

## FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES IN LINGUISTICS SPRING 2025: COURSE INFORMATION

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**INSTRUCTORS:** Sam Alxatib and Kyle Gorman  
**TIME/PLACE:** Wednesday 11:45-1:45; Room 7395  
**OFFICE HOURS:** Thu 2-3pm (Sam); Wed 10-11am (Kyle)

### CONTENT DESCRIPTION:

The goal of this course is to provide and encourage discussion of foundational issues in linguistics. Training in the subdisciplines of linguistics often starts with pre-established assumptions about the direction of inquiry, and about research methods. But equally important to the results of inquiry is the motivation behind the commitments that shape it. In linguistics these include commitments as to what the subject matter of linguistics is, what constitutes knowledge of language, what counts as relevant data, and how data are best collected and modeled. In this course we provide a forum for discussing these issues.

**PREREQUISITES:** Syntax I and Phonology I. Permission from instructors is required for interested students who have not taken Syntax I or Phonology I.

**COURSE GOALS:** To provide a discussion forum for questions concerning the place of linguistics in cognitive science, and questions about the validity of the empirical and analytical methods used by linguists. As such, the course is aimed to strengthen the grounds that more specialized courses build on, by encouraging critical assessment of the assumptions that linguists make (or take for granted) in their research.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** To familiarize students with foundational issues and debates in linguistic research and to encourage unbiased critical reflection and discussion of linguistic methodology. Students will engage with primary literature, and (a) gain proficiency in topics that are not covered in specialized linguistics classes, and (b) exercise unbiased critical analysis and evaluation of linguistic argumentation. Students will develop and strengthen oral and written communication skills through in-class roundtable discussions and written reviews/reactions to readings.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING POLICY:

Attendance and class participation: 20%  
Reactions to readings: 20%  
Three critical reviews: 60% (20% per review)

**COURSE MATERIAL:** Readings and other course material will be posted on Dropbox.

**REACTIONS TO READINGS:** For each reading assignment you must submit at least two questions (a) to demonstrate that you have read the assignment, and (b) to help shape class discussion. In addition, you must submit a blurb of at most 50 words that summarizes your opinion/reaction to the reading. You must submit this via email to both of us by 5pm on the **Monday** before the lecture where that reading is scheduled, **but see the course calendar below for exceptions!**

**CRITICAL REVIEWS:** Some course readings have associated peer commentary papers. For each of these, you will choose one of its commentaries and write your own review of (a) the commentary, and (b) the relevant reply by the authors of the original paper. Your review should be 2-4 pages long, single-spaced, and should include the following three components: (a) a summary of the relevant parts of the original paper, (b) a summary of the commentary and the reply, and (c) a critical assessment of the points made in both. Your submissions may be individual or group-based (up to three people per group). Group work is strongly encouraged. You must submit your reviews by 5pm on the dates indicated in the course schedule.

**COURSE CALENDAR (SUBJECT TO CHANGE):**

WEEK 1	Wed, Feb 05	<b>Introduction: explanation in linguistics. Readings:</b> Newmeyer 2017; Egré 2015
	Wed, Feb 12	<b>NO CLASS</b> <b>QUESTIONS+BLURB DUE FOR CHOMSKY 1980 + DENNETT 1980</b>
WEEK 2	Wed, Feb 19	<b>Linguistic nativism. Readings:</b> Chomsky 1980; Dennett 1980
	<b>Fri, Feb 21</b>	<b>QUESTIONS+BLURB DUE FOR PULLUM &amp; SCHOLZ 2002</b>
WEEK 3	Wed, Feb 26	<b>Poverty of Stimulus as an empirical issue. Reading:</b> Pullum & Scholz 2002
	<b>Fri, Feb 28</b>	<b>QUESTIONS+BLURB DUE FOR FODOR &amp; CROWTHER 2002</b>
	<b>Mon, Mar 03</b>	<b>Qs+B DUE FOR AMBRIDGE, PINE &amp; LIEVEN 2014</b>
WEEK 4	Wed, Mar 05	<b>Poverty of Stimulus as a logical issue. Reading:</b> Fodor & Crowther 2002
WEEK 5	<b>Thu, Mar 06</b>	<b>Other views of language acquisition. Reading:</b> Ambridge, Pine & Lieven 2014
	<b>Mon, Mar 10</b>	<b>Qs+B DUE FOR NEXT READING(S)</b>
WEEK 6	Wed, Mar 12	<b>Language evolution. Readings:</b> Hauser et al. 2014; (optional: Fitch 2010 Ch. 4)
	<b>Fri, Mar 14</b>	<b>CRITICAL REVIEW DUE FOR PULLUM &amp; SCHOLZ 2002</b>
	<b>Mon, Mar 17</b>	<b>Qs+B DUE FOR NEXT READING(S)</b>
WEEK 7	Wed, Mar 19	<b>Language universals?</b> Evans & Levinson 2009
	<b>Mon, Mar 24</b>	<b>Qs+B DUE FOR NEXT READING(S)</b>
WEEK 8	Wed, Mar 26	<b>UG as a postulate</b> Reiss 2024
	<b>Mon, Mar 31</b>	<b>Qs+B DUE FOR NEXT READING(S)</b>
WEEK 9	Wed, Apr 02	<b>Language and culture? Readings:</b> Everett 2005; NP&R 2009 Sections 2-4
	<b>Fri, Apr 04</b>	<b>CRITICAL REVIEW DUE FOR EVANS &amp; LEVINSON 2009</b>
	<b>Mon, Apr 07</b>	<b>Qs+B DUE FOR NEXT READING(S)</b>
WEEK 10	Wed, Apr 09	<b>Data in linguistics. Readings:</b> Featherston 2007; Phillips 2010
	Wed, Apr 16	<b>NO CLASS</b>

	<b>Mon., Apr 21</b>   <b>Qs+B DUE FOR NEXT READING(S)</b>
WEEK 11	Wed, Apr 23   <b>Data in linguistics (Part 2). Readings:</b>   Gibson & Fedorenko 2012; Sprouse & Almeida 2013
	<b>Mon., Apr 28</b>   <b>Qs+B DUE FOR NEXT READING(S)</b>
WEEK 12	Wed, Apr 30   <b>Data in linguistics (Part 3). Readings:</b>   Schütze 2005; Sprouse & Almeida 2012, Sprouse et al. 2013
	<b>Fri., May 02</b>   <b>CRITICAL REVIEW DUE FOR FEATHERSTON 2007</b>
	<b>Mon., May 05</b>   <b>Qs+B DUE FOR NEXT READING(S)</b>
WEEK 13	Wed, May 07   <b>AI AI AI! (Part 1). Reading:</b>   Piantadosi 2024
	<b>Mon., May 12</b>   <b>Qs+B DUE FOR NEXT READING(S)</b>
WEEK 14	Wed, May 14   <b>AI AI AI! (Part 2). Readings:</b>   Katzir 2024; Kodner et al. 2024

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#### **Pullum & Scholz 2002 commentary**

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#### **Featherston 2007 commentary**

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