

Today's topics:

- **Introduction to this course**
- **What is linguistics?**

1. Course information

Welcome!

- I am **Jen Smith** [here's [my web site](#)]
 - Please call me “Dr. Smith” or “Prof. Smith” or “Jen”
- This course is **Introduction to Language**
 - Provides an overview of **linguistics**
 - FC: *Ways of Knowing*
 - Perspectives on language most of you probably haven't considered before
 - FC: *Natural Scientific Investigation*
 - Human language as a natural phenomenon—!

1. Course information

- Course structure:

M, W | Lecture

- Presents new course content
- Lecture outline (slides) **usually posted** right before class
- Get involved: Expect practice problems, check-in questions, and pair discussions

F | Recitation

- Smaller groups led by teaching assistants (TAs)
- Be ready for discussion and hands-on practice
- A good opportunity for asking questions

1. Course information

- Recitation leaders (TAs):

	<i>10:10</i>	<i>11:15</i>
Yuhan Sui	601	604
Esther Chen	602	603

1. Course information

- **Textbook:** *Contemporary Linguistics*, 7th ed. (CL)
 - Be sure you have the 7th edition (green)
 - Unfortunately, there is no ebook

1. Course information

- **Course web site:** (also linked from Canvas site)
<https://users.castle.unc.edu/~jlsmith/ling101.html>
- Check the “[Daily syllabus](#)” web page after every class to find out about readings and assignments
 - Today’s entry has the “[Course info and policies](#)” handout — ***download and keep in a safe place***
 - Grading information
 - Exam dates ...and more
 - Remember to REFRESH your web browser to get the latest version of a web page

2. What is linguistics?

- What do you think of when you hear the words *linguistics* or *linguist*?
 - Write down a couple of ideas
 - When I give the signal, turn to someone near you and compare thoughts (groups of 2 or 3)

2. What is linguistics?

Linguistics is
the study of language

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→ What is **language**?

2. What is linguistics? What is language?

- What is **language**?
 - *Languages* = English, Spanish, Vietnamese, etc.
 - *Language* = human language, in general
- Human language is a system of communication...
but we need to ask:
 - What are its properties?
 - How is human language *similar to* and *different from* other communication systems?

2. What is linguistics? What is language?

- Human language is **creative**, but follows **systematic rules and constraints**
 - *Creative*: Invent new words! Express new thoughts!
 - *Systematic rules and constraints*: We will see many examples throughout this course
 - Some combinations of sounds, words, etc. are **possible** and some are **impossible**
 - Some possible/impossible things **differ** across languages — and some seem to be **universal** (found in all languages)

2. What is linguistics? What is language?

- In this course, we approach human language (mostly) from the perspective of **science**
 - We will occasionally consider social/cultural aspects
- More next time on using the **scientific method** in linguistics

2. What is linguistics? What is language?

Language is **biological** (as well as cultural)

- Appears to have a **critical period**
 - At least for first-language acquisition
- Language development in children occurs **spontaneously** when they are exposed to a speech community — *language doesn't need to be taught*
- A **main focus of this course** will be investigating the properties of a language system that a speaker has acquired **naturally** (not through instruction)
 - Linguistics as part of **cognitive science**

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** — but this doesn't mean what you might think

- What is *grammar*?

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** — but this doesn't mean what you might think

- Grammar: What people “should” say or write?

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** — but this doesn't mean what you might think

- Grammar: What people “should” say or write?
→ **Prescriptive** grammar
 - Useful for learning a foreign language, or learning a particular style (formal writing, ...)
 - NOT the focus of most research in linguistics

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** ...

- **Why** is prescriptive grammar *not* the kind of grammar that most linguists study?

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** ...

- **Why** is prescriptive grammar *not* the kind of grammar that most linguists study?
 - Remember from above...
We're interested in the properties of a language system that a speaker has acquired **naturally** (not through instruction)

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** ...

- **Descriptive** grammar
 - What people **do** say (and understand)
- **Mental** grammar = **Linguistic competence**
 - “What do we know when we know a language?”
- Linguistics typically focuses on **descriptive** and **mental** grammars of **native speakers**
 - **Native speaker**: Someone who acquires a language from exposure, *as a small child*

3. Linguistics and mental grammar

Linguists study **grammar** ...

- **Descriptive** grammar
 - What people **do** say (and understand)
- **Mental** grammar = **Linguistic competence**
 - “What do we know when we know a language?”
- **Linguistics is a scientific approach to language**
 - Our **data**: What people say (and understand)
 - Using this data, we aspire to build a **model** of human **mental grammar**

4. What is mental grammar?

What do we know when we know a language?

- The rules and principles of a speaker's mental grammar are largely **unconscious** "knowledge"

Example: (rules not taught in school!)

- Who does *himself* refer to?
 - (a) Oscar admires **himself**.
 - (b) Oscar thinks that Grover admires **himself**.

4. What is mental grammar?

- English speakers agree:
 - (a) **Oscar** admires **himself**.
 - (b) Oscar thinks that **Grover** admires **himself**.
- **Why** Grover, and *not* Oscar, in (b)?
 - Can you form a hypothesis?

4. What is mental grammar?

- Now who does *himself* refer to?

(c) *Oscar told Grover stories about **himself**.*

→ Does your hypothesis make the right prediction?

4. What is mental grammar?

- Two possible meanings this time!
 - (c) **Oscar** told Grover stories about **himself**.
Oscar told **Grover** stories about **himself**.
- What this example shows us:
 - English native speakers largely agree, even though they were not “taught” how to use *himself*
 - The mental grammar contains some systematic principle
 - But what is the principle? *Himself* doesn't simply refer to the closest preceding option, given (c)...
- Later in the course, we'll solve this puzzle

4. What is mental grammar?

More evidence for mental grammar:

- Children's **systematic** “mistakes” while acquiring their language
 - They are building a mental grammar
- The **creativity** (also called **productivity**) of human language
 - A mental grammar is more than just a memorized list
 - It allows us to produce and understand novel words/phrases/sentences

4. What is mental grammar?

- **Spoken language**, rather than written, is most reflective of mental grammar
 - Writing is often crafted (although “spontaneous” writing is more like speech)
 - Not all societies have written language, but all have spoken (or signed) language

4. What is mental grammar?

- Why is mental grammar worth studying?
 - Better understanding of human language(s)
 - Insight into nature of human mind/brain
- The world's languages are **diverse** in many ways
- But there are also strong **similarities** in the rules of mental grammar from language to language
- Linguists aim to develop a theory of mental grammar that can account for both the **differences** and the **similarities**

5. Getting ready for the next class

- Visit the [Daily Syllabus page](#) on the course web site
- **Reading assignment** for W Aug 23
 - A PDF scan of *CL* Ch 1 is available in [Course Reserves](#) on the LING 101 Canvas site
- Upcoming — **HW #1**
 - *Part 1*: **Discussion questions** are due at your recitation (**F Aug 25, 10:10 or 11:15am**)
 - *Part 2*: **Check-in** on “Course info & policies” and web site is due on Canvas by **F Aug 25, 9pm**