

Syntax Seminar: Topics in Polysynthesis

LING 675/775 — Winter 2024

M/W 8:35–9:55

Linguistics 002

Instructor

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Content and objectives of the course

This seminar class focuses on the syntax of *polysynthesis* in contemporary linguistic theory. Students will read and engage with primary works in this area focusing on the questions of complex stem formation, noun incorporation, clitics and agreement, and “free” word order and information structure. These specific topics will provide an entryway into larger questions in syntax—as well as in semantics and morphology—relating to parametric variation and the status of macro-parameters.

Through careful investigation of these issues over the course of the semester, students will develop independent research and critical analysis skills, including the ability to evaluate and construct linguistic arguments. Students will also gain experience in identifying a puzzle or problem and developing it into an independent research project.

Requirements and evaluation

	LING 675	LING 775 (pass/fail)
participation (see rubric on last page)	20%	50%
short assignments	15%	—
article presentation	15%	50%
final paper & presentation	50%	—

In-class participation

As with any seminar, in-class participation is an important component of this course. All readings will be posted on the MyCourses site, and all students are expected to come to class having completed the reading and prepared to contribute to class discussion.

To facilitate discussion, each student will contribute one short discussion post per required reading to a class discussion site by **3pm** the day before class (i.e. Sunday or Tuesday). The contribution may take the form of a question or comment either focusing on the reading itself, or relating the reading to other relevant material (e.g., other literature from class or elsewhere, relevant empirical phenomena, etc.). Clarification questions are welcome, but should involve some contentful discussion, i.e. not simply “What does X mean?”. Since questions are designed to facilitate in-class discussion, late questions cannot be accepted and failure to submit these will affect participation marks.

Assignments: For LING 675 students, there will be three short assignments over the course of the semester, one of which is your final paper proposal. These are designed to give you a chance to go in depth in a particular reading or topic. You are encouraged to discuss assignments with classmates, but you must write up assignments on your own. More information will be provided in class.

Article presentation: Each student will be responsible for presenting and leading discussion on one of the required meetings (roughly 45 minutes, potentially as a small group). Presentations should include: a brief summary of the background, goals, and motivation for the paper, including connection to relevant material already discussed in class; presentation of the proposal and critical discussion of the arguments; discussion of puzzles raised or predictions made by the analysis, and any questions that arise.

Final paper and presentation: A final paper is your chance to directly engage with the material and develop your own research project. Final papers should relate to the content of the course, and must go beyond summaries and critical review to make some original empirical and/or theoretical contribution. A successful final paper will have the potential to lead to an Evaluation paper or MA thesis topic. Your paper should be clearly organized, and it should be made clear which contributions are original.

timeline	
week of March 11th	meet with me to discuss topic
March 22nd	~1 page proposal due
April 10th & 11th	in-class presentations (15–20 minutes)
April 26th	final paper due (max ~12 single-spaced pages)

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). If you are considering working on related topics for term papers in different courses, it is very important that you discuss this with all instructors involved in order to get approval.

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 is located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien’kehá:ka, one of the founding nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. This land has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. McGill honors, recognizes and respects these nations as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters on which we meet today.

Timeline and readings (subject to some modification)

week	topic	reading (●=required; ○=required+student-led; ◉=optional)	due/other
1/08	intro	● - Haspelmath (2018) – ‘The last word on polysynthesis’ ○ - Fortescue et al. (2017) – ‘Introduction’ (to handbook)	
1/10		● - Barrie and Mathieu (2019) – ‘NI and polysynthesis’ ○ - Crippen (2019, ch. 1.2) – ‘The syntax in Tlingit verbs’	
1/15	(non-) configurationality	● - Jelinek (1984) – ‘Empty categories, case, config’ ○ - Hale (1983) – ‘Walpiri and non-configurational lgs.’	
1/27		◉ - Legate (2001) – ‘Config structure of nonconfig lg’	
1/22	parameters	● - Baker (1996, ch. 1) – ‘Polysynthesis parameter’	
1/24		● - Baker (1996, ch. 2) – ‘Polysynthesis parameter’ ○ - Baker (1996, ch. 3) – ‘Polysynthesis parameter’	
1/29		● - Coon (2023) – ‘Syntax of pronominal prefixes’ — (discussion/catch up day) —	assn. 1 (2/2)
1/31			
2/05	information structure	● - Aissen (1992) – ‘Topic and focus’	
2/07		◉ - Jelinek (2006) – ‘Pronominal arg parameter’ ○ - Ackema et al. (2006) – ‘Agreement & arguments’	
2/12	agreement & clitics	● - Baker (2006) – ‘On zero agreement’	
2/14		◉ - Yuan (2021) – ‘Agreement vs. clitic doubling’	
2/19	head movement	● - Dékány (2018) – ‘Approaches to head movement’ — (no class/catch up day) —	assn. 2 (2/23)
2/21			
2/26		● - Harizanov and Gribanova (2019) – ‘Whither head mov’t?’	
2/28		◉ - Arregi and Pietraszko (2021) – ‘Ups and downs’	
— reading week —			
3/11	stem formation	● - Svenonius (2012) – ‘Spanning’	guest!
3/13		● - Compton and Pittman (2010) – ‘Word formation by phase’	
3/18	noun incorporation	◉ - Slavin (2017) - ‘Stem composition in Oji-Cree’ ○ - Déchaine (1999) - ‘Algonquian morphology’	proposal (3/22)
3/20		● - Baker (2009) - ‘Is head mov’t still needed for NI?’ ○ - Mithun (1984) - ‘Noun incorporation’	
3/25			
3/27		● - Barrie and Mathieu (2016) - ‘NI and phrasal mov’t’ ● - DeCaire et al. (2017) - ‘On optionality in Mohawk NI’	
4/01	presentations	— no class, Easter Monday —	
4/03		◉ - Renard, Boles: Kanien’kéha NI (reading TBA)	
4/08 (☼●!)		● - Ershova (2020) - ‘Two paths to polysynthesis’	
4/10		— LING 675 student presentations —	
4/11 (Th!)		— LING 675 student presentations —	

Readings

- Ackema, Peter, Patrick Brandt, Maaïke Schoorlemmer, and Fred Weerman. 2006. The role of agreement in the expression of arguments. In *Arguments and agreement*, ed. Peter Ackema, Patrick Brandt, Maaïke Schoorlemmer, and Fred Weerman, 1–34. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Aissen, Judith. 1992. Topic and focus in Mayan. *Language* 68:43–80.
- Arregi, Karlos, and Asia Pietraszko. 2021. The ups and downs of head displacement. *Linguistic Inquiry* 52:241–289.
- Baker, Mark C. 1996. *The Polysynthesis Parameter*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baker, Mark C. 2006. On zero agreement and polysynthesis. In *Arguments and agreement*, ed. Peter Ackema, Patrick Brandt, Maaïke Schoorlemmer, and Fred Weerman, 289–320. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baker, Mark C. 2009. Is head movement still needed for noun incorporation? *Lingua* 119:148–165.
- Barrie, Michael, and Eric Mathieu. 2016. Noun incorporation and phrasal movement. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 34:1–51.
- Barrie, Michael, and Éric Mathieu. 2019. Noun incorporation and polysynthesis. In *The Routledge Handbook of North American Languages*, ed. Daniel Siddiqi, Michael Barrie, Carrie Gillon, Jason Haugen, and Éric Mathieu, 253–274. New York: Routledge.
- Compton, Richard, and Christine Pittman. 2010. Word-formation by phase in Inuit. *Lingua* 120:2167–2192.
- Coon, Jessica. 2023. The syntax of Northern Iroquoian pronominal prefixes. Ms., McGill University.
- Crippen, James A. 2019. The syntax of Tlingit verbs. Doctoral Dissertation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.
- DeCaire, Ryan, Alana Johns, and Ivona Kučerová. 2017. On optionality in Mohawk noun incorporation. *Toronto Working Papers in Linguistics* 39.
- Déchaine, Rose-Marie. 1999. What Algonquian morphology is really like: Hockett revisited. In *Papers from the Workshop on Structure and Constituency in Native American Languages: MIT Occasional Papers in Linguistics*, ed. Leora Bar-El, Rose-Marie Déchaine, and Charlotte Reinholtz, volume 17, 25–72. Cambridge, MA: MIT Working Papers in Linguistics.
- Dékány, Éva. 2018. Approaches to head movement: A critical assessment. *Glossa: A journal of general linguistics* 3:1–43.
- Ershova, Ksenia. 2020. Two paths to polysynthesis: Evidence from West Circassian nominalizations. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 38:425–475.
- Fortescue, Michael, Marianne Mithun, and Nicholas Evans, ed. 2017. *The Oxford Handbook of Polysynthesis*. Oxford: Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hale, Kenneth. 1983. Walpiri and the grammar of non-configurational languages. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 1:5–48.
- Harizanov, Boris, and Vera Gribova. 2019. Whither head movement? *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 37:461–522.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2018. The last word on polysynthesis: A review article. *Linguistic Typology* 22:307–326.
- Jelinek, Eloise. 1984. Empty Categories, Case, and Configurationality. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 2:39–76.
- Jelinek, Eloise. 2006. The pronominal argument parameter. In *Arguments and agreement*, ed. Peter Ackema, Patrick Brandt, Maaïke Schoorlemmer, and Fred Weerman, 261–288. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Legate, Julie Anne. 2001. The configurational structure of a nonconfigurational language. *Linguistic Variation Yearbook* 1:63–99.
- Mithun, Marianne. 1984. The evolution of noun incorporation. *Language* 60:847–894.
- Slavin, Taynya. 2017. Verb stem formation and event composition in Ojibwe. In *The structure of words at the interfaces*, ed. Heather Newell, Máire Noonan, Glyne Piggott, and Lisa Travis, 261–296. Oxford University Press.
- Svenonius, Peeter. 2012. Spanning. Ms. CASTL, University of Tromsø.
- Yuan, Michelle. 2021. Diagnosing object agreement vs. clitic doubling: An Inuit case study. *Linguistic Inquiry*

Grading rubric for participation

Grade component	Mostly not true	Partly true	Mostly true	Completely true
in-class discussion (60%)	0–15%	30%	45%	60%
participates in class discussion and demonstrates an engagement with class readings, through responding to questions raised by the instructor or other students, by asking questions, or contributing to relevant discussion points				
contribution to discussion board (40%)	0–10%	20%	30%	40%
makes weekly contributions to the online discussion board related to the topic and assigned readings				
TOTAL	25%	50%	75%	100%