English 306A:
An Introduction to Linguistics

Neil C. Hultin
H.H. 325
885-4567; ex. 3775
Office Hours:
  Tuesday 1:30-4:30;
  Other times by appointment

This course is intended to introduce you to some of the principles and methods of linguistic analysis. As with all brief surveys, only a limited number of topics can be considered; nevertheless I trust you will gain an appreciation of some issues which have greatly influenced anthropologists, psychologists, literary critics, linguists, and philosophers over the past decades. I hope that you will also come to appreciate more fully the power and richness of human language.

306A is not a "grammar" course as "grammar" is popularly understood. We will be less concerned with the way language "ought" to be used than with the ways in which it is used. For this reason, you should listen closely to the varieties of English spoken around you and be more aware of the varying sounds, structures, and gestures which you use and which you hear other using.

Our concerns will range from the individual sounds used in languages in general--and the English language in particular--to the structure of discourses and the development of meaning. Clearly, this will involve detailed examination of some points and while the details are important, I am most concerned that you be conscious of the methods involved in our analysis and the assumptions underlying those methods. You should ask yourself what these methods reveal about language and about ourselves.

To assist in your understanding both of method and detail, the exercises at the end of each chapter are very useful. As students have observed in the past, these exercises drive home the points in the text and if you are able to do them, you have probably mastered the material. From time to time, we will do a few of these exercises in class.


EXAMINATIONS:
1. 15% (in class)  |  These examinations will be based
2. 25% (in class)  |  on the material in the textbook
3. 25% (in class)  |  and on the lectures and classes.
4. 35% Final (covering all of the course). Scheduled by the university during the examination period.
TEXT READINGS: Read the assigned section before the days on which the subject is scheduled for discussion. You might do this even if we fall behind in lectures. It is confusing and frustrating—to say nothing of boring—to sit through classes for which you are not prepared. Obviously we can not talk about all of the material in the textbook; we do not have sufficient time nor is there much point in rehearsing what you can read by yourself. Instead I will pick out certain issues and approach them in a slightly different manner from the textbook.

A good plan is to read each section through once completely, and then to go back and re-read it, taking notes as you read and doing the exercises at the end of the chapter. As you will observe, the amount of reading in this course is not extensive and such a plan is not impractical. We will devote time in some periods to go over a few of the exercises from the chapters, collectively doing them to assure ourselves that we understand the concepts.

If you have any questions about the reading or the classes, be sure to ask me. My function is to help you with what may be new and, at times, puzzling topics. If you are reluctant to speak in class—though you may be certain that others will also appreciate the clarification—be sure to see me after class or during office hours.

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

We will look at the following topics from Akmajian et al. over the course of this term. If you follow this schedule in your reading you should have no difficulty getting through the material:

1. Weeks of 3 May and 10 May
   Introduction
   "The Structure of Human Language"; Chapter 1: "What is Linguistics";
   Appendix: "The Written Representation of Language"; Chapter 11: "Language
   Acquisition in Child and Chimp";

2. Weeks of 17 May, 24 May and 31 May
   Chapter 3 and Chapter 4: "Phonetics" and "Phonology."
   Exam 1: 2 June—one hour; in class.

3. Weeks of 7 June, 14 June, and 21 June
   Chapter 2: "Morphology. . . ."

4. Week of 28 June and 5 July
   Chapter 5: "Syntax. . . ."
   Exam 2: 28 June—one hour; in class.

5. 12 July and Week of 19 July
   Chapter 6: "Semantics. . . ."
Chapter 9: "Pragmatics. . ."

Exam 3: 21 July--one hour; in class

7. Week of 26 July
Chapter 7: "Language Variation. . ."

Supplementary Reading

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


