English 306A

Fall 1995

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Office Hours:
Tues./Thurs. 10:30-12:30
Wed. 9:00-10:30

English 306A is an introduction to the methods and principles of language analysis. As with all surveys, only a limited number of topics can be touched upon in the few weeks of the term; nevertheless, it is hoped that you will gain an appreciation for some issues which have greatly influenced anthropologists, psychologists, philosophers, literary critics, and linguists during the past few decades. You should also come to appreciate the power and richness which language affords you.

306A is not a "grammar" course as "grammar" is popularly understood. It is less concerned with the way language "ought" to be used (as defined by any "authority") than with the way in which it is used by native speakers. For this reason, you should be alert to the English language around you. Listen to its varying sounds and to the structures which it manifests, consider the nature of ambiguities of meaning and how these are resolved, examine the way the spoken language combines with gesture, attitude, and assumptions to direct understanding.

Keep in mind that we are focusing primarily upon the spoken language and not upon writing. Thinking of language as reading/writing has been one of the more difficult obstacles for many who take this course to overcome. These people speak, for example, of the "silent -e" in a word like "tale" or of the "doubled consonants" in a word like "little" but we might wonder if a "silent sound" is a sound at all and certainly none of us say two t's in succession in "little." We must listen to the actual sounds we use in speech.

Our examination will range from individual sounds used in human language, to the structure of discourses and the development of meaning. Clearly, this involves detailed examination of some issues and you are urged to be as specific as possible in all your explanations; still, I am concerned that you also be alert to the methods involved in the analysis and to the assumptions underlying those methods.

TEXT READINGS:

Read the sections assigned on the schedule below before the days on which the subject is discussed. It is confusing and frustrating to sit through lectures for which you are not prepared. Obviously we are not able to talk about everything in the textbook; there is neither time enough nor is there much point in rehearsing what you can read for yourself. Instead I will pick out certain issues and approach them in a slightly different manner from the textbook.

A good approach is to read each section through once completely and then to go back and re-read it, taking notes as you do so. The total amount of reading in this course is small and such a plan not impractical, even with the limited time a student has. To assist in your understanding both of method and detail, the exercises at the
end of each chapter are useful and you might try your hand at these. Past students have observed that these exercises drive home the points in the text; if you are able to do them, you probably will have mastered the material. From time to time, we will go over a few of these and similar exercises in class, doing them collectively to assure ourselves that we understand the concepts.

If you have questions about the reading or the class lectures, be sure to ask me. My job is to help you with what may be new and, at times, puzzling material. If you are reluctant to speak in class—though you may be certain that others will have the same questions you do—be sure to see me after class or during office hours.

I would also recommend the formation of "study groups" of three to five people to review the sample questions that will be handled out a week before each of the examinations. In fact, such groups might meet periodically to go over the exercises in the textbook and to talk about the material in the text and lectures.


**EXAMINATIONS:**

1. 20% October 3  
2. 25% October 31  
3. 25% November 16  
4. 30% Final (covering all of the course). Scheduled by the university during the examination period.

One week before each examination, a lengthy list of questions will be handed out from which the exam will be constructed. You will have that week in which to prepare your responses. Obviously, since you have this opportunity, more questions will appear on the examination than might be the case if you did not have occasion to prepare yourself in advance.

Lectures will cover the following topics from Akmajian, et. al. If you follow this schedule you should have no difficulty getting through the material.

1. Weeks of 12 September and 19 September  

2. Weeks of 26 September, 3 October, and 10 October  
   Chapters 3 and 4: "Phonetics" and "Phonology.

3. Weeks of 17, 24, 31 October  
   Chapter 2: "Morphology."

   **October 3: Exam I**  
   **October 31: Exam II**
4. Weeks of 7 and 14 November
   Chapter 5: "Syntax."

November 16: Exam III

5. Weeks of 21 and 28 November
   Chapter 6: "Semantics" and Chapter 9 "Pragmatics."

Supplementary Reading

There are a number of introductory linguistic texts available in the Dana Porter Library, many which may be useful to you. These generally cover the same ground as the assigned text but with some variation in presentation and examples. I will mention only three which are readily available. The text by O'Grady and Dobrovolsky also provides illustrations drawn from Canadian English and may therefore be of special interest:


William O'Grady and Michael Dobrovolsky, Contemporary Linguistic Analysis (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd.: 1987).