Syllabus

Junction Intro to Linguistics

What Is Linguistics?

Linguistics is the study of human language. In this course, we will briefly explore a few of the major questions in linguistics. How is language put together? How do we map sounds to words, words to sentences, and sentences to meanings? How do natural human languages vary, and how are they the same? What can all of this tell us about the human brain?

Linguistics will be fun for anyone who likes puzzle solving and critical thinking. This class will cover such useful topics as scientific thinking, reasoning, and writing. No prior experience in linguistics or foreign language is required.

Teacher

Anisa Schardl, aschardl@linguist.umass.edu

Schedule

Mondays and Wednesdays 5:30-7:30, Tuesdays and Thursdays 5:30-7, MIT room 1-277.

Website

http://esp.mit.edu/learn/Junction/2008_Summer/Classes/S1389/index.html

Requirements

A large portion of the grades will consist of class participation points. This is serious. Every student is expected to offer ideas and ask questions during each class. Merely attending will not earn you participation points.

In addition, there will be frequent problem sets and two short essays. For the problem sets, you are expected to think about the problems and express your thoughts clearly. Problem sets are due by 5:30pm. We will often talk about previous problem sets during class, and therefore I cannot accept them late.

The essays should be 3-4 pages long, not including diagrams. They should be double-spaced and in size 12 Times New Roman font. The first essay will be a rule-based account of a problem in phonology, due July 17th at 10pm. The second essay will be an explanation of an interesting phenomenon with regards to our current system for syntax and semantics, due August 7th at 10pm.

Assignments should be submitted by email as a pdf file, or in person, printed out or neatly handwritten. I will not accept Word documents by email, but if you want assistance converting Word documents to pdfs, feel free to ask me.

Schedule

Week 1: June 30 – July 3

Monday

Linguistics Problem Solving.
Problem set 1: Morphology (due July 1)

Tuesday

Phonetics. Review of Monday's problem set. Introduction to International Phonetic Alphabet, segments, phonetic features, natural classes.
Problem set 1 due.
Problem set 2: IPA practice (due July 3)

Wednesday

Phonotactics. Practical demonstration.

Thursday

Doing Phonology Problems. Figuring out underlying forms, the implications of predictability.
Problem set 2 due.
Problem set 3: Phonology problems (due July 7)

Week 2: July 7 – July 10

Monday

Phonology. Rule formation and rule ordering.
Problem set 3 due.

Tuesday

Phonology. Rule ordering and opacity.
Problem set 4: Opacity (due July 10)

Wednesday

Phonology. The limits of rules: Yawelmani.

Thursday

Phonology. The limits of rules: Yawelmani.
Problem set 4 due.
Problem set 5: Preliminary thoughts on syntax (due July 14)

Week 3: July 14 – July 17

Monday

A First Stab at Syntax. 2-word sentences. 3-word sentences. Constituents.
Problem set 5 due.
Problem set 6: Constituency (due July 16)

Tuesday

Arguments vs. Adjuncts. Subcategorization.

Wednesday

Phrase structure. Heads, complements, specifiers. Subcategorization again.
Problem set 6 due.
Problem set 7: Arguments and adjuncts (due July 21)

Thursday

Trees and syntactic ambiguities. Essay 1 due.

Week 4: July 21 – July 24

Monday

Wh-movement and traces.
Problem set 7 due.
Problem set 8: Syntax trees (due July 22)

Tuesday

Restrictions on movement. Move Closest. Islands.
Problem set 8 due.
Problem set 9: Syntax trees (due July 23)

Wednesday

Other movement. Unaccusatives. Passives. UTAH.
Problem set 9 due.
Problem set 10: Syntax trees (due July 24)

Thursday

Diagnostics for unaccusatives. Resultatives. Genitive of negation. Auxiliary choice.
Problem set 10 due.
Problem set 11: Syntax trees (due July 28)

Week 5: July 28 – July 31

Monday

Basics of set theory.
Problem set 11 due.
Problem set 12: set theory practice (due July 30)

Tuesday

Predicates and Schoenfinkelization. Meta-language.

Wednesday

What do sentences mean? What do words mean? Compositionality.
Problem set 12 due.
Problem set 13: Field work on pronouns (due July 6)

Thursday

Functional application rule. Problem set 14: Quantifiers (due July 5)

Week 6: August 4 – August 7

Monday

Limits of functional application. Predicate modification rule.

Tuesday

Limits of predicate modification. Non-intersective modifiers. Review of problem set 14.
Problem set 14 due.

Wednesday

What have we learned about pronouns? Linguistic universals. Problem set 13 due.

Thursday

A taste of field work. Guest: a native Burmese speaker. Essay 2 due.