

**Instructor:** Prof. Byron Ahn ['baɪ.jən 'æn]

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**Office Hours:** Tues 1:30-3:00, 621 Comm Ave Bo2;  
Wed 9:30-11:00, 621 Comm Ave Bo2;  
or by appointment

### Class Information

**Lecture:** Tues, Thurs 9:30-11:00, CAS B18A

**Section:** Wed 5:00-6:00, CAS B18A

**Course Description:** The primary goal of this class is to come to an understanding of the structural underpinnings of how words come together to form sentences.

This class is meant to introduce you to the ways in which we, as linguists, approach the observable structural aspects of language. What we learn in this class is by no means to be considered the final answer in our understanding of syntax. Quite the contrary, you should expect to find holes in the theories we present as we go (we will try to address these issues as much as this introductory course allows), but we have to start somewhere. So, we will be focusing on more basic problems, and the methods/approaches taken in attempting to solve them.

This course, at its core, is an investigation of the combinatory system that forms sentences from phrases (and phrases from their subparts), as well as the parallel combinatory system for forming words out of their subparts. We will also investigate the principles that underlie these systems, and see how those principles explain certain instances of natural language phenomena in English, and other languages.

**Prerequisite:** CAS LX 250, equivalent, or permission of the instructor.

**Requirements:** In addition to completing readings and assignments on time, students are expected to fulfill the requirements below:

- Attendance & Participation: 5%
- Problem Sets: 35%
- Mini-Assignments: 10%
- Quiz: 10%
- Midterm: 20%
- Final: 20%
- Snippet (Extra Credit): up to 2.5%

This can be a difficult subject, and the course is not designed to be an easy A. That said, it is designed such that, if you make a serious effort and do the work, you should do fine.

**Blackboard Learn Website:** <http://learn.bu.edu/>

This course will make extensive use of the website: readings, lecture notes, review materials, and all assigned work will be posted to this website – visit it frequently.

If you have any questions about the content of this course, they will only be answered in class, in office hours, and through the online discussion forum. (Never over e-mail.)

**Electronic Communication:** Time-sensitive information may sometimes be distributed by email, so please be sure I have your current frequently-read email address. I will send an email on the day of the first class meeting – if you don't get it, email me by the next morning.

**Reading:** The assigned readings will be posted on the course website. It's up to you whether you want to read before class, or after class – but you must do the reading. There is material you are responsible for in the reading, which we may not have time to go over in class.

- Sportiche, Koopman, & Stabler. 2013. An Introduction to Syntactic Analysis and Theory. ISBN: 978-1405100175.  
*Available at the bookstore or online. (There is even an e-book version on iTunes, Kindle, Nook, etc.)*
- Additional readings will be posted online.

**Attendance:** Attendance of both lectures and sections is a requirement. If you will miss a class, let me know as soon as you know.

**Participation:** As the instructor, of course I will be doing a large portion of the talking in class, but the course will be vastly improved by you, as students, sharing your ideas and asking your questions.

If what I've said is hard to follow, or if you think I've made a mistake, let me know right away. It's easiest to fix problems as they come.

Moreover, when I ask questions, I typically expect answers. Don't be shy – everyone should feel welcome to offer their (perhaps incomplete) thoughts!

Your participation grade will depend on (some combination of) attendance of lecture and section, asking me questions (in and out of class), and participation in discussions (in class/on the online forum).

### Assignments:

**Problem Sets:** Problem sets are longer assignments, given out every other week. They will take some time to do; they will often ask you to go beyond what we've learned in class, and apply a skill to a new type of problem. Typically, problem sets will be posted to the course website every other Thursday, and will be due the following Wednesday, at the beginning of section. Your write-ups can be turned in via email, or physically in class.

**Mini-Assignments:** Mini-assignments are significantly shorter than problem sets, and are meant to keep you up to speed with material as we learn it. Typically, mini-assignments will be posted after class on Tuesday, and will be due on Thursday at the beginning of class. They will be graded on scale of: ✓ (clear effort), ✓<sup>-</sup> (very little effort), o (not done). The main idea is to get you to figure out what you do and don't know, without losing points for making mistakes.

Late assignments will not be accepted, unless you have discussed it with me before the due date and I have agreed to give an extension.

Please work together! Syntax is often done best as a collaborative effort, and it's a good way to learn from each other. However, when working in groups, each student must turn in their own write-up listing the names of people they collaborated with.

You are also encouraged to collaborate by asking each other questions on the online discussion board!

Write-ups must be legible: it doesn't matter if it is done in pen, in pencil, or on the computer. When possible, I do prefer typed assignments, but anything is acceptable if it is neatly done. On the course site, I link to a few tools for drawing trees on the computer. (You can also type your assignments and leave blank spaces to draw your trees.)

If you are having difficulty with a certain (aspect of a) problem, write a brief side-note giving specifics about what you find difficult. This will help me understand your mindset, which will help me grade fairly. It will also help to improve the course for the future.

**Testing:** All testing will be cumulative, as each unit builds on previous units. The questions on the tests will be similar to the homework problems you will have been doing.

The quiz will be given during a lecture meeting, currently scheduled for Oct. 7th.

The midterm will be given during a lecture meeting, currently scheduled for Oct.23rd.

The final exam will be given during the final exam period, December 16th, 9AM-11AM.

**Snippet (Extra Credit):** You can earn up to 2.5 percentage points of extra credit by writing a very short paper, which we'll call a snippet. A snippet is a very short paper, 500 words or less, in which you describe a problem with our theory, and speculate about a possible solution. The emphasis is on clearly explaining how some observable phenomenon (e.g., a certain word order) does not fit into our analysis of syntax. Informed speculation about how we might (start to) analyze syntax in another way to handle this problem is welcome, though not required. 500 words is not a lot, so part of the trick is being able to be succinct!

**Meeting with me:** I'm very open to meeting with students outside of class. You are always encouraged to come to my office hours, or stay after class to discuss any questions or concerns. Please feel free to make an appointment if the timing of the office hours is inconvenient or not soon enough.

**Academic integrity:** Academic integrity is taken very seriously, and any misconduct (e.g., cheating or letting someone else cheat) will be reported to the Dean's office. Read the Academic Conduct Code at:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

In addition, as this is a 500-level course, the GRS Academic Conduct Code may apply to you; the URL for that is:

<http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/forms-policies-procedures/academic-discipline-procedures/>

If you are unclear about whether something counts as honest/dishonest work, feel free to ask me.

**Copyright Notice:** All course materials are under copyright of their respective authors. That means that none of these materials that I give to you can be redistributed by you without permission from the author(s). Specifically, this means you are not legally allowed to put any course materials on note-sharing websites.

**Speak Up:** I said it once, but it's worth repeating. This course works best when you interact with me. In case you're wondering, here are some times you should almost certainly talk in class:

- I was speaking too quickly/not clearly enough.
- You don't understand my wording.
- You think I may have contradicted the text.
- You think I may have contradicted myself.
- You find one of my arguments unconvincing.
- You think there's a problem in our theory.
- You have an idea about how to deal with a problem in our theory.
- You want to see an example of what we're talking about.

Of course, there are many other possibilities – so speak up!

Date	Topic	Due	Posted	Reading
T 9/2	Introduction		MA0	ISAT §1
W 9/3	<b>no section</b>			
Th 9/4	Parts of Speech, Compound Words	MA0		ISAT §2.1, §2.3.5, "Getting Started with Trees"
T 9/9	Word Structure and Lexical Entries		MA1	Remainder of ISAT §2
W 9/10				
Th 9/11	Phrasal Constituents	MA1	PS1	ISAT §3, up to 3.4
T 9/16	Constituency tests		MA2	ISAT §3.5-3.6, "Paraphrasing Ambiguity"
W 9/17		PS1		
Th 9/18	Constituency Tests Continued	MA2		ISAT §3.7-3.8
T 9/23	Constituency Tests Continued		MA3	Remainder of §3
W 9/24				
Th 9/25	Analyzing Test Results	MA3	PS2	
T 9/30	Clause Structure		MA4	ISAT §4
W 10/1		PS2		
Th 10/2	Heads and Selection	MA4		
T 10/7	<b>QUIZ</b>			
W 10/8	<b>no section</b>			
Th 10/9	Complements and Adjuncts		PS3	ISAT §5, up to 5.2
T 10/14	Structure of Other Phrases		MA5	Remainder of §5
W 10/15		PS3		
Th 10/16	X-Bar Theory	MA5		ISAT §6, up to 6.7
T 10/21	Head Movement		MA6	§8.3
W 10/22				
Th 10/23	X-Bar and Other Languages	MA6	PS4	
T 10/28	The Positions of Subjects		MA7	ISAT §6.7
W 10/29		PS4		
Th 10/30	Lexical Entries, Word Order Predictions	MA7		ISAT §6.8
T 11/4	Selection and Locality			Remainder of §6
W 11/5				
Th 11/6	<b>MIDTERM</b>			
T 11/11	Binding Theory		MA8	ISAT §7, up to 7.5
W 11/12				
Th 11/13	Binding Theory	MA8	PS5	Remainder of §7
T 11/18	More Movements		MA9	ISAT §8 (except 8.3)
W 11/19		PS5		
Th 11/20	Raising and Control	MA9		ISAT §9, up to 9.4
T 11/25	Raising and Control		PS6	Remainder of §9
W 11/26	<b>NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING</b>			
Th 11/27	<b>NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING</b>			
T 12/2	WH-Movement		MA10	ISAT §10
W 12/3		PS6		
Th 12/4	Overflow / Wrap-up	MA10		
T 12/9	Where We Go From Here / Review			

ISAT = Introduction to Syntactic Analysis and Theory

PS = Problem Set

MA = Mini-Assignment

The schedule for readings will be announced in class and online