

Intro to Language

ENGL 2370 (Spring 2021)
Texas Tech University

Instructor: Dr. Aaron Braver
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Office English & Philosophy Building, Room 312C

Class Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30pm–1:50pm (all times are Central)
From 1/21 until 3/11, via Zoom:
<https://zoom.us/j/97253901735> (see Blackboard for password)
From 3/16 until 5/4, in person:
English & Philosophy Building, Room 306

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00pm–3:00pm, and by appointment
Via Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/93807137900> (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

This course provides a broad overview of language—its structure, its origins, and its role in society. We'll try to understand why language is so weird (Why does the tiny island of Papua New Guinea have over 800 languages? Why does the !Xóõ language have 164 consonants?) by applying the tools of linguistics to the language we encounter in our daily lives and to languages from around the world.

This course counts towards the Social and Behavioral Sciences Core area. This means that you will learn to assess critically claims about social issues, human behavior, and diversity in human experiences. Full details about this Core area and how it relates to this course are available on Blackboard.

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

- Explain the properties that make human language unique
- Identify and critique explanations for linguistic phenomena
- Demonstrate knowledge of common linguistics patterns
- Demonstrate knowledge of the appropriate methods used by linguists

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. You should participate by computer rather than by phone; if this will not be possible, please let me know as soon as possible.

Please keep your webcam on during our class meetings, and refrain from engaging in other activities (cooking, cleaning, driving, etc).

Required Course Textbook



Language Myths
Laurie Bauer and Peter Trudgill (eds)
Penguin Books
ISBN: 978-0140260236

Assignments and Grading

Homework

Homework will be assigned approximately every other week.

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.

Midterm exam

We will have a take-home midterm exam, due on Thursday 3/18 at 11:59pm. It will be made available via Blackboard on 3/18 at our normal class time. Collaboration is not permitted on the exam.

Final exam

We will have a take-home final exam, due on Friday 5/7 at 11:59pm. It will be made available via Blackboard after our class meeting on 5/4. 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 midterm	15%	80–84.99%	B
Take-home final	15%	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 synchronous classes

The online portion of this course is *synchronous*. That means that we will meet in real time at our regularly scheduled class time via video conferencing.

To ensure that you are fully engaged in class discussions, you are expected to do the following:

- Maintain the same level of civility and professionalism that would be expected in a face-to-face classroom setting
- Attend all class meetings
- Log in to the video conference on time, and remain logged in for the duration of the class period
- Keep your camera on so that you are visible to the instructor and other students in the class. If you have concerns about leaving your camera on (such as childcare obligations, privacy issues, or a particular circumstance during a class period), please talk to the instructor
- Refrain from engaging in non-class related activities during class time, especially those that create a distraction for other students and/or limit your ability to engage in the course (e.g., cooking, driving, etc.)

Failure to meet these expectations may result in the following consequences:

- Being counted as absent for the class meeting
- Not receiving credit for class participation for that class period

Repeated violations of these expectations will may result in the following consequences

- Referral to the appropriate Associate Dean
- Academic penalty, ranging from a warning to failure of the course

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/2370> 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"> ● Attempt to answer questions (even if you're not sure!) ● Ask questions about the material being discussed or course readings ● Share comments about relevant outside information ● Come to office hours ● Email me with questions and comments about course content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have unexcused absences ● Frequently arrive to class late ● Fail to pay attention during class ● Use electronic devices for non-course activities ● Engage in disruptive or distracting behavior ● Disrespect others

After 4 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.

If the university moves online...

If the university decides to move courses entirely online after we've switched to face to face instruction halfway through the semester, we will follow the same procedures as for the first half of the class.

- We will continue to meet at our usual time, via the same Zoom link and password
- All assignments, due dates, and readings remain the same as before

Protective face coverings

The [Texas Tech University Facial Covering Policy](#) requires all members of the University Community (students, faculty, staff, visitors, vendors and contractors) to wear protective face coverings on University campuses or in University facilities. Students will be required to wear a mask or face covering when attending an in-person class.

For more information about protective face coverings, see [the guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Protective face coverings help to protect others in case you're infected but do not exhibit symptoms, and help to protect you if others are infected. The CDC recommends the following practices for [wearing your face covering correctly](#):

- Wash your hands before putting on your face covering
- Put it over your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin
- Try to fit it snugly against the sides of your face
- Make sure you can breathe easily
- Keep the covering on your face the entire time you're in public
- Don't put the covering around your neck or up on your forehead
- Don't touch the face covering, and, if you do, wash your hands
- Take off your cloth face covering carefully, when you're home

Students seeking a medical exception for this policy should contact [Student Disability Services](#).

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.

Date	Topics	Readings and assignments
Th 01/21	First class meeting	

What makes human language special?

Introduction: In this unit, we'll learn some of the scientific methods linguists use to study and classify unfamiliar languages. We'll discuss methods and criteria for understanding why language is uniquely human, and why this isn't such a straightforward question.

T 01/26	Human language and animal communication	·Fasold and Connor-Linton Introduction ·Yule ch. 2 ·Language Matters ch. 6
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Th 01/28 Why is Snorlax bigger than Pikachu? ·Language Matters ch. 2
Why grammar don't matter to linguists

Why don't any languages snort?

Phonetics and phonology deal with the sounds of language. We'll learn how the vocal tract anatomy effects our ability to speak, and we'll apply methods used by linguists to analyze the sounds of unfamiliar languages.

T 02/02 From lips to larynx ·Yule ch. 3
Phonetic contrast: tongue twisters

Th 02/04 Hey Siri/Ok Google ·O'Grady et al. ch. 18.0–18.2

Language and the brain

Your brain obviously controls the way you speak, but it does so in ways you wouldn't expect. We'll see what psycholinguistic and neurolinguistics methodologies teach us about our brains—and ourselves.

T 02/09 The brain is weird ·Yule ch. 12
A matter of grey matter

Th 02/11 Losing language: Aphasia ·HW 1 due
The benefits of bilingualism ·LF ch. 9.2

What's the longest word of English?

Morphology: Eskimos don't have hundreds of words for snow. In this unit, we'll see why that myth was so enticing—sociologically and linguistically.

T 02/16 The great Eskimo vocabulary hoax: ·LF ch 4.0, 4.1, 4.3
analytic vs. synthetic languages

Th 02/18 Hierarchical structure of words ·LF ch. 4.4
Productivity of affixes

Like, totally: Accents and social markers of identity

Sociolinguistics: Why do we have different accents? In this unit, we'll learn the tools used by sociolinguists to analyze linguistic variation—from interviews and questionnaires to quantitative analysis of vowels.

T 02/23 Regional accents ·Language Myths ch. 17 and 20
Language and power

Th 02/25 Gender identity and sexual orienta- ·**HW 2 due**
tion in speech ·Yule pp. 319–321
·Language Matters ch. 10

What's the longest sentence of English

Syntax: In this unit, we'll discover the linguistic methods used to analyze sentence structure. We'll learn syntactic methodology starting with English, then apply it to other languages.

T 03/02 Parts of speech ·Yule ch. 7 and 8
Gluing things together
Word order typology

Th 03/04 Ambiguity ·O'Grady et al. ch. 18.3
Syntactic processing by brains and ·Language Matters ch. 7
computers
Data mining

Language and social media

We'll see that as social media becomes as important—if not more so—than face to face communication, linguists have had to update their methods of analysis.

T 03/09 Emojis, emoticons, and gifs ·McColloch ch. 1 and 5

Th	03/11	Twitter "Black Twitter"	·HW 3 due · <i>The Truth About Black Twitter</i> (The Atlantic)
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Class moves to F2F, meeting in ENGL 306

Midterm exam

This week, we will review for the midterm, and then take the exam on Thursday.

T 03/16 Midterm review **in person**

Th	03/18	Midterm exam online , available during our class period	·Midterm exam due at 11:59pm
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What was the first language?

Historical linguistics: In this unit, we'll assess various theories about the beginnings of language. We'll also learn the methods used by historical linguists to bring dead languages back to life, and apply these methods to unfamiliar data.

T	03/23	Gestures, grunts, and aliens: theories of the first language Ye Olde Englishe	·Yule ch. 1
Th	03/25	Why are spelling bees even a thing? Latin isn't dead	·Yule ch. 17 ·Language Myths ch. 5

Writing systems

T	03/30	Writing systems	·Yule ch. 16
Th	04/01	Writing systems	·HW 4 due

It's just semantics

Why do words mean what they do? How does context affect their meaning?

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| T | 04/06 | Lexicography
Combining words into phrases | ·Yule ch. 9 |
| Th | 04/08 | Language as a game
Language and advertising | ·Yule ch. 10 |

Artificial languages

Un-natural languages have been created for fun, profit, and to bring about global harmony. We'll discuss the methods used to create these languages, and the role they play in our society.

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| T | 04/13 | Fictional languages in fiction (Klingon, Dothraki, Elvish, etc.) | ·From Elvish to Klingon ch. 5
·18 <i>Klingon Phrases That'll Save Your Life One Day</i> (Wired) |
| Th | 04/15 | La Internacia Lingvo: International auxiliary languages | · HW 5 due
·From Elvish to Klingon ch. 2 (just pp. 17–38) |

Does your language limit your thoughts?

Language and thought are intimately linked—but linguists disagree about just how tight that link is.

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| T | 04/20 | The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and linguistic relativity | ·LF ch. 11.2 |
| Th | 04/22 | Film viewing: <i>Arrival</i> | |

Sign languages are real languages

Sign languages are remarkably similar to spoken languages. What can this similarity tell us about human behavior?

T 04/27 Basics of signed languages ·Yule ch. 15

Th 04/29 Sign language phonology

Final exam review

T 05/04 Final exam review ·HW 6 due

F 05/07 ·Final exam due by 11:59pm