

## **Dynamic Syntax summer school course proposal**

Location: University of Bergen

Date: May 2020

Instructors: Professor Miriam Bouzouita (Ghent University, Belgium), Dr Hannah Gibson (University of Essex, UK), Professor Lutz Marten (SOAS University of London, UK)

### **Course overview**

The proposed course provides students with a comprehensive and interactive introduction to the Dynamic Syntax theoretical framework (Kempson et al. 2001; Cann et al. 2005).

Dynamic Syntax is a formal model of utterance description which aims to capture the real-time parsing and production process. There is a broad consensus that humans process linguistic input incrementally updating the meaning of the utterance after each word or morpheme. However, the dynamics of this incremental on-line process has traditionally not been reflected in most formal linguistic accounts. Dynamic Syntax seeks to address this gap by providing a model of the way in which hearers build step-by-step semantic representations (and interpretations) from the information provided by words and morphemes in context. Unlike most formal frameworks, Dynamic Syntax succeeds in modelling the parsing and production process using the same tools and mechanisms.

The course will be of interest to students of linguistics, particularly in the fields of formal syntax, semantics, pragmatics and their interfaces, historical linguistics and language change, as well as computational linguistics and those working in computer science.

### **Course structure**

This will be worth 5 credits and will be taught during 20 contact hours by three instructors over the course of a week.

The first part of the course will constitute an introduction to the tools and mechanisms employed by the Dynamic Syntax framework. We will look at the Logic of Finite Trees and tree growth, as well as the mechanisms used to represent structural underspecification (unfixed nodes) and sharing of information (Link structures).

The second part of the course will be dedicated to exploring a range of cross-linguistic phenomena through the adoption of the tools provided by the framework. It will be structured around readings from the primary Dynamic Syntax literature, and is open to suggestions or specific interests of course participants. Indicative topics include structural or language-specific topics, such as (i) clitic placement and their historical development in Romance and Greek, (ii) auxiliary placement and agreement in Bantu languages, and (iii) modelling dialogue and split utterances, among others.

The course is co-taught by three course instructors, with each session led by one instructor, and other instructors and students actively contributing. The course will culminate in presentations

by students which see the application of the Dynamic Syntax framework to their own fields of research.

### **Content**

1. Introduction: Syntax as a model of growth of interpretation
2. Tools of the framework
3. Underspecification, locally unfixed nodes
4. Link structures
5. The historical development of clitics in Romance and Greek: Modelling grammaticalisation dynamically
6. Rebuilding structure: Bantu auxiliary constructions
7. Left-to-right dynamics and linear order: Conjunction and agreement in Bantu
8. Modelling dialogue and split utterances

### **Learning methods and activities**

The course will be taught through a series of interactive seminars. The first 4 of these will lay the foundation for the course and provide the background on the theoretical framework. The second 4 of these will be based on papers which students will read and then provide short presentations and discussions on the basis of these readings.

	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
<b>Morning</b>	Session 1	Session 3	Session 5	Session 6	Session 8
<b>Afternoon</b>	Session 2	Session 4	Group work session	Session 7	Final poster presentations

### **Assessment**

The course will be assessed through two compulsory assignments – one written and one oral.

The written assignment will constitute a sample parse of a sentence employing the formal tools of the Dynamic Syntax framework, to be submitted on Wednesday.

The oral assignment will be a poster presentation Friday afternoon at the end of the course. Students will present the application of the Dynamic Syntax framework to one element of their own research.

### **Learning outcomes**

By the end of the course, students will:

1. Have an understanding of the theoretical foundations of Dynamic Syntax.
2. Be familiar with the study of key tools and mechanisms employed by the Dynamic Syntax framework.
3. Be familiar with the Dynamic Syntax approach to syntactic representation and the parsing/production process.
4. Be able to apply a number of the tools of the Dynamic Syntax framework to key issues in syntactic investigation.
5. Be able to sustain reasoned argumentation through application of the tools of the Dynamic Syntax framework.

## Reading and references

The core textbook for Dynamic Syntax is *The Dynamics of Language* by Cann et al. (2005):

- Cann, Ronnie, Ruth Kempson and Lutz Marten (2005). *The Dynamics of Language*. Oxford: Elsevier.

A more recent compilation of papers written from the perspective of the Dynamic Syntax framework are contained in Kempson et al. (2011). This is a helpful reference since it is an edited book and the chapters address different cross-linguistic challenges from the Dynamic Syntax perspective.

- Kempson, Ruth, Eleni Gregoromikelaki and Christine Howes (eds.) (2011). *The Dynamics of Lexical Interfaces*. CSLI. University of Chicago.

Specific references for the main topics discussed in the lectures will be made available at the outset of the course.

A wide selection of Dynamic Syntax papers can be found at <http://www.dynamicsyntax.org/>.

## The instructors

**Miriam Bouzouita** read her doctoral dissertation at King's College London, University of London under the supervision of Prof. Dr Ruth Kempson on clitic placement in the history of Spanish using a Dynamic Syntax approach. Her scholarly interests range from Hispanic philology, (Ibero-)Romance historical linguistics and dialectology to formal linguistics. She is currently a Professor in Hispanic Linguistics at Ghent University, where she coordinates the Diachronic and Diatopic Linguistics (DiaLing) research group.

She has published extensively on the grammaticalisation of clitic pronouns, Left-Periphery phenomena, future and possessive constructions in Romance from a historical and dialectological perspective. She is currently heading a research project on the grammatical variation in spatial adverbial constructions in the Spanish dialects and a research infrastructure project, which explores collaborative game-based approaches to morpho-syntactically annotate

and parse the COSER corpus (*Corpus Oral y Sonoro del Español Rural*; Audible Corpus of Rural Oral Spanish). Together with colleagues from the universities of Lausanne and Montreal, she is leading the Spanish Dialects App project (*Dialectos del español*; [www.dialectosdelespanol.org](http://www.dialectosdelespanol.org)) to explore current diatopic and sociolinguistic morpho-syntactic variation in the whole Spanish-speaking world using mobile phone applications.

**Hannah Gibson** is Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of Essex. She completed a doctoral thesis entitled *Auxiliary placement in Rangi: A Dynamic Syntax perspective* at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London in 2012. Prior to joining the University of Essex, she was a postdoctoral researcher Osaka University and a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at SOAS University of London.

Her research is primarily concerned with linguistic variation, particularly why and how languages change. Much of her work examines the syntax and semantics of the Bantu languages, with a focus on the languages of East Africa. Her formal work is articulated from the perspective of the Dynamic Syntax theoretical framework. Recent publications include *Probing the interaction of language contact and internal innovation: four case studies of morphosyntactic change in Rangi* (with Lutz Marten, *Studies in African Linguistics*, 2019), *Building meaning in context: A dynamic approach to Bantu clause structure* (Wiley Blackwell, 2018) and *A Dynamic Syntax modelling of Japanese and Rangi clefts: parsing incrementality and the growth of interpretation* (with Tohru Seraku, *Language Sciences*, 2016).

**Lutz Marten** is Professor of General and African Linguistics at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, where he served as Dean of the Faculty of Languages and Cultures from 2015 to 2018. He is interested in formal linguistics and linguistic theory, comparative and historical linguistics, and questions of language and identity. He has been centrally involved in the development of the syntactic framework of Dynamic Syntax, which explores the role of utterance comprehension for the architecture of grammar. Most of his work focuses on African languages and he has conducted research in Eastern and Southern Africa. He recently completed a 3-year Leverhulme-funded major research project on ‘Morphosyntactic Variation in Bantu: Typology, contact and change’ (2014-18).

His publications include *At the Syntax-Pragmatics Interface* (OUP 2002), *A Grammatical Sketch of Herero* (with Wilhelm Möhlig and Jekura Kavari, Köppe 2002), *The Dynamics of Language* (with Ronnie Cann and Ruth Kempson, Elsevier 2005), and *Colloquial Swahili* (with Donovan McGrath, Routledge 2003/2012). He is also the founding chair of the International Conference on Bantu Languages.