Syllabus

Formal Approaches to Natural Language
4 ECTS

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1. Course Description

a. Title of a Course

Formal approaches to natural language

b. Pre-requisites

Introduction to Linguistics

c. Course Type

Compulsory for the students of the MA program "Linguistic theory and language description" (first year).

d. Abstract

The course covers different topics in the formal studies of syntax, morphology and semantics, focusing on the generative framework as the most influential one in this domain. The course goes over a wide range of linguistic phenomena highlighting major debates in the field, advantages and disadvantages of formal approaches (in general and in their different varieties) and giving a wider perspective on their role in the study of various phenomena. A brief introduction is followed by several in-depth case studies selected to represent the foundational principles and questions of the formal approaches to natural language.

2. Learning Objectives

The goal of the course is to introduce students to the methodology of formal grammar and semantics and to the major questions that these frameworks seek to answer; to discuss linguistic phenomena that played a crucial role for these frameworks; to teach students how to use up-to-date conceptual apparatus, methods and argumentation in these domains.

3. Learning Outcomes

After completing the course, the student should:

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- understand the complexity and diversity of formal syntactic and semantic models, and what types of data and argumentation they rely on;

- be able to analyze sentence structure using different formal methods.

4. Course Plan

The following topics are included in the course:

1. The basics of generative grammar: a recapitulation.

2. Modality, tense and aspect in the syntactic structure.

3. The structure of noun phrases. The structure of relative clauses.

4. Predicate-argument structure in formal approaches.

5. Information structure in formal approaches.

6. On the crossroads of formal syntax and semantics: quantifiers; negative and positive polarity items.

5. Reading List

a. Required

Carnie, A. Syntax: A Generative Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006 [separate chapters]. — URL: https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=836603 — ЭБС ProQuest Ebook Central - Academic Complete.

Zimmermann, T.E., Sternefeld, W. Introduction to Semantics. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2013 [separate chapters]. — URL: https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1121618 — ЭБС ProQuest Ebook Central - Academic Complete.

b. Optional

Alexiadou, A., Kiss, T. Syntax: Theory and Analysis. Vols 1, 2. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015 [separate chapters] — URL: https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1867211 — ЭБС ProQuest Ebook Central - Academic Complete.

Reinhart, T. Interface Strategies. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006 [separate chapters] — URL: https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3338598 — ЭБС ProQuest Ebook Central - Academic Complete.

Cinque, G. Adverbs and Functional Heads: A Cross-linguistic Perspective. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [separate chapters] — URL: https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3052067 — ЭБС ProQuest Ebook Central - Academic Complete.

6. Grading System

Assignments:

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- Homework 1 (individual home assignment, to be discussed in class): analyzing syntactic structures of several sentences.
- Homework 2 (individual home assignment, to be discussed in class): testing a formal syntactic hypothesis on a small data sample (collected from native speakers or from a linguistic corpus).
- Homework 3 (individual home assignment, to be discussed in class): analyzing semantics of several examples with multiple quantifiers.
- Oral presentation (group home assignment): reading at home and presenting in class a paper

Final grading formula: HW1 (0.2) + HW2 (0.3) + HW3 (0.2) + Oral presentation in a group (0.3).

If homeworks are not submitted in time for a good reason, an analogous assignment can be provided to the student. If a student could not make an oral presentation for a good reason, an option to submit a written analysis of the chosen paper will be provided.

There is no final examination and no blocking elements of control. There are no elements of control that can be repassed.

7. Methods of Instruction

Lectures, seminars (including presentations, discussions, learning and applying different methods of analysis) and out-of-class work (under the guidance of the lecturer; it is possible to consult with the lecturer via the LMS system or by e-mail).

8. Special Equipment and Software Support (if required)

A projector, a whiteboard.