

COGSCIL 734: Contemporary Issues in Syntax

Winter 2024 Syllabus

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Course content:

The course extends the basics of syntactic theory introduced in LING 2SY3 and COGSCIL 731. The course uses detailed investigation of topics in syntactic theory to familiarize students with tools and methods used in current syntactic frameworks, specifically in the Minimalist Program. The content of the course will focus on interactions of the nominal and the clausal syntax. We will start by investigating the structure of nominals, and its feature interactions, with a special focus on person, number and gender. After we establish basic methodological prerequisites (based in the Y-model), we will look more closely at interactions of these features with the clausal and verbal domain. In particular, we will investigate different versions of Agree which will lead us to investigate the interaction between person and case, and what it might teach us about the nature of Agree. We will centre our investigation around the nature of articulated probes (Deal 2015, 2024) and what their source might be. A particular focus will be paid to the consequences of the different approaches to the grammar architecture (the Y-model).

Note: this course assumes knowledge of the material covered in LING 2SY3 and COGSCIL 731. It also requires basic familiarity with the Minimalist Program, and an ability to critically read primary syntactic literature.

Method:

This course will be a combination of interactive lectures, class discussions, in-class exercises, and student presentations. Students will be required to work with primary literature, to be able to critically evaluate primary literature, and to apply the material covered in the class to their own research question.

You will be required to read original papers. Since you may not be familiar with all the technical details and terminology used in the papers, I do not expect you to understand everything. The point is to try to understand the main argument of the paper and extract the relevant reasoning. One of the purposes of the lectures and in-class discussions is to spell out and discuss the main claims and arguments of the papers and relevant background literature you may not be familiar with.

Evaluation criteria:

20% - active participation in class discussions (students are required to read assigned papers before the class)

30% - regular written reports on papers covered in class
10% - class presentation (the student leads one session)
10% - final project presentation (a presentation of a final project delivered in the last class; 20 minutes of presentation followed by 10 mins of discussion)
20% - final paper (a squib showing the student is able to apply the material covered in the class to her own research question)

Late papers and assignments are graded zero (0). However, there is a general extension policy. Whenever you cannot complete your work on time, reach out to the instructor.

Only assignments submitted online through the Avenue course website will be accepted. Only individual work will be accepted for the evaluation. Please keep in my mind that submitting files in any other format than PDF is indecent. The length of the final paper should be 10 to 12 pages for MSc students and 12 to 15 pages for PhD students. The paper must involve an original research question (ideally also a suggested solution). New empirical data is an asset.

Important note:

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Readings:

Most of the assigned readings should be accessible via McMaster library. On occasion, the readings may be supplied by the instructor. The exact schedule and readings will be determined throughout the term, and will be modified based on student's interests.

Schedule (subject to change):

Week	Date	Topic	Reading
Week 1	Jan 10	background on nominal syntax and agree	n/a
Week 2	Jan 17	Cyclic Agree	Béjar and Rezac (2003, 2009)
Week 3	Jan 24	no class	n/a
Week 4	Jan 31	On the nature of probes	Deal (2015, 2024); Clem (2023)
Week 5	Feb 7	more on probes	Coon and Keine (2021); Bhatia and Bhatt (2023)
Week 6	Feb 14	Agree up and down	Bjorkman and Zeijlstra (2019); Bárány and van Der Wal (2022)
Week 7	Feb 21	midterm recess	n/a
Week 8	Feb 28	Where is agreement?	Kučerová & Munn 2023; Yuan (2021)
Week 9	March 6	Case and licensing	Kalin (2018); Branán (2022)
Week 10	March 13	More on case?	Christopoulos and Zompì (2023); Caha (2023)
	or. . .	more on Person?	Ganenkov (2022, 2023)
Week 11	March 20	no class	n/a
Week 12	March 27	PCC	Foley and Toosarvandani (2022); Sichel and Toosarvandani (2023)
Week 13	April 3	On good goals	Hartmann and Heycock (2023); Paparounas and Salzmán (2023)
Week 14	April 9 (?) & 10	final project presentations	n/a

References

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- Béjar, Susana, and Milan Rezac. 2003. Person licensing and the derivation of PCC effects. *Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science Series* 4:49–62.
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- Bhatia, Sakshi, and Rajesh Bhatt. 2023. Copular agreement in Hindi-Urdu. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 8:1–40.
- Bjorkman, Bronwyn M, and Hedde Zeijlstra. 2019. Checking up on (ϕ -)agree. *Linguistic Inquiry* 50:527–569.
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- Caha, Pavel. 2023. A default theory of default case. Unpublished manuscript [lingbuzz/007310], May 2023.
- Christopoulos, Christos, and Stanislao Zompì. 2023. Taking the nominative (back) out of the accusative: Case features and the distribution of stems in indo-european paradigms. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 41:879–909.

- Clem, Emily. 2023. Cyclic expansion in Agree: Maximal projections as probes. *Linguistic Inquiry* 54:39–78.
- Coon, Jessica, and Stefan Keine. 2021. Feature gluttony. *Linguistic Inquiry* 52:655–710. URL
- Deal, Amy Rose. 2015. Interaction and satisfaction in ϕ -agreement. In *Proceedings of NELS 45*, ed. Thuy Bui and Deniz Ozyildiz, volume 1, 179–192.
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- Ganekov, Dmitry. 2022. Person agreement with inherent case DPs in Chirag Dargwa. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 40:741–791.
- Ganekov, Dmitry. 2023. Agreement shift in embedded reports. *Linguistic Inquiry* 54:547–570.
- Hartmann, Jutta M, and Caroline Heycock. 2023. Person effects in agreement with Icelandic low nominatives: An experimental investigation. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 41:1029–1090.
- Kalin, Laura. 2018. Licensing and differential object marking: The view from Neo-Aramaic. *Syntax* 21:112–159.
- Paparounas, Lefteris, and Martin Salzmann. 2023. First conjunct clitic doubling, the person case constraint, and first conjunct agreement: Insights from modern greek. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 8.
- Sichel, Ivy, and Maziar Toosarvandani. 2023. The featural life of nominals. *Linguistic Inquiry* 1–96.
- Yuan, Michelle. 2021. Diagnosing object agreement vs. clitic doubling: An inuit case study. *Linguistic Inquiry* 52:153–179.