



PLIN0003: Introduction to Generative Grammar A

2019/20 Module information sheet

Name of lecturer

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Name of backup tutors

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Course description

This course is an introduction to the formal study of the syntax of natural language.

- It introduces students to some of the basic descriptive problems and theoretical tools of modern syntactic theory
- It introduces students to the broad questions driving research in generative syntax.
- It familiarizes students with the scientific process.

Prerequisites: None

Timetable: <https://timetable.ucl.ac.uk/tt/moduleTimet.do?firstReq=Y&moduleId=PLIN0003>

Teaching methods and backup arrangements

<lecture/tutorial times to follow>

Consistent participation in the plenary sessions and the assigned backup is obligatory.

The course is an introduction to the study of syntax, that is, the structure of sentences, in natural languages. For practical reasons, the language on which the study will be conducted is English, but the principles of theory and analysis extend to the study of the syntax of other languages.

There is no textbook. The course is based on a sequence of homework problems, which will be given out at the end of each plenary session and due at the following one. These problems constitute the main work of the course.

You will work on the problem sets, except for the final exam, in groups. Some of the problems are very hard and designed to be too difficult to be solved by one person alone.

Each group must hand in one jointly agreed solution to each problem set. The solution must state clearly on the first page who the members of the group are and who your backup tutor is. It must also state which member of your group wrote out the solution that you hand in. In addition to the formal plenary and the backups, you will have to arrange meetings with your small group. You will also have an opportunity to ask and discuss questions via the online learning platform moodle.

Homework problems will generally be somewhat open-ended. There will not always be a particular right answer, and the important thing will be how well you present and support the proposal you come up with. So two equally good papers might have different and indeed incompatible solutions. We can fight about that in class.

Communication

Your main tool for communicating with me should be the Moodle forum. This will enable everybody to see both your question and my answer and to join in the conversation. If your question is of a private nature or otherwise inappropriate for the Moodle forum, please send me an email: k.abels@ucl.ac.uk.

I will reply to any query within two working days.

Workload 155 hours

- 2.5 hours x 10 plenary sessions
- 1.5 hours x 10 backups
- 85 hours solving homework problems in group and writing up a solution (~4 each)
- 15 hours reviewing for final exam
- 15 hours solving and writing up final individually

Online resources

Moodle page available at: [<to follow>](#)

Basic texts: There is no textbook for this course.

I do recommend the following books as optional readings

R. K. Larson. Grammar as Science. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2010.

This is a coursebook for a course very similar in spirit to the one you are taking, though different in the details. A good read if you feel at sea.

S. Pinker. The Language Instinct. 1994.

An entertaining and polemical defense of the Chomskyan position regarding language that we will be following here.

B. Carey. How we learn: The surprising truth about when, where, and why it happens. Random House, New York, 2014.

This is not a linguistics text, but might help you to make the most of your study time in an unusual but evidence based way.

Information for intercollegiate and interdepartmental students

This module is available for students on other degree programmes, numbers permitting.

Interdepartmental students registered at UCL should register for the course on Portico.

Intercollegiate students should contact Alexa Richardson ([enquiries-](mailto:enquiries-linguistics@pals.ucl.ac.uk)

linguistics@pals.ucl.ac.uk) for a registration form. Interdepartmental and intercollegiate students with a disability requiring additional support should contact the lecturer or Alexa as soon as possible.

Assessment(s)

Please refer to the 'Assessment tab' on the module Moodle page for assessments submission dates.

You will be assessed on the basis of a portfolio of all of your group's solutions to the problem sets given (50% of the grade) and a final coursework (50% of the grade).

For the problem sets that go into your portfolio, you are expected to work in groups of four (or five) students, which we will assign you to for the duration of the term. You will co-operate and be graded on the best 14 of the graded problem sets given out during the term and you will be the lead in writing up four of them. Your grade for the portfolio will be determined as follows:

1. the average of the best three of the submissions for which you were lead author. The submissions are graded on an A=75, B=65, C=55, D=45, F=20 scale. Exceptionally insightful answers may earn an A+=85 or even an A++=95. This counts for half of the portfolio grade.
2. your group grade. This grade is based on the average of the 14 best of your group's submissions (graded on an A++, A+, A, B, C, D, F scale as above) but can be altered upward or downward by up to 10 points depending on how active you are in your group and how well you do as a team player in your group. The adjustment is based on the group's self-reported scores.

Late submissions of homework problems will not be accepted under any circumstances and missed assignments will earn you and your group a grade of 0. You do not need to type up your answers during the first half of term, but we expect clean, neat, and easily legible submissions. You are expected to type up your answers and submit via moodle during the second half of term.

For the final you have to work on and formulate the solution by yourself and are not permitted to co-operate in any way.

Citing of sources: Students are expected to have read the guidelines on plagiarism on the Moodle page for this module.

Form: use A4 paper (lined or unlined) and write on only one side. Leave at least one inch margins so that we will have some space to write comments.

Almost all assignments will require more than one page to answer; when there is more than one page, staple the pages together. It is not required that you type or word-process your papers, but they should be neat and legible.

To do well in this course, here are the things you need to do:

ATTEND CLASS

ATTEND BACKUPS

COOPERATE WELL WITH YOUR GROUP

MAKE SURE YOUR GROUP TURNS IN ALL ASSIGNMENTS

MAKE SURE YOUR GROUP DOES THE ASSIGNMENTS CAREFULLY AND WELL

Here are the things we look for in written work: a written assignment should be

NEAT
CLEAR
CAREFUL
THOROUGH

Neatness should be self-explanatory; clarity is mainly about the quality of your writing, but in this course will also concern the relation between what you write and certain formal representations which we will adopt, as well as argument and reasoning; in the next few weeks we will point out things that you need to be careful and thorough about.

Homeworks will be scored on a scale of A-F as detailed above on the basis of these criteria. We might sometimes not write your score on homework papers, but from the written comments you should get some idea of how you are doing grade-wise. If you are concerned about your probable grade, you can come in for an estimate.

Some course policies

Attendance is expected. We will not formally take attendance in the plenary sessions, but we will surely notice any absences. Absences will have a negative effect on the grade.

Backups are mandatory. You are signed up for and must regularly attend a backup. New material will be introduced in backups, and you will be responsible for it. Attendance in the backup will be taken.

All assignments must be turned in by your group or, in the case of the final by you. Failure to turn in an assignment results in a zero in the record, and (since the assignments form the basis of the course) just a few zeroes will result in you failing the course. There will be no way to make this up.

We realize that in most courses the syllabus gives you an outline of the course, with topics and reading assignments and all that. But in this course there are no reading assignments, and the topics are mostly a surprise, so you won't get that here. What you get is a promise that at the end of the course you will know a lot about the syntax of English, a bit about the nature of language in general, and something about how to investigate and argue in an area that is very human, very formal, and at the same time very empirical. This can be a lot of work, but it can also be a lot of fun.

Feedback

See below for information on how feedback will be provided.

Transferable skills

See below for information on the transferable skills you can acquire by studying this module.

Feedback Mechanisms

Types of Feedback (categorised into feedback areas)	This type of feedback is provided for this module (✓ all that apply)
<p>For those responses you tick, further details may be provided in the relevant box below (optional)</p>	
GENERIC TUTOR FEEDBACK	
<p>Oral feedback is given to the whole class (e.g. this will be about problem sets.)</p> <p><u>Further details:</u> Oral feedback will be provided in the plenary sessions and targeted feedback in the backups.</p>	✓
<p>Electronic feedback to the whole group</p> <p><u>Further details:</u> Electronic feedback to the whole group will be provided when an if necessary via the moodle forum and in response to questions posted on the moodle forum.</p>	✓
<p>Printed feedback to the whole group (e.g. answers to an exercise done in class, feedback relating to general performance on coursework or a task etc.) will not be provided.</p> <p><u>Further details:</u></p>	
<p>Coverage of topics in class which have been raised by members of the class (e.g. in areas where students ask for clarification/elaboration, these topics are addressed in class)</p> <p><u>Further details:</u> Classes are intended to be interactive. Content will be moved forward on the basis of the provided solutions to problem sets.</p>	✓
<p>Electronic responses to the whole group via the VLE or via email (e.g. sending replies to individual queries to the whole group)</p> <p><u>Further details:</u> The preferred method of communication for this class is the moodle forum. All discussion that, for one reason or another, did not or could not happen in the lecture or the backups will be continued here.</p>	✓
<p>Other generic tutor feedback (please give details)</p> <p><u>Further details:</u></p>	
AUTOMATED FEEDBACK	
<p>Tests / quizzes within VLE These are tests which do not count towards the module mark, but serve to inform students of how well they are understanding materials taught.</p> <p><u>Further details:</u></p>	
<p>Personal Response Systems (“clickers”) used within class (e.g. to test that students understand a concept, to survey which topics students would like elaborated)</p>	

<u>Further details:</u>	
Other automated feedback (please give details)	
SPECIFIC, TARGETED TUTOR/DEMONSTRATOR FEEDBACK	
Oral responses within class (e.g. demonstrators talking to students in lab, stats and computing classes).	✓
<u>Further details:</u> Sections devote some time to small group discussion and small group Q/A. Discussion and Q/A also provided and welcome in the plenary sessions, especially the second half of the Thursday session, which is all about feedback.	
Oral responses outside class (e.g. students are invited to telephone or come to see the module convenor/demonstrators/members of staff teaching on the module with individual queries regarding topics taught) <u>Further details:</u> (e.g. contact details/office hours may be specified here) I operate an open door policy. When my office door (115b) is open, please walk in. I am also happy to arrange a meeting by email: k.abels@ucl.ac.uk.	✓
Electronic responses to queries from individual students are provided (as above) <u>Further details:</u> The moodle forum is the preferred method of communication.	✓
Summative comments on coursework (e.g. handwritten feedback at the end of a written assessment which counts towards the module mark) <u>Further details:</u> Feedback comments will be provided on all homework assignments and on the final. In other words, students receive small-group level feedback twice a week and individual feedback at the end of the term.	✓
On-script comments in the body of individual summative coursework <u>Further details:</u> Individual comments will be provided on the submitted .pdf-file via moodle. Detailed comments on common problems will also be contained in the sample solution.	✓
Indication of achievement against set marking criteria (e.g. for an individual essay or a lab report) <u>Further details:</u> Coursework will be graded and the provisional grade be communicated to the students on an A+-F scale.	✓
Feedback using a standard feedback form (e.g. essay feedback form or lab marking forms) <u>Further details:</u> We will use a standard feedback form (rubrics) on turnitin for the final.	✓
Oral feedback on coursework talking to individual students about their coursework on the phone or in person, this could be summative points or specific comments on parts of the essay / lab report / project. <u>Further details:</u> On demand. I operate an open door policy.	✓

Electronic feedback on coursework This could be via email or on a VLE (e.g. using Gradebook on Moodle) <u>Further details:</u>	
Other specific, targeted tutor feedback (please give details) <u>Further details:</u>	
FEEDBACK FROM PEOPLE OTHER THAN MODULE STAFF	
Peer feedback Fellow students commenting on/marking each other's work, or working together on a task (e.g. group work providing students with feedback on their ideas/understanding) <u>Further details:</u> Problem sets are to be solved by groups. Group members can have input and get extra credit for improving their peer's drafts.	✓
Self-feedback (e.g. students evaluating their own coursework, worksheet answers, etc.) <u>Further details:</u>	
Feedback from seminar/year tutors Students may receive feedback on their understanding of topics/answers to queries/feedback on coursework from their tutor (e.g. 1105 poster, Research Project presentations etc.) <u>Further details:</u>	
Other feedback from those not teaching module (please give details) <u>Further details:</u>	
FEEDBACK RELATED TO EXAMINATIONS	
A mock examination is given to help students prepare for the final exam <u>Further details:</u>	
Marks for the previous year provided online, with a breakdown of marks for individual questions (where relevant). NB Marks will be anonymous. <u>Further details:</u>	
Samples of real student work provided , such as coursework, exam essays, and projects from previous students on the module. NB for exam essays these will be anonymous, for coursework and projects they may be cited with the students' consent. <u>Further details:</u> If practicable, students' solutions will be used as sample answers for the final.	(✓)
Other exam-related feedback (please give details) <u>Further details:</u>	

Please note that the categories of feedback and specific examples within categories were adapted from ideas on the HE Academy website at: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/new-to-teaching/HEA-Feedback-Toolkit/what-are-the-various-forms-that-feedback-can-take> (July 2013).

UCL Personal and Professional Development Framework: Transferable Skills

Specific transferable skills (categorised into skill areas)	Skill developed in module? (✓ all that apply)
ACADEMIC	
Learning Actively - Able to approach learning as an active agent, taking responsibility for the process and outcomes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Analysing Data - Able to filter and organise information to develop an argument and work toward a conclusion, applying numerical analysis where appropriate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Thinking Critically - Able to consider claims made against the evidence available and to develop one's own view systematically	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Using Sources - Able to locate and use appropriate books, journals, websites and other sources to gather relevant data	
Solving Problems - Able to use systematic approaches to overcome difficulties in producing a desired outcome	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Managing Projects - Able to plan a coordinated set of tasks and enact over time to produce a substantial result	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
SELF-MANAGEMENT	
Reflecting on Learning - Able to review dispassionately one's approaches to learning and the outcomes and progressively improve the process.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Managing Time - Able to prioritise tasks and commitments to achieve optimum results in a designated timeframe	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Being Creative / Innovative - Able to generate and apply original approaches to tasks and problems and produce improved outcomes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Assessing Oneself - Able to identify one's own strengths, weaknesses, progress made and action needed to improve effectiveness	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Being Independent - Able to work at own initiative with minimal supervision, taking responsibility for action and outcomes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Managing Resources - Able to allocate and conserve funds and other resources on a day to day basis and to support projects	
COMMUNICATING	
Writing - Able to communicate in textual forms (essays, reports, journal entries, web pages etc.) in an appropriate style with a clear narrative flow	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Listening - Able to hear and appreciate the content, background and purpose of what someone else is communicating to you	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Using Information Technology - Able to use digital technology for managing information and to mediate communication for learning and other purposes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Presenting - Able to speak to an audience, using visual aids as appropriate and respond to questions	

Communicating globally - Able to understand and manage factors affecting communication across cultures, including learning other languages	
Planning and making decisions - Able to identify steps needed to work towards goals and communicate them, including means of monitoring progress	<u>x</u>
WORKING WITH OTHERS	
Working in teams - Able to co-operate with others, to contribute your strengths and learn from theirs with a common purpose	<u>x</u>
Negotiating - Able to respect the needs and interests of others when they differ from your own and to find common ground	<u>x</u>
Leading - Able to galvanise a team into cooperative action, to manage, guide or facilitate a group to maximise success	
Understanding others - Able to recognise the variety of ways in which people can think and approach tasks, adjusting your own to suit	<u>x</u>
Assessing self and peers - Able to assess your own performance objectively and to give and receive constructive feedback with others	<u>x</u>
Managing change - Able to adapt to changing circumstances and maintain focus on the group's declared goals	
OTHER TRANSFERABLE SKILLS DEVELOPED BY THIS MODULE (please give details)	

Please note that the categories and skills listed here were taken from the *Personal and Professional Development Framework* provided online by the UCL Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ppd/resources/framework> (July 2013).