

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
First Term, 2026-2027
(Version August 2, subject to further adjustment)

Course Code: LING6903 (3 Units) Title in English: Syntactic Theory Title in Chinese: 句法理論
Description: This course introduces the Chomskyan generative syntax to RPG students. It provides students with an overview on the Principles & Parameters' model and the Minimalist Program. In particular, the most important concepts in the latest version of the Minimalist Program such as <i>free MERGE</i> , <i>Agree</i> , <i>Move</i> , <i>Match</i> , <i>Minimal Search</i> , <i>Probe-Goal</i> , <i>Phases</i> , <i>Labeling</i> , <i>Workspace</i> will be presented in a detailed way.

List of Topics, Content, highlighting fundamental concepts

Topic	Contents/fundamental concepts
X'-Theory	- X'-theory (Why? How?) - Projections (VP, NP, TP, CP)
Theta Theory	- Theta role assignment - Argument structure - θ-criterion
Case Theory	- Abstract/Structural Case - Government; Spec-head agreement - Case filter - DP hypothesis - VP-shell hypothesis: νP
Binding Theory	- Binding conditions A, B, C - Anaphora, pronouns, referential expressions - Control vs. Raising
A-Movement	- A-movement/NP-movement - Burzio's generalization - Raising verbs, passivization - ECM verbs, unaccusatives, ergatives, unergatives - VP-subject-internal hypothesis
A'-Movement	- Head-movement - A'-movement, A'-positions, A'-dependency - <i>Wh</i>-movement, relativization, topicalization
Locality	- Subacency, bounding nodes - Island constraints, island types (strong, weak) - Empty Category Principle (ECP), intermediate traces - Condition on Extraction Domain (CED) - Relativized Minimality
Logical Form	- Quantifiers: $\exists$, $\forall$ - Quantifier Raising (QR) and LF-movement - Arguments for covert <i>wh</i>-movement: selectional restriction, crossover effects (weak, strong)
The Minimalist Philosophy	- Beyond Explanatory Adequacy; - The "third" factor; - Optimal design, etc.

The Minimalist Architecture	- Lexical Array; Sub-Array; - Computational System of Human Language - Spell-Out, Transfer - PF and LF, etc.
Core Minimalist Conditions	- Legibility Condition; - Strong Minimalist Thesis; - Inclusiveness Condition; - Interpretability Condition; - Extension Condition;
Minimalist Operations	- Merge (External Merge, Internal Merge); - Move; Agree; - Label, etc. - Phase; Phase Impenetrability Condition;

Learning outcomes

After completing this course, research students should be able to:

1. Understand the major motivations for the shifting from the Principles & Parameters (P&P) model to the Minimalist Program (MP).
2. Understand the logical relationship among different minimalist conditions (cf. “concepts” listed above).
3. Understand and apply the essential operations in the MP model, such as *Merge*, *Agree* and *Move*.
4. Re-evaluate the basic concepts proposed in the P&P model, such as locality constraints (Subjacency, ECP, CED), movement, binding, cyclicity, etc., in terms of the Minimalist criteria.
5. Make a clear distinction between theoretical tools in the P&P framework and those in the MP.
6. Make a clear distinction between Chomsky’s initial proposals for each concept and the alternatives suggested by other researchers.
7. Understand the conceptual development of the Phase Theory and the Labeling Algorithm.
8. Solve certain problems with minimalist devices.

Course components (Teaching modes and Learning activities)

Teaching Modes and Learning Activities	
On-site face-to-face	Percentage of time
Lectures (hybrid: no)	100%

Learning activities:

Lecture (hr) in class	Assignment (hr) out class	Reading (hr) out class
3	1 (on average)	3
Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory

Assessment scheme:

Description	Points
Assignment 1	25
Assignment 2	35
Assignment 3	40
Total=	100

Grade Descriptions:

Grade	Overall Course
A	Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes. (i) Demonstrate thorough mastery of principles and subject matter in the course required for attaining all the course objectives (cf. Learning outcomes & List of topics). (ii) Demonstrate the ability to apply the analytical techniques introduced in the course to familiar and unfamiliar linguistic phenomena in familiar and unfamiliar languages. (iii) Demonstrate the ability to verify different theoretical hypotheses with solid arguments as well as coherent argumentation. (iv) Has the ability to express the knowledge or synthesis of ideas in a clear and cogent way. (v) Has extensive reading related to the course.
A-	Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes. (i) Demonstrate substantial command of principles and subject matter in the course required for attaining almost the course objectives (cf. Learning outcomes & List of topics). (ii) Demonstrate the ability to apply the analytical techniques introduced in the course to familiar and less familiar linguistic phenomena in familiar and some unfamiliar languages. (iii) Demonstrate the ability to verify different theoretical hypotheses in a logical and persuasive way. (iv) Has the ability to express the knowledge or synthesis of ideas with clarity and accuracy. (v) Has a certain amount of reading related to the course.
B	(i) Demonstrate general and sufficient command of principles and subject matter in the course required for attaining most the course objectives (cf. Learning outcomes & List of topics). (ii) Demonstrate the ability to apply the analytical techniques introduced in the course to most (but not necessarily all) familiar linguistic phenomena in familiar and some unfamiliar languages. (iii) Demonstrate the ability to verify different theoretical hypotheses in a logical and comprehensive way. (iv) Has the ability to express the knowledge or synthesis of ideas in a satisfactory and unambiguously was. (v) Has basic reading related to the course.
C	(i) Demonstrate general command of principles and subject matter in the course required for attaining some the course objectives (cf. Learning outcomes & List of topics). (ii) Demonstrate the ability to apply the analytical techniques introduced in the course to some familiar linguistic phenomena in familiar languages. (iii) Has the ability to express the separate pieces of knowledge in an unambiguously was. (v) Has some reading related to the course.
D	Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes. (i) Demonstrate a partial command of principles and subject matter in the course

	required for attaining some the course objectives (cf. Learning outcomes & List of topics). (ii) Demonstrate the ability to apply the analytical techniques introduced in the course to some simple linguistic phenomena in familiar languages. (iii) Has the ability to state the knowledge in simple terms. (v) Has very limited reading related to the course.
F	(i) Demonstrate little or no evidence of command of principles and subject matter in the course required for attaining the course objectives (cf. Learning outcomes & List of topics). OR (ii) failure to meet specified assessment requirements.

Learning resources for students

- (i) Detailed course handouts will be provided for each lecture.
- (ii) The general structure of the handout is given under “Topic” below (cf. Course schedule).
- (iii) Basic readings are indicated under “Recommended readings” below (cf. Course schedule).
Extended reading references will be specified on the handout related to each topic.
- (iv) Useful textbooks and reference books are listed here:
- For Government & Binding Theory (GB) /Principles and Parameter’s Model (PP)
 1. Haegeman, Liliane (1994). *Introduction to Government & Binding Theory (Second edition)*, Blackwell Publishing.
 2. Ouhalla, Jamal (1999). *Introducing Transformational Grammar: From Principles and Parameters to Minimalism (Second edition)*, Arnold Publishers.
 - For The Minimalist Program (MP)
 1. Grohmann, Kleanthes & Evelina Leivada (2026) *The Cambridge Handbook of The Minimalist Program*, Cambridge University Press.
 2. Chomsky, N., T. Daniel Seely, Robert C. Berwick, Sandiway Fong, M.A.C. Huybregts, Hisatsugu Kitakara, Andrew McInerney & Yushi Sugimoto. *MERGE and the Strong Minimalist Thesis*. [Elements in Generative Syntax]. Robert Freidin (ed). Cambridge University Press.
 3. Bošković, Zeljko & Howard Lasnik (2007). *Minimalist Syntax: The Essential Readings*. Blackwell Publishing.
 4. Hornstein Norbert, Jairo Nunes & Kleanthes Grohmann (2005) *Understanding Minimalism*. Cambridge University Press.
 5. Boeckx, Cedric (2011). *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Minimalism*. Oxford University Press.
- If you read French,*
6. Rouveret, Alain (2015) *Arguments Minimalistes. Une présentation du Programme Minimaliste de Noam Chomsky*. ENS Éditions.
- (v) Chomsky’s recent works and lectures on the latest development of the Minimalist Program:
2024. **Genuine explanation.** In Giuliano Bocci, Daniele Botteri, Claudia Manetti, and Vincenzo Moscati (eds.) *Rich Descriptions and Simple Explanations in Morphosyntax and Language Acquisition*. Based on the plenary talk “Genuine Explanations”, delivered at WCCFL 29, Arizona University on 2021.4.9, the video is available at
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6SbPKmVNVQ>)

2023. Chomsky, N., T. Daniel Seely, Robert C. Berwick, Sandiway Fong, M.A.C. Huybregts, Hisatsugu Kitakara, Andrew McInerney & Yushi Sugimoto. **MERGE and the Strong Minimalist Thesis**. Cambridge University Press.

2023. **The Miracle Creed and SMT**. Video Lectures 2023 Theoretical Linguistics at Keio-EMU Linguistics as Scientific Inquiry Lecture Series #3, March 2023
(<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLWXQYx-RCmeP7B2UtIA8OJsvAF-xvjDuZ>)

2021.4.2 **Minimalism: where we are now, and where we are going**. Lecture given at the 161st meeting of Linguistic Society of Japan.
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4F9NSVVUw>)

2021.2.24 **The Minimalist Program in 2021**. Lecture given at The Linguistics Association of Allameh Tabataba'i University. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1FCMEI4k)

2019. **The UCLA lectures**. Lectures given at the department of linguistics at UCLA.
(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKHqiqjo0ErkJS-R7vkPng/videos>),
handout (<https://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/005485>).

Course schedule (subject to adjustment)

<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Recommended readings</i>
1	Sept 7	- X'-Theory (Handout #1, Handout #2, Handout # Tree for beginners)	Haegeman (1994): ch. 2 Ouhalla (1999): ch. 2, 6
2	Sept 14	- Theta Theory (Handout #3) - Case Theory (I) : (Handout #4) - morphological case, abstract Case, - Case assignment, government	Haegeman (1994): ch. 3 Ouhalla (1999): ch. 7, 8
3	Sept 21	- Case Theory (II) : (Handout #4) - ECM, raising - DP hypothesis - Movement Theory (I) : A-movement (Handout #5) - Binding Theory (I) : Principles A, B, C, (Handout #6)	Haegeman (1994): ch. 6 Ouhalla (1999): ch. 4, 10
4	Sept 25 (regarded as the Make-up class, to be confirmed)	- Binding Theory (II) : control, PRO (Handout #6) - Movement Theory (II) : A'-movement (Handout #7) - Locality (I) : Subjacency (Handout #8)	Haegeman (1994): ch. 4 Ouhalla (1999): ch. 9
5	Sep 28	- Locality (II) : ECP, CED (Handout #8)	Haegeman (1994): ch. 4, 5, Ouhalla (1999): ch. 9, 10

		-Logical Form (I): - QR, crossover (Handout #9)	
6	Oct 5	- Logical Form (II): (<i>if time permits</i>) (Handout #9) - Reconstruction, intervention effects - The Minimalist Program (I) (Handout #10) - Minimalist innovations - Design of Language Faculty - Strong Minimalist Thesis - The “third factor” - Uniformity Principle	Chomsky, Noam (2000). Minimalist inquiries: the framework. <i>Step by step</i> . R. Martin, D. Michaels & J. Uriagereka eds., Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, p. 89-155. Chomsky, Noam (2001). Derivation by phase, in <i>Ken Hale: a Life in Language</i> , M. Kenstowicz eds., Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, p. 1-52. Chomsky, Noam (2005). Three factors in language design. <i>Linguistic Inquiry</i> 36, p. 1-22.
7	Oct 12	- The Minimalist Program (II) (Handout #10) - Lexicon, numeration, Merge - The MP Modal in <i>BEA</i> - Difference between Narrow Syntax and Σ	Chomsky, N., T. D. Seely, R. Berwick, S. Fong, M.A.C. Huybregts, H. Kitakara, A. McInerney & Y. Sugimoto. (2023) MERGE and the Strong Minimalist Thesis. CUP.
	Oct 19	*****Public holiday – The day following the Double Ninth Festival *****	
8	Oct 26	- Agree (I) (Handout #11) - Feature valuation, Agree, Matching, - Activeness condition	Adger, David (2003) <i>Core Syntax</i> . OUP. (Ch.5 Functional Categories I-TP)
9	Nov 2	- Agree (II) (Handout #11) - Conditions on Agree - Subject-verb agreement - Case on the object - Edge condition - Completeness condition - ϕ -features, - Defective Intervention Constraint	Bošković, Zeljko & Howard Lasnik (2007). <i>Minimalist Syntax: The Essential Readings</i> . Blackwell Publishing. (ch. 7 <i>Existential Constructions</i>) Chomsky, Noam (2001). Derivation by phase, in <i>Ken Hale: a Life in Language</i> , M. Kenstowicz eds., Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, p. 1-52.
10	Nov 9	- Agree (III) (Handout #11) - Completeness condition - ϕ -features, - Defective Intervention Constraint	Chomsky, N., T. D. Seely, R. Berwick, S. Fong, M.A.C. Huybregts, H. Kitakara, A. McInerney & Y. Sugimoto. (2023). MERGE and the Strong Minimalist Thesis. CUP.
11	Nov 16	- Phase Theory (I) (Handout #12) - Arguments in favor of the existence of phases - Features on phase heads - Uninterpretable features - Movement triggering feature - Phasal movement	Bošković, Zeljko & Howard Lasnik (2007). <i>Minimalist Syntax: The Essential Readings</i> . Blackwell Publishing. (ch. 2.3 <i>Locality</i> ; 2.4 <i>Recent Developments: Phases</i>) Chomsky, Noam (2001). Derivation by phase, in <i>Ken Hale: a Life in Language</i> , M. Kenstowicz eds., Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, p. 1-52.
12	Nov 23	- Phase Theory (II) (Handout #12) - Phase Impenetrability Condition (First version: <i>MI</i>)	Chomsky, Noam (2008). On phases. <i>Foundational Issues in Linguistic Theory</i> . R. Freidin, C. Otero & M.-L. Zubizarreta, eds., Cambridge,

		- Reconstruction and v^*P phase - Strong phase vs. weak phase - Phase Impenetrability Condition (Second version: <i>DbP</i>) - Phase and locality - Edge Feature - Feature Inheritance Hypothesis	Mass., MIT Press. Chomsky, Noam (2012). Forward. <i>Phases</i>, A. Gallego ed., Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, p. 1-7. Citko, Barbara (2014) <i>Phase Theory: An Introduction</i>. Cambridge University Press. (ch. 2 <i>Introducing phases</i>)
13	Nov 30	- Phase Theory (III) (Handout #12) - Inheritance of ϕ-features - <i>Wh</i>-dependency - Strong island (subject, adjunct); multiple spell out; late insertion. - Properties of phases	Legate, Julie (2003). Some interface properties of the phase. <i>Linguistic Inquiry</i> 34, p. 506-515. Nunes, Jairo & Juan Uriagereka (2000). Cyclicity and extraction domains. In <i>Syntax</i> 3.1, p. 20-43. Uriagereka, Juan (1999). Multiple Spell-Out. In <i>Working Minimalism</i>, ed. S. D. Epstein and N. Hornstein, 251-282. Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press.
	Reserved content	- Labeling (if we still have some time...) (Handout #13) - Labeling algorithm - Argument: Donati (2006) - Case 1: Small clause (Moro 2000) - Case 2: Predicate – internal subject construction - Case 3: Successive-cyclic <i>wh</i>-movement - Case 4: Indirect questions - Case 5: Subject-Predicate case - Case 6: Coordination	Chomsky, Noam (2013). Problems of projection, <i>Lingua</i> 130, p. 33-49. Chomsky, Noam (2015). Problems of projection: extensions. Chomsky, N., Gallego & Ott. (2019). Generative Grammar and the Faculty of Language: Insights, Questions, and Challenges. Chomsky, N. (2019). Some Puzzling Foundational Issues: The Reading Program. Chomsky, N. (2020) Puzzles About Phases.

Teachers' or TA's contact details

Professor/Instructor	
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Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/. With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. • In the case of group projects, all members of the group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible and liable to disciplinary actions, irrespective of
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whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the problematic contents.

- For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment.
- Students are fully aware that their work may be investigated by AI content detection software to determine originality.
- Students are fully aware of the AI approach(es) adopted in the course. In the case where some AI tools are allowed, students have made proper acknowledgment and citations as suggested by the course teacher.

Assignments without a properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers.

Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submissions. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

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Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Use of generative AI tools

- **All use of AI tools is prohibited in assignments and assessment tasks**

For assignments and assessment tasks that count towards the final course grades, students are not allowed to submit work which is produced with the collaboration of or supported by the use of any generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT)*.

Any breach of the regulations will be considered an act of academic dishonesty and will be handled according to the University's *Procedures for Handling Cases of Academic Dishonesty*.

In case of queries, students should seek advice from the course teacher.

Guideline on sharing lecture recordings

1. The copyright of any lecture recordings shared in the course, whether they are produced by teachers, students, or peer note-takers, belongs to the University.
2. Students should not share these recordings with others without obtaining prior written consent from the teacher(s).