

# Grammar and Language Use

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# Topic

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The class is concerned with the relationship between structure and words, or grammar and lexicon.

**Grammar** is a system of categories and rules.

(1) Peter saw the snake.

Categories: noun, verb, determiner, subject, object

Rules: basic word order in declarative sentences, etc

**The lexicon** includes definitions of individual words.

*Snake* Phonetic form: [snæk]

Syntactic category: N

Meaning: A legless, sometimes venomous reptile having a long, tapering, cylindrical body and found in most tropical and temperate regions

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Central thesis of this class: Grammar and lexicon are more closely related than commonly assumed.

In language use, structure and words are often closely related.

(1) I was wondering if you could give me a hand.

-> I was wondering (if)

-> to give somebody a hand

The whole is more than the sum of its parts.

- Idioms have idiosyncratic semantic features.
- Some idioms have idiosyncratic syntactic features.

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(1) .... you could give me a hand.

-> What kind of verb is ,give‘?

-> How many semantic participants has ,give‘?

(2) I was wondering if ...

-> What kind of sentence is ,I was wondering if ...‘?

-> Is ,I was wondering if ...‘ really the matrix clause?

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Topic of this class: Fixed expressions. Idioms are fixed expressions, but not all fixed expressions are idioms.

Fixed expressions raise questions about ...

- the meaning and structure of sentences
- the relationship between grammar and lexicon
- the nature of grammatical categories (e.g. 'transitivity')
- the overall organization of grammar

# Syllabus

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- Principles of formal grammar (1 meeting)
- Semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic principles of fixed expressions (5 meetings)
- Theoretical implications of the study of fixed expressions for the analysis of grammar (3 meetings)
- Fixed expressions in L1 and L2 acquisition (2 meetings)
- Translation of fixed expressions (1 meeting)
- Student presentations (2 meetings)

# Requirements

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- Readings
- Assignments
- Term paper
- Presentations: (i) project presentation and/or (ii) short report

## Interview

Interviewer: So what d'you think about this country?

Respondent: What do you mean?

Interviewer: Well um just say something about ... what you think this is like ... as a country.

Respondent: What I think?

Interviewer: Yes, ... just tell me something in your own words ... what you think.

Respondent: You mean anything that typically ... typically British /

Interviewer: Yea.

Respondent: The food (heh heh heh)

Interviewer: Yea.

Respondent: And there's ... we:::ll ... there's this stereotype of ... of how it's ... like ... like we've got a long history and ... and tradition and all that. People still drink tea in the afternoons and policemen ride bicycles and we're all ... old fashioned ... And then there's things like of course we always lose at sport and ... I suppose that one's true ... (heh heh).



## **Less cargo, more snails go (The Sunday Times, October 6<sup>th</sup>)**

It is wrong to tease the French, but sometimes it just can't be helped. The economy across the Channel is in such bad shape that thousands of young French people are coming to Britain each year in search of work. We even managed to snatch the Olympics from Paris. Yet now comes perhaps the cruellest blow of all: British companies are hoping to export snails to France.

The British have been slowly acquiring a taste for snails. (Of course it's been slow — what else would you expect from snails?) But this year Aylesbury Escargots, a farm in Buckinghamshire, looks as if it will double its sales compared with last year and is hoping to find markets across the Channel.