Seminar in Syntax: Experimental Syntax  
Fall Semester 2012  

ENGL 627 / LING 629  
MWF 2:30-3:20, Heav 110

Instructor

Dr. Elaine Francis  
Office: Heav 408  
Office hours: MW 11:30-12:20 and 3:30-4:20, or by appointment  
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Tel: None. For urgent matters, you may call the English dept. main office at 494-3740.

Description

Increasingly, theoretical linguists are using experimental methods to gauge linguistic knowledge. This course introduces basic concepts of experimental design and explores how experimental methods may be used to answer theoretical questions in syntax. Students will evaluate theoretical and methodological aspects of current research articles and will also have the opportunity to design their own experiments. Specific topics and readings will be determined in part by the research interests of seminar participants.

Some of the issues we will address in the course are as follows:

- What is experimental syntax and why do we need it? Why conduct experiments rather than simply using our own intuitions or those of a native-speaker consultant?
- What do acceptability judgments mean and how can we interpret judgment data with respect to theoretical problems in syntax?
- When we design an experiment to investigate a syntactic problem, how can we be sure our data really get at the relevant issues? What are the potential factors influencing a particular linguistic phenomenon, and how do we control for extraneous factors?
- How do experimental data inform the analysis of word order alternations, island violations, subject-verb agreement, event structure, and other syntactic phenomena?
- What are the boundaries of the competence grammar? How can we decide whether apparently syntactic phenomena are really a manifestation of semantic, discourse, and/or processing constraints?
- How can experimental research on language processing, language acquisition, language disorders, and neurolinguistics inform our understanding of the competence grammar?
• Besides acceptability judgments, what other techniques can linguists use to study grammatical phenomena in competence and performance?

Blackboard Learn

• The Blackboard Learn course web pages will be used to distribute lecture notes, assignments, handouts, and supplemental readings and to post grades and other important course information and announcements.

• To access Blackboard go to: http://www.itap.purdue.edu/learning/tools/blackboard/

• Click on the link to Blackboard Learn and enter your career account login and password.

Class Format

• The class will consist primarily of reading and discussion of book chapters and research articles. Class activities will also include demonstrations of research techniques (by myself and some guest speakers), and hands-on practice with data collection and analysis.

Requirements

Class Participation and Attendance 25% / 250

• To get full credit for class participation, you must attend every class, complete the assigned reading before class, and participate in class activities and discussions. In preparation for each class, you should also prepare a set of written questions and/or comments pertaining to the assigned reading. Please bring your questions/comments to class each day to facilitate discussion of the reading.

• Each unexcused absence will result in an automatic 50-point (out of 250) deduction from your class participation grade.

• If you must be absent due to an illness or other unavoidable circumstances, this will not count against your grade. However, please notify me as soon as possible so that you can arrange to make up the work. Please provide appropriate documentation for any absences that you would like to be excused.
CITI course in human research ethics  

- Before Sept 17, you must complete the CITI online training course in human research ethics. You will receive full credit (50 points) for successfully passing the course, regardless of your exact score in the course. If you have already completed the CITI course, you do not need to take it again.

- Register at the CITI webpage and take the Group 2 (Social Behavioral Research) test. You may submit a printout of your CITI certification as proof of completion. There is a link to CITI webpage from the Purdue IRB webpage:  
  http://www.purdue.edu/research/vpr/rschadmin/rschoversight/humans/edu.php

Article presentations (3)  

- On three occasions during the semester you will present an article to the class in a critical way and lead the discussion of the article. You should prepare a brief handout summarizing the points you plan to cover. More details about article presentations will be given in a separate handout.

Term Paper and Short Presentation  

- The term paper will consist of a 15-25 page paper (double-spaced, including tables, graphs, examples, and references) on a topic of your choice in experimental syntax. Sentence materials or sample questionnaires may be included as appendices (not included in 25 page limit).

- The paper will propose an original experiment testing a research question of interest to you, preferably something related to your own dissertation or thesis research. The paper must consist of the following components:
  - Introduction: literature review and theoretical issue(s) to be addressed.
  - Hypotheses: clear statement of specific predictions to be tested, including graphs depicting expected pattern of data.
  - Methods: detailed experimental design, including materials, procedure, and a description of the population to be tested.
  - Pilot Results and Discussion: a report and discussion of the data collected from three or more pilot subjects.

- The term paper will be due at 5pm on Tuesday, Dec 11 (in finals week). I will need a one-page topic proposal from you by Monday, Oct 22. Additional details of the term paper will be given on a separate document.

- Some time during the last week of class or the final exam period, you will give a short presentation of the term paper (20 minutes for presentation, 10 minutes
for discussion). The presentation does not need to include everything in the term paper. You should prepare a short handout. Powerpoint is optional.

- A note on IRB approval. Class projects do not normally require IRB approval. However, if you wish to use any of the data collected for this term paper in your dissertation and/or in a published paper, you must work together with your dissertation advisor to seek IRB approval before collecting any data. See the Purdue IRB webpage for details: http://www.purdue.edu/research/vpr/rschadmin/rschoversight/humans/approval.php

General Policies

Grading

- A+ = 970 and above; A = 930-969; A- = 900-929; B+ = 870-899; B = 830-869; B- = 800-829; C+ = 770-799; C = 730-769; C- = 700-729; D+ = 670-699; D = 630-669; D- = 600-629; F = below 600

Plagiarism and Cheating

- In writing your paper, please be sure to provide proper citation (including page numbers) for any information quoted or paraphrased from a published source.

- The University’s guidelines on plagiarism and cheating are listed in the brochure “Academic Integrity: A Guide for Students,” which is available online at: http://www.purdue.edu/ODOS/administration/integrity.htm

Classroom atmosphere

- Please share you ideas and opinions about the course material, and don’t be shy about asking questions. This is a small class, and its success depends on your active participation!

- Please help maintain an atmosphere that is both friendly and professional.

Getting Help

- If you have any questions about the course material or are having any kind of problems in the course, feel free to come discuss it with me. If you cannot make it to office hours, you can set up an appointment at a different time.

- If you need any kind of special accommodation for a disability, medical condition, or other situation, please go to the Dean of Students Office (494-1747) to develop an official arrangement for accommodations in your classes.
**Readings**

**Required Texts**


**Supplemental Texts** (on reserve in Hicks library)


**Preliminary List of Additional Readings** (pdf files to be posted in Blackboard)


**Experimental Syntax: Fall 2012 Timetable**

(AP= article presentation, schedule to be updated with additional readings)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings (preliminary schedule)</th>
<th>Presentations &amp; Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Aug 20-24</td>
<td>Why do experimental syntax? Native-speaker intuitions and syntactic theory</td>
<td>Wasow &amp; Arnold 2005; Myers 2009a; Schütze 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Aug 27-31</td>
<td>Acceptability vs. grammaticality; Subject and task-related factors in intuitive judgments</td>
<td>Cowart 1997, ch. 1-2; Schütze 1996, ch. 1-5;</td>
<td>AP 1-2</td>
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<td>3 Sept 5-7</td>
<td>Experiment design and procedures</td>
<td>Cowart 1997, ch. 3-5; Schütze 1996, ch. 6-7</td>
<td>No class Sept 3, Labor Day AP 3-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Sept 10-14</td>
<td>Case study of experimental syntax: noun phrases in Chinese</td>
<td>Myers (2009b); Li (1998)</td>
<td>AP 5-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Sept 17-21</td>
<td>Wh-constraints and gradience in syntactic judgments</td>
<td>Featherston 2005a; Francis &amp; Matthews 2006; Sprouse 2007b</td>
<td>CITI certification due Sept 17 AP 7-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Topic</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Oct 1-5</td>
<td>Wh-constraints, prosody, and pragmatics</td>
<td>Kitagawa &amp; Fodor 2006; Ambridge &amp; Goldberg 2008</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Oct 10-12</td>
<td>Wh-constraints and sentence processing</td>
<td>Kluender &amp; Kutas 1993; Alexopoulou &amp; Keller 2007</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Oct 15-19</td>
<td>Wh-constraints and sentence processing, continued</td>
<td>Hofmeister &amp; Sag 2010; Phillips 2011</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Oct 22-26</td>
<td>Response methods for judgment experiments</td>
<td>Featherston 2005c; Bader and Häussler 2010; Weskott &amp; Fanselow 2011; Sprouse 2011</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Oct 29-Nov 2</td>
<td>Constructing questionnaires Data summaries and statistics (Bring laptops this week if you can.)</td>
<td>Cowart 1997, ch. 6-9 Cowart 1997, ch. 10-12 Francis 2010</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Nov 5-9</td>
<td>Research ethics in experimental language research</td>
<td>LSA ethics statement; Purdue ethics statement; sample IRB documents; other readings TBA</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Nov 12-16</td>
<td>Topic TBA</td>
<td>AP 19-20</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Nov 19</td>
<td>Topic TBA</td>
<td>AP 21-22</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Nov 26-30</td>
<td>Topic TBA</td>
<td>AP 23-24</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Dec 3-7</td>
<td>Term paper presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finals week</td>
<td>Dec 10-14</td>
<td>Term paper presentations continued in final exam period (date, time TBA)</td>
<td>Term paper due Dec 11</td>
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