



PLIN0023: Current Issues in Syntax

2021/22 Module information sheet

Name of lecturer

Elena Titov (e.titov@ucl.ac.uk)

Module objectives

To enable students to understand current issues in syntactic theory. To enable students to evaluate conflicting proposals critically. To enable them to adjust existing proposals in the light of new data and to test their adjustments.

Module description

This course introduces students to theories of a specific topic in generative syntax. This year we will explore the so-called wh-parameter, which deals with cross-linguistic variation in the placement of wh-phrases.

It is well known that languages differ in how they form wh-questions. Thus, in a neutral English wh-question (e.g. What did Mary see?) the wh-phrase 'what' cannot remain in object position (*Mary saw what?), whereas the opposite is true of Chinese. The question that this course explores is how this variation should be modelled.

We will start by considering an influential analysis that attributes the variation to the choice of the grammatical module that wh-movement takes place in, with the result that wh-movement is invisible in some languages but still interpretable. We will see how this idea has been explored and modified in more recent theories. In the first half of the course, we will concentrate on theories that attribute the variation in the placement of wh-phrases to the nature of the feature located in the interrogative C. We will see that such approaches run into a variety of empirical and theoretical problems, the most significant of which being the fact that they fail to account for the cross-linguistic information-structurally (IS) and prosodically conditioned optionality of wh-fronting. That is, wh-movement languages (e.g. English) have the option of leaving the wh-phrase in its base position as long it carries the main sentential stress and the value for the wh-variable is retrievable from the context (e.g. echoic context), whereas wh-in-situ languages (e.g. Chinese) front wh-phrases under very similar conditions. More concretely, theories that attempt to explain the variation in the placement of wh-phrases in purely syntactic terms fail to account for the connection between the syntactic position of a wh-phrase and its prosodic properties, on the one hand, and between the prosodic properties of a wh-phrase and its IS interpretation, on the other. In order to capture this connection, we will shift our attention in the second half of the course to interface-based approaches to the wh-parameter that aim to capture the optionality of wh-fronting by looking at the interaction of syntactic, prosodic and interpretive constraints.

Throughout the course, various theoretical approaches to the wh-parameter will be compared and critically evaluated. After a few weeks of teaching, students will spend part of

their time working in groups on wh-questions in different languages and address the problems that bear on the wh-parameter.

Prerequisites

Two years of undergraduate syntax

Timetable: <https://timetable.ucl.ac.uk/tt/moduleTimet.do?firstReq=Y&moduleId=PLIN0023>

Teaching methods and backup arrangements

- Students prepare for class by reading assigned papers, watching recorded lectures, and posting questions related to the reading and the lecture materials in the Hot Questions Task on Moodle or in the Moodle forum.
- Students attend one in-person (circumstances permitting) weekly tutorial on Friday. In the first half of the course (i.e., before the reading week), the tutorial will consist of a Q&A session addressing the questions posted in the Hot Questions Task or in the Moodle forum, or brought directly to the session. In the second half of the course, the Q&A session will be followed by a lab meeting where students will carry out research on a topic that bears on the wh-parameter. Students will work in groups, and each group will have the opportunity to present their findings and to receive feedback on their work weekly. All groups are expected to produce a folder with data, references and a summary of their findings. The final essay can be written on the basis of any of these folders (or on another topic that bears on the wh-parameter).
- In addition to the lab meetings on Friday, you will have to arrange meetings with your research group to discuss the readings and work on the presentations.

Consistent participation in all module components is obligatory.

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: e.titov@ucl.ac.uk

Workload

- 10 x 1.5 hours asynchronous lectures
- 5 x 2 hours Q&A sessions (before the reading week)
- 5 x 1 hour Q&A sessions (after the reading week)
- 5 x 1 hour lab meetings
- 10 x 4.5 hours reading, revision and research group meetings

Online resources

Moodle page available at: TBC

Core texts

Bailyn, John Frederick. 2012. *The syntax of Russian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 3, Section 3.3 “Wh-structures”.)

Bošković, Željko. 2002. On Multiple Wh-Fronting. *Linguistic Inquiry* 33: 3, 351–383.

Faure, Richard & Katerina Palasis. 2021. Exclusivity! Wh-fronting is not optional wh-movement in Colloquial French. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 39, 57–95.

Hamlaoui, Fatima. 2011. On the role of phonology and discourse in Francilian French wh-questions. *Journal of Linguistics* 47.1:129–162.

- Huang, James. 1982. Move WH in a language without WH movement. *The Linguistic Review* 1, 369-416.
- Mathieu, Éric. 2016. The wh parameter and radical externalization. In Luis Eguren, Olga Fernández-Soriano, and Amaya Mendikoetxea (eds.) *Rethinking Parameters*. OUP.
- Pires, Acrisio and Heather Lee Taylor. 2007. The syntax of wh-in-situ and common ground. In Pascual Masullo (ed.) *Romance Languages: Structure, interfaces, and microparametric variation*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Stepanov, Arthur. 1998. On wh-fronting in Russian. In *Proceedings of NELS 28*, 453–467. GLSA, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Titov 2021. Russian wh-questions. Ms. UCL.

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

Assessment

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

Mode of Assessment	Level	Weight	Format
Coursework	Level 6 UG	100%	Essay, 3000 words
Coursework	Level 7 PG	100%	Essay, 3000 words

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

Form: It is required that you type or word-process your papers. Syntactic tree diagrams can be drawn by hand.

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

- Watch the recorded lectures
- Read the assigned papers
- Ask questions in the Hot Questions Task on Moodle or in the Moodle forum
- Attend weekly live Q&A sessions and lab meetings (Friday)
- Make sure your final coursework takes the form of an academic essay

A written assignment should be clear, careful and thorough. 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.

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) For those responses you tick, further details may be provided in the relevant box below (optional)	This type of feedback is provided for this module (✓ all that apply)
GENERIC TUTOR FEEDBACK	
Oral feedback is given to the whole class (e.g. this may be about coursework or in-class tasks). <u>Further details:</u> Oral feedback will be provided in the Friday tutorials.	<u>x</u>
Electronic feedback to the whole group <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.	<u>x</u>
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.).	
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).	<u>x</u>
Electronic responses to the whole group via the VLE or via email (e.g. sending replies to individual queries to the whole group) <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 tutorials will be continued here.	<u>x</u>
Other generic tutor feedback (please give details)	
AUTOMATED FEEDBACK	
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.	
Personal Response Systems (“clickers”) used within class (e.g. to test that students understand a concept, to survey which topics students would like elaborated)	
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).	
Oral responses outside class (e.g. students are invited to telephone or meet with module staff with individual queries regarding topics taught). <u>Further details:</u> To arrange a meeting email: e.titov@ucl.ac.uk	<u>x</u>
Electronic responses to queries from individual students are provided (as above)	<u>x</u>
Summative comments on coursework (e.g. handwritten feedback at the end of a written assessment which counts towards the module mark).	

On-script comments in the body of individual summative coursework	
Indication of achievement against set marking criteria (e.g. for an individual essay or a lab report)	
Feedback using a standard feedback form (e.g. essay feedback form or lab marking forms)	
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.	
Electronic feedback on coursework This could be via email or on a VLE (e.g. using Gradebook on Moodle)	
Other specific, targeted tutor feedback (please give details)	
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> Students will work in groups to prepare weekly presentations in the second half of the course. Students are encouraged to provide feedback on other groups' weekly presentations.	<u>x</u>
Self-feedback (e.g. students evaluating their own coursework, worksheet answers, etc.)	
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.)	
Other feedback from those not teaching module (please give details)	
FEEDBACK RELATED TO EXAMINATIONS	
A mock examination is given to help students prepare for the final exam	
Marks for the previous year provided online, with a breakdown of marks for individual questions (where relevant). NB Marks will be anonymous.	
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.	
Other exam-related feedback (please give details)	

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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	
Presenting - Able to speak to an audience, using visual aids as appropriate and respond to questions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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).