

Attention!

This is a representative syllabus. The syllabus for the course you are enrolled in will likely be different.

Please refer to your instructor's syllabus for more information on specific requirements for a given semester.

NELC 5111 - Comparative Semitic Linguistics

I. Course Description: The Semitic languages constitute a discrete corpus of generally unified linguistic data within originally clearly defined geographical boundaries (with some important exceptions that result from imperial and colonial expansion): from the Arabian Peninsula in the south to the upper Tigris-Euphrates River Valley in the north, from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the Zagros Mountains and the Persian Gulf in the east, along with Ethiopia in East Africa. This course will investigate the distinctive features of the Semitic languages as a whole and with respect to the individual languages, with particular attention to contemporary problems associated with the comparative analysis of the data that these languages provide.

The aim of this course is to familiarize the student with the general issues associated with Comparative Semitic Linguistics, the current issues of comparison, the possibilities and nature of linguistic reconstruction, and the most important bibliography. Students are expected to have some acquaintance with at least one Semitic language, although in the case of advanced students of linguistics, exceptions can be made. This course will provide an opportunity to open a window onto other languages not commonly studied in our department (Epigraphic South Arabian, Modern South Arabian, Ethiopic languages, etc.), as well as onto the more general picture of the Afroasiatic languages.

II. Objectives: By the end of the quarter, students will be able to identify and evaluate 1) the essential elements that characterize the Semitic languages, 2) how these elements have developed in each of the major languages, 3) the key problems associated with the reconstruction of Proto-Semitic, 4) proposed solutions to these problems, and 5) the tools by which such problems can be investigated.

III. Achieving the objectives:

- 1) Class-room discussion.
- 2) Daily readings.
- 3) Daily written assignments.

IV. Measuring achievement of the objectives:

- 1) Quizzes and assignments – 25%
- 2) Term paper (due Tuesday, November 24) – 25%
- 2) Take-home Midterm Due (Tuesday, October 13) – 25%
- 3) Take-home Final Due (Tuesday, December 8 11:10) – 25%.

Quizzes will be given periodically when appropriate, graded on a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 is an A (all correct), 9 is a B (one item wrong), 8 is a C (two items wrong), etc. A student receives a zero if the quiz is not taken. The quizzes will be based on the readings assigned for that day. The purpose of the quizzes is to make sure the student is doing the assigned reading; and they are designed neither to be picky nor to focus on minor details. If you read the material carefully and answer questions provided in study guides, there is no reason why all your quizzes should not be perfect A's.

Assignments will be varied and dependent upon the material that needs to be covered. They will be graded in the same way that quizzes will be graded.

The Term Paper will be written on a topic chosen by the student in consultation with the professor. The student may choose any topic related to a specific Semitic language or to any phenomenon shared by a number of Semitic languages. The point of the paper is to provide the student the opportunity to use the resources introduced in the class for solving problems associated with linguistic phenomena in the Semitic language family. It is not necessary that the student come up with any new observations or discoveries in this paper, although disciplined creativity is certainly encouraged. The paper can be simply a survey of options available on the chosen topic, with appropriate evaluations by the student. The paper's length will be determined by the nature of the topic selected.

V. Class Conduct. **Late assignments** or quizzes are not accepted. Because of inevitable circumstances beyond the student's control, 10% of all quizzes and assignments will be dropped. This means that for those who faithfully submit all quizzes and assignments, 10% of their work with the lowest grades will be dropped.

Absence: the student is responsible for all information and materials and class discussion that occur, even in his or her absence. This syllabus is subject to modification as posted on Carmen, and attention will be drawn to any modifications. The absent student must make arrangements with other class members to obtain notes or to be apprised of class developments or changes when absent. **Plagiarism** is not tolerated, and the student is reminded to read about academic misconduct in the student handbook. **Students with disabilities** should be registered with Student Life Disability Services (SLDS) and should alert the professor in a timely fashion if special arrangements are to be made. If you have any questions about this process, please contact Disability Services in room 150 Pomerene Hall, 614-292-3307, slds@osu.edu.

VI. E-Mail: If you have not received an e-mail message from the professor by the end of the 1st week indicating that he has your e-mail address, send your email address to the professor lest you not be in touch with a source of communication of possible import for the class.

VII. Required materials:

All materials required for the course will be 1) made available by the professor in digital format, 2) available in hard copy in the library, or 3) accessible on the internet. There are quite a number of books that provide material essential for the course, but all have their drawbacks, and indeed, one of the benefits of the course will hopefully be that the students will discover the relative value of various texts that are available.

For example, the commonly used volume edited by Sabatino Moscati, *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages: Phonology and Morphology* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1969; OSU = PJ 3021 M 6 1969) is a handy reference tool but is superficial for serious work.

The classic work by Carl Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen*. Berlin: Reuther & Reichard; New York: Lemcke & Buechner, 1908-13; at OSU = PJ 3021 B 86) has not been translated into English even though it remains a valuable source of information for those who know German. It can be downloaded for free from Google books. Brockelmann's condensed work, *Kurzgefasste vergleichende Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen: Elemente der Laut- und Formenlehre*. Berlin: Reuther & Reichard; New York:

Lemcke & Buechner, 1908; at OSU = PJ3021 .B865) is also available as a free download from google books. Again the drawback to this volume is that it is accessible only for those who know German.

Patrick Bennett's *Comparative Semitic Linguistics: A Manual* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1998; OSU = PJ3021 .B36 1998 in the JDC Reading Room Reference) is a helpful compilation of data that is weak on analysis.

I. M. Diakonoff's original essay, *Semito-Hamitic Languages: An Essay in Classification* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), along with his later revision, *Afrasian Languages* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988; OSU = PJ 992 D 51 1988), provides an essential and more comprehensive view of the Semitic picture in the context of the larger group of the Afrasian languages of which it is a part.

The student will be introduced to these and other works that are important tools for the investigation of linguistic phenomena in the arena of the Semitic languages, for there is no one single source to which one may turn. Accessing these works and understanding their relative value will be one of the objectives of the course (see above under "Objectives").

VIII. Working Schedule (subject to revision):

The following general schedule is designed to provide an overview of the course:

Weeks One-Four Introduction to the study of the Semitic languages; the Semitic languages within the context of the Afrasian group; the phonetic inventory of the Semitic languages.

Weeks Five-Seven The pronominal system.

Weeks Eight-Nine The nominal system

Weeks Ten-Twelve The verbal system

Weeks Thirteen-Fifteen Special Problems