LINGUISTICS

WITH Cri

Teaching academic writing via theoretical linguistics

Towards authentic assessments in introductory linguistics classes

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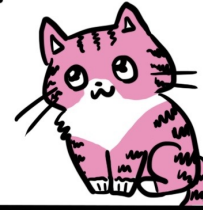University of Toronto Mississauga

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LIN204 (English Grammar I):

- No prerequisite
- Introductory linguistics with a focus on English morphosyntax and syntax
- Required for the English Language Linguistics (ELL) minor
- Lots of international students and future English teachers
- Asynchronous online lectures (even during non-COVID times)
- 2 hour lecture, 1 hour tutorial
- Cap: 700 students (!)

LIN205 (English Grammar II):

- Prerequisite: LIN204
- Continuation of LIN204
- Focus on sentence-level syntax
- Usually face-to-face
- Synchronous online during COVID
- 2 hour lecture, 1 hour tutorial
- Cap: 420 students

LIN204 course description (official)

Students will learn about fundamental grammatical concepts, focusing on the major grammatical categories in English and how they interact at the phrase level. They will be introduced to the main constituents of English sentences and learn about the basic relationship between tense, aspect, and modality. Students will learn to apply this knowledge as a tool to think analytically about English, evaluating various registers and styles, and **gaining an awareness of their own style of speaking and writing**.

(Source: UTM Academic Calendar)

Why you might want to teach a course like this

- Super popular
  - 2006 (**100** students) → 2011 (**400+** students) → current (**700** students)
  - Demographic trend: **international students** driving enrolment
  - Great for recruitment
- This interest was turned into an **English Language Linguistics (ELL) minor**
- New faculty hires
  - Increase in program enrolment justified the hiring of **seven** LIN faculty
- TAships in LIN and related programs
  - Linguistics, French, Spanish/Portuguese, LTL, Education

(Source: UTM Department of Language Studies)

Acknowledgement

- Michelle Troberg 👏👏👏
  - LIN204/205 was created by her
  - Amazing Program Coordinator and mentor
- My colleagues at UTM
- My LIN204 TAs: Ailen Cruz, Michelle Irwin, Hong-Yan Liu, Jade Kim, Emilia Melara, Ramesh Pokharel, Yulia Smirnova, Jessica Yeung
- My LIN205 TAs: Leila Farzinpur, Reza Javaheri, Justine Jun, Ivan Lasan
- My LIN204/LIN205 students
- Alan Munn, Marcin Morzycki, Cristina Schmitt
  - For originally teaching me how to teach

Today

How do you teach a course like this?

Writing advice via linguistics

Majority of class is international students

What types of assessments can be used in a course like this?

Authentic assessments

Assessments inclusive to non-native speakers of English

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Two main approaches

1. **Linguistic expressions carry social meaning**
   - Register
   - Not about "right" vs. "wrong" forms, but "this carries social meaning X"
   - Make the writing advice not about prescriptivism, but **meta-sociopragmatic awareness**
   - **Prerequisite lesson:** sociolinguistics (variation, arbitrariness of prestige), semantics lite (at-issue vs. non-at-issue meaning)

2. **Academic writing is a certain register of English, and has certain conventions (and here's how linguistics can help with it)**
   - Direct application of concepts in linguistics to writing
   - **Prerequisite lesson:** relevant theoretical linguistics
   - e.g., syntax (constituency/substitution), semantics/pragmatics (pronoun reference)

Examples of writing lessons

1. **Linguistic expressions carry social meaning**

2. Academic writing is a certain register of English, and has certain conventions (and here's how linguistics can help with it)

Thank you and you're welcome

1. I appreciate it
2. Thank you very much
3. Thank you
4. Thank you so much
5. Thanks
6. Thanks a bunch
7. ty

Which ones sound formal? Which ones sound informal?

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1. **Linguistic expressions carry social meaning**

2. **Academic writing is a certain register of English, and has certain conventions (and here's how linguistics can help with it)**

Re: the trouble of the thesaurus

- **Absolute synonyms** (words that mean *exactly* the same) don't really exist
  - No two words ever mean *exactly* the same thing
  - Always some difference
- Be careful about using the thesaurus to replace a word with a longer, fancier sounding word in a formal context

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1. Linguistic expressions carry social meaning

2. **Academic writing is a certain register of English, and has certain conventions (and here's how linguistics can help with it)**

Re: the trouble of the thesaurus

- **Absolute synonyms** don't really exist
  - No two words ever mean *exactly* the same thing
- Be careful about using the thesaurus to replace a word with a longer, fancier sounding word in a formal context

Original:

For this **job**, I was responsible for managing financial transactions totaling up to $1000.

Replacement:

For this ___, I was responsible for managing financial transactions totaling up to $1000.

Do this now:

Go to thesaurus.com and look up *job*. Which words can you reasonably replace with *job* in this sentence? Which ones would be weird?

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1. **Linguistic expressions carry social meaning**

2. Academic writing is a certain register of English, and has certain
   conventions (and here's how linguistics can help with it)

(Source: Instagram)

1. **Linguistic expressions carry social meaning**

2. Academic writing is a certain register of English, and has certain conventions (and here's how linguistics can help with it)
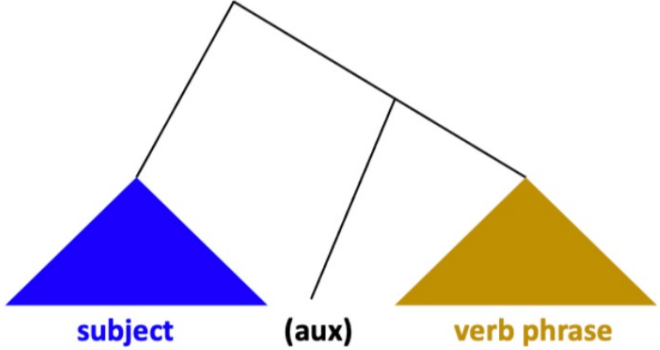

btw

BTW

lowercase btw and uppercase btw don't carry the same social meaning

12:50 / 15:07

1. Linguistic expressions carry social meaning

2. **Academic writing is a certain register of English, and has certain conventions (and here's how linguistics can help with it)**

Spot the sentence fragments

Using techniques from LIN204W11V2, find the sentence fragments (incomplete sentences) in the passage on the following slide. Then, fix the passage so that there are no sentence fragments.

subject   (aux)   verb phrase

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1. Linguistic expressions carry social meaning

2. **Academic writing is a certain register of English, and has certain conventions (and here's how linguistics can help with it)**

Answer

__Thousands of years ago.__ *Five African tribes war over a meteorite containing the metal vibranium. One warrior ingests a "heart-shaped herb" affected by the metal and gains superhuman abilities.* *__Becoming the first "Black Panther".__* *He unites all but the Jabari Tribe to form the nation of Wakanda. Over centuries, the Wakandans use the vibranium to develop advanced technology and isolate themselves from the world.* *__By posing as a Third World country.__* *In 1992, Wakanda's King T'Chaka visits his brother N'Jobu.* *__Who is working undercover in Oakland, California.__* *T'Chaka accuses N'Jobu of assisting black-market arms dealer Ulysses Klaue with stealing vibranium from Wakanda.* *__N'Jobu's partner's revelation that he is Zuri, another undercover Wakandan.__* *This confirms T'Chaka's suspicions.*

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Other examples (full guide coming soon to my website)

- E-mail etiquette

- Proper quotation incorporation
  - No: The critic praised the movie *Moana* "it pays tribute to Polynesian culture."
  - Yes: The critic said that "[the movie Moana] pays tribute to Polynesian culture." (V+CP)

- How singular *they* is descriptively fine, but what to do if a stuffy editor doesn't want you to use it
  - e.g., Change the antecedent so that the referent is a plural DP

- Syntactic ambiguity that actually might be confusing for reader, and how to rephrase it
  - Fronting a PP to get rid of ambiguity

- Pronoun coordination and register

- Eliding words can sound informal

- Tense
  - Students are instructed to write in the present tense, and sometimes they don't even know what present tense is.

- Descriptive observations about emoji and other internet language
  - Helpful for speakers of languages in which emoji rules are different

- Inclusive writing
  - Avoiding gender and racial biases

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Assessments inclusive to non-native speakers of English

Authentic assessments

- Focuses on measuring students' ability to apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired in class to situations that emulate professional or otherwise "real life" settings (Gulikers, Bastiaens, & Kirschner 2004).
  - e.g., a diet report in a biology class, constructing a news show or writing a report in a journalism class
- "What can I do besides make students draw trees in a syntax class?"

Examples of authentic assessments

Part 3   **Using linguistics for writing**

[5 points] Imagine that that you are writing an English proficiency test. In this test, you are asked to write an email to (i) a friend, and (ii) someone who just interviewed you for a job. In each email, you must include the following:

1. A greeting
2. The body of the email, in which you must do the following:
   a. Thank the person for a meeting you recently had (e.g., a quick chat, job interview, etc.)
   b. Ask a question
   c. Briefly talk about a class project that you and a classmate/friend worked on recently
   d. Tell them you're looking forward to seeing them or hearing from them soon.
3. A closing + your name

If you are a NON-NATIVE SPEAKER of English, do this exercise:

(i)   Write ONE short passage in a relatively INFORMAL register, as if you were writing to a close friend using the above criteria. Use at least TWO writing techniques you've learned in this class.
(ii)   After that, write ONE short passage in a more FORMAL register, as if you were writing to someone who just interviewed you for a job. Use at least TWO writing techniques you've learned in this class.
(iii)   Comment briefly on what techniques from class you used to differentiate an informal email from a formal one.

Also "authentic" (I think)

Someone says to you that they think negative concord is "uneducated" because it "doesn't make sense." Using what you learned in class, what might you say to this person to try to convince them that this is not true?

Someone says to you that "___ is not a word because it's not in the dictionary." Using what you learned in class, what might you say to this person to try to convince them that this is not true?

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Examples of inclusive assessments

2 The meaning of listemes

Consider the following sentences.

(1) *The bees swarmed me.*

(2) *Dozens of children swarmed the park.*

From these sentences, you hypothesize that *swarm* requires a subject that refers to a group or an aggregate.

Give ONE semantically anomalous sentence to support the above hypothesis. If you are a non-native speaker of English, construct a sentence that you would predict to be semantically anomalous based on the above hypothesis (please indicate that you're a non-native speaker in your answer when you do this).

Part 2 Can you say this in English? (10 points)

The following italicized sentence breaks some sort of language rule. The acceptability judgment (i.e., * to indicate a sentence that a native speaker of English would never say), where applicable, is not included in the sentence for the purposes of this exercise.

This is difficult than I thought

As discussed in the lecturette video LIN204W2V1, breaking a descriptive rule results in a sentence that a native speaker of the language would never, ever say. If it breaks a prescriptive rule, you should get a sentence that some native speakers still say, although some people may consider it stylistically "improper."

Your task is to go on the internet and to use a search engine (e.g., Google) to try to determine whether the given sentence is something that a native speaker of English would say or not. Here are some search engine tricks you may find helpful for this:
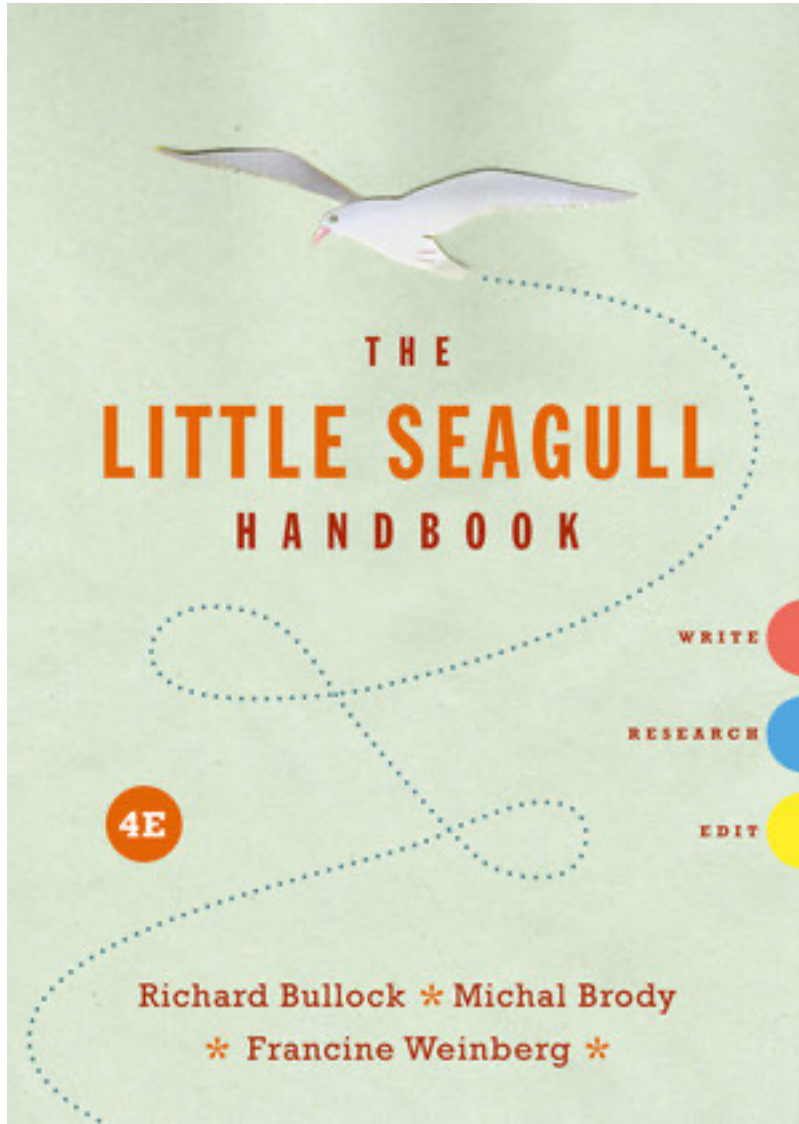https://time.com/4116259/google-search-2/

Conclusion

- There *are* practical things that linguistics can teach

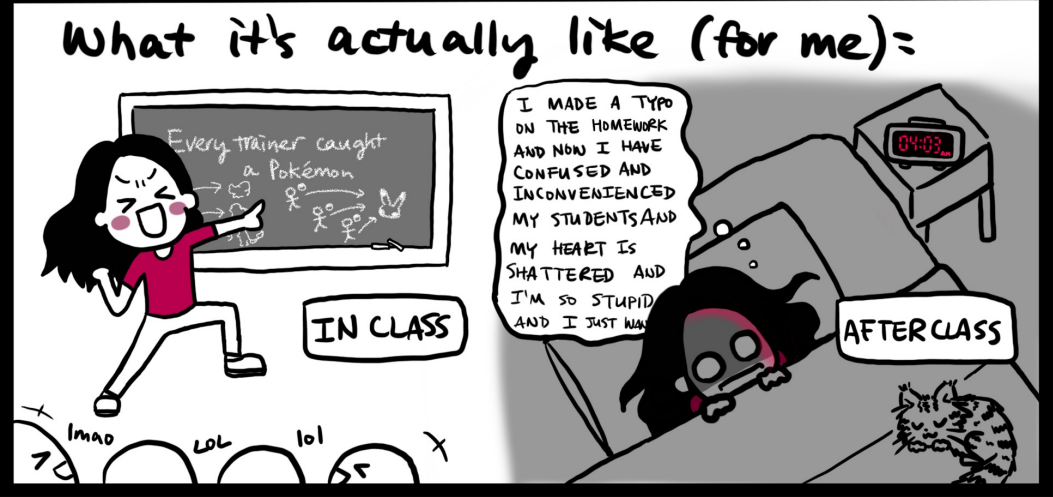- Please consider including assessments that don't rely on *having* native speaker judgments

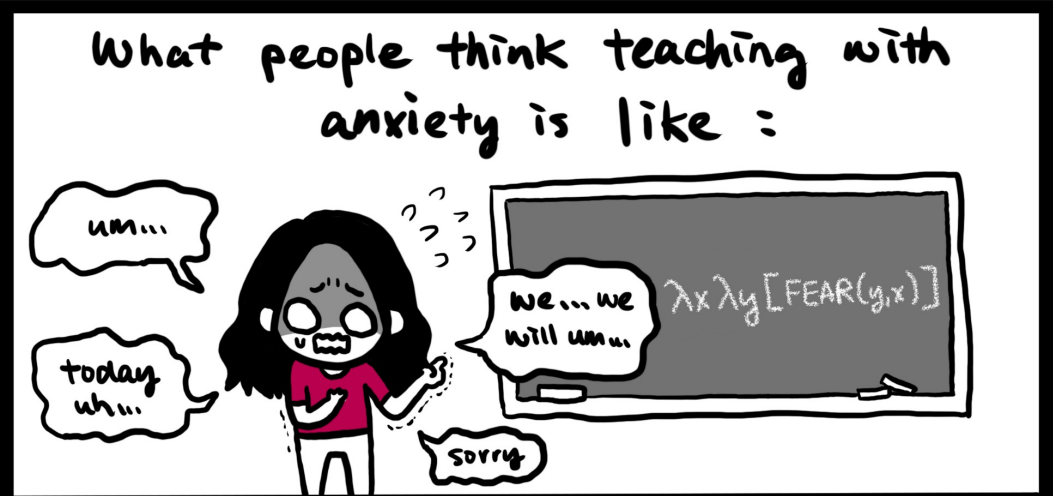- This book was a good reference for academic writing
- Michal Brody is a linguist!

Image: https://wwnorton.com/books/9780393877939

Thank you

- Email: ai.taniguchi@utoronto.ca
  - Please don't hesitate to contact me if you want to teach (or have taught!) a course like this
  - I'm making a whole LIN204 teaching guide so that all of my colleagues at UTM can teach it; please email me if you're interested
- Twitter/Instagram: @LinguistAiT
- Coffee break after this session, with me:
  - **Including English Learners in Linguistics Classes** (short title *Including English Learners*)
  - In this group, we will discuss what classroom and assessment strategies we can adopt in order to make linguistics more inclusive to students who do not speak English as their native language.

References

Gulikers,J., Bastiaens, T., and Kirschner, P. (2004). A five-dimensional framework for authentic assessment. Educational Technology Research and Development, 52 (3), 67-85.

Meuller, J. (2016). Authentic assessment toolbox. Retrieved from http:// jfmueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/.

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