

# Studies in Linguistics: Structure of Sign Languages

ENGL 4373 (Fall 2013)

Texas Tech University

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English & Philosophy Building, Room 312C

**Class Meetings:** M/W/F, 1:00pm–1:50pm, English & Philosophy Building, Room 264

**Office Hours:** M/W/F, 11:00am–11:50am (and by appointment)

## About this course

Starting in the late 1960s and 1970s, linguists began to study signed languages in much the same way that 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). We will also read several scholarly articles written about issues in signed language linguistics. A major goal of this course is to investigate (and disprove) a number of false assumptions and myths 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, explain, and analyze common features of signed language phonology, syntax, and semantics
- Relate phenomena in signed languages to phenomena in spoken languages
- Appreciate the diversity found 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.

## Materials

### Readings

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

- SigningSavvy: <http://www.signingsavvy.com>
- Spread the Sign: <http://www.spreadthesign.com/us/> (click the appropriate flag!)
- ASLPro: <http://www.aslpro.com/cgi-bin/aslpro/aslpro.cgi>
- ASL Browser: <http://commtechlab.msu.edu/Sites/aslweb/browser.html>
- Auslan Signbank: <http://www.auslan.org.au/dictionary>

## **Assignments and Grading**

### **Assignments**

#### **Homework**

Each unit has a corresponding homework assignment, graded out of 10 points. Additional homework assignments may be added at the discretion of the instructor.

#### **In-class work**

In-class assignments may include quizzes, problem sets, and reflections on the course materials, readings, and lectures.

### **Presentation(s)**

Students will present a summary of one or more articles assigned to them, and will lead discussion about their article(s). In the case of longer/more complex articles, students will form groups, with each group member presenting for approximately 10–15 minutes. Further details will be given in class.

### **Midterm and final exams**

A midterm exam will be given in class, tentatively scheduled for Friday, October 11<sup>th</sup>. The final exam will take place according to the university's final exam schedule (<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/officialpublications/ClassSchedule/FallClass.php>)

### **Participation**

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 credit by discussing course content with me via email, posting in the forums on the course Blackboard site, or by coming to office hours.

## Grade breakdown

Category	Percent	Numerical score	Letter grade
Homework assignments	40%	95–100%	A+
In-class work	5%	90–94.99%	A
Presentation(s)	15%	85–89.99%	B+
Midterm exam	10%	80–84.99%	B
Final exam	20%	75–79.99%	C+
Attendance and participation	10%	70–74.99%	C
		65–69.99%	D+
		60–64.99%	D
		>60%	F

## 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. (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).

Number of absences	Consequence
2	0% for 'attendance and participation' category of final grade
5	Automatic F for the course

University policy (OP 34.19) 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. To exercise this right, *students must inform the instructor in writing prior to the absence*.

### Late work

Assignments must be submitted on time—this is at the start of class, unless otherwise specified (e.g., the end of class for reading responses). *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. To use it, you must email the instructor *before* the original deadline, and turn in the assignment by the following class meeting.

## **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 (4373) 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.

Two tips that apply both in this course and with other instructors: (1) Allow about 24 hours for a response during the week (we get lots of email!) and longer on weekends. (2) Think carefully about the tone, register, and formality of your writing—a polite, well-written email can stand out in a full inbox.

## **Civility in the classroom**

Students are expected to maintain a polite, civil environment that is conducive to learning for everyone. Appropriate behavior creates a better environment for both teaching and learning.

Please do not use cell phones (to talk, text, browse, play, listen, watch, record, photograph, etc.) in class. Be sure to treat your classmates with respect by responding to their remarks in a polite manner. Such inappropriate behavior will minimally result in the offending student being asked to leave class. More serious breaches of classroom etiquette may result in lowering of a student's course grade by a grade level or more.

## **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 must 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 Student Disability Services office in 335 West Hall or call (806) 742-2405.

Note that it is your responsibility to provide your instructor with a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) within the first week of class, or within one week of receiving the LOA, so please bring me your LOA as soon as possible. Further, the LOA becomes effective only after it is signed by the instructor, and is *not* retroactive.

## Academic integrity

Academic integrity will be policed vigorously in this course. Please familiarize yourself with TTU's policy on academic integrity, which can be found in the *Student Handbook & Code of Conduct*, §II.B, X.B3 (<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/handbook/>), and the University's Operating Policies & Procedures §34.12.3 (<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP34.12.pdf>).

Some broad outlines of the University policy:

- *The attempt of students to present as their own any work not honestly performed is regarded by the faculty and administration as a most serious offense and renders the offenders liable to serious consequences, possibly suspension. (OP §34.12.3)*
- “Cheating” includes, but is not limited to: copying from another student; using unauthorized materials during an exam; using, buying, or transporting test keys or homework solutions; collaborating on assignments without authority to do so; falsifying data.
- “Plagiarism” includes, but is not limited to: presenting others’ work as one’s own academic work; failure to appropriately give credit to quotes or ideas taken from other sources including books, magazines, Internet sources, and scholarly works.

You are encouraged to form study groups outside of class to help you understand the course material and discuss readings. You may not collaborate on homework assignments.

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

## 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 via the course Blackboard site.

# Schedule

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

⏏ HW due

ℝ Reading

Ⓐ Article for presentation

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## INTRODUCTION

M	8/26	What are signed languages? Signed languages of the world		
W	8/28	History of SL research What is modality?	· <i>What is Sign Language</i> (Perlmutter) · <i>Syntax of ASL</i> appendices A.1, A.2, A.4	ℝ ℝ
F	8/30	Effects of modality Age of SLs	· <i>SL:AIH</i> , pp. 4–7 · Kassubek et al. (2004) · Pettito et al. (2000)	ℝ Ⓐ Ⓐ
M	9/2	No Class	Labor Day	

## ARE SIGNED LANGUAGES ‘REAL’ LANGUAGES?

W	9/4	Communication vs. language The hallmarks of language	· <i>Language Matters</i> , ch. 5	ℝ
F	9/6	Animal communication		
M	9/9	Animal communication		
W	9/11	Origins of SLs SL myths Gesture vs. language	· <i>Where did NSL come from?</i> (Senghas) · <i>A new language arises</i> (Wade) · <i>Myths about ASL</i> (Markowicz), pp. 1–3 · Senghas and Coppola (2001) · Hickock (1998) · Goldin-Meadow (2006) · Ekman (1999)	ℝ ℝ ℝ Ⓐ Ⓐ Ⓐ Ⓐ
F	9/13	Deaf Art and Media		

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## PHONOLOGY

M	9/16	Phonology review	· <i>Contemporary Linguistics</i> , pp. 79–116	ℝ
W	9/18	Phonology review		
F	9/20	How can SLs have phonology? Basic handshapes	· <i>SLLU</i> , pp. 113–119 ·Basic Handshapes ·Battison (1980)	ℝ ℝ A
M	9/23	Signed syllables	· <i>Linguistics of ASL</i> , pp. 18–21, 24–40 ·Perlmutter (1992) · <i>SLLU</i> , pp. 216–220 ·Liddel and Johnson (1989)	ℝ ℝ ℝ A
W	9/25	Signed syllables		
F	9/27	Natural classes Features	· <i>Language Matters</i> , pp. 56–58 · <i>Australian Sign Language</i> , pp. 81–101 · <i>SL:AIH</i> , pp. 9–17 ·Russell et al. (to appear)	ℝ ℝ ℝ A
M	9/30	Features Non-manual marking	· <i>SLLU</i> , pp. 60–63 · <i>SL:AIH</i> , pp. 21–27	ℝ ℝ
W	10/2	Phonological processes	· <i>Linguistics of ASL</i> , pp. 41–45, 57–61, 70–72	ℝ
F	10/4	Deaf culture and Deaf rights	· <i>Language Matters</i> , pp. 61–70	
M	10/7	Deaf culture and Deaf rights		
W	10/9	Midterm review		
F	10/11	Midterm exam		

## MORPHOLOGY

M	10/14	Morphology review Text	<i>Contemporary Linguistics</i> , pp. 131–151, 155–167	ℝ
W	10/16	Morphology basics	· <i>SL:AIH</i> , ch. 5 ·Aranoff et al. (2005)	ℝ A
F	10/18	Classifiers Non-concatenative morphology	· <i>SL:AIH</i> , pp. 158–164 · <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	ℝ ℝ ℝ
<b>SYNTAX</b>				
M	10/21	Syntax review	· <i>Contemporary Linguistics</i> , pp. 187–196, 207–210, 216–217	ℝ
W	10/23	Syntax review		
F	10/25	How can SLs have Syntax?	· <i>Linguistics of ASL</i> , pp. 137–144 · <i>SLLU</i> , pp. 304–308	ℝ ℝ
M	10/28	NMM and syntactic structure Wh-questions	· <i>SLLU</i> , pp. 60–63, 432–445, 310–315 · <i>Australian Sign Language</i> , pp. 96–99, 154–156 ·Neidle et al. (1998) · <i>Syntax of ASL</i> , ch. 7	ℝ ℝ A A
W	10/30	Other syntactic phenomena		
F	11/1	Other syntactic phenomena Parallels with spoken language	· <i>Myths about ASL</i> , pp. 5–6 · <i>SLLU</i> , pp. 472–474 ·Campbell (1999)	ℝ ℝ A
M	11/4	Cochlear implants	· <i>My bionic quest for Boléro</i>	
W	11/6	Cochlear implants		

## SEMANTICS



F	11/8	Semantics review Semantics vs. semiotics	· <i>General Course in Linguistics</i> (Saussure), ch. 1 §1–2 (pp. 65–69)	ℝ ℝ
M	11/11	Iconicity	· <i>Myths about ASL</i> , pp. 4–5 · <i>Linguistics of ASL</i> , pp. 6–8 · <i>Australian Sign Language</i> , pp. 232–242	ℝ ℝ ℝ
W	11/13	Aspect Time reference Pronouns, deixis, and agreement	· <i>SLLU</i> , pp. 23–29, 39–42 · <i>SL:AIH</i> , pp. 441–453 · <i>Linguistics of ASL</i> , pp. 91–97 · <i>SLLU</i> , ch. 22	ℝ ℝ ℝ A

### ACQUISITION

F	11/15	Manual babbling Phonological acquisition	· <i>SL:AIH</i> , pp. 648–659 ·Hoffmeister and Wilbur (1980)	ℝ A
M	11/18	Signed motherese Typical mistakes		

### SOCIOLINGUISTICS

W	11/20	Sociolinguistics of signed languages	· <i>SL:AIH</i> , pp. 789–811 ·Woodward (1980)	ℝ A
F	11/22	Sociolinguistics of signed languages	· <i>The Linguistics of BSL</i> , ch. 2	A
M	11/25	TBD		
W	11/27	No class	Thanksgiving recess	
F	11/29	No class	Thanksgiving recess	
M	12/2	TBD		
W	12/4	Final exam review		

FINAL EXAM - As per university schedule  
(<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/officialpublications/ClassSchedule/FallClass.php>)