



Área Académica de Humanidades

# Language as a system

General Information

## General information

---

This course is composed by four units dedicated to the elements constituting the language system. The first unit introduces sounds, their nature and some of their features. In the second unit we will be working with words and their meanings, as well as phrases. For unit three, you will deal with phrases, sentences and structures in general. And finally, in unit four, all these elements will come together to form discourse, which can be spoken or written, and can be found in a diversity of contexts with specific functions. The topics will be treated not in too much depth, but there will be a lot of reflection going on.

- **Rational**

Language is part of our everyday lives. We use it at all times in different ways, we boast about being the only race on earth with such an elaborated language form, but... have you ever asked yourself what language is? This might seem a silly question at first sight, but just try to give a thorough definition of language.

To begin with, there are not only many different languages around the world, but also several different types of languages within the same community. The main purpose of any language, though, is to communicate, and communication is one of the most important issues for the human race.

Given its importance, it is worth dedicating a course to the concept of 'language', but to cover all languages and all of its forms in a single course is simply too ambitious. Our context for this specific course is that of non-native speakers of English who are already, or want to become, English teachers. Speaking the language is one thing, teaching the language is quite another.

It is necessary for an English teacher not only to use the language efficiently (English, of course), but also to understand the elements that constitute it. This can certainly benefit us with a more proficient use of the language, but it also provides us with the necessary understanding of the nature of a language to teach it efficiently.

Therefore, we will focus on language as a system. This system is built by different components which go from really short to quite long and complex units: sounds and letters turn into words, words into phrases and sentences, and sentences into discourse. This is a simple way to see the system, and hopefully to understand it. And remember, if you understand it, then... you got it!!!

- **Performance objectives**

Students will be able to:

- identify some of the characteristics that sounds provide the language with.
- broadly understand the nature of words and their meanings.
- identify and broadly analyse some elements in sentences, in both spoken and written texts.
- define grammar according to different perspectives.
- identify the main differences between spoken and written texts.
- recognize different types of discourse and their functions.
- identify the elements of the language system taking part in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.

- **Methodology**

As this is a Distance teaching Program, students are expected to develop a high degree of autonomy. Reflection will be an essential element throughout the course, along with constant communication with other students, and sometimes with the facilitator, to share the outcomes of all this reflection.

Reading the course material is definitely another necessary activity in order to obtain more input for reflection, but it will not be passive reading. Activities will tend to be dynamic and interactive, in order to make students feel at ease with the course and to create a good learning environment. Students will have to do the activities indicated for each week within the deadline, and upload the ones marked as 'portfolio' activities on the corresponding activity section in Eminus to be revised by the facilitator. Many of this course activities are merely a general overview of the topics, and students will only be making their best guess. Do not worry if you don't get the correct answers on the first, second or even third try. The idea of doing the activities is to make you reflect as you are doing them, and also once you can check the correct answers, by analysing why they are so.

If you are having problems to grasp any issue, you can always post your questions and comments in the corresponding forum (LAS – Questions and comments); but, of course, it is much better if you first try looking into other sources related to the topics you are having difficulties with, and whenever you think something is useful, please share it in the same forum. Everybody will benefit from this.

Readings and reflections will eventually end up in critical discussions on a specific issue dealt during the course : the forums. In these forums, you are expected to post your main participation by Friday every week at the latest to be taken into account for evaluation, and reply to your e-mates by Sunday. After that, forums are closed for participation of any kind, but remain open for consultation. This is important because students will also have to write 2 short essays during the course about their insights on the corresponding topics, and a final essay about their own general perspectives of the relation between the topics in each unit and the language aspects: pronunciation, lexis and grammar, and the usefulness of these issues in their lives as teachers or future teachers.

### • Self-evaluation and Evaluation

You'll see that most of the activities will be self-assessed, as you'll have access to the correct answers once you have provided yours, but there are some activities actually called Self-evaluation in Units 1, 2 and 3. These are a sort of recapitulation of the contents that have been covered. All the previous activities are not part of the evaluation, but they are obviously of paramount importance for actual learning to take place, and essential to participate in forum discussions and write your essays, which are part of the evaluation.

The activities denominated as PORTFOLIO will constitute 20% of your grade. The portfolio activities for each unit have a different percentage, since the number of activities in every unit varies, as well as its complexity (Unit 1 – 3%, Unit 2 – 7%, Unit 3 – 4%, and Unit 4 – 6%). Remember you need to upload them in the corresponding activity section within the deadlines indicated, since these sections are closed after such deadlines. Forum participation will be assessed in terms of the number and quality of your interventions, constituting 20% of your grade. Remember that your main participation should be posted by Friday every week to be taken into consideration. Replies are as important as main participations, so even if you did not post your main participation within the deadline, you still have a couple of days to reply to your e-mates.

You will need to write 2 short essays (one for units 1 and 2, and another for units 3 and 4), which will constitute 30% of your grade. The top grade for each essay will be 10 points, and they will be evaluated under the following criteria: content (4 points), organization (4 points), language (1 point), and format (1 point). This means that the maximum number of points that can be obtained is 20 points, which equals the 30% of your grade (10 points – 15%). There will be deadlines established to hand in these essays, and there will be no extensions.

You will also need to write a final essay about your insights regarding all the units, which will be evaluated under the same criteria as the short essays, constituting 30% of your grade. This means that the maximum 10 points that can be obtained with the final essay equal the 30% of your grade. There will also be a deadline to hand in this essay, and there will be no extension.

<b>Forum participation</b>			<b>20%</b>
<b>Portfolio activities</b>	<b>Unit 1</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>20%</b>
	<b>Unit 2</b>	<b>7%</b>	
	<b>Unit 3</b>	<b>4%</b>	
	<b>Unit 4</b>	<b>6%</b>	
<b>Short essays</b>			<b>30%</b>
<b>Final Essay</b>			<b>30%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>100%</b>