LIN 4930/6932 Special Topics: Syntax of the Thematic Domain

Spring 2026

when: M/W/F 5 (Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11:45 AM - 12:35 PM)
where: MAT 0118
course website: elearning.ufl.edu on Canvas

instructor: Irina Burukina
e-mail: irinaburukina@ufl.edu   office: 4017 Turlington   phone: (352) 294-7452

office hours (in person & Zoom): TBA
reserve your spot here: irinaburukina.youcanbook.me
the link for Zoom meetings: TBA

1 Course description

This course addresses the question of how syntax puts predicates and arguments together focusing primarily on various argument structure alternations attested in the world's languages. We will examine ways in which syntax allows arguments to be added or removed through valency-changing operations, such as causativization, passivization, and antipassivization. We will further discuss existing formal approaches to the structure of the thematic domain (i.e., the part of the clause where the arguments are introduced), their strengths and limitations.

2 Learning objectives

After completing the course the students will be able to:

- identify and describe various syntactic phenomena from English and other languages,

- apply concepts and principles of generative syntax to analyze novel linguistic data,

- work within a formal theory, formulate hypotheses, test them, and interpret the results,

- critically engage with primary literature in syntax,

- present research ideas and arguments.

3 Prerequisites

- Intro to Linguistics

- Intro to Syntax/Syntax 1

4 Course materials

The readings for the course include selections from various textbooks, survey chapters, and journal articles. All the reading materials will be available on Canvas.

Required textbook: **none**.

Instructional materials for this course consist of only those materials specifically reviewed, selected, and assigned by the instructor. The instructor is only responsible for these instructional materials.

5 Course requirements

1. homework – 15% (5% for each HW)

2. Cornell notes – 16% (2% for each paper)

3. paper presentation (in class) – 20%

4. mid-term test (in class) – 20%

5. final squib – 25%

6. attendance & in-class participation – 4%

Late assignments are not accepted without valid proof/justification of an emergency situation.

You are encouraged to discuss your homework with other students. However, you should write your texts individually. Identical or nearly identical answers/squibs will get 0 (zero) points. Texts copied from the internet will get 0 (zero) points. All use of AI must be acknowledged and documented.

5.1 Homework

There will be **three** homework assignments. These will be problem sets focusing on applying the concept and principles discussed in class to new linguistic data. The homework assignments will be graded on a satisfactory-unsatisfactory basis.

Tools for drawing syntactic trees:

- SynTree online

- jsSyntaxTree online

- Treeform, download

- LATEXpackages: qtree

5.2 Paper presentation & Cornell notes

Each student is expected to choose one paper from the Reading list and **present it in class**.
These presentations should:

- run 25-30 minutes,

- include either a short handout or slides,

- summarize the paper's main claims, key arguments, and broader theoretical implications,

- follow the format of a conference presentation, as much as possible.

You do not need to cover every empirical observation in the paper. You are encouraged to include your own critical evaluation of the proposed analysis, but make sure that you clearly distinguish between the author's arguments and your commentary.

You should let me know which paper you would like to present by **January 28**.

You are also expected to read the papers from the Reading list that you are not presenting. For each paper, you should prepare **Cornell Notes** (**one page maximum**) and submit the file (.doc or .pdf) on Canvas. You do not have to write down every single detail, but rather focus on the most interesting observations and/or aspects of the proposal. You can learn more about the Cornell note taking system here.

5.3 Mid-term test (in class)

There will be one mid-term in-class test based on the readings and handouts, scheduled during our usual class time (preliminarily, on **March 11**). We will have a practice session before the mid-term test.

5.4 Squib

The **squib** is due on **May 1**.

A **squib** is a short research paper that calls attention to a theoretically unexpected observation about language that is potentially relevant to a certain theory. A squib does not need to present a complete analysis, but it should outline one or several research hypotheses.

Your **squib** should:

- present an interesting puzzle/problem,

- explain its relevance to the syntactic theory,

- formulate a testable hypothesis or two,

- outline possible implications for the general theory.

Your squib should **not** be a summary of the existing literature (though it will inevitably refer to it).

The squib length is approximately 12 pages or 5000 words; see the style sheet here (LI) or here (Glossa).

Start thinking about the topic of your squib early. You **must** send me your topic by **March 15** at the latest. You will also have to submit a one-page outline of your squib by **April 17**.

For examples of squibs, see *Linguistic Inquiry* website or *Glossa* website.

6 Grading

The course follows UF grading policies; see the official webpage.

		B+	84-86	C+	74-76	D+	64-66	E	56 and below
A	90-100	B	80-83	C	70-73	D	60-63		
A-	87-89	B-	77-79	C-	67-69	D-	57-59		

7 Attendance

Attendance is part of your grade, and you are expected to attend the classes, take notes, and participate in the discussion. If you have to miss a class, you should go through the corresponding handout and study the assigned materials; if you have questions, you can schedule an appointment with me.

8 Exams

The mid-term test will cover material from approximately half of the course, including information presented in lectures, handouts, and the assigned readings.

There is no separate final exam for this course. Your squib is considered the final project.

See above for more details.

9 Academic Policies

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those polices and for resources for students, please see this link.

10 Campus resources

10.1 Health and Wellness

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

- *Student Health Care Center*: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

- *University Police Department*: Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608. Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website.

- *GatorWell Health Promotion Services*: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352-273-4450.

10.2 Academic resources

- *E-learning technical support*: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu. Visit the UF Computing Help Desk website.

- *Career Connections Center*: Visit the website of Career assistance and counseling services.

- *Library Support*: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. Visit the library support website.

- *Academic Resources*: General study skills and tutoring. Visit the Academic Resources website.

- *Writing Studio*: Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. Visit the Writing Studio website.

- *Academic Complaints*: Office of the Ombuds. Visit the Complaint Portal webpage.

- *Enrollment Management Complaints (Registrar, Financial Aid, Admissions)*: Visit the Student Complaint Procedure webpage.

11 Tentative schedule

This is a preliminary schedule of the course. Changes to it will be announced in class in advance.

Read the assigned readings (indicated in the schedule) and prepare Cornell notes **before** the class.

Date	Topic	
Jan. 12, 14, 16	background: types of predicates, VP-vP, argument licensing	
Jan. 19	holiday	
Jan. 21, 23	argument structure, Voice	
Jan. 26, 28, 30	passive, impersonal passive, middle	HW1 assigned; select a paper to present
Feb. 2	discussion: Collins 2005	reading notes
Feb. 4, 6	implicit arguments	
Feb. 9	discussion: Landau 2010	reading notes
Feb. 11, 13	antipassive, antipassive impostors	
Feb. 16	discussion: Sansò 2018	reading notes
Feb. 18, 20	applicatives	
Feb. 23	discussion: McGinnis 2008, Larson 2010	reading notes*2
Feb. 25, 27	causatives	HW2 assigned
March 2	discussion: Nie 2022	reading notes
March 4, 6	causatives, syncretism	
March 9, 11, 13	mid-term: preparation, exam, discussion	**mid-term**, squib topic due
March 16, 18, 20	spring break	
March 23, 25, 27	reflexives	
March 30	discussion: Reinhart & Siloni 2005	reading notes
April 1, 3	high vs. low Agents	HW3 assigned
April 6	discussion: Tollan 2018	reading notes
April 8, 10	summarizing approaches to Voice	
April 13	discussion: Wood & Marantz 2017	reading notes
April 15, 17	symmetrical voice	squib outline due
April 20, 22	review	
May 1	no class	**squib due**