



COURSE UNIT (MODULE) DESCRIPTION

Course unit (module) title	Code
The Emergence and Evolution of Language (Kalbos atsiradimas ir raida)	

Academic staff	Core academic unit(s)
Coordinating: assist. prof. dr. Antanas Keturakis Other:	Department of French language, literature and culture

Study cycle	Type of the course unit
Bachelor's degree	Optional

Mode of delivery	Semester or period when it is delivered	Language of instruction
Lectures and seminars	Autumn semester	English

Requisites	
Prerequisites: none	Co-requisites (if relevant): none

Number of ECTS credits allocated	Student's workload (total)	Contact hours	Individual work
5	125	34	91

Purpose of the course unit		
<p>The aim of this course unit is to familiarize students with the main debates in the study of language origins and language change. The course presents language as a product of human biological evolution and examines how linguistic structure and meaning emerge and change over time. It also addresses the importance and impact of cultural and policy factors in processes of language change and encourages students to consider the future of language in a world shaped by the rapid development of artificial intelligence.</p> <p>In addition to developing specific linguistic knowledge, the course aims to develop the following general competences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critical thinking, understood as the ability to evaluate different, and sometimes competing, theories explaining the same phenomena. • argumentation skills, understood as the ability to produce a coherent written essay and support it with well-structured arguments. • time management, understood as the ability to plan, develop, and present a project within a given time frame and in accordance with defined objectives. 		
Learning outcomes of the course unit	Teaching and learning methods	Assessment methods
By the end of the course, the student will be able to understand and explain the main theoretical approaches to the emergence and evolution of human language, including biological, cognitive, and cultural perspectives.	Lectures, guided discussion, analysis during seminars.	Final examination, discussion during seminars.
The student will be able to use and explain key linguistic concepts related to symbolic reference, the emergence of grammatical structure, and language change.	Lectures, problem-based learning, analysis during seminars.	Final examination, creative task, discussion during seminars.

Students will be able to explain how cultural traditions and social institutions influence processes of language change, including standardisation, language policy, and language revival.	Lectures, guided discussion, analysis during seminars.	Final examination, discussion during seminars.
Students will be familiar with contemporary issues related to artificial intelligence, including machine language production and questions of meaning in artificial systems.	Lectures, guided discussion, seminar activities.	Final examination, discussion during seminars.
The student will have developed general academic competences, including critical thinking, argumentation skills, and time management.	Seminars, independent work, preparation of the creative linguistic task.	Final examination, creative linguistic task, seminar participation.

Content	Contact hours							Individual work: time and assignments	
	Lectures	Tutorials	Seminars	Workshops	Laboratory work	Internship	Contact hours, total	Individual work	Tasks for individual work
1. Approaches to studying the origins of language. Evolution of Humans, biological and cognitive preconditions for language.	6		2				8	16	Study of scholarly literature and preparation for the seminar
2. Theories on the origin of human language. Symbolic reference as the threshold of language. Core properties of human language and comparison with animal communication systems	6		2				8	20	Study of scholarly literature, review of a documentary or podcast, preparation for the seminar
3. From protolanguage to grammar and structured language. Grammaticalisation and the emergence of linguistic categories. Language acquisition and re-emergence in children and sign languages.	6		2				8	24	Study of scholarly literature, review of a documentary or podcast, preparation for the seminar
4. Language change in modern societies: standard languages, writing, language death and revival. Language production in artificial intelligence and questions of meaning in artificial systems.	4		2				6	20	Study of scholarly literature and preparation for the seminar
5. Preparation for and completion of the final examination	2						2	11	
Total							32	91	

Assessment strategy	Weight %	Deadline	Assessment criteria
Final open-book exam in essay format, assessing understanding and the ability to synthesize course material.	60 %	At the end of the semester	6 points – excellent understanding of course concepts; clear and well-structured argument; correct and consistent use of terminology; ability to synthesize ideas from different parts of the course 5 points – very good understanding of the main concepts; generally clear argument; minor inaccuracies or omissions 4 points – good understanding of basic concepts; limited synthesis; some inaccuracies or unclear explanations 3 points – sufficient understanding of the course material; descriptive rather than analytical; weak structure or unclear use of terminology 2 points – limited understanding; major gaps in knowledge;

			poor argumentation 1 point – minimal understanding; very fragmented or incorrect answer 0 points – no relevant answer or exam not submitted
A creative linguistic task in which students analyse or propose a plausible grammaticalisation pathway using concepts introduced in the course	20 %	By the final lecture	2 points – well-structured and plausible analysis; clear stages of grammaticalisation; correct and confident use of course concepts; convincing justification. 1.5 points – generally plausible analysis; stages of grammaticalisation mostly clear but partially underdeveloped; minor conceptual or explanatory issues. 1 point – weak or unclear analysis; limited or imprecise use of course concepts; implausible or poorly justified grammaticalisation pathway. 0.5 points – task submitted but largely inadequate; minimal engagement with the assignment; analysis largely missing, incorrect, or unjustified. 0 points – task not submitted or does not address the assignment.
Active participation in seminars	20 %	During the semester	2 point – active participation in three or four seminars 1 point – active participation in two seminars 0 points – participation in fewer than two seminars

Author (-s)	Publishing year	Title	Issue of a periodical or volume of a publication	Publishing house or web link
Required reading				
Pleyer, Michael, Stefan Hartmann	2024	<i>Cognitive Linguistics and Language Evolution</i>		Cambridge University Press
Tallerman, M., K. R. Gibson (eds.)	2012	The Oxford Handbook of Language Evolution, p. 39-45, 96-101, 120-175, 216-223, 239-249, 258-281, 346-351, 370-386, 442-454, 479-492, 512-527, 606-611.		Oxford University Press
Bickerton, D.	2007	Language evolution: A brief guide for linguists	<i>Lingua</i> , Volume 117, Issue 3, Pages 510-526	Elsevier
Smith, J. M., E. Szathmary	2009 (1999)	<i>The Origins of Life: from the Birth of Life to the Origins of Language</i> , pages 129-161.		Oxford University Press
Botha, R., Ch. Knight (eds.)	2009	<i>The Prehistory of Language</i> , pages 12-35, 181-200.		Oxford University Press
Required readings and media (such as documentaries and podcasts) assigned by the instructor.				
Recommended reading				
Beekman, M.	2025	<i>The Origin of Language: How We Learned to Speak and Why</i>		Simon & Schuster
Lieven, E.	2006	Language Development: Overview in <i>Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics</i>		Elsevier
de Cillia, R., B. Busch	2006	Language Policies: Policies on Language		Elsevier

		in Europe in: <i>Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics</i> . Pages 575-583.		
Allott, R.	1989	The origin of language: a general problem in <i>Studies in Language Origins</i> , vol. 1.		<u>John Benjamins Publishing Company</u>

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