

# Principles of Language

ENGL 5335 (Spring 2024)  
Texas Tech University

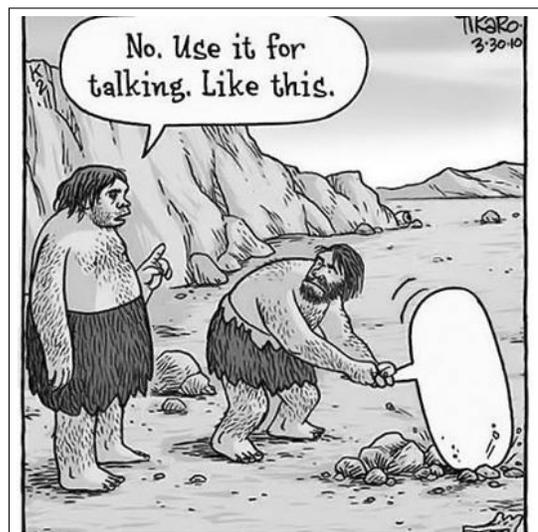
- Instructor:** Dr. Aaron Braver  
*Email* aaron.braver@ttu.edu  
*Web* <http://www.aaronbraver.com>  
*Office* Humanities Building (formerly English/Philosophy), Room 312C
- Class meetings:** T/Th, 12:30pm–1:50pm  
*Section 001* Humanities Building (formerly English/Philosophy), Room 308  
*Section D01* Via Zoom at <https://texastech.zoom.us/j/97284933559> (password on Blackboard)
- Office Hours:** T/Th, 2:00pm–2:50pm, and by appointment  
Be sure to reserve a slot: <http://www.aaronbraver.com/officehours>  
In person in Humanities 312C or via Zoom at  
<https://texastech.zoom.us/j/93807137900> (password on Blackboard)
- 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

### Required Course Textbook

- *Language Files: Materials for an Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, 13th Edition. Ohio State University Press. ISBN: 9780814258354.
- *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*. Steven Pinker. ISBN: 9780061336461.

### 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

### Readings

The readings for this course are drawn from textbooks, scholarly articles, and popular publications.

You should be prepared to discuss the readings on the day they are listed on the syllabus—you may be called upon for your thoughts during class.

### 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.

### Final paper

There are two options for your final paper, both due on Monday, 5/6.

Language sketch: Using appropriate reference sources, you will compile a “sketch” of a language unfamiliar to you. This will include descriptions of at least the language’s phonetics, phonology, morphology, and syntax, as well as highlighting the rare features that make your language stand out from other languages.

or...

Traditional paper: Write a traditional research paper. You will choose a “problem” in the literature and highlight existing solutions to that problem. You will cite data from multiple languages that bear on the problem, and you may propose your own unique solution (or a modification of an existing one).

Regardless of the option you choose, you will give a presentation about your project at the end of the semester (see schedule).

A proposal for your final paper will be due on Thursday, 3/21.

## Grade breakdown

Category	Percent	Percentage	Letter grade
Homework	70%	95–100%	A+
Final paper	30%	90–94.99%	A
		85–89.99%	B+
		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.

## Schedule

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

### Introduction

Date

Topic(s)

Reading/Assignments

Th	01/11	Syllabus What is linguistics? What do you already know?	
T	01/16	Design features of language	·LF 1.0–1.5 ·Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch 2002
Th	01/18	Modality Animal communication	·LF 17.0–17.2 ·LF 17.4–17.6 ·LF 14.0–14.3
<b>Phonetics</b>			
T	01/23	What is phonetics? The vocal tract	·LF 2.0–2.1
Th	01/25	Consonants of English Vowels of English	· <b>HW 1 (Introduction) due</b> ·LF 2.2–2.3
T	01/30	Sounds not in English Suprasegmental features	·LF 2.4–2.5
Th	02/01	Acoustic phonetics Transcription	·LF 2.6
T	02/06	TBD	·Language Instinct ch. 6 (just pp. 153–168)

### Phonology

Th	02/08	What is phonology? Phonotactic constraints Phonemes and allophones	· <b>HW 2 (Phonetics) due</b> ·LF 3.0–3.2
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T	02/13	Phonemes and allophones cont'd Phonological rules and processes	·LF 3.3
Th	02/15	Phonological rules and processes cont'd Syllables	
T	02/20	Tackling phonological puzzles	·LF 3.5
Th	02/22	TBD	·Language Instinct ch. 6 (just pp. 168–189)

### Morphology

T	02/27	What is morphology? How do words work? Morphemes	· <b>HW 3 (Phonology) due</b> ·LF 4.0–4.1
Th	02/29	Morphological processes	·LF 4.2
T	03/05	Morphological systems Hierarchical structure of words	·LF 4.3–4.5
Th	03/07	TBD	·Language Instinct ch. 5
T	03/12	No class—Spring break	
Th	03/14	No class—Spring break	

### Syntax

T	03/19	What is syntax? The basics of syntax Syntactic properties	· <b>HW 4 (Morphology) due</b> ·LF 5.0–5.1
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Th	03/21	Syntactic properties cont'd Constituency Syntactic categories	· <b>Project proposal due</b> ·LF 5.2–5.4
T	03/26	Building phrases	·LF 5.5
Th	03/28	Building phrases cont'd Ambiguity	
T	04/02	TBD	·Language Instinct ch. 4
<b>Semantics</b>			
Th	04/04	What is semantics? Lexical semantics The truth	· <b>HW 5 (Syntax) due</b> ·LF 6.0–6.3
T	04/09	Compositional semantics Assertion and presupposition Scope relations	·LF 6.4
Th	04/11	TBD	·Language Instinct ch. 7
<b>Wrapping up</b>			
T	04/16	Presentations	· <b>HW 6 (Semantics) due</b>
Th	04/18	Presentations	
T	04/23	Presentations	
Th	04/25	Project workshop	
T	04/30	Project workshop	

## Policies and expectations

### Attendance and punctuality

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.

If you are or will be absent, please check with your classmates for notes and assignments.

### Absences due to illness

In case of an illness that will require absence from class for more than one week, the student should notify their academic dean. The dean's office will inform the student's instructors through the departmental office. In case of class absences because of a brief illness, the student should inform the instructor directly. Other information related to illness can be found in the Student Handbook at <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/handbook/>.

### Absences due to religious holy days

Refer to the University's statement on Religious Holy Days at:  
<https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpdc/RequiredSyllabusStatements.php>

### Absences due to officially approved trips

Any student absent because of university business must be allowed to make up missed work within a reasonable span of time, or have alternate grades substituted for work due to an absence. In order to receive these privileges, the faculty or staff member responsible for the officially approved trip must notify me of the departure and return schedules. Students will not be penalized for these absences, but are responsible for all material missed.

### 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.

## **Use of AI**

Generally speaking, you are not allowed to use artificial intelligence (AI) engines, software, or artwork generating programs (such as ChatGPT or DALL-E) to produce work for this class. If you believe you have a compelling reason to use AI for a particular aspect of the course, you may ask permission for that specific use at my discretion.

## **Expectations for online participants in hybrid courses**

The online section of this course is *synchronous*. That means that both the on-site and online sections will meet at the same time—on-site students in person, and online students via Zoom.

Online students will need to have a webcam and a microphone. I also strongly recommend that you have headphones or a headset.

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.)

## **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/5335> for further instructions.

## **University policies and statements**

Texas Tech Policies Concerning Academic Honesty, Special Accommodations for Students with Disabilities, Student Absences for Observance of Religious Holy Days, and Accommodations for Pregnant Students may be found at <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpsc/RequiredSyllabusStatements.php>.

Additional statements—including those on discrimination, harassment, and sexual violence; civility in the classroom; plagiarism; student support; and food insecurity—are available at <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpsc/RecommendedSyllabusStatements.php>.

## **Supporting student communities**

It is my intent that students from a variety of 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.

For more information about services, opportunities for participation, and ways in which Texas Tech can support your success in college, please contact the Office of Campus Access and Engagement at (806) 742-7025 or at <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/access-engagement/>.

Additional resources for student success, including for mental health and well-being, are listed at <http://www.aaronbraver.com/students>.

## **Mandatory reporting of sex/gender-based discrimination and violence**

Please be aware that employees of Texas Tech University are *mandatory reporters*. This means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, stalking, or sex/gender-based discrimination, I am required by law to report this information to the TTU Title IX office. Reports to the Title IX office are private, and will not be shared with other students, faculty, non-Title IX staff, or parents, without your express consent or as required by university policy.

After a report is submitted, a Title IX Case Manager will send you an email to discuss the ways the University can assist you, but you are not obligated to respond. In almost

every situation, you are in control of whether or not to move forward with an investigation, and any action taken in response to the situation will be up to you. Our main goal is to provide you with immediate support and protect all students and employees from a hostile or discriminatory environment.