

# How Language Works

ENGL 3371 (Fall 2020)  
Texas Tech University

**Instructor:** Dr. Aaron Braver  
*Email* aaron.braver@ttu.edu  
*Web* <http://www.aaronbraver.com>  
*Office* English & Philosophy Building, Room 312C

**Class Meetings:** Thursdays 6:00pm–8:50pm (all times are Central)  
Via Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/97489700767> (see Blackboard for password)

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays, 1:00pm–2:00pm, and by appointment  
Via Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/92382384016> (see Blackboard for password)  
Be sure to reserve a slot: <http://www.aaronbraver.com/officehours>

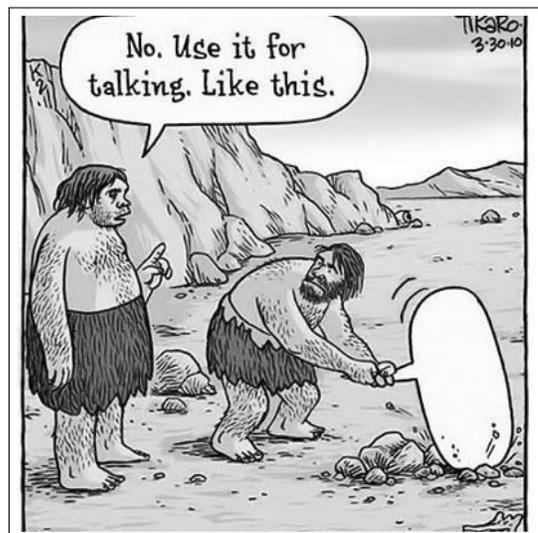
**Course website:** On Blackboard: <http://ttu.blackboard.com>

## About this course

Human languages are complicated and diverse—but also highly systematic. This course provides a basic introduction to these systematic, structural properties of human language, as illuminated by modern linguistic theory. We will examine the methods employed by linguists, as well as some of the key results from this work. We will also consider some of the social, philosophical, and cognitive aspects of human language.

### By the end of this course, you should be able to...

- Explain the properties that make human language unique
- Find patterns and regularities in linguistic data
- Infer from these patterns what kind of knowledge all language-speakers must share
- Understand the basics of linguistic theory and how this theory explains the fundamental properties of human language



This course is *not* about ‘proper’ grammar or how to learn hundreds of languages (in fact, we’ll see that *linguistics* is not about these things at all).

# Materials

## Technology requirements

You will need to have a webcam and a microphone to take this online course. It is strongly preferred that you participate via a computer rather than a phone—if this will not be possible, please let me know as soon as possible.

## Required Course Textbook

*Language Files: Materials for an Introduction to Language and Linguistics, 12th Edition.* Ohio State University Press. ISBN: 0814252702.

- Please be sure to get the *12th* edition (it has a big '12' on it). Other editions will *not* be usable for this course.

## Handouts

Handouts for each unit will be posted on Blackboard. It is your responsibility to bring the appropriate handouts with you to every class meeting, either in digital or dead tree format.

# Assignments and Grading

## Homework

There will be approximately one homework assignment per unit.

Work must be typed and submitted **as a single PDF file** via the course Blackboard site (too many linguistic fonts go wrong in Word documents). Work submitted in another format or as multiple files will receive a zero.

Collaboration is permitted on homework assignments under the following conditions:

Each person must write up and hand in their own assignment.

Any answers, explanations, or reasoning in the assignment must be written in *your own words*.

If you and another person hand in nearly identical assignments (as judged by me), I reserve the right to require you to work alone from then on.

You must clearly indicate at the top of the assignment who you collaborated with.

A guiding principle: You must always do your own work—this means that you must state things in your own words and show that you understand any ideas that you got from another source.

## In-class exercises

We will occasionally have in-class exercises and problem sets. These cannot be made up if you are absent.

## Final exam

We will have a take-home final exam, due on Monday 11/3 at 11:59pm. Collaboration is not permitted on the exam.

## Grade breakdown

Category	Percent	Percentage	Letter grade
Homework	50%	95–100%	A+
In-class assignments	10%	90–94.99%	A
Participation	10%	85–89.99%	B+
Take-home final	30%	80–84.99%	B
		75–79.99%	C+
		70–74.99%	C
		65–69.99%	D+
		60–64.99%	D
		< 60%	F

Final course grades will be rounded to two decimal places (e.g., 94.991% rounds down to 94.99% and is an A, while 94.995% rounds up to 95.00% is an A+).

## Keeping track of grades

Your assignments will be returned to you via Blackboard. You can see your assignment scores via the My Grades section of the course Blackboard page. A running calculation of your course grade is available in the 'weighted grade' entry.

## Policies and expectations

### Expectations for online courses

I will expect the following from every student during this online course:

- You will have a webcam and microphone connected to your computer.
- You will not engage in any other activities (cooking, cleaning, driving, etc.) during class meetings.
- You will participate in class discussions as if you were sitting in a face-to-face class.

- You will keep your webcam on during our class meeting. If you foresee this being an issue, please let me know as soon as possible.
- You will try to be in a quiet area with no distractions.

Some etiquette specific to Zoom:

- Please keep your microphone muted until you want to speak.
- Use Zoom's 'raise hand' function and I will call on you. You can also get my attention via the text chat.
- If you use a Zoom background, choose an image that is not distracting. No video backgrounds, please.
- When setting up your Zoom profile, use your preferred first name and the last name that appears on the course roster.

**If (when) technology goes wrong...**

If the University network, Zoom, or Blackboard goes down, I will send you instructions via your TTU email address. If TTU email is down, check the course Blackboard site. If that is down too, visit <http://www.aaronbraver.com/courses/3371> for further instructions.

**Attendance, punctuality, and participation**

You are expected to come to (every) class and to participate fully in class discussions and exercises. Please make an effort to arrive on time. (Repeat tardiness may be counted as an absence.)

If you know you will be absent, *email me ahead of time*. If the absence is documented and justifiable, it may be excused (at the discretion of the instructor).

Participation counts for 10% of your grade in this course. A student who attends class regularly and does not disrupt other students, but does not otherwise contribute, will earn at best a C for this category.

Ways to earn a <i>better</i> participation grade	Ways to earn a <i>worse</i> participation grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempt to answer questions (even if you're not sure!)</li> <li>• Ask questions about the material being discussed or course readings</li> <li>• Share comments about relevant outside information</li> <li>• Come to office hours</li> <li>• Email me with questions and comments about course content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have unexcused absences</li> <li>• Frequently arrive to class late</li> <li>• Fail to pay attention during class</li> <li>• Use electronic devices for non-course activities</li> <li>• Engage in disruptive or distracting behavior</li> <li>• Disrespect others</li> </ul>

After 3 unexcused absences, you will automatically receive an F for the course.

### **Illness-based absences**

If at any time during this semester you feel too ill to participate in synchronous online class meetings. please follow the procedure TTU has set forth:

1. If you are ill and think the symptoms might be COVID-19 related:
  - (a) Call Student Health Services at (806) 743-2848 or your health care provider. After hours and on weekends contact TTU COVID-19 Helpline at (806) 742-5929 or the TTUHSC Nurse-on-Demand at (806) 743-2911.
  - (b) Self-report as soon as possible using the COVID-19 Absence Report Form found on the Dean of Students COVID-19 webpage. This website has specific directions about how to upload documentation from a medical provider and what will happen if your illness renders you unable to participate in classes for more than one week.
  - (c) If your illness is determined to be COVID-19-related, all remaining documentation and communication will be handled through the Office of the Dean of Students, including notification of your instructors of the period of time you may be absent from and may return to classes.
  - (d) If your illness is determined not to be COVID-19-related, please follow steps 2.a-d below.
2. If you are ill and can attribute your symptoms to something other than COVID-19:
  - (a) If your illness renders you unable to attend face-to-face classes, participate in synchronous online classes, or miss specified assignment due dates in asynchronous online classes, you are encouraged to visit with either Student Health Services at (806) 743-2848 or your health care provider. Note that Student Health Services and your own and other health care providers may arrange virtual visits.
  - (b) During the health provider visit, request a "return to school" note;
  - (c) E-mail the instructor a picture of that note;
  - (d) Return to class by the next class period after the date indicated on your note.

Following the steps outlined above helps to keep your instructors informed about your absences and ensures your absence or missing an assignment due date because of illness will be marked excused. You will still be responsible to complete within a week of returning to class any assignments, quizzes, or exams you miss because of illness.

## Religious holy days

Texas law requires institutions of higher education to excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day. The student shall also be excused for time necessary to travel.

An institution may not penalize the student for the absence and allows for the student to take an exam or complete an assignment from which the student is excused. The student should make up any missed work.

TTU policy indicates that a student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known to the instructor prior to the absence.

See OP 34.19 at <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP34.19.pdf> for more information.

## Late work

Assignments must be submitted on time—this is at the start of class, unless otherwise specified. *Assignments turned in after the deadline will receive zero points.* There is no partial credit for late work.

This course has a one-time no-questions-asked pass on this policy applicable only to homework assignments (and not to in-class assignments or exams). To use it, you must email the instructor *before* the original deadline, and turn in the assignment no later than one class meeting after the original deadline.

## Extraordinary circumstances

Life is complicated—illnesses and injuries happen. If these or other life events are interfering with your ability to meet course requirements, please *let me know as soon as possible*.

## Email

Some course-related announcements will be made over email. These messages will be sent to your TTU address, which you should check at least daily. Failure to check your TTU email will not excuse you from any requirements assigned via email.

Please include the course number in the subject line of any emails you send me (as well as an actual subject). If you are sending from an account other than your TTU address, please include your full name in the message body.

## Civility in the classroom and electronic devices

Students are expected to maintain a polite, civil environment that is conducive to learning for everyone. This includes refraining from non-approved uses of electronic devices, or use of such devices that becomes distracting for other students.

Breaches of decorum may result in expulsion from the classroom or consequences for your final grade.
--

## **Accommodations for students with disabilities**

Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements, should contact the instructor as soon possible to make the necessary arrangements. Students should present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor's office hours. Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, please contact the Student Disability Services office in 335 West Hall or call (806) 742-2405.

## **Academic integrity**

Cheating and plagiarism will be treated very seriously. As a general policy, all such cases will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct with a recommendation for the fullest sanctions, including failure for the course. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with TTU's statement on academic integrity, which is available at <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentconduct/academicinteg.php>, and related policies in the Student Handbook Part I, Section B, Subsection 1 (<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/docs/PartISectionB.pdf>) and Part I, Section C (<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/docs/PartISecC.pdf>).

You are encouraged to form study groups outside of class to help you understand the course material and discuss readings, however you may not collaborate on homework assignments other than as described above.

If you have any questions, please consult the instructor, a dean, or the University's academic integrity policy.

## **Diversity, inclusion, and resources for a safe campus**

Texas Tech University is committed to providing and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from gender and/or sex discrimination of any kind. Sexual assault, discrimination, harassment, and other Title IX violations are not tolerated by the University. Report any incidents to the Office for Student Rights & Resolution, (806)-742-SAFE (7233) or file a report online at <http://titleix.ttu.edu/students>.

It is my intent that students from a variety of diverse backgrounds and perspectives participate in this course, that their learning needs be addressed, and that we see this diversity as a beneficial resource. I aim to include materials and activities that are respectful of all forms of diversity, including racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, disability, age, cultural, and socioeconomic. Please let me know if you see ways to improve the effectiveness of this course for you personally, or for other groups of students.

I identify as an ally to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community, and I am available to listen and support you in an affirming manner. I can assist in connecting you with resources on campus to address problems you may face pertaining to sexual orientation and/or gender identity that could interfere with

your success at Texas Tech. Please note that additional resources are available through the Office of LGBTQIA within the Center for Campus Life, Student Union Building Room 201, <http://www.lgbtqia.ttu.edu>, (806) 742-5433.

If you have a preferred set of pronouns that you would like me to use when referring to you, please make them known to me.

Faculty and staff members at TTU are committed to connecting you to resources on campus. Some of these available resources are:

- TTU Student Counseling Center, (806) 742-3674, <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/scc/> (provides confidential support on campus)
- TTU 24-hour Crisis Helpline, (806) 742-5555 (assists students who are experiencing a mental health or interpersonal violence crisis. If you call the helpline, you will speak with a mental health counselor)
- Voice of Hope Lubbock Rape Crisis Center, (806) 763-7273, <http://voiceofhopelubbock.org> (24-hour hotline that provides support for survivors of sexual violence)
- The Risk, Intervention, Safety and Education (RISE) Office, (806) 742-2110, <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/rise/> (provides a range of resources and support options focused on prevention education and student wellness)
- Texas Tech Police Department, (806) 742-3931, <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/tttd/> (to report criminal activity that occurs on or near Texas Tech campus)
- Raider Red's Food Pantry provides students with short-term access to supplemental food, <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/foodpantry.php>, (806) 742-2984

## Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Please pay attention for announcements in class and via email.

### Introduction

Th	08/27	Introduction Syllabus What is linguistics?	·LF 1.0–1.3
Th	09/03	Design features of language Modality Animal communication	·LF 1.4–1.5 ·LF 14.0–14.3

### Phonetics

Th	09/10	What is phonetics? The vocal tract Consonants of English Vowels of English	·HW1 (Intro) due ·LF 2.0–2.3
Th	09/17	Sounds not in English Suprasegmental features Acoustic phonetics Transcription	·LF 2.4–2.6
Th	09/24	Special topic TBD	
<b>Phonology</b>			
Th	10/01	What is phonology? Phonotactic constraints Phonemes and allophones	·HW2 (Phonetics) due ·LF 3.0–3.2
Th	10/08	Phonological rules and processes Syllables Tackling phonological puzzles	·LF 3.3 ·LF 3.5
<b>Morphology</b>			
Th	10/15	What is morphology? How do words work? Morphemes Morphological processes Morphological systems Hierarchical structure of words	·HW3 (Phonology) due ·LF 4.0–4.5
Th	10/22	Special topic TBD	
<b>Syntax</b>			

Th 10/29 What is syntax?  
Syntactic properties  
Constituency  
Syntactic categories  
Building phrases  
Ambiguity

·HW4 (Morphology) due  
·LF 5.0–5.5

---

### Semantics

Th 11/05 What is semantics?  
Lexical semantics  
The truth  
Compositional semantics  
Assertion and presupposition

·HW5 (Syntax) due  
·LF 6.0–6.4

---

### Potpurri

Th 11/12 Writing systems  
Historical linguistics

·HW6 (Semantics) due  
·LF 15.0–15.3  
·LF 13.0–13.2

---

Th 11/19 Final exam review

---

Th 11/26 No class — Thanksgiving

---

M 11/3 Final exam due at 11:59pm

---