

**Linguistics 315 – Introduction to Syntax**  
**Syllabus**

**MW 11:30 – 1:00p**

**Place: FB 3528**

**Professor: Acrisio Pires**

**Office hours:**

**Tue 1-2p** (walk in), or Mon through Fri by appointment

**Office:** 4095 Frieze Building

**Email:** [pires@umich.edu](mailto:pires@umich.edu) (the best way to contact me)

**Phone:** 734.6472156

**Webpage:** <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/ling/pires/#currentteaching>

**CourseTools webpage :** <http://coursetools.ummumich.edu/2003/fall/ling/315/001.nsf>

**Course description:**

This course investigates the syntax (sentence structure properties) of human language. It addresses the need for a scientific model to explain human knowledge of language that also makes predictions about its representation in the mind. The focus here is on human language as a specific cognitive capacity restricted to humans, rather than on the individual languages (e.g. English, Arabic, Hindi) that are made possible by the existence of this capacity. For this reason, the course explores in detail many structural properties that are common across different languages, even those that clearly do not share a common recent past. A simple example: all languages have specific strategies to ask questions that make them different from affirmative sentences (e.g. English uses special question words — ‘*who*’, ‘*what*’ and so on — as most languages do). In order to explain this and many other common properties of human language, a scientific hypothesis that has been explored in depth is that a large part of human knowledge of language is biologically determined, and maybe innate. This is further supported by the fact that normal children effortlessly learn their native language at an amazing speed, despite the complexity of the task at hand (compare trying to learn for example Korean or Turkish as an adult, with years of language classes), and despite variation and deficiencies of the language input they are exposed to.

However, it is also clear that there is a huge diversity among human languages, which can be illustrated only in an unfair way in this short description (e.g. only some languages change the sentence structure in a regular question: you say ‘*Who do you like?*’ in English, instead of ‘*You like who?*’, a possible word order similar to the one would find for instance in Chinese). Given this kind of diversity, which will be made clear, children need to be exposed to some minimum input of a particular language in order to be able to acquire it proficiently. Therefore, a major question that arises in modern linguistic inquiry and that will be object of this course is how the hypothesis of a biological basis for human language — which provides an explanation for the common aspects among all human languages and for the striking success of the acquisition task — can be reconciled with the obvious diversity of the human language experience.

*Prerequisites:* Although *there are no official prerequisites*, students usually take one introductory course in linguistics (Ling 210, 211 or 212) before taking this course.

**Coursebook: Required**

Carnie, A. 2002. *Syntax: A Generative Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell. ISBN 0-631-22544-7 (paperback)

**Schedule**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>
1	1. Setting the stage: the focus of generative linguistics 2. The scientific inquiry of language.	
2	3. What ' <i>language</i> ' counts? 4. I-language vs. E-language (also: Is any distinction between language and dialect relevant?) 5. Individual grammar: Linguistics and cognitive psychology 6. The biological basis of human language knowledge: – The innateness hypothesis. – Why languages are so strikingly similar. – Dealing with language variation. 7. A language organ?	*Carnie: Ch. 1
3	8. Acquisition, biology and the environment Learning vs. acquisition 9. Uniformity of acquisition 10. Altering the environment: - Is Motherese necessary? - Language acquisition by deaf and blind children.	*Gleitman&Newport 1995a
4	11. Acquisition, biology and the environment: manipulating the learner's maturational status	*Gleitman&Newport 1995a
5	12. Evidence from genetics – a grammar gene?  13. The challenge of acquisition: lexicon, structure dependence. 14. What acquisition is not: what the environment does not provide.	Pinker 2001 Balter 2001, 2002  *Carnie: ch. 1
6	15. Grammaticality vs. acceptability 16. The competence vs. performance distinction 17. The logical problem of language acquisition: the poverty of the stimulus argument	*Carnie: ch. 1
7	18. Description and explanation: - Explanatory vs. descriptive adequacy 19. Principles and Parameters: Individual grammars and particular languages.	*Carnie: ch. 1
8	20. The primitives of syntax: lexical categories 21. Tests for lexical categories	*Carnie: ch. 2
9	22. The primitives of syntax: functional categories 23. Syntax as a combinatorial system: Phrases and Phrase Structure Rules	*Carnie: ch. 2
10-11	24. Phrase structure rules: the clause 25. Syntax as a recursive system 26. Structural ambiguity 27. Constituency 28. Tests for constituency	*Carnie: ch. 2
12-13	29. X'-Theory and lexical categories	*Carnie: ch. 5
14	<b>Midterm</b>	

Class	Topic	Readings
15-16	30. X'-Bar theory and functional categories	*Carnie: ch. 6
17	31. Argument structure and Theta-Theory - Thematic roles	*Carnie: ch. 7
18	32. The Projection Principle 33. Expletives and the Extended Projection Principle	*Carnie: ch. 7
19	34. Structural Relations - Dominance - C-command	*Carnie: ch. 3
20-21	35. Binding Theory	*Carnie: ch. 4
21	<b>One-page summary of final paper project</b>	
22	36. Case Theory - Morphological and abstract Case - The Case filter	*Carnie: ch. 9
23...	37. NP-Movement - NP movement: 'passives' and 'raising'. 38. Wh-Movement - Head-movement: I-to-C, <i>do</i> -support	*Carnie: ch. 9  *Carnie: ch. 11, p. 281-293 Carnie: ch. 8, p. 205-210
...	Last day of classes/ <b>hourly exam</b>	

\*Required readings

#### Evaluation:

1. **Midterm: 30%**
2. **Assigned homework 10%**
3. **Pop quizzes/group assignments in class 20%**
4. **Final hourly exam (or final paper): 40%**

#### Notes:

1. There will be regular class and homework assignments. Students are strongly encouraged to complete all of them, since they will include questions very similar to the ones included in the exams.
2. **On final hourly exam/final paper:** If you decide to write a final paper instead of taking the final exam, you have to hand in a 1-page summary of the project for the final paper.
3. After the midterm you will get some guidelines about how to prepare and write the final paper.

#### Other selected readings/references:

The underlined references are links to the papers available online at Library Reserves:

<http://www.lib.umich.edu/reserves/ures/lists/1/fa2003/>

Even if not specified on the schedule, these readings may be assigned throughout the semester.

[Anderson, Stephen R. & David W. Lightfoot "Language as a Mental Organ" and "Syntax," in The Language Organ: Linguistics as Cognitive Physiology. 1st edition, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 18-66.](#)

[Balter, M. "First gene linked to speech identified." Science, Vol. 294, No. 5540, Oct 5, 2001, pp. 32.](#)

[Balter, M. "'Speech Gene' tied to modern humans." Science, Vol. 297, No. 5584, Aug 16, 2002, pp. 1105.](#)

[Dwenvald, Mary. "Seeking deeper meaning in the babbling of babies." The New York Times, No. Tuesday, Oct 1, 2002, pp. Health&Fitness, D5.](#)

Gleitman L. R. & M. Liberman, eds. 1995a. *Language: An Invitation to Cognitive Science, Second Edition. Vol. 1.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

[Gleitman, Lila R. and Elissa L. Newport "The Invention of Language by Children: Environmental and Biological Influences on the Acquisition of Language," in \*An Invitation to Cognitive Science: Volume 1: Language, Second edition\*, edited by Lila R. Gleitman & Mark Liberman Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press, 1995, pp. 1-24.](#)

[Jackendoff, Ray. "The Argument for Mental Grammar," and "The Argument for Innate Knowledge," in \*Patterns in the Mind: Language and Human Nature\*. New York: Basic Books, 1994, pp. 8-35.](#)

[Pinker, Steven. "How Language Works" and "Baby Born Talking - Describes Heaven," in \*The Language Instinct\*. New York: William Morrow, 1994, pp. 83-125, 262-296.](#)

[Pinker, Steven. "Talk of genetics and vice versa." \*Nature\*, Vol. 413, No. 6855, 4 October 2001, pp. 465-466.](#)

**Additional references on physical reserve:**

**Location: UNIVERSITY RESERVES Course: LG 315 URES2**

**Instructor: PIRES,A**

Author	Title	Call Number	Bar Code
CLARK, V. P. ET AL.	LANGUAGE: READINGS IN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE	P 25 .L28 1998	027508889
DEPT. OF LINGUISTICS/OSU	LANGUAGE FILES : MATERIALS FOR AN INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE	P 121 .L277 2001	050081242
ANDERSON, STEPHEN R.	LANGUAGE ORGAN : LINGUISTICS AS COGNITIVE PHYSIOLOGY	P 132 .A531 2002	056180360
BAKER, MARK C.	ATOMS OF LANGUAGE	P 107 .B351 2001	053048305
CHOMSKY, NOAM.	KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE : ITS NATURE, ORIGINS, AND USE	P106 .C5181 1986	010245747
COOK, V. J.	CHOMSKY'S UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR : AN INTRODUCTION	P 85 .C55 C77 1996	037497651
OUHALLA, JAMAL	INTRODUCING TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR : FROM PRINCIPLES AND PARAMETERS TO MINIMALISM	P 158 .O941 1999	056791927
POOLE, GEOFFREY	SYNTACTIC THEORY	P 291 .P641 2002	053178276
RADFORD, ANDREW.	TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR : A FIRST COURSE	P 158 .R291 1988	013333995