

Syntax Seminar: Argument structure, voice, and valence

LING 675/775 — Winter 2021

M/W 2:35–3:55 — online

Instructor

	Jessica Coon
<i>email</i>	jessica.coon@mcgill.ca
<i>office</i>	TBD
<i>office hours</i>	TBD

Content and objectives of the course

This seminar class focuses on the syntax of *argument structure* in contemporary linguistic theory. Students will read and engage with primary works in this area focusing on the questions of how arguments are introduced into the clausal structure; where and how information about verbal “valence” is encoded; as well as on voice and valence-adjusting operations. We will begin with how arguments are *added* into the clause, including works on *v* and Voice, causatives, and applicatives, and then turn to so-called valence-*decreasing* constructions such as passives, antipassives, middles, and reflexives. These specific topics will provide an entryway into larger questions in syntax—as well as in semantics and morphology—relating to selection, licensing, the nature of thematic roles, and parametric variation.

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%	60%
short assignments	15%	—
article presentation	15%	40%
final paper & presentation	50%	—

In-class participation

As with any advanced seminar, in-class participation is an essential 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.

- Note that “completed the reading” and “contribute to class discussion” does not mean that you have completely understood all of the reading, or that you are saying things that are “right”. An important skill you are developing is getting the most you can out of a difficult reading, without spending more time on it than you are reasonably able to (especially during a global pandemic). Contributing to discussion is about moving the conversation forward, has nothing to do with being “right” or “wrong”. Often the best way to move a discussion forward is to ask questions—even (or maybe especially) questions for which you worry the answers might be obvious.

To facilitate discussion, each student will contribute at least one post per week to a class discussion site by midnight the night 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. Comments and questions should be contentful. Clarification questions are welcome, but should involve some 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.

Virtual format: Given that all registered students have reported being able to attend at the listed times, the plan is to have class meetings synchronously via Zoom. Of course, if situations change during the semester, the course will be adapted to meet the needs of students, whether this means recording and posting class-content, or finding alternate ways for students to asynchronously follow the material.

Assignments: There will be two short assignments over the course of the semester, 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 one article (roughly 45 minutes). 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 the 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 8th	meet with me to discuss topic
March 19th	~1 page proposal due
April 12th & 14th	in-class presentations (15–20 minutes)
April 30th	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

week	topic	reading (●=required; ♥=required+student-led; ○=optional)	to do
1/11 1/13	overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ramchand (2013) — ‘Argument structure & alternations’ ○ Harley (2011) — ‘A Minimalist approach to arg. structure’ 	
1/18 1/20	v/Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Legate (2014, chs. 1–3) — ‘Voice and v’ ○ Kratzer (1996) — ‘Severing the external argument’ 	
1/25 1/27	v/Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Legate (2014, chs. 4–6) — ‘Voice and v’ ● Harley (2017) — ‘Disparate functions of v’ 	
2/8 2/10	introducing arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Pylkkänen (2008, chs. 1–2) — ‘Applicatives’ ○ McGinnis (2008) — ‘Applicatives’ 	assn. 1 (2/12)
2/1 2/3	causatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Pylkkänen (2008, ch. 3) — ‘Causatives’ ● Akkuş (2020) — ‘Variable embedded agent’ 	
2/15 2/17	applicatives	<p style="text-align: center;">— (catch up day) —</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nie (2020, ch. 3) — ‘Applicatives’ 	
2/22 2/24	possessor raising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deal (2017) — ‘External possession & possessor raising’ ● Tyler (2020) — ‘Two kinds of ext. possession in Choctaw’ 	assn. 2 (2/26)
— reading week —			
3/8 3/10	anticausatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Alexiadou et al. (2006) — ‘Properties of anticausatives’ ○ Schäfer (2009) — ‘The causative alternation’ 	
3/15 3/17	passives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Bruening (2013) — ‘By-phrases in passives and nominals’ ● Müller (2017) — ‘Structure removal’ 	proposal
3/22 3/24	antipassives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Legate et al. (2020) — ‘Passives of passives’ ● Coon (2019) — ‘Building verbs in Chuj’ 	
3/29 3/31		<p style="text-align: center;">— (catch up day) —</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Crippen and Déchaine (2015) — ‘Tlingit classifiers’ 	
4/5 4/7	reflexives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Kastner (2017) — ‘Reflexive verbs in Hebrew’ ○ Reinhart and Siloni (2005) — ‘The lexicon–syntax parameter’ 	
4/12 4/14	presentations	<p style="text-align: center;">— catch-up, debrief, discussion — — LING 675 student presentations —</p>	

Readings

- Akkuş, Faruk. 2020. Variable embedded agent in Sason Arabic. *Journal of Linguistics* .
- Alexiadou, Artemis, Elena Anagnostopoulou, and Florian Schäfer. 2006. The properties of anticausatives crosslinguistically. In *Phases of Interpretation*, ed. Mara Frascarelli, 187–212. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bruening, Benjamin. 2013. By phrases in passives and nominals. *Syntax* 16:1–41.
- Coon, Jessica. 2019. Building verbs in Chuj: Consequences for the nature of roots. *Journal of Linguistics* 55:35–81.
- Crippen, James A., and Rose-Marie Déchaine. 2015. Syntax and semantics of the Tlingit classifier. In *Proceedings of the Workshop on Structure and Constituency of Languages of the Americas 20*, ed. Natalie Weber. University of British Columbia Working Papers in Linguistics.
- Deal, Amy Rose. 2017. External possession and possessor raising. In *Blackwell companion to syntax*, ed. Martin Everaert and Henk van Riemsdijk. John Wiley & Sons.
- Harley, Heidi. 2011. A Minimalist approach to argument structure. In *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Minimalism*, ed. Cedric Boeckx. Oxford University Press.
- Harley, Heidi. 2017. The ‘bundling’ hypothesis and the disparate functions of little v. In *The verbal domain*, ed. Roberta D’Alessandro, Irene Franco, and Ángel Gallego, 3–28. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kastner, Itamar. 2017. Reflexives in Hebrew: Deep unaccusativity meets lexical semantics. *Glossa* 2:1–33.
- 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.
- Legate, Julie Anne. 2014. *Voice and v: Lessons from Acehnese*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Legate, Julie Anne, Faruk Akkuş, Milena Şereikaitė, and Don Ringe. 2020. On passives of passives. *Language* 96:771–818.
- McGinnis, Martha. 2008. Applicatives. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 2:1225–1245.
- Müller, Gereon. 2017. Structure removal: An argument for feature-driven Merge. *Glossa: A journal of general linguistics* 2:1–35.
- Nie, Yining. 2020. Licensing arguments. Doctoral Dissertation, New York University, New York, NY.
- Pylkkänen, Liina. 2008. *Introducing arguments*. Linguistic Inquiry Monographs. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Ramchand, Gillian. 2013. Argument structure and argument structure alternations. In *The Cambridge Handbook of Generative Syntax*, ed. Marcel Den Dikken, 265–321. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Reinhart, Tanya, and Tal Siloni. 2005. The Lexicon-Syntax parameter: Reflexivization and other arity operations. *Linguistic Inquiry* 36:389–436.
- Schäfer, Florian. 2009. The causative alternation. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 3:641–681.
- Tyler, Matthew. 2020. Two kinds of external possession in Mississippi Choctaw. *Syntax* .

Grading rubric for participation

Grade component	Mostly not true	Partly true	Mostly true	Completely true
in-class discussion (80%)	0–20%	40%	60%	80%
The student engages 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 participating in relevant discussion points.				
contribution to discussion board (20%)	0–5%	10%	15%	20%
The student makes weekly contentful contributions to the online discussion board related to the topic and assigned readings.				
TOTAL	25%	50%	75%	100%