LING 110: In a Word

Instructor: Aljoša Milenković
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Lecture:
M, W 2:00-3:20 pm — Location: Kaprielian Hall 113

Lab:
F 12:00-1:50 pm — Location: Kaprielian Hall 167

Office Hours:
Tu 12:00-1:00 pm,
Th 2:00-3:00pm — Location: Grace Ford Salvatori Hall 339
or on zoom, by appointment

Brightspace: https://brightspace.usc.edu/

Course overview

What do the world's almost 7,000 languages have in common, and how do they differ? What can their structure and diversity tell us about the human capacity for language? How do smaller units of meaning combine to form words, and how do words combine to form infinitely many sentences? How do the meanings of words combine to create sentence meaning, and how does context shape what we understand? How do languages combine sounds to form and distinguish meaningful units? How does the relationship between sound and meaning change across languages, speakers, and time?

This course introduces the scientific study of language through the lens of words: their sounds, structure, meaning, history, and place in human cognition and society. Along the way, we examine how words combine into sentences, how linguistic meaning is constructed and interpreted, and how languages vary and change. We also explore language contact and relatedness, language in society, bilingualism, sign languages, sound symbolism, and the creative use of language in poetry and humor.

This course satisfies the university's GE-D, Life Sciences requirement and the Dornsife Core Literacy requirement.

Course schedule

Week 1	Aug 24, 26	Course overview; Introduction	*An Introduction to Language* pp. 1-15
Week 2	Aug 31, Sep 02	**Word structure** (1)	*An Introduction to Language* pp. 33-59
Week 3	Sep 07, 09	**No class (Labor Day)**; Word structure (2)	*An Introduction to Language* pp. 60-74
Week 4	Sep 14, 16	Word structure (3); **Sentence structure** (1): How words combine to form sentences	*Introduction to typology: The unity and diversity of language*, (Brightspace)
Week 5	Sep 21, 23	Sentence structure (2)	*An Introduction to Language* pp. 75-107
Week 6	Sep 28, 30	Sentence structure (3); **The meaning of words** (1)	*An Introduction to Language* pp. 144-151
Week 7	Oct 05,07	The meaning of words (2-3)	
Week 8	Oct 12,14	Midterm Sounds (1)	*An Introduction to Language* pp. 183-198
Week 9	Oct 19, 21	Sounds (2)	*An Introduction to Language* pp.199-215
Week 10	Oct 26, 28	Sounds (3); Beyond arbitrariness: Sound symbolism **History of words** (1): Language contact and relatedness	*An Introduction to Language* pp. 216-233 *Sound Symbolism* (OECS article);
Week 11	Nov 02, 04	**History of words** (2): Language change and reconstruction	

Week 12	Nov 09, 11	**Words in Society, Mind, and Art** (1) Dialects	
Week 13	Nov 16, 18	**Words in Society, Mind, and Art** (2) Language of poetry and humor; Sign Linguistics	
Week 14	Nov 23, 25	**Words in Society, Mind, and Art** (3) Language Acquisition and Bilingualism; **No class – Thanksgiving**	
Week 15	Nov 30, Dec 02	Wrap-up; practice for final	

Course structure and learning objectives

The lectures introduce the important concepts and analytical tools relevant to each module. The lab meetings provide opportunities for hands-on practice and discussion of that week's material. Attendance at both lectures and lab meetings is required.

The course is organized into six thematic modules. Each module explores a different aspect of human language. Each week consists of two lectures (M, W) and one mandatory lab meeting (F).

Module 1: Word structure

In this module, we will learn

- How smaller units of meaning combine to form words
- How new words are created from existing ones
- To analyze the structure of words in less familiar languages
- How rules of grammar sometimes yield ambiguous structures
- How languages of the world differ in marking grammatical relations in the sentence.

Reading: course materials (on Brightspace); Chapter 2 of *An Introduction to Language*.

Module 2: Sentence structure

In this module, we will learn:

- How words combine to form phrases and sentences
- How a finite set of words and grammatical rules allows us to produce infinitely many sentences
- How to identify the constituent structure of sentences
- How the same sequence of words can have more than one syntactic structure and interpretation
- How to analyze increasingly complex sentence types, including questions and embedded clauses
- How languages differ in basic aspects of sentence structure, including word order and the expression of subjects

Reading: course materials (on Brightspace); Chapter 3 of *An Introduction to Language*.

Module 3: The Meaning of Words

In this module, we will learn:

- How word meanings are related to one another
- How words can have multiple related or unrelated meanings
- How the meanings of words combine to determine the meanings of phrases and sentences
- How to identify semantic relations such as entailment and contradiction
- How context contributes to interpretation
- How speakers use linguistic and contextual knowledge to communicate meanings beyond what is explicitly said

Reading: course materials (on Brightspace); Chapter 4 of *An Introduction to Language*.

Module 4: Sounds of the Language

In this module, we will learn:

How the sounds of language are produced and perceived

- How to describe and transcribe speech sounds using the International Phonetic Alphabet
- How languages organize sounds into systems
- How differences between sounds can distinguish words and meanings
- How the pronunciation of sounds changes depending on their linguistic context

- How sound patterns differ across languages

Reading: course materials (on Brightspace); Chapters 5-6 of *An Introduction to Language*.

Module 5: History of words

In this module, we will learn:

- How languages change over time
- How words, sounds, and grammatical patterns can change across generations
- How to determine whether languages are genetically related
- How linguists reconstruct aspects of earlier languages from their descendants
- How to trace the histories and origins of words
- How language contact can introduce words and structures from one language into another
- How the languages of the world are grouped into major language families

Reading: course materials (on Brightspace); Chapter 8 of *An Introduction to Language*.

Module 6: Words in Society, Mind, and Art

In this module, we will learn:

- How language varies across social groups and contexts
- How language is used creatively in poetry and humor
- How sign languages are structured and how they compare with spoken languages
- How children acquire language
- How bilingual speakers acquire and use multiple languages

Reading: course materials (on Brightspace); Chapters 7 and 9 of *An Introduction to Language*.

Requirements and grading

The final grade has four components: attendance and participation, weekly comments, problem sets, and in-class examinations. Their contributions to the final grade are shown in the table below:

Group	Weight

Attendance and Participation	10%
Comments	20%
Problem Sets	40%
In-class Exams	30%
Total	**100%**

1. Attendance and Participation (10%). Attendance at both lectures and lab meetings is required, barring a valid reason for absence. You are expected to come to class fully prepared (i.e., having completed the assigned readings) and contribute actively during lectures and, especially, lab meetings. Active participation may include sharing your thoughts on the course material, contributing to discussions, making observations, and asking questions.

2. Comments (20%). Each week, you will complete a required reading assignment, whose purpose is to help you follow the lectures and participate meaningfully in lab meetings. You must complete the assigned chapter or article before the Monday lecture and submit a comment on the designated Brightspace page.

Comments should be concise and no longer than 250 words. Your comment should address the following questions:

- What is the main idea of the reading?
- What did you learn from it? Did it change how you think about a particular linguistic phenomenon?
- Were there any concepts that you found difficult to understand?
- What questions or ideas would you like the instructor to elaborate on during the lecture?

No comments are required during the first two weeks of the semester (to give everyone time to get a copy of the textbook). All readings not taken from the textbook will be made available on Brightspace.

3.Problem sets (40%). There are five problem sets, each worth 8% of the final grade. Each problem set assesses material from one of the first five course modules: Word Structure, Sentence Structure, Meaning, Sounds of the Language, and the History of Words. There is no separate problem set for the sixth and final module, Words in Society, Mind, and Art; however, material from this module will figure prominently in the final examination.

Problem sets will be distributed no later than one week before their deadlines, although some may be distributed earlier. Completed problem sets must be uploaded to the designated Brightspace page.

Deadlines are strict. Late submissions will not be accepted unless an extension or other accommodation has been arranged in advance. If you anticipate not being able to complete an assignment by the deadline, contact the instructor as early as possible.

4. In-class exams (30%). There are two in-class exams:

- Midterm exam: **October 12**, **during the regular class meeting**;
- Final exam: **December 11, 2:00–4:00 p.m**.

Each in-class exam is worth 15% of the final grade. The midterm will cover the first three modules: Word Structure, Sentence Structure, and Meaning. The final will cover the last three modules: Sounds, the History of Words, and Words in Society, Mind, and Art.

Per USC policy (https://arr.usc.edu/final-exam-schedule/; scroll to Final Examination Policies), students may not omit the final exam or take it early. Students with two final exams scheduled at the same time, or more than two final exams scheduled on the same day, must contact the instructors involved no later than two weeks before the exams to request an accommodation.

Grading scale. Course grades will be determined based on the following scale.

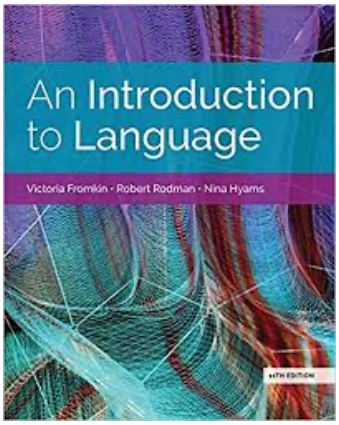
A	94 or higher
A-	90 or higher and lower than 94
B+	87 or higher and lower than 90
B	84 or higher and lower than 87
B-	80 or higher and lower than 84
C+	77 or higher and lower than 80
C	74 or higher and lower than 77
C-	70 or higher and lower than 74
D+	67 or higher and lower than 70
D	64 or higher and lower than 67
D-	60 or higher and lower than 64
F	59 and below

C- or higher counts as Pass for Pass/Non-Pass.

The cut-off points above may be adjusted, depending upon the overall scores of students.

Textbook and course materials

I upload all lecture and lab materials (slides, class notes) to Brightspace before each class, to give you the option to download and annotate them during class. The course complements in-person lectures with labs and a textbook, allowing you to engage with the material from several continuous, interconnected perspectives. Your textbook is *An Introduction to Language* by Victoria Fromkin, Robert Rodman, and Nina Hyams. **You will need the 11th edition** (note that editions differ considerably); it is available for rent and as an e-book. All additional readings will be posted to Brightspace as pdfs.



Late policy

This course has a strict late-work policy: **Assignments submitted after the deadline will not be graded**, except in exceptional circumstances, such as health-related issues. If you anticipate being unable to meet a deadline, please contact the instructor as early as possible.

Regrade policy

Questions about Grades: Any concerns regarding the grading of an assignment or the midterm exam must be communicated to the instructor within a week.

Classroom policy

Laptops are welcome during lectures if they support your learning. However, please avoid engaging with unrelated content that may distract you or your classmates.

Lectures will not be recorded. If you miss a class, please consult the assigned readings and posted course materials, ask questions during the lab meeting, and attend office hours as needed. Office hours provide an opportunity to ask questions, discuss course content, and receive additional help with the material.

Collaboration policy

The midterm and final must be completed individually. Problem sets should generally be completed independently. However, you may discuss problem-set questions with classmates, especially after first attempting them on your own. If you discuss any questions with classmates, you must acknowledge them by name in your submission. Unless explicitly instructed otherwise, you may use the assigned textbook and materials posted on Brightspace but may not consult external materials or sources, including generative AI and other online resources), as this will not actually help you learn the material.

Academic integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is contrary to this fundamental mission and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form), as well as cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage. Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in all coursework. This course follows the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. Students may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university, such as suspension or expulsion. For more information about academic integrity see the Student Handbook, the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct. Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

For general guidance, you may consult the following resources:

- USC Student Handbook
- Generative AI General Policy

- Practical Tips for Using AI in Academic Work
- Office of Academic Integrity

Generative AI policy

Unless explicitly authorized by the instructor, the use of generative AI tools, including ChatGPT, to complete course assignments or examinations is not allowed. Work created by another person or by a generative AI tool but presented as a student's own (copied verbatim or paraphrased) constitutes plagiarism.

Statement on University academic and support systems

Students and Disability Accommodations
USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems
Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call
The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

CARE-SC: Confidential Advocacy, Resources, and Education Support Center - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7/365 on call.

Confidential advocates, prevention educators, and professional counseling teams work to promote a universal culture of consent, and prevent and respond to gender- and power-based harm. Services available to all USC students at no cost.

Office of Civil Rights Compliance - *(213) 740-5086*
Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment, discrimination, retaliation on the basis of a protected characteristic, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - *(213) 740-0411, uscsupport@usc.edu*
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

USC Emergency Information
Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety
For 24 hour emergency assistance or to report a crime: UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323)-442-1000.
For 24 hour non-emergency assistance or information: UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: 323-442-1200.

Office of the Ombuds - *(213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)*
A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - *(323) 442-2850 or* otfp@med.usc.edu
Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

The Office of Sustainability promotes numerous ways for all Trojans to study, work, and live sustainably at USC. Students can access tools, resources, and opportunities on their website and in the Sustainability Hub in the Student Union Building, Suite 101.

USC Report & Response provides a front door to reporting concerns, including an ability to report anonymously, which violate university policies or go against our Unifying Values and helps connect you with the support you need. The website provides a list of confidential resources, supporting offices, and policies that are available to our university community. The Resources page includes information regarding the university's response in the event of immigration enforcement activity on campus or involving a student or employee. Additional questions may be directed to the Office of Professionalism and Ethics (OPE) and ope@usc.edu or in reviewing the Office of Professionalism and Ethics website.