Linguistics 801: Seminar on Graduate Study in Linguistics

Requirements & Syllabus: Fall Term, 2006

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Office hours: T 1:30-2:30, W 10:00-11:30, and by appointment.

This year-long seminar has four goals. First, it will introduce students to the history of modern linguistics, especially (from the mid-20th century on) linguistics in the United States. In the Fall Term, we will focus on readings and discussions that will take us from 19th-century linguistics through the Chomskyan revolution of the 1960s (roughly 1957-1965). Second, students will begin to develop an understanding of some of the many approaches to the study of language and linguistics, and an appreciation for the relations (“interfaces”) among these different approaches; these topics will be covered mainly in the Winter Term. The aim is to provide a forum where students can discuss how the various aspects of their coursework fit together. These two goals converge in helping us begin to build an integrated view of the discipline. The third goal is specific to first-year students in the Department of Linguistics: the seminar will serve as an orientation to graduate study in linguistics, in the department, and at the university; we will consider first-year students’ long-term goals relative to the course of study they are embarking on. And the fourth goal is to introduce students to a variety of faculty members and (especially in the Winter Term) their research interests.

Requirements:

The primary requirements are active participation in our weekly discussions and completion of the weekly readings, together with possible occasional written assignments (problem solving and short essays). In both terms, individual students may be assigned primary responsibility for one week’s discussion topic.

Readings:

A set of weekly readings will be placed on reserve in...um... wherever we’re keeping readings these days. You may copy the readings if you like, but you may not remove them from the Workroom. (It’s barely possible that I’ll be organized enough to put at least some of the readings on the web, but don’t count on it.)

Tentative syllabus for Fall 2006:

This syllabus is subject to change: we may decide to spend extra time on some topics, and/or less time on others, and some visiting speakers may not be available at the times scheduled (so that we may have to rearrange a few topics).
1, Sept. 6: **Organizational meeting & orientation**: broader goals of linguistic study. We’ll begin discussing such questions as these: Why study linguistics? What is the relation of linguistics to other disciplines? What is the relation of linguistics to aspects of life outside academia? And what would you like to get out of this course?

2, Sept. 13: **Orientation to graduate study**, continued—further discussion of general issues, and moving on to consideration of academic linguistics as a profession.

Reading: Bloomfield, ‘Why a linguistic society?’ (Language 1:1-5, 1925); Julia S. Falk, ‘The women Foundation Members of the Linguistic Society of America’ (Language 70/3, 1994—this is a long article, so you needn’t read all of it, but do read some of it); S. Thomason, three or more of the following Editor’s Department columns from Language, 1988-1994: ‘Notes on journal policy’ (64/3:652, 1988); ‘Answers to readers’ questions about journal submission’ (65/2:445-47, 1989); ‘More answers to readers’ questions’ (65/3:683-84, 1989); ‘Editorial policy and areas of specialization’ (65/4:919-21, 1989); ‘How to review edited collections of papers’ (66/3:659-60, 1990); ‘How to write effective referee reports’ (66/4:891-95, 1990); ‘Advice to authors on how to deal with journal editors’ (67/2:428-31, 1991); ‘Bernard Bloch and Noam Chomsky’ (67/4:871-72, 1991); ‘The sin of duplicate publication’ (68/2:453-55, 1992); ‘Description of submission categories’ (69/3:639-43, 1993); ‘How to handle data responsibly’ (70/2, 1994).

3, Sept. 20: **Orientation**, continued: issues specific to graduate study in linguistics at U of M.

Reading: no new assignment; read some more of last week’s readings.

4, Sept. 27: **19th-century linguistics: Comparative and historical linguistics**. Possible guest speaker.

Reading: TBA. (Written assignment possible, but not very likely.)

5, Oct. 4: **19th-century linguistics: Comparative and historical linguistics**, continued; also **Typology**.

Reading: TBA. (Written assignment possible.)
From 19th- to 20th-century linguistics: Saussure.
Reading: Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 1916, pp. 94-140 (and, optionally, pp. 23-43); or, if you don’t read French, read the 1959 English translation, *Course in general linguistics*, pp. 65-100 (and, optionally, pp. 6-23).

The heirs of Saussure #1: Prague School Linguistics: Trubetzkoy and Jakobson.


The heirs of Saussure #2: American structuralism: Bloomfield.

Post-Bloomfieldian American structuralism: the phonemic principle and (if time permits) immediate constituent analysis.
Reading: TBA. (Written assignment possible.)

Structuralism at U of M: Kenneth Pike (videotape).

Discussion of issues concerning graduate study in linguistics. (YES, we will meet the day before Thanksgiving!)
13, Nov. 29: **Early generative theory: syntax.** Probable guest speaker: Sam Epstein.

14, Dec. 6: **Early generative theory: phonology.** Probable guest speaker.
(Written assignment possible.)

Reading: TBA.

A few general readings relevant to topics covered in the Fall Term:


Joos, Martin, ed. 1957. *Readings in linguistics I: the development of descriptive linguistics in America, 1925–1956.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Joos’s comments at the end of some of these readings constitute the most extreme of the post-Bloomfieldian American structuralists. They’re often quite entertaining.]

