



LING109

Language, Culture and Communication

S1 External 2015

Dept of Linguistics

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General Information

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Credit points

3

Prerequisites

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description

This unit investigates language through issues the major linguists have asked over the last century. These questions begin with: what counts as a sign and how sign systems begin in a community, but organise the brain of the individual. We track the emergence of language in the child and variations of language which are a consequence of new pressures to act, talk, and think throughout our social networks. The unit also examines the variation of languages across 'language families', and the extent to which linguistic tools can be applied in diverse areas of cultural analysis – from electronic channels to verbal art. We consider the power of language by looking at the relationship of language to the ideologies of everyday experience, as well as those that are actively produced and maintained by powerful groups with vested interests.

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- Begin the study of Linguistics as a formal discipline
- Understand some of the complexities of studying language as a meaning making system
- Recognize and analyse patterns in language
- Relate these patterns to what language is doing for its speakers in a given social and cultural context
- Understand how language grows and develops in human culture and individuals
- Understand some of the ways that language varies in different cultures and contexts
- Be familiar with basic tools and techniques for the study of language data
- Make judgments about the social and cultural implications of linguistic patterns in natural language data

Assessment Tasks

| Name | Weighting | Due |
|---|-----------|----------------------|
| Short Essay | 15% | 5pm Monday Week 5 |
| Tutorial participation & blog | 20% | See task description |
| Module study | 40% | 5pm Friday Week 12 |
| Examination | 25% | Exam period |

Short Essay

Due: **5pm Monday Week 5**

Weighting: **15%**

This task will be a short essay (500 words) on the first module topic of Ling109

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Begin the study of Linguistics as a formal discipline
- Understand some of the complexities of studying language as a meaning making system

Tutorial participation & blog

Due: **See task description**

Weighting: **20%**

You are required to read and do a task in preparation for each tutorial. You are also required to put up a minimum of 6 posts on the tutorial blog, based on your tutorial preparation throughout the semester. The first three posts are due by Friday week 6. The second three must be posted by the Monday of week 13. The blog will be closed after that date. Six posts are the minimal requirement for a pass mark in this assessment task. Your overall mark will be based on your blog posts, tutorial preparation, and tutorial contributions.

On successful completion you will be able to:

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Module study

Due: **5pm Friday Week 12**

Weighting: **40%**

Data collection, analysis and interpretation (1500 words), based on a topic that you choose, aligned to one of the unit's four modules (see unit schedule).

On successful completion you will be able to:

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Examination

Due: **Exam period**

Weighting: **25%**

As exam worth 25% of your mark will be held in the exam period.

On successful completion you will be able to:

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Delivery and Resources

One 1-hour lecture

External students will listen to the ECHO360 recording of the lecture each week.

Two on-campus sessions

External students attend two oncampus days. In 2015, these dates are 28/3/15 and 16/5/15.

Room locations will be advised closer to the dates. Tutorial attendance, preparation, participation and blogging are all part of the overall mark for the unit - see assessment tasks.

All readings are available on e-reserve.

Technologies: iLearn

Unit Schedule

UNIT SCHEDULE

| Week | Topic | Lecture topic |
|------|---|---|
| 1 | MODULE 1: Signs and social networks | <p>Starting with signs in writing systems</p> <p>Speech is difficult to study since it comes to us and goes in the moment; but writing systems offer us a static start – we can look at words and examine the basis of writing. Early writing systems, and many contemporary schemes are based on the ‘syllable’ – a chunk of combined sounds. An alphabet appears to be based on single sounds, and this singularity produces the smaller set of symbols of the Greek, Latin, English system that we use. Japanese has 2 syllabic scripts and an additional use of Chinese characters, which can be called upon for their value as sounds or as meanings. Chinese characters are neither iconic (pictures) or syllabic. How does all this variety work out in a wider world of global communication? How do writing systems affect literacy? What about printing and computers? Why is writing an art form in some cultures? Why is the spelling of many words unlike their actual sound? What, then, is punctuation? These basic beginnings allow us to reflect on what counts as a linguistic sign.</p> |
| 2 | | <p>How do you mean? Signs and linguistic sign systems.</p> <p>If you think you know what a sign is, think again. While we are sensitive to meanings, humans generally show a poor sense of how their meanings come about. Even linguists trade in simplifications in order to avoid the paradoxical nature of our first steps in linguistics. But the complexity of sign behaviour – when we confront that complexity– becomes a source of wonder, and a new way of seeing our society and its interaction with our brains. When you make a mistake in ‘reading’ the world about you, then you are likely to be amidst a sign system that you have misinterpreted. But a linguistic sign is not simply a piece of sound aligned to a human meaning! Signs are social and psychological; psychological and social. How does this 2 way relationship come about? And how can we put our knowledge about sign systems to work as we look around us at society, at literature, at film, and in the propaganda and advertising that sweep around us with their dazzling claim on our attention and our beliefs? This lecture opens up the fields of linguistics and of semiotics (the general study of systems of signs).</p> |
| 3 | | <p>Social networks and social networking</p> <p>The familiar notion of a social network has a history going back to the study of families, businesses, accents and dialects; and social class. All of these were studied before our use of social networks as connections through the internet and phone systems. While we generate networks of connections by living, we ask how can such networks be put to practical use – not for surveillance, but in understanding social conditions and social change; the dynamics of hospitals and urban systems; and in the ways we might better manage complexity of economies and cities.</p> |
| 4 | MODULE 2: Linguistics in the era of big data | <p>Linguistics in the era of big data</p> <p>We live in an era of ‘big data’. More and more scientists and engineers are involved with compiling and analysing big bodies of data, to help communities understand themselves better and to plan for the future. What does ‘big data’ mean in linguistics? This lecture introduces the idea of ‘corpora’, bodies of language data used for scholarly research as well as in many fields of practical application. We will look at the google books corpus, the largest ever corpus of English language data, and consider some technology for analysing texts as well as for visualizing patterns in text, including word clouds, word trees, and the distribution of words across a text.</p> |
| 5 | | <p>Using technology for corpus studies</p> <p>In this lecture, we introduce you to some handy technology which automates the study of some kinds of lexical patterns in big data sets. Make sure you bring your laptop or an ipad to the lecture this week. We will step through how to use a concordance programme, how to use IBM’s Many Eyes data visualisation tool (http://www-969.ibm.com/software/analytics/manyeyes/), and how to use Voyant Tools (http://voyant-tools.org/). We will provide some interesting text data for you to start your own explorations.</p> |
| 6 | | <p>What kinds of questions can you ask of a corpus?</p> <p>In this lecture, we introduce key notions for shaping and defining a corpus. The ways in which we form a body of texts shapes the kinds of questions we can ask. We discuss the importance of corpora in creating an empirical foundation for linguistics. We explore some important findings from corpus linguistics, and their cultural significance. We also discuss the limitations of automated text analysis.</p> |

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| 7 | <p>MODULE 3:</p> <p>Language, culture and education</p> | <p>Language and schooling: how culture shapes learning</p> <p>What actually happens in a classroom? Is primary school an extension of home knowledge? What differences are there in the talk of teachers as we go up to high school and university? How are we different from peoples who did not learn to write and read? Are we stilling evolving through the cultural and mental tools we devise? Will computers change the way we think, feel, and work. Should language be more of a focus of schooling, or can we become good 'users' without explicit, objective enquiry into language? Given controls over press and other sources of information, do we need to emphasise the tools of reasoning in language in order to increase our critical powers?</p> |
| 8 | | <p>Language and culture: language construing reality</p> <p>How different are cultures – what are the extremes in viewing the world? How might languages give us clear evidence of different patterns of living? Linguists have been at the forefront of these questions about cultural relativism. We need to look at concrete cases of variation in dealing with the world through meaning – what is unacceptable, even heinous, in one culture can seem reasonable in another, or in the same culture in a different historical era (consider slavery, or capital punishment; but also attitudes to animals, forests, and the passing of time). How do such contrasts of custom come about? And how are we to discuss such clashes of interpretation when they ensnare communities or whole countries into conflicts?</p> |
| 9 | | <p>The language brain</p> <p>How language came about and its role in the evolution of the human brain IS the hottest topic in human sciences! Linguists are only a minor group in the choir of academic voices who lay claim to this topic: the language brain. Neuroscientists, biologists, philosophers have competed to interpret the most complex unit of matter in the cosmos. For a start the brain is not the beginning and end of our nervous system: language reminds us of our whole body and the links to those around us – we are part of a collective, and come to our personalities through dealing with other people – all the specific connections that we tried to represent in the lectures on social networks.</p> <p>We review the implications of the most recent neuroscience in relation to the role of language: that is, language as an extension of evolution(do other species have languages, or sign systems?); and language in the construction of our inner lives. Ultimately, we look at the way language constructs that most subtle of all organs – the unique self.</p> |
| 10 | <p>MODULE 4:</p> <p>A World of Language Variation</p> | <p>Language, context and text</p> <p>Carrying over from the previous modules, we come down to details of the way we can describe our transactions with the world, context by context. We are not all members of the same social networks; we become exponents of different forms of discourse – you need a lawyer in court; an architect must defer to an engineer; sports, dance, music all have specific ways of meaning expressed in ways of saying... We divide up contexts into parameters or variables which help us keep track of what is going on. We build in the direction of things by following the choices that speakers make in that field, with a particular emotional tenor, and we examine the way the channel of communication determines aspects of what people can and cannot do in that mode. The tool is simple and allows us to decide how much we need for our social research questions.</p> |
| 11 | | <p>Accent, register, dialect, code</p> <p>A different style of discourse for a different context is called register variation. In the previous lecture, we looked at how to bring out this kind of variation in our research applying field, tenor, and mode. But how does register relate to the more obvious manifestations of a spoken language: namely, the accent someone exhibits, and the differences of dialect (words and grammar that separate the speakers whom we describe as 'speaking' the same language? We set out the important distinctions in relation to the 3 terms: accent, register; dialect. We then move back to the different semantic expectations we have in the living of life – how authority is expressed; how it might be contested; how it leads us to make assumptions about something which is still 'a work in progress' – namely, what makes sense; how the world is to be ordered and regulated by a silent code.</p> |

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| 12 | | A world of languages 100 years before Darwin proposed evolutionary “descent with modification”, linguists noted that languages appeared to change according to a system of family relationships. Today, the languages of the world present us with a mesmerising spectrum of practical ways of interrelating aspects of our social and material worlds. Languages sort out things, events, times, forms of evidence, human hierarchies, intimacies, predictions; agency; prominence of information...and so much more, into categories that we call grammar. To discover this breadth of variation between humans is much like finding a new continent with abundance of life forms not previously imagined. This raises many issues for us to ponder – the loss of ‘species’ of language as languages disappear; translation as an art; the experience of being bi-lingual; cross cultural thinking; and teaching! |
| 13 | Course review and exam preparation | Exam review |

Learning and Teaching Activities

Lecture

There is a one hour weekly lecture

Reading

e-Reserve hosts the weekly readings for this course. For some readings, there are accompanying videos to help you make sense of the reading material. These videos are hosted in unit website.

Tutorials

Tutorial attendance and preparation (activities, blogging) is compulsory and constitutes 25% of the overall mark

Assessment tasks

Assessment tasks are designed to help students engage in a focussed way with course concepts and to apply them to linguistic data.

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](#). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

Academic Honesty Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html

Assessment Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy.html>

Grading Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html>

Grade Appeal Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/gradeappeal/policy.html>

Grievance Management Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grievance_management/policy.html

Disruption to Studies Policy http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption_studies/policy.html *The Disruption to Studies Policy is effective from March 3 2014 and replaces the Special Consideration Policy.*

In addition, a number of other policies can be found in the [Learning and Teaching Category](#) of Policy Central.

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: https://students.mq.edu.au/support/student_conduct/

Results

Results shown in *iLearn*, or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in [eStudent](#). For more information visit ask.mq.edu.au.

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

Learning Skills

Learning Skills (mq.edu.au/learningskills) provides academic writing resources and study strategies to improve your marks and take control of your study.

- [Workshops](#)
- [StudyWise](#)
- [Academic Integrity Module for Students](#)
- [Ask a Learning Adviser](#)

Student Services and Support

Students with a disability are encouraged to contact the [Disability Service](#) who can provide appropriate help with any issues that arise during their studies.

Student Enquiries

For all student enquiries, visit Student Connect at ask.mq.edu.au

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit <http://informatics.mq.edu.au/help/>.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use Policy](#). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

Graduate Capabilities

Commitment to Continuous Learning

Our graduates will have enquiring minds and a literate curiosity which will lead them to pursue knowledge for its own sake. They will continue to pursue learning in their careers and as they participate in the world. They will be capable of reflecting on their experiences and relationships with others and the environment, learning from them, and growing - personally, professionally and socially.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Assessment task

- Module study

Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills

Our graduates will take with them the intellectual development, depth and breadth of knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content in their chosen fields to make them competent and confident in their subject or profession. They will be able to demonstrate, where relevant, professional technical competence and meet professional standards. They will be able to articulate the structure of knowledge of their discipline, be able to adapt discipline-specific knowledge to novel situations, and be able to contribute from their discipline to inter-disciplinary solutions to problems.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Begin the study of Linguistics as a formal discipline
- Understand some of the complexities of studying language as a meaning making system
- Recognize and analyse patterns in language
- Relate these patterns to what language is doing for its speakers in a given social and cultural context
- Understand how language grows and develops in human culture and individuals
- Understand some of the ways that language varies in different cultures and contexts
- Be familiar with basic tools and techniques for the study of language data
- Make judgments about the social and cultural implications of linguistic patterns in natural language data

Assessment tasks

- Short Essay
- Tutorial participation & blog
- Module study

- Examination

Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking

We want our graduates to be capable of reasoning, questioning and analysing, and to integrate and synthesise learning and knowledge from a range of sources and environments; to be able to critique constraints, assumptions and limitations; to be able to think independently and systemically in relation to scholarly activity, in the workplace, and in the world. We want them to have a level of scientific and information technology literacy.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Begin the study of Linguistics as a formal discipline
- Understand some of the complexities of studying language as a meaning making system
- Recognize and analyse patterns in language
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Assessment tasks

- Tutorial participation & blog
- Module study
- Examination

Problem Solving and Research Capability

Our graduates should be capable of researching; of analysing, and interpreting and assessing data and information in various forms; of drawing connections across fields of knowledge; and they should be able to relate their knowledge to complex situations at work or in the world, in order to diagnose and solve problems. We want them to have the confidence to take the initiative in doing so, within an awareness of their own limitations.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understand some of the complexities of studying language as a meaning making system
- Recognize and analyse patterns in language
- Relate these patterns to what language is doing for its speakers in a given social and

cultural context

- Understand how language grows and develops in human culture and individuals
- Understand some of the ways that language varies in different cultures and contexts
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- Make judgments about the social and cultural implications of linguistic patterns in natural language data

Assessment tasks

- Tutorial participation & blog
- Module study
- Examination

Effective Communication

We want to develop in our students the ability to communicate and convey their views in forms effective with different audiences. We want our graduates to take with them the capability to read, listen, question, gather and evaluate information resources in a variety of formats, assess, write clearly, speak effectively, and to use visual communication and communication technologies as appropriate.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Begin the study of Linguistics as a formal discipline
- Understand some of the complexities of studying language as a meaning making system
- Recognize and analyse patterns in language
- Relate these patterns to what language is doing for its speakers in a given social and cultural context
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Assessment tasks

- Short Essay
- Tutorial participation & blog
- Module study
- Examination