

LT5431: FUNCTIONAL APPROACHES TO SYNTAX

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Functional Approaches to Syntax

Subject Code

LT - Linguistics and Translation

Course Number

5431

Academic Unit

Linguistics and Translation (LT)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

P5, P6 - Postgraduate Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

Nil

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This course is designed to give a general survey of current syntactic theories, with a special emphasis on functional approaches to syntax. It aims to explore the differences between 'formal' and 'functional' paradigms for syntactic analysis, with a thorough discussion of their 1) theoretical premises, 2) research concerns, 3) data collection 4) analytical methodology, and 5) explanatory principles. The class will gradually prepare students to master the functional theories from more assessable to more challenging approaches. The class will first lay a foundation by focusing on the form-function associations manifested in the English grammar and then progress to introduce a variety of functional explanatory mechanisms with illustrations from a wide range of languages. The ultimate goal of this class is to familiarize students with a wide spectrum of contemporary syntactic theories that take grammar as coding devices for coherent communication. "Syntax codes what people do the most." – T. Givón.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if DEC-A1 app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Review and discuss their weekly readings	20	x	x	
2	Demonstrate critical thinking, clear organization, teamwork, and oral skills in group presentation	20		x	x
3	Describe and explain the theoretical constructs in a debate on formal vs. functional approaches: · Functional vs. formal premises and analyse of the same linguistic issue	5	x	x	x
4	Develop analytical skills on the form-meaning mapping relations with regard to the following issues: · Nouns and Verbs · Topic vs. Subject · Information status · Preference and definiteness · Passive construction · Transitivity	25	x	x	x
5	Apply one of the theoretical approaches discussed in class to the analysis of a set of chosen data (final project): · Givónian Semantics · Discourse and grammar · Cognitive semantics · Construction grammar · Corpus-based approach · Emergent Grammar · Grammaticalization/constructionalization	30	x	x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Weekly adventure	Students will read assigned materials for group discussion	1	2-3 hours/wk
2	Group production	Student groups will deliver oral presentations in class	2	1-2 hours/sem
3	Debate	Students will be divided into groups for debating about the different approaches to the same issue (the passive voice)	3	2-3 hours/sem
4	Discovery project	Students will apply what is learned in class to a hands-on project on analysing a set of data they collected	5	10-20 hours/sem

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs		CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- " for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Weekly adventure	1	20	Students can use GenAI tools to gather information, format references, and edit language. However, they should give proper acknowledgment to all the content from GenAI tools that they incorporated into the assignment and keep a journal of their GenAI conversations. They should not present texts generated or translated by GenAI tools as their own original work.	Yes

2	Group creative production and presentation	2	20	Students can use GenAI tools to gather information, format references, and edit language. However, they should give proper acknowledgment to all the content from GenAI tools that they incorporated into the assignment and keep a journal of their GenAI conversations. They should not present texts generated or translated by GenAI tools as their own original work.	Yes
3	Debate on analytical approaches	2, 3	5	Students can use GenAI tools to brainstorm and gather information. However, they should give proper acknowledgment to all the content from GenAI tools that they incorporated into the project and keep a journal of their GenAI conversations. They should not present texts generated or translated by GenAI tools as their own original work.	Yes

4	Mid-term innovative review assignment	4	25	Students can use GenAI tools to gather information, format references, and edit language. However, they should give proper acknowledgment to all the content from GenAI tools that they incorporated into the assignment and keep a journal of their GenAI conversations. They should not present texts generated or translated by GenAI tools as their own original work.	Yes
5	Final discovery project	5	30	Students can use GenAI tools to gather information, format references, and edit language. However, they should give proper acknowledgment to all the content from GenAI tools that they incorporated into the project and keep a journal of their GenAI conversations. They should not present texts generated or translated by GenAI tools as their own original work.	Yes

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

Weekly readings (20%) (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Clear and critical understanding of the reading

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Excellent ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Good

(B+, B, B-) Good ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Satisfactory ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Marginal

(D) Barely adequate evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Failure

(F) Little or no evidence of the said ability

Assessment Task

Group production and presentation (20%) (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Clear, interesting, and well-organized oral presentation

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Excellent ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Good

(B+, B, B-) Good ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Satisfactory ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Marginal

(D) Barely adequate evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Failure

(F) Little or no evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Assessment Task

Debate (5%) (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Clear, interesting and well-delivered arguments for the chosen approach

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Excellent ability in demonstrative the said criteria

Good

(B+, B, B-) Good ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Satisfactory ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Marginal

(D) Barely adequate evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Failure

(F) Little or no evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Assessment Task

Mid-term review (25%) (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Clear, accurate and well-presented written text of the assigned topics

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Excellent ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Good

(B+, B, B-) Good ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Satisfactory ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Marginal

(D) Barely adequate evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Failure

(F) Little or no evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Assessment Task

Discovery Project (30%) (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Clear, interesting and well-argued analysis of a set of chosen data with an abstract for conference presentation

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Excellent ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Good

(B+, B, B-) Good ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Satisfactory ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Marginal

(D) Barely adequate evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Failure

(F) Little or no evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Assessment Task

Weekly readings (20%) (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Clear and critical understanding of the reading

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Excellent ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Good

(B+, B) Good ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Fair

(B-, C+, C) Barely adequate evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Failure

(F) Little or no evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Assessment Task

Group production and presentation (20%) (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Clear, interesting, and well-organized oral presentation

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Excellent ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Good

(B+, B) Good ability in demonstrating the said criteria

Marginal

(B-, C+, C) Barely adequate evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

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Mid-term review (25%) (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

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Failure

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Clear, interesting and well-argued analysis of a set of chosen data with an abstract for conference presentation

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Marginal

(B-, C+, C) Barely adequate evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Failure

(F) Little or no evidence in demonstrating the said criteria

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Topics to be covered in class discussion include:

- Formal vs. Functional approaches to syntax
- Theoretical framework: Grammar as form-function association
- Definitions of 'function'
- Explanatory Principles
- Discourse basis for syntactic categories
- Discourse and cognition
- Argument structure and information status
- Language universal

- Ergative case marking
- Transitivity
- Construction grammar
- Emergent Grammar
- Corpus-based approach
- Grammaticalization and lexicalization

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Givón, T. 1993. English Grammar: a function-based introduction. Chapter 1 and Chapter 7. Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Co.
2	Li, Charles and Sandra Thompson. 1976. Subject and topic: a new typology of language, in Subject and Topic, ed. by Charles Li. Academic Press.
3	Hopper, Paul and Sandra Thompson. 1984. The discourse basis for lexical categories in universal grammar. <i>Language</i> (60): 703-753.
4	Chafe, Wallace. 1987. Cognitive constraints on information flow, in <i>Coherence and Grounding in Discourse</i> , ed. By Russell Tomlin.
5	Goldberg, Adele. 1995. <i>Constructions. A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
6	Thompson, Sandra, and Paul Hopper. 1997. Emergent grammar and argument structure: evidence from conversation. Paper presented at the Symposium on Discourse and grammar.
7	Traugott, Elizabeth and Bernd Heine. Introduction. In <i>Approaches to Grammaticalization</i> , vol. 2, eds. by E. Traugott and B. Heine, 1-14. Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Co.
8	Thompson, Sandra, and Anthony Mulac. 1991. A quantitative perspective on grammaticalization of epistemic parentheticals in English. In <i>Approaches to Grammaticalization</i> , vol. 2, eds. by E. Traugott and B. Heine, 313-329. Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Co.
9	Heine, Bernd, Ulrike Claudi and F. Hunnemeyer. 1991. From cognition to grammar – evidence from African Languages. In <i>Approaches to grammaticalization</i> , eds by E. Traugott and B. Heine, 150-187. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
10	Liu, Meichun. 1997. From motion verb to linking element: discourse explanations for the grammaticalization of JIU in Mandarin Chinese. <i>Journal of Chinese Linguistics</i> (25): 259-289.
11	Givón, T. 1984. <i>Syntax Vol. I. Background</i> . Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Co.
12	Hopper, Paul and Sandra Thompson. 1980. Transitivity in grammar and discourse. <i>Language</i> (56): 251-299.
13	Du Bois, John. 1987. The discourse basis for ergativity. <i>Language</i> (63): 805-855.
14	Bybee, Joan. 2006. From usage to grammar: the mind's response to repetition. <i>Language</i> 82(4). 711-733.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Givón, T. (1984). <i>Syntax, Vol. I & II</i> . Amsterdam/Chicago: Amsterdam: J. Benjamins Publishing Co.
2	Givón, T. (1993). <i>English Grammar: a function-based introduction. Vol. I and II</i> . Amsterdam/Chicago: Benjamins Publishing Co.
3	Traugott, E, and B. Heine. 1991. <i>Approaches to Grammaticalization</i> . Amsterdam/Chicago: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
4	Big, Yung-O, James Tai, Sandra Thompson. 1996. Recent developments in functional approaches to Chinese. In <i>New Horizons in Chinese Linguistics, Ch. 3.</i> , eds. by C-T. James Huang, Y-H Audrey Li. Kluwer Academic Publishing.
5	Haegeman, L. 1991. <i>Liliane. Introduction to Government and Binding Theory</i> . 1991. · Oxford: Basil Blackwell.