

**LIN 431 The Structure of an Uncommonly Taught Language:  
[specify language]**

*"Curiosity is insubordination in its purest form."*

*Vladimir Nabokov, as quoted in  
Reading Lolita in Tehran by Azar Nafisi*

**COURSE STAFF**

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... (Language Resource Person): ...  
...(TA): ...

**DESCRIPTION**

Your knowledge of phonetics, phonology, morphology, and syntax, gained in the prior courses LIN 101, 201, 301, and 311, will be applied in this course to the project of the analyzing the grammar of an unfamiliar language. Our data will come from a native speaker of the language, . . . . Our starting point will be mild ignorance, and relying on our consultant's knowledge of the vocabulary and her intuitions about phonological and syntactic well-formedness, we will build up a partial grammar of the language. We will begin by constructing a word-list and we'll end with such things as relativization and *wh*-questions. In between we will attempt to determine the phonetic and phonemic inventories, we'll have a look at inflectional and derivational morphology, and we'll cover some of the major phonological processes and syntactic structures. By the end of the semester we should have an idea of how the language works. The investigation will be driven by questions from the class, so regular attendance and class participation is vital to the success of the course. Prerequisites: LIN 301 and 311.

A linguist who teaches a similar course at another university wrote this description, which applies perfectly to our course:

"The basic skill of any linguist is to discover structure in language. In this course you will learn how to do that by discovering structure in a language you do not know, starting only with paper and pencil, listening to and interacting with a native speaker of that language. You will learn how to construct questions that leave the answer open. You will learn how to avoid predetermining answers. You will learn how to avoid distorting data. You will learn how to make preliminary analyses, and then how to test those analyses, and then how to make new and different analyses. Then you will learn how to write up your early discoveries so that the material is available to other scholars. In all of this you will learn, in detail, how good ethics and good science mutually imply each other, that your science is a human science, human beings learning together with other human beings."

M.J. Hardman, <grove.ufl.edu/~hardman/courses/FieldMethods2003.htm>

## **GOALS**

### **Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS+)**

- learn to apply techniques of linguistic analysis that you have learned in other courses to an open-ended, interconnected body of data
- become acquainted with the structure of an unfamiliar language
- gain confidence in your ability to deal with an unfamiliar language outside the framework of language-learning instruction
- gain the following specific skills:
  - hear and transcribe phonetically utterances in . . . [language]
  - formulate precise linguistic hypotheses
  - determine what data would be needed to test those hypotheses
  - restate in writing, in a well-organized, orderly way, data that has been obtained in a less orderly way
  - formulate coherent formal analyses of phonological, morphological, and syntactic phenomena, construct logical and convincing arguments for your analyses, and write them up in a manner appropriate for linguistics research papers
  - identify additional research topics of interest
  - work productively with a team of colleagues

### **Practice and Respect Critical and Ethical Reasoning (CER)**

- examine the ethical and legal principles that govern linguistic research involving human subjects, and the elements of respect, consideration, privacy, and courtesy that are required, especially when in contact with cultures and communities that may be very different from our own
- gain experience working with a speaker of an unfamiliar language in a simulated fieldwork situation
- formulate suitable questions to ask the Language Resource Person (LRP): questions that are factual, the kind that a native speaker of any language would be able to answer (rather than questions that ask for generalizations or analytical ideas) and that will elicit data useful for testing and extending a hypothetical analysis

### **Speak Effectively before an Audience (SPK)**

The Daily Recaps and team Project presentations mean that every student will speak in front of the class several times during the semester.

- acquire skills (and a level of comfort) presenting complex information orally
- learn how to effectively use visuals (projected displays or paper handouts) to support the oral presentation

## **WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

On Tuesdays and Thursdays the class will meet together with the LRP to obtain data and try collectively to figure out what's going on. At the Friday class sessions the LRP will not be present. Fridays are devoted to developing clearer and better analyses of the material previously elicited, and planning the next steps.

## **TEAMS**

Some of the assignments will be done in teams of three or four students. I will make up the teams on a random basis.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

**Attendance** is required. You need to be present at all class sessions, but attendance will not be recorded. Since there is no textbook and all the information and much of the analysis will

be discovered "live" in class, you will not be able to do well on your assignments without being present and alert and thinking during class, and taking complete, detailed notes.

1. **Daily recap** (team). At the beginning of each class session one team will present a very brief review (not more than 5 minutes) of what we learned in the previous class and ask a question or two to start us off on the new day's investigation. The presentation should be accompanied by a handout listing examples and analysis. The team is responsible for making photocopies for the entire class.
2. **Weekly summary** (individual). Write a weekly summary (not a complete compilation) of our progress during that week. Alternatively you may focus on a single point that especially interests you. Sometimes we will assign a question for you to address in that week's report. These will normally be about 3 pages long. **Due every Tuesday.**
3. **Transcription quiz** (individual). A quiz on phonetic transcription of Arabic. Ammar will read a list of words we haven't heard before, and you will transcribe them.
4. **Two research papers** (individual), one due in mid-semester and one at the end. Select a single issue or phenomenon that we have investigated in class and write a paper presenting the data and an analysis of it. You will gather a set of data from the material we have obtained in class; you should not expect to ask the LRP for additional data outside of class. Your analysis should account for the phenomenon accurately, but it does not have to do so perfectly and completely; it is acceptable to call attention to aspects of the problem that your analysis does not account for, especially if you discuss why it is not accounted for and mention some alternative approaches to it. You should hand in a brief written description of the topic you propose to work on in advance of the due date, to make sure it is feasible and appropriate.

The two papers may be on the same or related topics or entirely different ones. The first one will be on phonetics, phonology, or morphology, and the second topic, if different, will normally be on morphology or syntax.

5. **Project** (team). Each team will investigate an aspect of Arabic that has not been treated in class and write up a description and analysis of it. You will have to use your imagination and everything you know about language and linguistics to come up with a topic to explore, and meet with our LRP to collect data. The teams will present their findings to the class. There must be some visual component to the presentation, either a PowerPoint-type display or a paper handout. You will also submit a log of the team's work.

#### **Grading**

In-class participation	5 %	(individual)
Phonetics quiz	10	(individual)
Weekly summaries	20	(individual)
First research paper	20	(individual)
Second research paper	20	(individual)
Daily recaps	10	(team)
Project	<u>15</u>	(team)

100 %

#### **SCHEDULE**

Transcription quiz	Thurs. Feb. ...
First paper	Thurs. March ...
Team presentations	Thurs., Tues. & Thurs., May ...
Team project report	Fri. May ..
Second paper	Mon. May ..

#### **COLLABORATION**

Although we expect that students will discuss the assignments, you are strictly forbidden to work together **in writing up** any of the individual assignments or **to copy** any part of them; either of these constitutes improper collusion. You may work together with other students to understand the material, but then you must separate and, each student working individually, write up your own answers in your own individual way. If we find clear cases of copying or collusion on individual assignments, all students involved will be reported to the Academic Judiciary Committee and a grade of F will be recommended.

#### **WHAT THE HOMEWORK GRADES MEAN**

- 0 Not handed in, or made no sense. (Equivalent to F.)
- 1 Made some sense but did not have much to do with the problem or did not have the right idea, or, it's hard to tell whether it had the right idea. (Approximately D.)
- 2 Had the basic idea, but not developed correctly, or with some misunderstanding, or missing a significant part. (Approximately C.)
- 3 Good: got the point, included what was necessary, but with minor misunderstanding, vagueness, irrelevant points, or omissions. (Approximately B.)
- 4 Excellent: complete, correct, clear, to the point, concise, with no vagueness. (Approximately A.)
- 5 Superb: has all the qualities of a 4, and in addition had something unexpected and truly outstanding, such as synthesis, comparison, or critique. This will be given rarely, if ever. (A++)

### **STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY OFFICIAL NOTICES**

#### **DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (DSS)**

If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, room 128, (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations, if any, are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information go to the following website: <http://www.stonybrook.edu/ehs/fire/disabilities>

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at <http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/>

**CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT**

Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn.