

Linguistics of Signed Languages

Linguistics 461, Rutgers University, Spring 2021

Mondays & Thursdays 11:30am–12:50pm

<https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/106189>

Instructor: **Dorothy Ahn** (dorothy.ahn@rutgers.edu)

Office Hours: Mondays 2:00pm–3:00pm (sign up on [Calendly](#))

1 Course Description

Signed languages offer a unique window into the human language faculty. In this course, you will be introduced to the visual-gestural modality via the study of the American Sign Language (ASL). Specifically, we will be looking at how some core areas of language - sound (phonetics and phonology), words (morphology), sentence structure (syntax), and meaning (semantics and pragmatics) are manifest in signed languages. We will explore what the study of the visual-gestural modality alongside the oral-aural modality can teach us about the language capacity as well as human cognition.

Prerequisite Linguistics 201: Introduction to Linguistic Theory

Textbook There is no official textbook that you are required to purchase for this course. Any required reading materials will be provided as pdfs online.

Course Learning Goals

- Become familiar with theoretical approaches to a range of topics in sign linguistics
- Extend problem-solving skills from other linguistic courses to a new area of research
- Connect linguistic theory to broader cognitive, social, and cultural issues

Department Learning Goals

- Reason about language
- Identify how incorrect or irrational assumptions and prejudices distort understanding of language
- Demonstrate knowledge about language in the world including a sophisticated understanding of linguistic and cultural variation
- Evaluate popular views on the nature of human languages and their speakers
- Majors and minors will also demonstrate technical mastery over the tools of linguistic analysis in syntax, phonology and semantics and apply linguistic theory in these areas
- Investigate linguistic data and analyze it demonstrating strong problem-solving skills
- Apply the techniques of linguistics that they have learned in the core courses to new topics, and access current research in the field

2 Requirements

Attendance & Participation 10% You will be graded based on your overall level of participation in class. Participation includes: answering questions raised in class, asking questions, participating in in-class exercises.

[Zoom] In order to facilitate a lively discussion, I ask that you join with your video on. If you foresee any problems with this, please get in touch with me.

Absences

- University policy excuses absences due to religious observance or participation in Rutgers-approved activities, and permits students to make up work missed for these circumstances. **You must notify me in advance if this applies to you.**
- If you anticipate that you will be absent for whatever reason, particularly religious or medical reasons or for an emergency, you must notify me in writing as soon as possible AND report your absence via this link <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>.
- If your absence is not excused prior to class, you will receive a zero on any in-class assessment or exam for which you are absent.

Assignments 50% Weekly assignments will be posted on the Canvas site a week before they are due. Please type up your work and submit a pdf via Canvas.

- Late assignments will lose 10% for each day it is late; After 3 days it will not be accepted unless you let me know of a reason before the original due date.
- You can resubmit a corrected assignment to receive half of the missing credit back

Midterm Project 20% You will be asked to watch a short ASL narrative and identify different grammatical aspects learned in class. Details to be discussed in class.

Final Project 20% [Virtual Sign Language Conference](#), where you will be asked to prepare a 10-minute presentation on a sign language of your choice from 34 sign languages collected in *Sign Languages of the World* (Jepsen, De Clerck, Lutalo-Kiingi, and McGregor (Eds.)). Details to be discussed in class.

	A	≥90
	B+	85-89
	B	80-84
Grading	C+	75-79
	C	70-74
	D	60-69
	F	<60

3 Other specifics

Academic integrity Students are encouraged to collaborate and discuss the assignments on Canvas, but are expected to write up their own responses. Any outside resource must be cited.

Students with disabilities Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must follow the procedures provided by the Office of Disability Services.

Recording: Portions of this class may be recorded by the instructor for educational purposes, but will not be shared. Students are not allowed to record, copy, reproduce, or distribute any portion of this course.

Canvas: All class materials, including readings and relevant handouts will be uploaded and shared on Canvas. I will make use of the Announcements feature on Canvas exclusively to make announcements so that we have all the necessary information for the course in one place. Please make sure you have email/push notifications enabled if you would like to be notified!

- If you have questions or have problems with course access, downloading content, or navigating, Canvas Support which is available 24/7 at [<https://canvas.rutgers.edu/canvas-help/>].

Respect for diversity: It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. I intend to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: race/ethnicity, gender identities, gender expressions, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, disabilities, religion, regional background, veteran status, citizenship status, nationality and other diverse identities. Coercive, intimidating, harassing, abusive, derogatory or prejudicial actions or speech will not be accepted in this class. Please don't hesitate to let me know of any concerns you might have, or ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups.

4 Weekly schedule

*The course website supersedes the tentative schedule outlined in this document.

Week	Date	Topic	Content	Assignment Due
1	1/21	Introduction		
2	1/25 1/28	Background	Sign languages in the world SLs and linguistics	#1
3	2/1 2/4	Phonology	Phonemes Phonological processes	#2
4	2/8 2/11	Morphology	Derivational morphology Compounds, borrowing, fingerspelling	#3
5	2/15 2/18	Syntax I	Sentence structure Verbs	#4
6	2/22 2/25	Syntax II	Classifiers Negation	#5
7	3/1 3/4	Semantics I	Sentence Meaning Tense and Aspect	#6
8	3/8 3/11	Semantics II	Reference Role Shift	MIDTERM PROJECT
9	3/15 3/18	SPRING BREAK SPRING BREAK		
10	3/22 3/25	Pragmatics	ASL in Use [GL1] Discourse Analysis	Response 1
11	3/29 4/1	Case Studies	Nicaraguan Sign Language [TBD]	#7
12	4/5 4/8	Language Acquisition	Studies in ASL acquisition [GL2] Acquisition	Response 2
13	4/12 4/15	Sociolinguistics	Language Variation [TBD]	#8
14	4/19 4/22	Speech and Sign	Panel Discussion [GL3] Gestures	Response 3
15	4/26 4/29	Case Studies	[TBD] [TBD]	
16	5/3	Lightning Talks		FINAL PROJECT