

Mysteries of language (LING 1100)

Study guide for midterm

The midterm will consist of multiple choice questions covering all of the material we've gone through up to the 1st week after the break. Most likely, the next topics (pidgins and creoles, and language diversity) will not be on it. (That material, like everything else, will be on the final exam).

The questions will refer to material from all of the readings, both the textbook and articles, and to the content of the lectures. Some questions will test basic understanding of terms of concepts, making sure you've done the readings and been to class. Other questions will probe a little deeper, asking you to apply some of the knowledge. The best way to study for the midterm is to (re)read the material and go over the slides/lecture notes with the following list in hand, making sure you are familiar with all the items.

You are encouraged to see Lev or one of the TAs in office hours (see course outline for times and locations).

1 Introduction; animal communication

- Components of language: lexicon, phonology, syntax, semantics
- Design features of human language: discreteness; productivity; recursion; duality of patterning; arbitrariness of the sign; displacement; reflexiveness; cultural learning
- Onomatopoeia, sound symbolism
- Relationship between language learning and language diversity; poverty of the stimulus
- Universal grammar
- Signed languages
- Vocal tract anatomy in apes vs. humans
- Design feature differences between animal and human languages

2 Phonetics and phonology

- The vocal tract; the speech production mechanism
- Places and manners of articulation: bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, palatal, velar; stop, fricative, affricate, nasal
- Larynx and voicing

- Phonemes and allophones
- Minimal pair
- Contrastive vs. complementary distribution
- English consonant phonemes, and their IPA transcription (it's ok if you don't know IPA for English vowels)
- Canadian raising

3 Language change, varieties, and attitudes

- Language family; cognates; proto-languages
- Comparative method
- Regularity of sound change
- Morphological, semantic change
- Dialect maps; isoglosses
- Tree and wave diagrams of language families
- Connection between change and variation
- Variation and social meaning
- Features of AAVE: habitual tense; negative concord

4 Morphology & syntax

I expect you to have a basic grasp of the terms and concepts from the morphology and syntax chapters. You won't be expected to do complex problem sets in this class, such as drawing syntax trees. The midterm may contain some examples of words and sentences and ask you questions about them. You should do fine if you've read the chapters, did the reading response, and are familiar with the terms below.

- Parts of speech: nouns, verbs, determiners, adjectives, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, adverbs
- open vs. closed class; lexical vs. function words
- morpheme; suffix, prefix, stem
- inflection, derivation
- word formation processes: back formation, compounding, zero derivation
- predicates, arguments
- head, modifier, constituent
- grammatical relations
- case, number, gender, tense, aspect, person, number