

LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

Lecture 1

Hadas Kotek



January 2016

Outline

- 1 Preliminaries
 - Introducing the instructor
 - Introducing the conference leaders
 - Logistics
- 2 Course description
 - Defining linguistics
 - Knowledge of language
 - Key features of language

Slides credit: Lauren Clemens, Rebecca Starr

LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

The instructor

- **LING 200:** Introduction to the study of language
- **Instructor:** Dr. Hadas Kotek
 - hadas.kotek@mcgill.ca
 - 1085 ave. Dr. Penfield, rm. 101
 - Office hours: Mondays 15:00-16:30 (and by appointment)

LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

LING 200: Short description

This class will provide some answers to basic questions about the nature of human language. Throughout the course, we will be examining a number of ways in which human language is a complex but law-governed mental system.

In the first half of class, we will study some core aspects of this system. We will then use what we have learned to address a variety of other questions – including how language is acquired, how dialects arise, how languages change over time, and others.

LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

LING 200 vs. LING 201

- **LING 200:** Introduction to the study of language
 - **LING 201:** Introduction to linguistics
 - **LING 200 will cover some of the same materials as LING 201** in the 'core' areas of linguistics: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics.
 - LING 201 will go into more depth and be more technical.
 - LING 200 will establish some basic concepts and terminology and then apply them to a broader range of topics, such as historical linguistics, psycholinguistics, language acquisition, language variation, writing systems, sign languages, ...
- ➔ **LING 201 is required for both the major and the minor.**
- From the Linguistics website: "LING 200 *does* count toward complementary course credit, but we do not recommend that you take it if you have also taken LING 201—there is a lot of overlap."

LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

Meet your TAs!

Colin Brown

colin.brown@mail.mcgill.ca



Donghyun Kim (Don)

donghyun.kim@mail.mcgill.ca

Francesco Gentile

francesco.gentile@mail.mcgill.ca



LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

The course

- Lectures: Mondays & Wednesdays, 12:35-13:25.
- There will also be a lecture this Friday, January 15.
- Conferences will begin next week and replace the Friday lecture.
- ▶ **You must sign up for a conference on Minerva.**
- Registration will open on Wednesday, January 13.
- You **must** do this to get your assignments graded and to get a conference participation grade.

LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

Readings

- Course pack (available at McGill bookstore).
- Additional readings may be posted on MyCourses.
- You can find the list of readings in the syllabus on MyCourses.

LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

Requirements

- | | |
|---|-----|
| • Readings (most weeks) | |
| • Attendance and participation (lectures & conferences) | 10% |
| • 6 problem sets | 30% |
| • 2 midterms | 20% |
| • Final exam | 40% |

LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

Assignments

- Published on *MyCourses* at least one week before due date.
- Submit via *MyCourses* by the end of the day Monday.
- Submissions are time-stamped:
 - Assignments submitted after their due date will not be graded, except in the case of documented illness or other emergency.
- You are allowed to work in groups
 - At most 3 students per group
 - **All with the same TA**
 - Submit one assignment with all participant names, receive one grade (other group members: submit one-liner “I worked with XYZ and ABC. XYZ submitted the assignment.”)
 - You are not required to work in a group

LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

Midterms

- There will be two lecture-long midterms (in class).
- Scheduled for:
 - Wednesday, February 10
 - Wednesday, March 16
- Makeup midterms: only for documented illness or other emergency.

LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

Electronic device policy

- **The use of any and all electronic devices is strictly prohibited.**
- All slides will be posted on *MyCourses* after the lectures.
- You should always have something to take notes with, as we will sometimes solve problems in class.

LING 200: Introduction to the Study of Language

Resources on *MyCourses*

- The course syllabus contains information about:
 - The schedule
 - The readings
 - Grading policy
 - Academic conduct, . . .
 - **When in doubt, always consult the syllabus!**
- Online discussion forum:
 - This is an excellent place to get answers to questions.
 - The course staff will check it, but you can also answer each others' questions.
 - Participation in the forum is worth a 1% bonus to your final grade.
- Email etiquette FAQ.
- Slides, handouts, assignments, readings, extra materials.

Defining linguistics

What is linguistics?

- ▶ Linguistics is the scientific study of language as a system.

What do linguists study?

- Linguists study various aspects of the structure of language, from sound patterns to narratives. Also...
 - How language is acquired
 - How it is processed in the brain
 - How it can be processed by computers
 - How it changes over time
 - How it varies by situation
 - How it functions in society

Defining linguistics

Some big questions in linguistics

- Do all languages share a common underlying structure?
 - Is the way that we think shaped by the language(s) that we speak?
 - Is language learned and processed in the brain differently from other cognitive skills?
- ⇒ These are subject to ongoing research!

Defining linguistics

Some Frequently Asked Questions

- Do linguists only study English?
 - No. Linguistics is the study of language in general. This course will focus on English examples, but not exclusively.
- Do linguists teach people how to speak properly?
 - No. Linguistics is “descriptive,” not “prescriptive.” We are interested in how people actually speak, not in how someone has decided they *should* speak.
- But some ways of speaking are more grammatical than others, right?
 - Actually, no. As we will see, standard and non-standard language varieties are equally systematic and rule-governed.
- Do linguists learn to speak many languages?
 - Many linguists do enjoy learning languages. But linguistics is not about learning to be a translator, or learning lots of languages.

Defining linguistics

Some Frequently Asked Questions

- How do linguists study language?
 - Linguistics involves a wide range of **quantitative** and **qualitative** research methods and tools. Some examples:
 - Brain imaging (fMRI, EEG, etc.)
 - Acoustic analysis software
 - Statistical analysis of corpora
 - Ethnographic fieldwork

Most work for this course will involve analytic reasoning: observation of data and identification of patterns.

- So, is linguistics in the sciences, the social sciences, or the humanities?
 - Linguistics is at the crossroads of many disciplines. Different universities classify it in different ways.
Many students are drawn to linguistics because they are interested in both sciences and the arts.

Defining linguistics

Summary

- Linguistics is the scientific study of language as a system.
- Linguists investigate language patterns using a range of methods.
- This course will be awesome.

Knowledge of language

Knowledge of language

When we say that we know a language, what exactly do we mean?

Two common answers

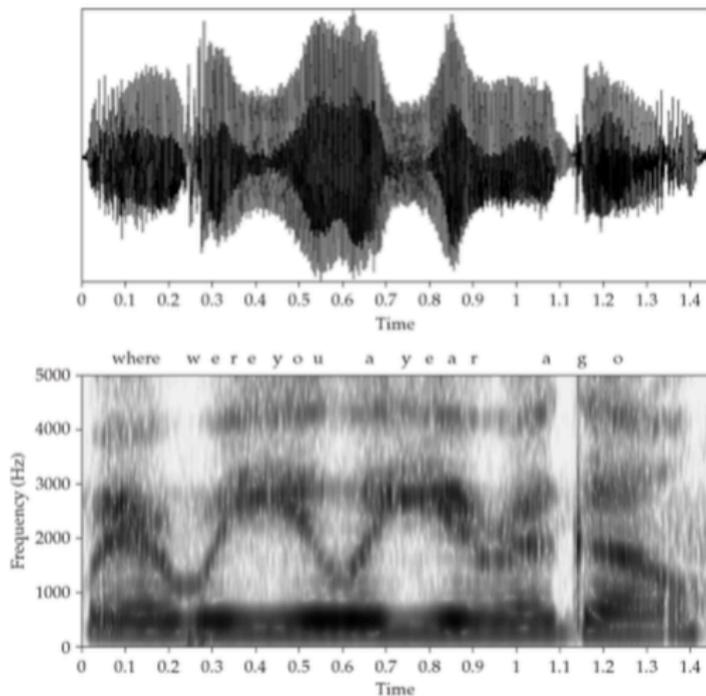
- Function: knowing how to communicate/express yourself in the language.
- Form: knowing the words of the language and the rules for putting them together.
- But beyond knowing “words,” what else do native speakers know about the form of their language?

Tacit knowledge

Tacit knowledge

- We know a lot of things about our language that we don't know we know ...
- ... and that nobody (parents, teachers, etc.) ever explicitly taught us.
- ➡ The job of the linguist is to document and model this knowledge.

Sounds



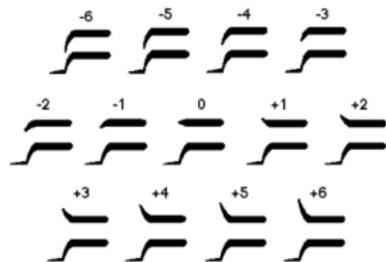
Source: *Discovering Speech, Words, and Mind* by Dani Byrd, Toben H. Mintz

Sounds

Speech sounds

Although speech sounds exist on a continuum, speakers of the same language break it up into conventionalized units, like syllables and words.

Raise your hand when you hear [da] in this sequence.
Lower your hand when you hear [ga].



Source: <http://www.haskins.yale.edu/featured/bdg.html>

➤ The study of speech sounds is called **phonetics**.

Sound patterns

Which one of the following is most likely to be an English word?

- (1) a. vlorsh
b. frink
c. kdvo

Our knowledge of English tells us that “frink” is most likely to be a word, even though “vlorsh” is not inherently impossible to produce.

➡ The study of patterns in speech is called **phonology**.

Speech patterns

The *redden* rule

- (2) a. whiten, blacken, redden, quicken, deepen, shorten, lighten...
b. *bluen, *greenen, *yellowen, *slowen, *highen, *tallen...

The *flapping* rule in North American English

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------|-------------------|
| (3) | <u>but</u> ter | de <u>bat</u> e |
| | <u>mat</u> ter | mat <u>er</u> ial |
| | art <u>is</u> try | art <u>is</u> tic |
| | att <u>est</u> ation | att <u>est</u> ed |
| | art <u>er</u> y | art <u>er</u> ial |

Word structure

By the way, this is a frink:



And these are two ... frinks!

We know that the plural of “frink” is “frinks,” even though we’ve never heard that word before.

- The study of the structure of words and their parts is called **morphology**.

Sentence structure

Which of these sentences is grammatical?

- (4) a. I yesterday two frinks vargled.
b. Yesterday I vargled two frinks.
c. Vargled I yesterday two frinks.

None of these sentences are actually “correct” English, since they contain non-words.

Still, we can identify which one has English sentence structure.

➡ The study of the structure of phrases and sentences is called **syntax**.

What we don't know we know

Active-passive

- (5) a. The baby chattered to us.
b. We were chattered to by the baby.
- (6) a. The baby mattered to us.
b. ???

Seem vs. hope

- (7) a. Anya seemed to speak German.
b. It seemed that Anya spoke German.
- (8) a. Anya hoped to speak German.
b. ???

What we don't know we know

One more example...

- (9) a. * Screw yourself!
b. Go screw yourself!
c. Screw you!
d. * Go screw you!

➡ Where did you learn this? Parents? School?

Key features of language

Although languages vary in some respects, they all share a few key features.

Feature 1: Arbitrariness

- Is there an inherent connection between the word “cat” and ...



Key features of language

Feature 2: Discreteness

All languages are made up of discrete units:

phones	[slaidz]
morphemes	slide-s
words	slides
phrases	these slides
sentences	these slides are confusing.

Key features of language

Feature 3: Compositionality

Larger unites are composed of smaller units:

Sentence =	Noun Phrase +	Verb phrase
	I	like cats.
	The cat	is gray.
	The cat I saw	meowed loudly all day.

Key features of language

Feature 4: Creativity

You can use the finite grammar of a language to compose an infinite number of utterances.

- (10)
 - a. Anya's neighbor
 - b. Anya's neighbor's friend
 - c. Anya's neighbor's friend's husband
 - d. Anya's neighbor's friend's husband's cat ...
- In principle, I could go on forever, but *performance factors* would probably stop me:
 - This class would end
 - I would get hungry
 - People would stop paying attention to me
 - I would eventually die
- ➡ Nonetheless, our syntax has the capacity to produce sentences that are infinitely long.

Key features of language

Feature 5: Rule-governedness

- All languages follow a set of conventional rules (=their grammar).
- These rules govern how linguistic units are constructed and how they fit together.
- ➡ **Non-standard dialects and slang also follow rules.**

Key features of language

Summary

- Arbitrariness
- Discreteness
- Compositionality
- Creativity
- Rule-governedness

For next time...

- I will post the lecture slides on *MyCourses*.
- See the syllabus and other information on *MyCourses*, and use the discussion forum if you have any questions.
- The first problem set has been posted.
- We will begin talking in more detail about *phonetics* – the study of the sounds of natural language.
- ➡ **Read Ladefoged “A Course in Phonetics” (chapter 1, pages 1-20)**
- ➡ **Wash your hands before class!**