in pairs.

No email submission of problem sets will be accepted.

Problem sets for conferences For some conferences, a problem set or a practice problem will be posted on myCourses, to be completed before the conference. These problems are meant to focus the questions for the conference session and to provide practice for the quizzes, assignments and exams. You do not have to turn anything in, but if you do not come to conferences prepared, your TA will lose a lot of time explaining the material and will not be able to cover everything.

Exams The midterm exam will be take-home, open book exam, and available on myCourses starting on **Wednesday Feb 21 at 6PM until Friday Feb 23 at 6PM**. The final exam will be scheduled by the Exams Office during the semester and will be in-person. **The final exam is a closed book exam.**

Tutors: If you feel that you need more individual attention, we encourage you to contact either the Student Tutorial Service (398-6011) or SLUM (the undergraduate linguistics student association: slum.linguistics@mail.mcgill.ca). It is understood that tutors help with the content of the course but do not help directly with assignments. Make sure that your tutor knows what is being covered in the course this term since the content can change from term to term.

Email: The TA should always be your first point of contact for general questions about the course. If you need to contact the instructor, please do so through myCourses. In regular email, include "LING 371" in the subject line. However, please do not expect instant responses. We will try to respond **within two days, barring weekends**.

Copyright – Course materials: Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions) **are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium under any circumstances**. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

Academic integrity McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the code of student conduct and disciplinary procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

Right to submit in French In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Territory acknowledgement McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

Schedule (Tentative and subject to adjustment)

		Topics	Assignments
F	1/5	Introduction to course	
M	1/8	Parts of speech	
W	1/10	Constituency & tests	
F	1/12	Constituency & tests	
M	1/15	Structural relations	
W	1/17	Anaphors and c-command	**Quiz 1** (available 24h; 30 min limit)
F	1/19	*Conference 1*	
M	1/22	The structure of VPs	
W	1/24	The structure of VPs	*(PS1 available)*
F	1/26	*Conference 2*	
M	1/29	The structure of NPs	**PS1 due before class**
W	1/31	X-bar Theory	
F	2/2	X-bar Theory (**no conference!**)	
M	2/5	Auxiliaries	**Quiz 2** (available 24h)
W	2/7	Subcategorization	*(PS2 available)*
F	2/9	*Conference 3*	
M	2/12	Modals and the TP	**PS2 due before class**
W	2/14	Midterm exam outline	
F	2/16	*Conference 4*	
M	2/19	Subjects and other specifiers	
W	2/21	Overflow	**MIDTERM**
F	2/23	*No conference*	(available Wed 6 PM – Fri 6 PM)
M	2/26	Embedded clauses	
W	2/28	More on selection	
F	3/1	*Conference 5*	
		Reading week	
M	3/11	Head movement	
W	3/13	Head movement	
F	3/15	*Conference 6*	
M	3/18	Passives	**Quiz 3** (available 24h)
W	3/20	Subjects of infinitives	*(PS3 available)*
F	3/22	*Conference 7*	
M	3/25	Two types of infinitives	**PS3 due before class**
W	3/27	Expanded VPs	
F	3/29	*Conference 8*	
M	4/1	NO CLASS	
W	4/3	Wh-movement	**Quiz 4** (available 24h)
F	4/5	*Conference 9*	
M	4/8	Wh-movement	
W	4/10	TBD	
Th	4/11	Review	
F	4/12	*Conference 10*	