

# LING419: Fitting Syntax and Semantics Together

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| <b>Instructor</b>   | Tim Hunter<br>1417A Marie Mount Hall<br>timh@umd.edu  |
| <b>Classes</b>      | Monday/Wednesday, 11:00 – 12:15<br>ARM 0120 (room may change; stay tuned)                   |
| <b>Office Hours</b> | By appointment  |
| <b>Web page</b>     | <a href="http://www.ling.umd.edu/~timh/ling419/">http://www.ling.umd.edu/~timh/ling419/</a> |

## Course Description

When a human being knows a language, he/she knows that certain sounds are paired with certain meanings. In your syntax classes, you've basically learnt that certain sounds are paired with certain tree structures. The aim of this course is to complete the picture by looking at how those tree structures relate to meanings, and look at why the syntax-centric approach that you have been exposed to has become popular.

The topics we'll cover are listed below. Others may be added if there is time and interest. A more detailed schedule, subject to change, is on the website.

- We'll begin by looking at **categorial grammar** (CG), which is a simpler alternative to the syntax-centric approach that we'll be aiming to justify in this course, and look at its relative advantages and disadvantages.
- We'll look at how an approach to semantics involving **events** might be able to help explain some of the strange syntactic properties displayed by **adjunction** — adjuncts are a particularly major headache for modern theories of syntax. One aim of this section is to see how thinking about syntax and semantics together can lead us to explanations that otherwise would not be found.
- Discussions of adjunction will lead us to look briefly at the topic of **copying** in grammar. This is something else which can seem like a complicated question when we think about syntax alone, but keeping in mind the bigger picture including semantics clarifies things.
- At a couple of points along the way we will look at some **experimental work** on semantics and its relation to syntax: some experiments with adults on the relation between meaning and verification, and some experiments with children on the conservativity of determiners.

## Textbooks and Readings

There is no required textbook for this course. All the readings will be made available on the website.

## Assessment and Grading

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|--------------------------|-----|
| Homeworks                | 40% |
| Class Presentation       | 20% |
| Paper Topic Presentation | 5%  |
| Paper                    | 35% |

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| $90 \leq x \leq 100$ | A | if $x = 100$ then A+                 |
| $80 \leq x < 90$     | B | else if $(x \bmod 10) < 3$ then -    |
| $70 \leq x < 80$     | C | else if $(x \bmod 10) \geq 7$ then + |
| $60 \leq x < 70$     | D |                                      |
| $x < 60$             | F |                                      |

The grades will not be curved, so you are not competing against your classmates (i.e. it is possible that everyone in the class will get an A).

- There will be somewhere between three and five **homeworks**, consisting of some technical questions to give you practice with the formal details of theories we'll be dealing with, and some more "thinking questions" where you'll need to think about what a certain theory gets right and gets wrong. You generally won't need to do any research beyond what's been covered in class for these. Each one will be due at the beginning of a class.
- You will do one **class presentation** at some point during the semester. You will prepare a hand-out summarising the material and lead discussion for one class. You'll be assigned a specific paper/chapter/etc. well in advance, and you're *strongly encouraged* to meet with me as you're preparing your presentation — at least once, or probably twice in order to do a good job. There will usually be a particular way in which the material you're presenting fits in with the "big picture story" of the course, so in order to present it properly you will need to keep up with the other topics as well.
- You will write a short **paper**, outlining a problem you find interesting that relates in some way to the things we've discussed in class. This is due at *9am on Monday the 17th of May*. You won't need to present a solution to the problem (if you can easily solve the problem just using what we've learnt in the class, it doesn't count as a problem!) but you should make clear what the specific difficulties involved are. This might take the form of a "partial solution": an explicit and detailed proposal that is almost right, but can't be extended to be completely right. Towards the end of the course (see the schedule, but subject to change), you'll give a *very short paper topic presentation/discussion*. How developed your ideas are by this point is up to you, but this presentation/discussion is a chance for you improve them, and it won't work very well for that if the idea is still very vague.

Homeworks and final papers that are handed in late will have their score reduced by 20% per 24 hour period (or part thereof).

## Official details

### Academic integrity

We follow the University's policies on academic honesty and will report any form of cheating according to these policies. Please review the terms and penalties of the Student Honor Council's Code of Academic Integrity at: <http://www.shc.umd.edu/code.html> . According to this code plagiarism is defined as "intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as ones own in any academic exercise." This is regarded as a form of academic dishonesty and suspected cases of plagiarism will be referred to the

Honor Council for subsequent action. The grade of XF is listed on the transcripts of individuals found to have plagiarized work; this grade means an F was received because of academic dishonesty.

In accord with the Code, students will be required to write and sign the following statement on each assignment:

I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this examination (or assignment).

Discussions with other students about homework exercises are not a problem, even encouraged, but you should write up the final version individually. Including anything in your own submission that you do not understand is plagiarism. *If you are at all unsure about whether something would constitute plagiarism, you should assume that it would.*

## **Students with disabilities**

If you have a physical disability or learning disability that might affect your work in this course, you should bring it to my attention as soon as possible — definitely before any assignments are due. I will make every effort to accommodate your needs.

## **Religious holidays**

The University of Maryland's policy provides that students should not be penalised because of observances of their religious beliefs. If any religious holidays might affect your work in this course, you should bring it to my attention as soon as possible. I will make every effort to schedule homeworks and presentations in a way that accommodates these holidays.