Date: 27.09.2026

Syllabus - Teaching Program for the Course

Linguistics Beyond Language

Masha Esipova| Department of English Literature and Linguistics

Course No 9600

Course Type:	seminar
Semester:	2026-2027, semester A
Day & Time:	Tuesday, 16:00-19:30
Office hours:	by appointment
Lecturer Email:	mariia.esipova@biu.ac.il

Course description and learning goals

Course Abstract

In this class, we will learn how to apply the mindset and the skillset of a linguist to various non-standard objects, including aspects of human communication that have been traditionally overlooked in formal linguistics such as different types of gesture; non-linguistic systems, such as pictorial and video representations, music, dance, etc.; and animal communication. In the process, the students will gain a deeper understanding of cognitive universals that underlie both linguistic and non-linguistic behavior in humans, as well as hone their knowledge of linguistic notions and theories.

Learning objectives

1. The students will get familiarized with the so-called "Super Linguistics" research program that applies linguistic methodology to a diverse range of non-standard objects in order to gain a better understanding of cognitive universals that underlie human behavior.
2. In the process, the students will strengthen their knowledge of various analytical tools in linguistics by seeing how they can be used beyond their standard applications and thus gaining a deeper understanding of the abstract core insights underlying those tools.
3. While working on their final paper, the students will hone their independent research skills (such as identifying a research question that is appropriate in scale, situating their research question within the existing research, making empirical generalizations in ways that lead to analytical insights, etc.), as well as their academic presentation and writing skills.

Course structure (subject to change)

Week No.	Lesson topic	Readings
1-4	Introduction: overview of the "Super Linguistics" research program. Multi-channel communication.	Required: Patel-Grosz et al. 2023 (1-2); Esipova 2019b; Esipova 2026 (3-4) Optional: Esipova 2019a; Schlenker 2018
5-6	Pictures: possible-worlds semantics of pictures; syntax of pictorial narratives and within a single image; (not-)at-issueness in pictures.	Required: Patel-Grosz et al. 2023 (3.1, 5.1); Esipova 2021 Optional: Abusch 2019; Cohn 2018, 2020
7	Emoji.	Required: Grosz et al. 2021 Optional: Cohn et al. 2019; Herring & Ge 2020
8-9	Video: conventional filmmaking and beyond.	Required: Cumming et al. 2017; Esipova 2023a
10	Music and dance.	Required: Patel-Grosz et al. 2023 (5.2–5.4)

		Optional: Charnavel 2019; Patel-Grosz et al. 2018; Schlenker 2021
11	Non-communicative behavior: athletic movement; chess.	Required: Esipova 2023b Optional: Ducard 2017
12	Animal communication.	Required: Patel-Grosz et al. 2023, Appendix Optional: Schlenker et al. 2016; Henderson et al. 2022; Heesen et al. 2022
13-14	Student presentations.	



Final grade

Description of the product	Weight in the final score
Paper proposal	20% of final grade
Paper presentation in class	20% of final grade
Paper write-up	60% of final grade



Course requirements

Attendance. You can miss two classes without an explanation. Additional absences require justification for a passing grade, but contact the instructor if you need more flexibility.

Version history. Both the paper proposal and the paper itself must be written in a Google doc or an Overleaf project, and the instructor will need to be given access to the version history of the document. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in the proposal/paper not being graded at all and at the very least will lead to the student getting 0 on the 'Writing progress' component of the paper grade. Further details on how to share the version history with the instructor will be discussed in class.

Paper submission and oral defense. The seminar paper will need to be submitted by an internal deadline set by the instructor. After you submit your paper, you need to schedule an appointment with me for a mini-defense session (typically over Zoom), in which we will discuss your paper together. The defense will be in a Q&A format, you do not need to prepare a presentation for it. The defense is a pre-requisite for your paper to be graded and will constitute a grade component in your paper grade.

Plagiarism policy

Any instance of plagiarism in your work will immediately result in you failing this course and will be reported to the administration. Please consult the department's guidelines on what constitutes plagiarism:

https://english.biu.ac.il/sites/english/files/shared/what_is_plagiarism_biu_english_literature_and_linguistics.pdf

AI use policy

Any use of generative AI (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, etc.) when writing up the proposal, presentation, or paper that was not explicitly permitted by the instructor in advance is prohibited and will result in a range of penalties, depending on the severity of the infraction, if discovered (possibly even resulting in the student failing the course and being reported to the administration in some cases). Permissible uses of AI will be discussed in class, as well as in case-by-case discussions with individual students. When in doubt, ask the instructor directly, do not assume.

Prerequisites

Course number	Course name
37-289 OR 37-987	Semantics Introduction to Syntax and Semantics

Bibliography: Up-to-date reading, viewing, and listening content items

The readings will be made available to the students electronically.

Required:

- Cumming, Samuel, Gabriel Greenberg & Rory Kelly. 2017. Conventions of viewpoint coherence in film. *Philosophers' Imprint* 17(1). 1–29. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3521354.0017.001
- Grosz, Patrick Georg, Elsi Kaiser & Francesco Pierini. 2021. Discourse anaphoricity and first-person indexicality in emoji resolution. In Grosz, Patrick Georg, Luisa Martí, Hazel Pearson, Yasutada Sudo & Sarah Zobel (eds.), *Proceedings of Sinn Und Bedeutung*, 25, 340-357. https://doi.org/10.18148/sub/2021.v25i0.941
- Esipova, Maria. 2019b. Towards a uniform super-linguistic theory of projection. In Schlöder, Julian J., Dean McHugh & Floris Roelofsen (eds.), *Proceedings of the 22nd Amsterdam Colloquium*, pp. 553–562. http://events.illc.uva.nl/AC/AC2019/uploaded_files/inlineitem/Esipova_Towards_a_uniform_super-linguistic_theory_o.pdf
- Esipova, Maria. 2021. On not-at-issueness in pictures. *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics* 6(1), 83. https://doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.1314
- Esipova, Maria. 2023a. Discontinuity as prosody: meaning and form of jump cuts on YouTube. *NYI Constellations* 1. https://lingbuzz.net/lingbuzz/007423
- Esipova, Maria. 2023b. Reps and representations: a warm-up to a grammar of lifting. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 46. 871–904. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10988-022-09372-z

- Esipova, Maria. 2026. Composure and composition. To appear in *Languages*. https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/005003
- Patel-Grosz, Pritty, Salvador Mascarenhas, Emmanuel Chemla & Philippe Schlenker. 2023. Super Linguistics: an introduction. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 46. 627–692. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10988-022-09377-8

Optional:

- Abusch, Dorit. 2019. Possible-worlds semantics for pictures. In Daniel Gutzmann, Lisa Matthewson, Cécile Meier, Hotze Rullmann & Thomas Ede Zimmermann (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Semantics*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118788516.sem003
- Charnavel, Isabelle. 2019. Steps toward a universal grammar of dance: Local grouping structure in basic human movement perception. *Frontiers in Psychology* 10. 1364. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01364
- Cohn, Neil. 2018. Combinatorial morphology in visual languages. In Geert Booij (ed.), *Construction of words*, vol. 4, 175–199. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74394-3_7
- Cohn, Neil. 2020. Visual narrative comprehension: Universal or not? *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* 2(27). 266–285. https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-019-01670-1
- Cohn, Neil, Jan Engelen & Joost Schilperoord. 2019. The grammar of emoji? Constraints on communicative pictorial sequencing. *Cognitive Research* 4. 33. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-019-0177-0
- Ducard, Dominique. 2017. Language and the game of chess: Saussure, Hjelmslev, Wittgenstein and Greimas. *Semiotica* 214. 199–217. https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2016-0201
- Esipova, Maria. 2019a. Composition and projection of co-speech gestures. In Blake, Katherine, Forrest Davis, Kaelyn Lamp & Joseph Rhyne (eds.), *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) 29*, pp. 117–137. https://doi.org/10.3765/salt.v29i0.4600
- Heesen, Raphaela M., Christine Sievers, Thibaud Gruber & Zanna Clay. In press. Primate communication: Affective, intentional, or both? In Bennett L. Schwartz & Michael J. Beran (eds.), *Primate Cognitive Studies*, Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/g5zse
- Henderson, Mathew, Patrick G. Grosz, Kirsty E. Graham, Catherine Hobaiter, and Pritty Patel-Grosz. 2024. Shared semantics: Exploring the interface between human and chimpanzee gestural communication. *Mind & Language* 39(4), 454–471. https://doi.org/10.1111/mila.12500
- Herring, Susan C. & Jing Ge-Stadnyk. 2020. Do emoji sequences have a preferred word order? In *Workshop Proceedings of the 14th International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, https://doi.org/10.36190/2020.05
- Patel-Grosz, Pritty, Patrick Georg Grosz, Tejaswinee Kelkar & Alexander Refsum Jensenius. 2018. Coreference and disjoint reference in the semantics of narrative dance. In Uli Sauerland & Stephanie Solt (eds.), *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 22*, 199–216. https://semanticsarchive.net/Archive/GE4MWViN/Patel-Grosz.pdf
- Schlenker, Philippe. 2018. Iconic pragmatics. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 36(3). 877–936. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-017-9392-x
- Schlenker, Philippe. 2021. Musical meaning within Super Semantics. *Linguistics and Philosophy*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10988-021-09329-8
- Schlenker, Philippe, Emmanuel Chemla, Anne M. Schel, James Fuller, Jean-Pierre Gautier, Jeremy Kuhn, Dunja Veselinović, Kate Arnold, Cristiane Cäsar, Sumir Keenan, Alban Lemasson, Karim Ouattara, Robin Ryder & Klaus Zuberbühler. 2016. Formal monkey linguistics. *Theoretical Linguistics* 42(1-2). 1–90. https://doi.org/10.1515/tl-2016-0001