ENGLISH 306A

An Introduction to Linguistics

Fall 1991

Instructor: P. H. Smith, Jr.

Office Hours: by appointment

The course will meet from 2:30 to 4:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The textbook will be *Contemporary Linguistic Analysis* by O'Grady and Dobrovolsky. This book is available in the University Bookstore, and costs $32.15.

The course will closely follow the textbook, though it will cover only a few chapters of that book. Exercises will be taken from the text and from other sources. Outside readings may be assigned from time to time, but basically the text is the heart of the course.

There will be one midterm exam (toward the end of October) and a final. The midterm will count for 25% of the final course grade, and the final for 40%. There will be 5 homework exercises each worth 5% of the course grade. There may be unannounced class quizzes each worth 2% of the course grade. The remaining percentage of the course grade will depend on class participation.

The course will be divided into five “segments”:

1. The meaning of “grammar”. Discussion of what the term (descriptive) “grammar” means to a linguist as contrasted to the way the word is used (prescriptively) in school. The purpose is to encourage students to accept, for purposes of linguistic examination, all kinds of language, even the “ungrammatical”. Homework assignment: commentary on the grammaticality of a dozen or so sentences.

2. Articulatory phonetics. The sounds of language, our own and others. How the sounds are made, how to listen for them. The class usually has a number of speakers of languages other than English, several of whom can be persuaded to give short dictations which the students will be asked to transcribe in standard phonetic notation. Homework assignment: transcription of a passage of modern English into phonetic notation.

3. Phonology. The notion of the phoneme; a phonetic contrast is exploited phonologically in one language but not in another; sounds structure one way in one language and differently in another. Homework assignment: analysis of a phonological contrast in an exotic language.


5. Historical linguistics. How languages change over time. A bit of the history of (Indo-European) historical linguistics and thus the history of the English language. Homework assignment: use of the etymologies given in three different dictionaries to trace the origin and development into modern English of half a dozen words.