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LING 472.01: Generative Syntax and Semantics

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Linguistics 472 (572)
Generative Syntax
Fall 2014
TR, 12:40 to 2:00, Social Sciences 254

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Course status: CO-CONVENING

The course in Generative Syntax co-convenes graduate students earning a Linguistics MA (enrolled in LING 572) and undergraduates earning a bachelor's degree and pursuing a Linguistics minor or option (enrolled in LING 472). Consequently, participants in this course must satisfy differing coursework obligations as per the two classifications, graduate or undergraduate. While the responsibilities may vary, the learning outcomes are common to both courses.

Coursework: LEARNING OUTCOMES

Coursework encourages students of syntax to overtly display skills including but not limited to those listed below.

- a) master notions of categoriality (i.e., parts-of-speech in traditional grammar instruction, word-/morpheme classes in pre-generative *structural* linguistic analysis) by capably identifying categories, the gradients that they exhibit, and forms across human languages that permit more reliable distinctions among varieties of gradient categories
- b) grasp methods, some pre-generative (or structural) and most generative, of translating (or mapping) categories into calculated representations in formal notation, predominantly at the level of sentence-formation systems, and then apply some of these methods in the analysis of various human languages
- c) proficiently and operationally draw distinctions between human language categories (described as form-classes) and constituencies (described as function-classes) in analyzing sentence-level data into their individual segments
- d) recognize the progress of syntactic theory as a series of missed generalizations, or statements that make the data seem complex (this set of sentences follows three different rules) when a single statement accounts for all of the data (this set of sentences follows three same rule)
- e) mark transitions among syntactic theories using analytical methods characterizing each one as it becomes simpler than the previous one, beginning with Chomsky's graduate-student days to early versions of Government & Binding (a.k.a. Principles and Parameters), roughly the three decades from 1951-1981 (not including Barriers model of 1986)

Course materials:

Textbooks

Aarts, Bas. 2013. English Syntax and Argumentation, 4th Ed. New York: Palgrave.
Poole, Geoffrey. 2011. Syntactic Theory, 2nd Ed. New York: Palgrave.

Selections

Passages from other texts posted and scheduled on the Moodle internet supplement for the course.

Course grading:

I evaluate final grades based on the exams and the assignments. Your final grade equals 45% for the assignments, 25% for the midterm and 30% for final. I assess a final grade based on the points that you accrue from assignments and exams. I gauge points in several ways: according to a percentage (points you earn divided by the total amount of available points), a percentile (points earned by each student, which are compared and measured on a "curve"), and a quartile (points earned by each student, compared and distributed in fourths, e.g., top 25%, bottom 25%, etc.). These three measurements help me make a course assessment represented by traditional letter grades with +/-.

Coursework: LATE POLICY

All activities, assignments or exams given to the instructor after its due-date are not guaranteed to be either graded (and entered into the grade record) or returned (i.e., students must keep track).

Course attendance: UNIVERSITY POLICY

Perfect attendance is desired but not expected; excessive absences typically intersect adversely with **late policy** and affect final grades. Students who miss the first two class meetings must drop the course (see URL presented below):
(<http://www.umt.edu/catalog/acad/acadpolicy/default.html>, under attendance/absence).

Course participation, assignments, objectives:

In order to enjoy a degree of success in the course as well as mastery of course content, you should, at the very most, attend every class meeting, and, at the very least, miss no more than **two** class meetings (it is a truly difficult course, but half the students in it in the past have earned As and A-s).

To pass this course, you must attempt to complete the midterm and final exams, and you also must submit the majority of your completed problem-sets assigned as homework (due dates to be announced on moodle/in class).

Becoming proficient in grammatical analysis is, like anything else, a matter of practice. Therefore, you will earn nearly one-half of your final grade by completing daily or weekly problem-sets: Typically, on a Thursday, I assign a number of exercises from textbooks or on handouts distributed on moodle/in class, and exercises will be due the following Tuesday when we meet for class, unless announced otherwise. Some exercises are done in class.

The exercises often take the form of *tree diagrams* that represent syntactic structures of sentences analyzed. A tree diagram is technically called a PHRASE STRUCTURE MARKER because it is a formal (computational) description of the *phrase structure rules* that were once argued to generate syntactic structures radiating from terminal nodes (categories) filled by lexical elements (forms). Other exercises focus on issues or topics related to grammatical rules or principles pertaining to phrase structure.

Exercises must be completed cleanly and legibly to receive full credit (neatness counts!). Please have them ready to be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due (late assignments cannot receive full credit; when turned in on the due date after lecture begins, assignments are reduced to partial credit: full credit = 9 points).

Completing exercises neatly and thoroughly earns full credit and also prepare for midterm and final exams (take-home format to be announced). Also, each set of exercises builds on the previous set, so it's important to do all the exercises and attend all classes, where concepts and analysis for the exercises will be discussed.

Objectives: understanding propositional content, recognizing parts-of speech, identifying lexical categories, discriminating between lexical and functional categories, analyzing sentences according to phrase-structure rules, applying the principles of a language faculty for discovering abstract structure (movement of constituents, properties of agreement and case, empty categories). NOTE: Objectives are intentions of the instructor, not learning outcomes.

Special accommodation:

If you will need special accommodation in this course due to some learning challenge that has been verified by DSS, please see me early in the semester, and we can come up with some appropriate accommodation.

Technology:

You may, of course, take class notes on a laptop or iPad or the like. Aside from that, I expect that technology will not intrude during class time. Please turn your phones to "vibrate" or a similar setting that will not disturb the class.

Do not plan to receive phone calls during the class period

Course Withdrawal: UNIVERSITY POLICY

To know more information about [withdrawing from a course](http://www.umt.edu/withdrawal/AlternateOptions.aspx), see the URL below:
(<http://www.umt.edu/withdrawal/AlternateOptions.aspx>)

Academic Honesty:

All students must observe academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to academic penalty by the instructor of the course and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. As a student in this course and at this university, you must be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#) (see URL presented below):

(http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php)

Course Description:

Creativity constituted the earliest notions (mid 1950s) of generativity, or the ability of all humans to create (i.e., generate) both infinite numbers of novel sentences and sentences of infinite length. This property of all languages served as evidence for a *generative* syntax that became known as Transformational Grammar (TG), a reaction against behavioral theories of language learning and the structuralist theories of language knowledge used to complement behaviorism (circa 1957). The leading advocate for TG at the time, Noam Chomsky, argued persuasively that behaviorists relied too much on language experience to explain development and therefore could not explain the human mind's capability for creating utterly unique sentences never experienced before, revealing a generative capacity. The mind, according to generative grammars, includes *a priori* (prior to experience of language) a finite body of language knowledge. Such knowledge takes the form of syntactic structures (properties of a mental computational system). These structures function as the source of innovative and conceivably endless phrases and clauses that are derived from basic phrasal and clausal constructions altered by certain transformational rules (thus TG).

In the initial theory, transformational rules affected the structural description (SD) of a sentence (SDs are formal objects defined mathematically as combinatorial computations) and, as a result, caused a structural change (SC) that gets realized by moving, adding, deleting or substituting structural material. A decade later, a glut of transformational rules grew too unwieldy to account for development, so other generative theories evolved from TG: First, the Standard Theory, which assumed that a component dedicated exclusively to language knowledge (or competence) is independent from language use (or performance); then, the Extended Standard Theory, which assumed that a lexicon (mental dictionary) functions independently of the component generating computational combinations; and, finally, the Revised Extended Standard Theory, which assumed that rules reflect an interaction of deeper, more abstract principles of generativity (we will study this theory by building up to it through relevant features of former theories). All theories evolving from TG preserve the notion of transformational rule in some form, yet the concept *generative* no longer refers to its original sense of seemingly unlimited creativity but now denotes instead with a degree of mathematical precision "how sentences of the language are in fact characterized by the grammar" (Chomsky, *Rules and Representations*, p. 220). Most currently, the term refers to how principles controlling the computational system (a universal grammar, UG) routinely gain access to features in the lexicon (constituting extremely restricted language-specific parameters).

Course Reading Materials:

Textbooks

Aarts, Bas. 2001. English Syntax and Argumentation, 2nd Ed. New York: Palgrave.

Poole, Geoffrey. 2002. Syntactic Theory. New York: Palgrave.

Selections

Passages from other texts posted and scheduled on the course's Moodle internet supplement.

"Creativity is predicated on a system of rules and forms, in part determined by intrinsic human capacities. Without such constraints, we have arbitrary and random behavior, not creativity."

Noam Chomsky, *Reflections on Language*, p. 133