



PLIN Modules – Module Information Sheet (2020/21)

1. General Information

- **Module Code:** PLIN0023
- **Title:** Current Issues in Syntax
- **Credits:** 15
- **Module Tutor:** Elena Titov; **Contact:** e.titov@ucl.ac.uk
- **Module Available at the following levels:**
 - **Level 6 UG**
 - **Level 7 PG**

- **Module Description:**

Module outline:

This course introduces students to a recent theory of a specific topic or a series of related topics in generative syntax.

Module aims:

This course explores current analyses of one or more specific topics in syntactic theory. Examples from previous years are the encoding of grammatical dependencies, the mapping between syntax and information structure, and the relation between syntax and morphology.

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.

The wh-parameter

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 – the so-called wh-parameter – should be modelled.

It is typically assumed that the left periphery of a wh-question contains a functional category C bearing an interrogative feature which must enter into agreement with a corresponding feature in the wh-phrase. The difference between English and Chinese is captured by the so-called 'EPP' feature of C. If this feature is present in the given language, agreement is accompanied by movement of the agreeing wh-phrase to SpecCP.

The agree-based approach to wh-movement predicts that movement of a wh-phrase either happens in a language (English) or does not (Chinese). However, most languages allow both in-situ and ex-situ strategies for wh-questions. Thus, English has in-situ (echoic) wh-questions (e.g. So, Mary saw WHAT again?), which pragmatically presuppose that the wh-phrase ranges over a discourse-salient set of alternatives that contains at least one member that yields a true answer, whereas Chinese permits wh-movement under the same conditions. This of course implies that a new analysis must be developed for the wh-parameter that captures the observed optionality.

In this course, we consider and critically evaluate different approaches to the wh-parameter, with the aim to arrive at a theory that successfully captures the data. 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>
- **Summary:**

The initial plan for the course is given below. We will not necessarily follow this in detail – topics may be skipped or added based on discussion in class.

1. The Problem

Bonan, Caterina. 2017. Arguing against a one-fits-all Derivation for Northern Italian Insituness. In J. Garzonio (ed.) *Quaderni di Lavoro ASIt* 20. 49–76.

Chomsky, Noam. 1981. *Lectures on Government and Binding*. Dordrecht: Foris.

Cole, Peter and Gabriella Hermon. 1998. The typology of wh-movement. Wh-questions in Malay. *Syntax* 1:3, 221–258.

Stepanov, Arthur. 1998. On wh-fronting in Russian. In *Proceedings of NELS 28*, 453–467. GLSA, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

2. *The Government and Binding account*

Huang, James. 1982. Move WH in a language without WH movement. *The Linguistic Review* 1, 369–416.

Tsai, Wei-Tien Dylan. 1999. On lexical courtesy. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 8, 39–73.

3. *The Minimalist account*

Chomsky, Noam. 1995. The Minimalist program.

Cole, Peter and Gabriella Hermon. 1994. Is there LF wh-movement? *Linguistic Inquiry* 25, 239–262.

Chomsky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by Phase. In M. Kenstowicz, ed., *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*, 1–52. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

4. *Multiple wh-fronting languages*

Bošković, Željko. 1997a. Fronting wh-phrases in Serbo-Croatian. In *Proceedings of the V Annual Workshop on Formal Approaches to Slavic Linguistics*, ed. M. Lindseth and S. Franks, 86–107. Michigan Slavic Publications, Ann Arbor.

Bošković, Željko. 1997b. Superiority effects with multiple wh-fronting in Serbo-Croatian. *Lingua* 102: 1–20.

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

5. *Russian as a wh-in-situ language*

Stepanov, Arthur. 1998. On wh-fronting in Russian. In *Proceedings of NELS 28*, 453–467. GLSA, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Dyakonova, Marina. 2009. A phase-based approach to Russian free word order. Utrecht: LOT. (Chapter 6. “Wh-movement in Russian”.)

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

6. *Optional wh-movement*

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

7. Clausal Typing hypothesis

Cheng, Lisa. 1997. *On the Typology of Wh-Questions*. Outstanding dissertations in linguistics. New York: Garland.

Shi, Dingxu. 1994. The Nature of Chinese Wh-Questions. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 12: 301–333.

Cole, Peter, and Gabriella Hermon. 1994. Is There LF Wh-Movement? *Linguistic Inquiry* 25: 239–262.

8. Wh-in-situ and the availability of Q particles or wh-words as indefinites

Bruening, Benjamin. 2007. Wh-in-situ Does Not Correlate with Wh-Indefinites or Question Particles. *Linguistic Inquiry* 38: 139–166.

9. Prosodic accounts

Richards, Norvin. 2010. *Uttering Trees*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Truckenbrodt, Hubert. 2012. An analysis of prosodic F-effects in interrogatives: Prosody, syntax and semantics. *Lingua* 124 (2013) 131–175.

Mathieu, Éric. 2016. The wh parameter and radical externalization. In Luis Eguren, Olga Fernández-Soriano, and Amaya Mendikoetxea (eds.) *Rethinking Parameters*. Oxford University Press.

- **Information for students on other programmes and Affiliate/intercollegiate students:**

If you want to take this module, you should select it on Portico as usual. Any general queries about taking the module can be addressed to pals.lingteachingoffice@ucl.ac.uk.

2. Teaching

- **Teaching methods and tutorial/lab arrangements:**

Pre-recorded lectures will be made available via the Moodle page for this module.

1 synchronous Zoom session per week:

Fridays 11:00-13:00. This session will be used for Q&A sessions, as well as for discussion, planning and presentation of student projects. This session will be recorded and made available via the Moodle page for this module.

- **Communication:**

The easiest way of contacting me is by email (see above). However, I would encourage you to use the Moodle discussion forum if you have a question or point concerning the material discussed in classes or readings. This will enable other students to respond to your question/point and benefit from the discussion.

- **Workload:**

Classes: 3-4 hours per week

Reading and independent research: approximately 4 hours per week

- **Core Texts:** n/a /

Although the course material will primarily be based on the readings listed in the week-by-week summary above, I would recommend using a textbook (e.g., Haegeman's 1994 book *An Introduction to Government and Binding Theory*) to refresh your memory of basic concepts.

- **Libraries and other resources:** n/a

- **Additional Information:** n/a

- **Recording:** Lectures for this module are recorded via the UCL Lecturecast system, and a link to recordings will be made available via the Moodle page for this module. Please note that recordings can fail for a number of reasons.

3. Assessment

- Level: 4/5/6/7 UG/PG

Mode of Assessment	Weight	Format
Coursework	100%	Essay, 3000 words

Table 1. Assessment Formats and Weightings

- **Other assessment information:**
 - 3,000 words excluding footnotes, example sentences, definitions, direct citations and references
 - Due by 24 February 2021
 - Submission via Moodle

4. Types of Feedback

Types of feedback students on this module can expect to receive.

4.1 Generic Tutor Feedback

Type of Feedback	Provided
Oral feedback is given to the whole class (e.g. this may be about coursework, an in-class or online task).	Yes
Electronic feedback to the whole group (e.g. see oral feedback above).	No
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).	No
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).	No
Electronic responses to the whole group via the VLE or via email (eg sending replies to individual queries to the whole group).	No

Table 2. Generic Tutor Feedback

4.2 Automated Feedback

Type of Feedback	Provided
Tests / quizzes within Virtual Learning Environment (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.	No

Personal Response Systems used within class (e.g. to test that students understand a concept, to survey which topics students would like elaborated).	No
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Table 3. Automated Feedback

4.3 Specific Targeted Tutor Feedback

Type of Feedback	Provided
Oral responses within class (e.g. demonstrators talking to students in lab, stats and computing classes).	Yes
Oral responses outside class (e.g. students are invited to telephone or meet with module staff with individual queries regarding topics taught).	Yes
Electronic responses to queries from individual students are provided (as above)	No
Summative comments on coursework (e.g. handwritten feedback at the end of a written assessment which counts towards the module mark).	No
On-script comments in the body of individual summative coursework	Yes
Indication of achievement against set marking criteria (e.g. for an individual essay or a lab report).	No
Feedback using a standard feedback form (e.g. essay feedback form or lab marking forms)	No
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.	No
Electronic feedback on coursework. This could be via email or within VLE (e.g. using Gradebook on Moodle).	No

Table 4. Specific Targeted Tutor Feedback

4.4 Feedback From People Other Than Module Staff

Type of Feedback	Provided
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).	No
Self-feedback (e.g. students evaluating their own coursework, worksheet answers, etc.)	No

Feedback from seminar tutors: Students may receive feedback on their understanding of topics/answers to queries/feedback on coursework from their tutor (e.g. poster, Research Project presentations etc)	No
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Table 5. Feedback from People other than Module Staff

4.5 Feedback related to examinations

Type of Feedback	Provided
A mock examination is given to help students prepare for the final exam.	No
Marks for the previous year provided online , with a breakdown of marks for individual questions	No
Samples of real student work , such as coursework, exam essays, and projects from previous students on the module.	No

Table 6. Feedback related to examinations

5. Specific Transferable Skills

Transferable skills students on this module can expect to develop, categorised into skill areas.

5.1 Academic

Type of transferable skill	Provided
Learning Actively – Able to approach learning as an active agent, taking responsibility for the process and outcomes.	Yes
Analysing Data – Able to filter and organise information to develop an argument and work toward a conclusion, applying numerical analysis where appropriate.	Yes
Thinking Critically – Able to consider claims made against the evidence available and to develop one’s own view systematically	Yes
Using Sources – Able to locate and use appropriate books, journals, websites and other sources to gather relevant data	Yes
Solving Problems – Able to use systematic approaches to overcome difficulties in producing a desired outcome	Yes
Managing Projects – Able to plan a coordinated set of tasks and enact over time to produce a substantial result	Yes

Table 7. Academic transferable skills

5.2 Self-Management

Type of transferable skill	Provided
Reflecting on Learning – Able to review dispassionately one’s approaches to learning and the outcomes and progressively improve the process	Yes
Managing Time – Able to prioritise tasks and commitments to achieve optimum results in a designated timeframe	Yes
Being Creative/Innovative – Able to generate and apply original approaches to tasks and problems and produce improved outcomes	Yes
Assessing Oneself – Able to identify one’s own strengths, weaknesses, progress made and action needed to improve effectiveness	Yes
Being Independent – Able to work at own initiative with minimal supervision, taking responsibility for action and outcomes	Yes
Managing Resources – Able to allocate and conserve funds and other resources on a day to day basis and to support projects	No

Table 8. Self-management transferable skills

5.3 Communication

Type of transferable skill	Provided
Writing – Able to communicate in textual forms (essay, reports, journal entries, web pages etc.) in an appropriate style with a clear narrative flow	Yes
Listening – Able to hear and appreciate the content, background and purpose of what someone else is communicating to you	Yes
Using Information Technology – Able to use digital technology for managing information and to mediate communication for learning and other purposes	No
Presenting – Able to speak to an audience, using visual aids as appropriate and respond to questions	Yes
Communication globally – Able to understand and manage factors affecting communication across cultures, including means of monitoring progress	No
Planning and making decisions – Able to identify steps needed to work towards global and communicate them, including means of monitoring progress	Yes

Table 9. Communication transferable skills

5.4 Working with others

Type of transferable skill	Provided
Working in teams – Able to co-operate with others, to contribute your strengths and learn from theirs with a common purpose	Yes
Negotiating – Able to respect the needs and interests of others when they differ from your own and to find common ground	No
Leading – Able to galvanise a team into cooperative action, to manage, guide or facilitate a group to maximise success	No
Understanding others – Able to recognise the variety of ways in which people can think and approach tasks, adjusting your own to suit	No
Assessing self and peers – Able to assess your own performance objectively and to give and receive constructive feedback with others	No
Managing change – Able to adapt to changing circumstance and maintain focus on the group's declared goals	No

Table 10. Working with others transferable skills