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The course gives a survey of the major fields in the grammar of English: word classes, syntactic constituents, construction types, clauses, as well as the principles and conditions underlying syntactic operations. On the basis of the achievements of generative linguistics, the course offers sound foundations for any further study in English linguistics.
The course deals with fundamental issues in the grammar and in particular the syntax of English in the framework of modern grammatical theory. Emphasis in the latter part is placed on arguments for and against proposals concerning grammatical structures and analyses. The course aims at explaining what systematic regularities define language in general and English in particular.

Grading will be based on a written exam during the exam period, sample tasks will be provided during the semester.
Handouts downloadable from the SEAS homepage.

Te**xtbook:**   Mark Newson et al, *Basic English Syntax with Exercises*, HEFOP, Budapest, 2006

THE CENTRAL QUESTIONS OF LINGUISTICS

1. What is language?
        Difficulties of definition. Communication? cf. animal communication (www.nytud.hu/nyelv_es_nyelvek/) . Natural languages vs. artificial languages

2. What do we know when we know a language?
        Knowledge of language versus use of language. competence vs. performance.
        A native speaker, by definition, has a perfect knowledge of his/her language.
        There are no primitive/superior languages (debate on LingBuzz about Piraha).

Answers to question [2] must accounf for the following (among others):
(1) Different forms, identity of (conceptual, thematic, logical, truth-functional) meaning
        a. Bill claimed Jim to have hit Jack.
        b. Jim was claimed by Bill to have hit Jack
        c. Jack was claimed by Bill to have been hit by Jim.

(2) Identical conceptual/thematic meanings - different quantifier scopes & logical meanings
     a. Everybody in this room speaks two languages.
     b. Two languages are spoken by everybody in this room.

(3) The interpretation of different pronominal forms
        a. *$Bertie_i$ hurt him_i.
        b.$Bertie_i$ hurt $himself_i$.
        c. $Bertie_i$ said that $he_{i/j}$ felt rather ill./*Bertie said that himself felt rather ill.
        d. Bertie expected him_j/$self_i$ to feel a little better.
        e. He expected Bertie to feel a little better.

Problems (1)-(3) and the like are solved by relating form and meaning in sentences, over which speakers are capable of making judgements. Sound (phonological structure) & meaning (semantic structure) are not directly relatable, have to be encoded on different levels: intermediate (syntactic) levels.

Syntax relates form and meaning

Language is **structure dependent**: all syntactic rules in all languages operate on structures rather than on unstructured strings of words. Humans are capable of identifying structure-independent patterns in the context of a puzzle, but not in the context of language learning. (No "move the third word from the left" rule)
Structure dependency seems to be one of the properties of language that can be regarded innate (see e.g. *yes*/*no*-questions, no structure independent types of errors made by children).

Who does the coach want to shoot?/Who does the coach wanna shoot?
→ only one of the sentences is ambiguous, *wanna*-contraction cancels one of the potential interpretations. Why? Explanation in terms of traces:
Who$_i$ does the coach want t$_i$ to shoot?/Who$_i$ does the coach want to shoot t$_i$?
Who$_i$ does the coach wanna shoot t$_i$?/second option not available after contracting *want to*

In general it can be stated that we know much more than could be expected based on the quantity and quality of the input e.g. ambiguity, pronominal reference, *wanna*-contraction.

3. How do we come to have knowledge of (some) language?
      Argument from 'poverty of stimulus': how to acquire a richly articulated system of knowledge on the basis of the scattered, chaotic, haphazard data available to the learner (=child)? Can the learning process be based on conditioning (Stimulus → Response)
→ postulation of **language faculty**: an innate language acquisition device specific to the human species located in the brain. Genetically given mental organ determining stages of acquisition, allowing for cross-linguistic variety.

Rules vs. imitation: systematic errors in language acquisition: *goed – went*

The number and length of sentences is infinite → need for deductive definition instead of enumeration (sentences)