

Linguistics of Signed Languages

01:615:461
Summer (III) 2010
Linguistics Department
Rutgers University

- Instructor:** Aaron Braver
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18 Seminary Place, Room 001 (College Avenue Campus)
- Class Meetings:** July 12 – August 18
Mon, Tues, Weds, Thurs, 10:05 am – 11:55 am
18 Seminary Place, Room 108 (College Avenue Campus)
- Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 1 pm – 2 pm and by appointment
18 Seminary Place, Room 001 (College Avenue Campus)
- Prerequisite:** 01:615:201 (Introduction to Linguistic Theory)

About this course

Starting around the 1970s, linguists began to study signed languages in much the same way they studied spoken languages. This course serves as a broad overview of that research, focusing on phonology, syntax, and semantics, as well as Deaf arts and culture. We will examine data from a number of natural signed languages, especially American Sign Language (ASL) and Australian Sign Language (Auslan). A major goal of this course is to investigate (and disprove) a number of false assumptions about signed languages. We will explore specific linguistic phenomena in signed languages, and compare them with phenomena found in spoken languages.

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

- Identify and argue against false assumptions about signed languages
- Identify and explain common features of signed language phonology, syntax, and semantics
- Relate phenomena in signed languages to phenomena in spoken languages
- Appreciate the diversity in signed languages of the world

No knowledge of ASL or any other signed language is required or assumed. This is *not* a language instruction course.

Assignments and Grading

Assignments (40%)

Each unit has one homework assignment worth 10 points. Additional homework assignments may be added at the discretion of the instructor. In-class assignments will include summaries of course materials and readings, reflections on lectures, and short-answer questions. In-class assignments are worth 2 points each.

Midterm exam (20%)

A midterm exam will be given in class on **Tuesday, 7/27**.

Final exam (30%)

A final exam will be given in class on **Wednesday, 8/18**.

Participation (10%)

In addition to attending class, you are expected to ask and answer questions, make relevant comments, and generally contribute to discussions. Participation will be evaluated on both the quantity and quality of your contributions—keep in mind that any question that helps you understand the material is of high quality. Students who participate significantly in every class meeting will receive the full 10%; less participation will result in a lower score.

If you are uncomfortable talking in class, you may accrue participation points by discussing course content with me via email, posting in the forums on the course Sakai site, or by coming to office hours.

Extra credit

The best way to earn a good grade in this course is to participate in class, turn in your assignments on time, and prepare adequately for the exams.

From time to time, participants may be needed for experiments run by members of the linguistics department. If such a need arises, you will be notified of how you can participate in the experiment as well as how much credit you can earn. You may only participate in one experiment for extra credit for this course. Department policy states that no student may be excluded from participating in an extra credit experiment, even if the student does not speak the target language, or has a speech or language disorder. You must request from the experimenter and present to me a receipt showing your participation in the experiment.

Grades are earned, not given—and as such, it is impossible for me to give you a grade other than the one you earn according to the criteria outlined in this syllabus.

Keeping track of your grade

You can track your assignment grades on Sakai. Navigate to the course Sakai site, then click on the 'Gradebook' link in the lefthand navigation bar.

Policies and expectations

Attendance

You are expected to come to class and to participate fully in class discussions and exercises.

Summer courses fit the equivalent of an entire semester into less than six weeks. As such, each day of a summer class corresponds to much more than one day of a regular semester class. After two unexcused absences, a full grade level will be deducted from your final course grade for each additional day that you are absent. After five total unexcused absences, you will receive an F in the course.

University policy (University Regulation on Attendance, Book 2, §2.4.7B) requires that no penalty be imposed upon students who are absent from class because of religious observances, and allows for students to make up the work missed because of such absence. Please notify me as early as possible in the semester of an upcoming absence for religious reasons.

Responsibility for course material

You are responsible for all material covered in class, assigned readings, and homework assignments. Any of this material may appear in exams, homework assignments, or in-class exercises. If you miss class, it is *your* responsibility to learn about any material or assignments you miss from your classmates. It is not the instructor's responsibility to make up for your absence or to re-teach the material.

Late work

Assignments must be submitted on time—this is before 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.

Since circumstances sometimes unavoidably prevent the timely, satisfactory completion of homework, each student is allowed to turn in up to one assignment late by at most one week with no penalty (note, however, that no work will be accepted after the last class meeting). Neither the midterm exam nor the final may be postponed, taken early, or retaken.

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*. Do note, however, that verification—such as a note from the Dean—may be required. Also note that leaving for vacation is *not* an 'extraordinary circumstance'—please plan to be here throughout the entire duration of the course.

Accommodations for students with disabilities

If you have a disability and require some type of accommodation, your coordinator in the Office of Disability Services should provide you with a Letter of Accommodation, describing the accommodations to which you are entitled.

Please bring me your Letter of Accommodation as soon as possible. Don't wait until you start having problems or just before a test—I want you to have every opportunity to do well in this course, but advance notice may be necessary.

If you have any questions, you can contact me directly, or the Office of Disability Services at (732) 932-2848 or via email at dsoffice@rci.rutgers.edu.

Academic integrity

You are encouraged to form study groups outside of class to help you understand the course material.

You may discuss individual points of the homework assignments with your classmates, but please do not collaborate on entire assignments. Remember that each student must write up and turn in their own assignment, and must provide their own explanations and reasoning in their own words. Collaboration is *not* permitted on exams.

Copying from another source, or misrepresenting ideas as your own constitutes plagiarism—please cite any sources you use.

Violations of this policy will be handled in accordance with the University's academic integrity policy, which can be found at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>.

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

Office hours

Office hours for this course are Wednesdays from 1 pm – 2 pm (and by appointment) in room 001 of 18 Seminary Place, on the College Avenue Campus. Attending office hours is a good way of clarifying any questions you might have, discussing course material you find interesting, or seeking additional help.

Be sure to come prepared—write down any questions you have, and bring the relevant readings or course materials with you. If you attend office hours for help on an assignment, it is important that you attempt the assignment on your own first. Since summer courses move quickly, it is a good idea to ask for help or clarification as soon as possible. *Students who come to office hours tend to do better than those who do not.*

Suggestions and complaints

I welcome suggestions and complaints at any time. The sooner an issue is brought to my attention, the sooner it can be remedied. You may provide anonymous feedback at any time at <http://rci.rutgers.edu/~abraver/feedback.html>.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibits me from discussing your course performance with your parents or other family members. If you need to discuss your course performance, please contact me directly.

The Bylaws of the Linguistics Department state that any complaint must first be directed to the instructor. Only if the complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of all parties will it be referred to the Undergraduate Program Director, followed by the Chair of the department,

then the Dean of the school. This procedure does not apply to complaints about specific grades assigned to particular students, about which the instructor is the final arbiter.

Materials

All readings will be made available on the course Sakai site. Please contact me immediately if you cannot access the Sakai site.

Additional Resources

The following dictionaries may prove useful to look up examples referenced in readings and throughout the course. Do keep in mind that signed languages, like spoken ones, have regional and dialectal variation, so you may benefit from checking more than one source.

- ASLPro: <http://www.aslpro.com/cgi-bin/aslpro/aslpro.cgi>
- ASL Browser: <http://commtechlab.msu.edu/Sites/aslweb/browser.htm>
- Signing Savvy (ASL): <http://www.signingsavvy.com>
- Auslan Signbank: <http://www.auslan.org.au/dictionary>

Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Please check the course Sakai site for updates.

	Topics	Assignments	Readings
M, 7/12	Introduction to signed languages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are signed languages? • Signed languages of the world • History of signed language research 		
T, 7/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is modality • Effects of modality • Age of signed languages 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What Is Sign Language?</i> (Perlmutter) • <i>Syntax of ASL</i> Appendix §A.1, A.2, A.4
W, 7/14	Are signed languages ‘real’ languages? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication vs. language • Animal communication 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Language Matters</i> ch. 5
R, 7/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Origins of signed languages • Myths about signed languages • Gesture or language? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Where did NSL Come From?</i> (Senghas) • <i>A New Language Arises...</i> (Wade) • <i>Myths About ASL</i> pp. 1-3
M, 7/19	Signed language art and media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed languages in hearing media • Deaf art and media 	HW #1 due	

T, 7/20	Signed language phonology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phonology review How can signed languages have phonology? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Contemporary Linguistics</i> pp. 79-116 <i>SL&LU</i> pp. 113-119
W, 7/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization within the sign Syllable structure in signed languages 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Sonority and Syllable Structure in ASL</i> (Perlmutter) pp. 407-411 <i>SL&LU</i> pp. 216-220
R, 7/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patterns and natural classes in signed languages Features in signed languages Non-manual marking 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Language Matters</i> pp. 56-58 <i>Australian Sign Language</i> pp. 81-101 <i>SL&LU</i> pp. 60-63
M, 7/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data day: phonological processes Midterm review 	Phonology HW due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Linguistics of ASL</i> pp. 41-45, 57-61, 70-72 <i>Australian Sign Language</i> pp. 114-116, 130-136
T, 7/27	Midterm exam		
W, 7/28	Deaf culture and Deaf rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The history of Deaf America Cross-cultural communication Deaf rights 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Language Matters</i> pp. 61-70
R, 7/29	Morphology of signed languages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classifiers Non-concatenative morphology 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Australian Sign Language</i> §6.2.2.2, pp. 172-173 <i>Linguistics of ASL</i> pp. 76-82 <i>Australian Sign Language</i> pp. 165-172
M, 8/2	Syntax of signed languages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Syntax review How can signed languages have syntax? 	Morphology HW due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Contemporary Linguistics</i> pp. 187-196, 207-210, 216-217 (review as needed) <i>Linguistics of ASL</i> pp. 137-144 <i>SL&LU</i> pp. 304-308
T, 8/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-manual marking and traditional views of syntax Wh-questions 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>SL&LU</i> pp. 60-63, 432-445 <i>Australian Sign Language</i> pp. 96-99, 154-156
W, 8/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Syntactic phenomena Syntactic parallels with spoken languages 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Myths About ASL</i> pp. 5-6 <i>SL&LU</i> pp. 472-474 <i>The Syntax of ASL</i> pp. 149-152
R, 8/5	Deaf culture and Deaf rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cochlear implants Movie: <i>Sound and Fury</i> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>My Bionic Quest for Boléro</i>

M, 8/9	Semantics of signed languages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semantics vs. semiotics • Arbitrariness and iconicity 	Syntax HW due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Course in General Linguistics</i> (de Saussure) ch 1 §1-2, pp. 65-69 • <i>Myths About ASL</i> pp. 4-5 • <i>Linguistics of ASL</i> pp. 6-8 • <i>Australian Sign Language</i> pp. 232-242
T, 8/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iterativity/aspect • Time reference 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Australian Sign Language</i> pp. 148-154 • <i>Linguistics of ASL</i> pp. 105-108, 113-116
W, 8/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronoun reference/deixis and agreement 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>SL&LU</i> pp. 23-29, 39-42 • <i>Linguistics of ASL</i> pp. 91-97
R, 8/12	Acquisition of signed languages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual babbling and age of first production • Acquisition of signed phonology 		
M, 8/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed 'motherese' • Typical mistakes 	Semantics HW due	
T, 8/17	Wrap up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassessment of myths • Final review 		
W, 8/18	Final exam		