Columbia Linguistics Course Schedule, 2024-2025

Fall 2024

**Introduction to Linguistics** (LING UN3101)

Instructor: William Foley

To introduce students to the general nature of human language; and to demonstrate how it can be described and analyzed. To teach ability in applying analytic techniques, and thereby provide a conceptual framework for thinking about and discussing language and language-related topics. With the specific objectives of learning basic concepts in areas that include *phonetics*, *phonology*, *morphology*, *syntax*, and *semantics*, and developing skill at applying linguistic principles in the analysis of data.   
Issues of importance will include:

* *The sounds of human languages (phonetics/phonology*) and how they vary.
* *The theory of word formation (morphology), language universals* and *language typology*(what the languages of the world are like).
* *The theory of grammar (syntax)* (or what it is that people know about their languages that enables them to produce and interpret new sentences).
* *The meanings (semantics)* that different languages express and how this may be related to the culture in which they are used.

**Endangered Languages in the Global City: Language, Culture, & Migration in Contemporary NYC** (LING UN3102) Instructor: Ross Perlin

*No prerequisite. Global core. Language in context theme.*

Of the world’s estimated 7,000 languages – representing migrations and historical developments thousands of years old – the majority are primarily oral, little documented, and increasingly endangered under the onslaught of global languages like English. This course will take the unprecedented, paradoxical linguistic capital of New York City as a lens for examining how immigrants form communities in a new land, how those communities are integrated into the wider society, and how they grapple with linguistic and cultural change. Drawing on sociolinguistics, anthropology, and history, the course will focus on texts from and encounters with members of three of the city’s fastest-growing but least-studied communities (Indigenous Americans, Himalayans, Central Asians) before closing with a series of classes exploring broader questions around mapping, education, policy, the role of linguists, revitalization and the future of language and mobility.

**Language, Brain & Mind** (LING UN3103)

Instructor: William Foley

*No prerequisite. Psychology & biology of language theme.*

The ability to speak distinguishes humans from all other animals, including our closest relatives, the chimpanzees. Why is this so? What makes this possible? This course seeks to answer these questions. We will look at the neurological and psychological foundations of the human faculty of language. How did our brains change to allow language to evolve? Where in our brains are the components of language found? Are our minds specialized for learning language or is it part of our general cognitive abilities to learn? How are words and sentences produced and their meanings recognized? The structure of languages around the world varies greatly; does this have psychological effects for their speakers?

**Phonetics & Phonology** (LING GU4376)

Instructor: Meredith Landman

*Prerequisite: Intro Ling. Required for the major.*

An investigation of the sounds and sound systems of the world’s languages. Topics include: articulatory/acoustic properties of sounds; phonemic and morphophonemic analysis; segmental and suprasegmental (stress, tone, and other prosodic) patterns; the role of morphology and syntax (domain boundedness and boundary signals); perception, diachrony, and acquisition.

**Syntax** (LING GU4903)

Instructor: Meredith Landman

*Prerequisite: Intro Ling. Required for the major.*

An introduction to the study of sentence structure in the world’s languages. Topics include: phrase structure and constituency; the role of the lexicon and word meaning; the influence of pragmatics; different clausal types; syntactic typology, cross-linguistic commonalities and variation.

**Cognitive Linguistics** (SPAN GR5450) Instructor: Reyes Llopis-Garcia

*No prerequisite. Language and meaning theme.*

What happens in the mind when language is at work? Cognitive linguistics provides a theoretical and applied framework to understand that language stems from interaction with the world and emerges in the mind as part of our experience and physical position in space. Language embodies the global cognitive capabilities of all human beings.

**Senior Thesis Seminar** (LING UN3993) Instructors: Meredith Landman & William Foley

*Required for the major*. Linguistics majors in their senior year should enroll in 3 points.

Spring 2025

**Word & Grammar** (LING GU4022) Instructor: William Foley

*Prerequisite: Intro Ling. Language diversity theme.*

Many modern theories of grammar are almost entirely based on English, having been developed mainly to describe the structure of English and, to a much lesser extent, other familiar languages of Europe. But the languages of the world are highly diverse, many of them, in contrast to English, with highly complex word and inflectional structures and relatively simple phrasal structures. Theories of grammar built on English serve such languages poorly. This course seeks to address this imbalance by focusing on languages with complex morphological and morphosyntactic structures. Because the grammars of such languages are built around word structures, we will be exploring current lexicalist theories of grammar such as Lexical Functional Grammar and Construction Grammar to develop formal explicit analyses of these languages. One learns morphological and morphosyntactic analysis by doing it across languages of various types, so we will regularly be working through problems to analyze in class.

**Semantics & Pragmatics** (new course)

Instructor: Meredith Landman

*Prerequisite: Intro Ling. Language and meaning theme.*

An introduction to how meaning is expressed in the languages of the world.

**Language Documentation & Field Methods** (LING GU4120)

Instructor: Meredith Landman

*Prerequisites: Intro Ling and Phonetics & Phonology. Language diversity theme.*

This course provides training in fieldwork for language documentation and description.

**Language & Society** (LING GU4800)

Instructor: Ross Perlin

*No prerequisite. Language and society theme.*

How language structure and usage varies according to societal factors such as social history and socioeconomic factors, illustrated with study modules on language contact, language standardization and literacy, quantitative sociolinguistic theory, language allegiance, language and power.

**Languages of Asia** (LING GU4174)

Instructor: Ross Perlin

*No prerequisite.* *Language diversity theme.*

With the largest landmass of any continent and a majority of the world’s population, Asia is deeply diverse linguistic terrain, where even the major national languages may come from very different families and employ varied writing systems. Though many are endangered and little documented, Asia’s 2000-plus languages exemplify both features that are typologically significant worldwide such as tone, ergativity, evidentiality, and nominalization, and more particularly local features including vowel harmony, retroflexion, elaborate expressions, and sentence-final particles. This course surveys four of Asia’s major language groups (Indo-Iranian, Turkic, Tibeto-Burman, and Sinitic) and four of its proposed linguistic areas (the Caucasus, India, mainland Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia), where a constellation of languages from a variety of families, as well as isolates, have long been in close contact. Representative languages large and small will be examined in “close-up” for both their linguistic features and the natural, social, and historical forces that shape them.

**Descriptive Grammar of Hungarian** (HNGR UN3343)

Instructor: Carol Rounds

*No prerequisite. Language diversity theme.*

This course is designed for those curious about the structure of Hungarian – an unusual language with a complex grammar quite different from English, or, indeed, any Indo-European language. The study of Hungarian, a language of the Finno-Ugric family, offers the opportunity to learn about the phonology of vowel harmony, the syntax of topic-comment discourse, verb agreement with subjects and objects, highly developed case systems and possessive nominal paradigms. In addition to its inflectional profile, Hungarian derivation possibilities are vast, combinatory, and playful. During the semester we will touch upon all the important grammatical aspects of Hungarian and discuss them in relation to general linguistic principles and discourse, and finally, through some text analysis, see them in action. Although the primary discussion will center on Hungarian, we will draw on comparisons to other Finno-Ugric languages, most notably Finnish and Komi; students are encouraged to draw on comparisons with their own languages of interest.

**Senior Thesis Seminar** (LING UN3994)

Instructors: Meredith Landman & Ross Perlin

*Required for the major*.Linguistics majors in their senior year should enroll in 3 points.