EL4880F Grammar and language processing **Thursday 3 pm - 5:35 pm**
AY2021/2022, Semester 2 **AS8-0401**
Department of English Language and Literature, NUS

Module Description

Many morphosyntactic phenomena, such as those concerning subject-verb agreement or wh-dependencies, are typically seen as reflecting abstract grammatical rules. However, linguists have often questioned the need for such rules, arguing that these phenomena can be more fruitfully understood as the product of sentence processing and cognitive constraints, such as the limits of working memory. This module introduces students to these perspectives, their underlying assumptions, and their successes and limitations. Through this module, students will also become more familiar with the logic of linguistics experiments and statistical analysis.

Students completing the module will:

- Gain an understanding of how linguistic phenomena have been analysed and understood in language processing terms, rather than grammatical terms.
- Become familiar with critically evaluating evidence, especially of a technical and/or quantitative nature, and assessing competing proposals.
- Get experience in reading, understanding, and presenting linguistic research, especially experimental research with statistical analyses.

Workload

This is a 5-MC module = 10 hours a week, allocated as 0-3-0-4-5.5 (Lecture, Tutorial, Lab, Project, Preparation)

Instructor information

Dr. Nick Huang ("Nick" is fine)

Email   znhuang@nus.edu.sg
Office   AS5, 05-05
Office hours   online, by appointment

Course assessment

Class presentations (12%): In most weeks, pairs or small groups of students will present the discussion reading(s) for that week and lead the class discussion. The pair/group will prepare appropriate presentation materials and post it on LumiNUS before every class.

Class participation (16%): This class is intended to be interactive. As preparation for discussion, students will be required to post brief comments or questions about the readings on LumiNUS each week.

Assignments (20%): Students will complete 4 problem sets, consisting of a mix of short-answer and/or short-essay questions.

Mid-term review paper (20%): Students will write a paper of about 1,500 words on topics covered in the first half of the module.

Final paper (32%): Students will write a final paper of about 3,000 to 4,000 words discussing the overall merits and limitations of these language processing approaches, drawing from the case studies discussed over the semester.

More information about the class presentation, participation, and papers will be provided in Week 1.

Assignments and papers should be submitted on LumiNUS.

Late work

Problem sets are posted at ~3 pm on Thursday, and due a week later at 3 pm (when class starts). If you realise you cannot meet a deadline, let me know as soon as possible, unless it is a family, personal, or health emergency. Otherwise, there will be a 10% penalty for every day or part thereof.

Module structure

All readings will be made available on Luminus.

We will meet one time a week, at 3 pm on Thursday.

Schedule

Note: I will indicate which sections or pages to read for each paper. Generally, students are **not** expected nor required to read the entire paper.

Week	Date	Topic / reading(s)	Deadlines
1	13 Jan	**Language and the mind**	
2	20 Jan	**Key concepts in syntax and language processing**	
3	27 Jan	**Centre-embedding** Gibson, E. & Thomas, J. (1999). Memory limitations and structural forgetting: The perception of complex ungrammatical sentences as grammatical. *Language and Cognitive Processes, 14*, 225–248.	
4	3 Feb	**Subject-verb agreement, word order** Kimball, J., & Aissen, J. (1971). I think, you think, he think. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 2, 241-246. Scontras, G., Degen, J., & Goodman, N. D. (2017). Subjectivity predicts adjective ordering preferences. *Open Mind: Discoveries in Cognitive Science, 1*, 53-65.	PS1
5	10 Feb	**Wh-dependencies: an introduction** Chapter 7 of Haegeman 1994 (**No presentation / no need to post comments**)	
6	17 Feb	**Wh-dependencies and working memory** Hofmeister, P. & Sag, I. A. (2010). Cognitive constraints on syntactic islands. *Language*, 86, 366–415. Sprouse, J., Wagers, M., & Phillips, C. (2012). A test of the relation between working memory capacity and syntactic island effects. *Language*, 88, 82-123.	PS2
Recess			
7	3 Mar	**Wh-dependencies and pragmatics** Erteschik-Shir, N. & Lappin, S. (1979). Dominance and the functional explanation of island phenomena. *Theoretical Linguistics* 6, 41-85.	Mid-term paper

8	10 Mar	**Wh-dependencies and bridge verbs** Ambridge, B. & Goldberg, A. (2008). The island status of clausal complements: Evidence in favor of an information structure explanation. *Cognitive Linguistics, 19*, 357--389. Liu, Y. et al. (2019). Verb frequency explains the unacceptability of factive and manner-of-speaking islands in English. In *Proceedings of the Cognitive Science Society*. 685-690.	PS3
9	17 Mar	**Resumptive pronouns** Han, C., et al. (2012). Processing strategies and resumptive pronouns in English. *Proceedings of the 30th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*, ed. N. Arnett and R. Bennett, 153-161. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. Heestand, D., Xiang, M., and Polinsky, M. (2011). Resumption still does not rescue islands. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 42, 138–152.	
10	24 Mar	**Resumptive pronouns** Ackerman, L., Frazier, M., and Yoshida, M. (2018). Resumptive pronouns can ameliorate illicit island extractions. *Linguistic Inquiry, 42*, 847–859.	PS4
11	31 Mar	**Uniform information density** Levy, R., & Jaeger, T. F. (2007). Speakers optimize information density through syntactic reduction. In B. Schlökopf, J. Platt, & T. Hoffman (Eds.). Advances in neural information processing systems (Vol. 19, pp. 849–856). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. **VP ellipsis and discourse coherence** Kehler, A. (2000). Coherence and the resolution of ellipsis. *Linguistics and Philosophy, 23*, 533–575.	
12	7 Apr	**VP ellipsis and discourse coherence** Frazier, L., Clifton, C. (2006). Ellipsis and discourse coherence. *Linguistics & Philosophy, 29*, 315–346.	
13	14 Apr	**No class (Well-being Day)**	Final paper (due 13 Apr)

Class attendance

Class attendance is expected, although I will share the slides on LumiNUS. If you cannot come to one of the class meetings, please let me know as soon as possible.

I will be taking class attendance, as required by NUS policy on in-person classes.

General rules

Know the syllabus

If you have questions about how the module is managed, the schedule, requirements – consult this syllabus first.

Feel free to collaborate, but submit your own work

You should feel free to discuss the course material and problem sets with other students. Working with others is a great way to learn!

However, the work that you submit must be your own (except for the group project).

When turning in problem sets and the essays, list the students who you worked with / discussed with, if any.

No plagiarism

NUS Code of Student Conduct (Clause 4):

> *The University takes a strict view of cheating in any form, deceptive fabrication, plagiarism and violation of intellectual property and copyright laws. Any student who is found to have engaged in such misconduct will be subject to disciplinary action by the University.*

For the purpose of this class, this means:

- Cite your sources. It's fine to refer to other sources, but always give them credit. Quote them if you are not confident of paraphrasing them in your own words.
- To repeat: You **must** write up your own work, even if you might have arrived at your conclusions after discussing the topic with someone else.

Ask questions

You should feel free to post questions on LumiNUS: Forum > Questions.

Finally: I want you to learn something in this module and to do well. So, if you have questions, always let me know.