

Syntax 3

LING 671 — Fall 2026

Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:30–2:30

Instructor

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<i>office hours</i>	Thursdays 1:00–2:00pm (starting 9/10) or by appt.

Content and objectives of the course

This course is an introduction to generative syntax for graduate students. The goal of the class is to provide a foundation in core topics and developments in syntactic theory. Through readings, discussion, presentation, and written assignments, you will develop skills in data analysis, theory formulation, and evaluation of arguments. A main objective of this class is to provide you with the tools to engage critically with primary syntactic literature and current research and debates in the field.

Requirements and evaluation

in-class participation (10%) & article presentation (10%)	20%
regular short assignments (7.5% each)	60%
final squib proposal (15%) and presentation (5%)	20%

In-class participation and readings

In-class participation is an essential component of this course. For each class you'll have one article-length required reading. All readings will be posted on the MyCourses site, and required readings should be done before coming to class. **Very important note:** We are reading original sources for this class, and many of them are challenging! Having “done the reading” does not mean that you have completely understood the reading, or even necessarily made it to the end. Your job is to engage with it as much as possible, learn how to skim where needed, move on if you don't understand something—in short, do your best, and be ready to ask questions. You should spend roughly 1–2 hours reading for each class (not more). Optional/background readings are truly optional. All students are expected to come prepared to contribute to class discussion.

Article presentation

Each student will be responsible for leading or co-leading discussion on one of the assigned articles. Presenters should schedule a meeting with me before the class to discuss the presentation, which should include: a brief summary of the background, goals, and motivation for the paper; connection to any relevant material already discussed in class; presentation of the proposal and critical discussion of the arguments; questions that arise or areas that are unclear; along with ideas and questions for class discussion.

Short assignments

Rather than a final paper, there will be regular short assignments over the course of the semester, roughly 1–3 pgs. each. You are encouraged to discuss assignments with classmates, but you must write up assignments on your own. **You should not search for answers in the literature (aside from what we are reading in class).**

If you are referencing any literature that you are already familiar with, you must cite it. More information will be provided in class.

All assignments should be submitted to **MyCourses by 5pm on the Tuesday** of the week listed below, in PDF format. You have two 24-hour late passes to use at any point in the semester on any of the short assignments. Other late assignments require a medical note or permission ahead of the due date.

These short assignments will be graded on the 4-point scale below. Though this scale is coarse-grained, it has a few advantages: (1) it allows me to get your work back to you quickly; (2) the goal is that you will focus on the written feedback, rather than on a break-down of individual point deductions; (3) more fine-grained distinctions emerge as the result of averaging a large-ish number of assignments.

	(0/3)	assignment not done	
✓ −	(1/3)	assignment does not meet expectations	(come see me, we'll discuss)
✓	(2/3)	assignment meets expectations	(good)
✓ +	(3/3)	assignment exceeds expectations	(excellent!)

The purpose of the assignments is to get feedback to you and give you the chance to learn and improve. You may redo any 1/3 assignment by Friday 5pm of that week for a max score of 2/3 (replacing the original score).

Final presentation

For one of your last *Short Assignments* you will be asked to write a proposal for a squib—a squib which you do not have to write (but which I will not forbid you from writing!). For your final presentation, you will present on this topic.

In linguistics the term “squib” refers to a short paper that raises an interesting problem but may or may not actually solve it. Squibs go beyond just summarizing to make some original contribution. This could take the form of a critical review, discussion of a puzzle, comparison of differing account of the same empirical phenomenon, etc. Your task for your final presentation is to present and discuss the puzzle or problem you have identified. Your presentation should be clearly organized, connected to material we have covered in the course, and it should be made clear which contributions are original.

Regulations

Generative AI policy

Generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot) are powerful and can support your work. I assume you are already using Generative AI, and that these tools will be part of how you work as a researcher going forward. For many scholars, they are already an important part of the workflow. However, these tools are also dangerous and have drawbacks: they can generate wrong information, give inconsistent answers, and—most relevant for this course—they can let you feel like you understand an argument you haven't actually worked through yourself.

As the author Ted Chiang has *written*, using AI to do your thinking for you is like bringing a forklift to the gym (your gym = this class). The point of this course is not primarily to transmit a set of facts about syntactic theory; it's to build your capacity to sit with a challenging topic or argument, be confused by it, figure out for yourself what's actually being claimed, and develop your own judgment about whether you believe it. That capacity cannot be outsourced.

As graduate students, your job is not to consume other people's analyses efficiently—it's to develop the ability to evaluate them, extend them, and eventually produce your own. Letting an AI tool summarize a paper's argument, explain what a piece of data is supposed to show, or tell you “what the author is really claiming” short-circuits exactly the skill we want to build. Confusion when reading a dense syntax paper is not a sign that something has gone wrong; it's the normal, necessary first stage of doing this kind of work, and it's one you need practice tolerating and working through on your own. This doesn't mean I expect you to *never* use these tools. It means I'm asking you to be deliberate and honest with yourself about which uses build the skill and which ones quietly erode it.

You are permitted to use AI for:

- Minor cleanup of prose you have written yourself (proofreading, especially if English is not your first language)

- Looking up unfamiliar general terminology or formalism notation you've encountered but that isn't the paper's actual analytical content (e.g., "what does this notation for feature checking typically mean") — not what a specific author's specific argument means
- Searching for where a phenomenon or construction has been discussed elsewhere in the literature, as a supplement to your own literature searching (and then reading those sources)
- Formatting or troubleshooting typesetting (LaTeX, tree-drawing tools) once you've decided what content and analysis you want to represent

You may not use AI for:

- Summarizing an assigned reading's argument or main point
- Generating or checking your own syntactic analyses, tree structures, or argumentation before you've worked through them independently
- Generating discussion questions, response papers, or seminar comments for you to present as your own thinking
- Writing whole assignments or non-trivial amounts of the prose in your written work
- Using AI-generated claims about the literature or about syntactic theory without independently verifying them against the actual sources; treat any such claim as a hypothesis to check, not a fact

A note on trust

I'm not asking you to log every interaction with an AI tool the way I would in an undergraduate class — I trust you to exercise judgment about a policy whose purpose you understand. But if you do use AI in a way connected to submitted work, you should still cite it and be ready to describe how you used it and why you think it didn't substitute for your own reasoning. If it becomes clear that a habit of AI use is preventing someone from developing independent analytical judgment, I'll raise it directly and we'll talk about it. If I see clear signs of AI use without a citation, this will be treated as a violation of academic integrity. If you're ever unsure whether a particular use crosses the line, just ask!

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/integrity for more information).

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.

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.

Timeline

week	topic	reading (subject to slight modification)	due
9/1 9/3	foundations foundations, cont.	□ - Chomsky (1965) – <i>Aspects</i> ch. 1 (skim) & ch. 2.3.3–2.3.4 (see “guide”) □ - Chomsky and Lasnik (1993) – <i>P&P</i> §1.1–1.2 (reprint in Chomsky 1995) ☆ - Chomsky (1995) – <i>MP</i> , §4.3–4.4	
9/8 9/10	phrase structure; selection	□ - Harley (2011) – <i>A Minimalist approach to arg. structure</i> □ - Grimshaw (1979) – <i>Complement selection</i> * ☆ - Fukui (2001) – <i>Phrase Structure</i>	📅1
9/15 9/17	expletives, EPP case	□ - Bobaljik and Wurmbrand (2008) – <i>Case in GB/Minimalism</i> ☆ - Marantz (1991) – <i>Case & licensing</i> □ - Baker and Vinokurova (2010) – <i>Two modalities of case assn.</i> *	📅2
9/22 9/24	unaccusativity; reflexives	□ - Levin and Rappaport-Hovav (1995, ch. 2) – <i>Unaccusativity</i> ☆ - Perlmutter (1978) – <i>Unaccusative hypothesis</i> □ - Akkuş and Paparounas (to appear) – <i>Turkish verbal reflexives</i>	📅3
9/29 10/1	passives	□ - Bruening (2013) – <i>By-phrases in passives & nominals</i> * □ - Legate et al. (2020) – <i>On passives of passives</i>	📅4
10/6 10/8	Voice and v	□ - Kratzer (1996) – <i>Severing the external argument</i> * □ - Harley (2013) – <i>On the distinctness of Voice and v</i> ☆ - McCloskey (1997) – <i>Subjecthood and subject positions</i>	📅5
— Fall break —			
10/20 10/22	agreement hierarchy effects	□ - Bobaljik (2008) – <i>Where’s ϕ?</i> * □ - Coon and Keine (2021) – <i>Feature gluttony</i> ☆ - Deal (2025) – <i>Current models of Agree</i>	
10/27 10/29	control	□ - Polinsky and Potsdam (2002) – <i>Backward control</i> * □ - Bobaljik and Landau (2009) – <i>Control is not A-movement</i>	📅6
11/3 11/5	head movement; roots	□ - Matushansky (2006) – <i>Head movement</i> * □ - Harizanov and Gribanova (2019) – <i>Whither head movement?</i> ☆ - Dékány (2018) – <i>Approaches to head movement</i>	📅7
11/10 11/12	double objects; applicatives	□ - Larson (1988) – <i>On the double-object construction</i> * □ - Harley (2002) – <i>Possession and the double object construction</i> ☆ - McGinnis (2008) – <i>Applicatives</i>	📅8
11/17 11/19	wh-movement; cyclicity	□ - Richards (2014) – <i>A’-movement</i> □ - Halpert (2019) – <i>Raising, unphased</i> * ☆ - van Urk (2015, ch. 2) – <i>A uniform syntax for phrasal movement</i>	📅 squib proposal
11/24 11/26	movement cont.; binding	□ - Holmberg et al. (2019) – <i>Movement from the DOC</i> □ - Royer (2025) – <i>Binding and anti-cataphora</i> ☆ - Buring (2005, ch. 1) – <i>Binding Theory</i>	
11/29 12/1		— class presentations — — class presentations —	

□ – required; ☆ – character building/extra background (optional); * – student-led; 📅 – assignment due

Readings

- Akkuş, Faruk, and Lefteris Paparounas. to appear. The argument structure of Turkish verbal reflexives. *Linguistic Inquiry*.
- Baker, Mark C., and Nadya Vinokurova. 2010. Two Modalities of Case Assignment: Case in Sakha. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 28:593–642.
- Bobaljik, Jonathan David. 2008. Where's Phi? Agreement as a Post-Syntactic Operation. In *Phi Theory: Phi-features across interfaces and modules*, ed. Daniel Harbour, David Adger, and Susana Béjar, 295–328. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bobaljik, Jonathan David, and Idan Landau. 2009. Icelandic Control Is Not A-Movement: The Case from Case. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40:113–132.
- Bobaljik, Jonathan David, and Susi Wurmbrand. 2008. Case in GB/Minimalism. In *Oxford Handbook of Case*, ed. Andrej Malchukov and Andrew Spencer, 44–58. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bruening, Benjamin. 2013. By phrases in passives and nominals. *Syntax* 16:1–41.
- Büring, Daniel. 2005. *Binding Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1965. *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1995. *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam, and Howard Lasnik. 1993. The Theory of Principles and Parameters. In *Syntax: An International Handbook of Contemporary Research*, ed. Joachim Jacobs, Arnim von Stechow, Wolfgang Sternefeld, and Theo Vannemann, 506–569. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Coon, Jessica, and Stefan Keine. 2021. Feature gluttony. *Linguistic Inquiry* 52:655–710.
- Deal, Amy Rose. 2025. Current models of Agree. In *Berkeley Papers in Formal Linguistics*, volume 4. doi.org/10.5070/BF2.48662.
- Dékány, Éva. 2018. Approaches to head movement: A critical assessment. *Glossa: A journal of general linguistics* 3:1–43.
- Fukui, Naoki. 2001. Phrase structure. In *The Handbook of Contemporary Syntactic Theory*, ed. Mark Baltin and Chris Collins. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Grimshaw, Jane. 1979. Complement selection and the lexicon. *Linguistic Inquiry* 10:279–326.
- Halpert, Claire. 2019. Raising, unphased. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 37:123–165.
- Harizanov, Boris, and Vera Gribova. 2019. Whither head movement? *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 37:461–522.
- Harley, Heidi. 2002. Possession and the double object construction. *Linguistic Variation* 2.
- Harley, Heidi. 2011. A Minimalist approach to argument structure. In *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Minimalism*, ed. Cedric Boeckx. Oxford University Press.
- Harley, Heidi. 2013. External arguments and the mirror principle: On the distinctness of voice and v. *Lingua* 125:34–57.
- Holmberg, Anders, Michelle Sheehan, and Jenneke van der Wal. 2019. Movement from the double object construction is not fully symmetrical. *Linguistic Inquiry* 50:677–722.
- Kratzer, Angelika. 1996. Severing the external argument from its verb. In *Phrase Structure and the Lexicon*, ed. Johan Rooryck and Laurie Zaring, 109–137. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Larson, Richard K. 1988. On the double object construction. *Linguistic Inquiry* 21:589–632.
- Legate, Julie Anne, Faruk Akkuş, Milena Şereikaitė, and Don Ringe. 2020. On passives of passives. *Language* 96:771–818.
- Levin, Beth, and Malka Rappaport-Hovav. 1995. *Unaccusativity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Marantz, Alec. 1991. Case and Licensing. In *Proceedings of the 8th Eastern States Conference on Linguistics (ESCOL 8)*, ed. German Westphal, Benjamin Ao, and Hee-Rahk Chae, 234–253. Ithaca, NY: CLC Publications.
- Matushansky, Ora. 2006. Head movement in linguistic theory. *Linguistic Inquiry* 37:69–109.
- McCloskey, James. 1997. Subjecthood and subject positions. In *Elements of Grammar*, ed. Liliane Haegeman, 197–235. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- McGinnis, Martha. 2008. Applicatives. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 2:1225–1245.
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- Polinsky, Maria, and Eric Potsdam. 2002. Backward control. *Linguistic Inquiry* 33:245–282.
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- Royer, Justin. 2025. Binding and anti-cataphora in Mayan. *Linguistic Inquiry* 56:247–310.
- van Urk, Coppe. 2015. A uniform syntax for phrasal movement: A case study of Dinka Bor. Doctoral Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.