

# Person, Number, and the Architecture of Grammar

## *PART ZERO: Course Overview*

Omer Preminger, University of Maryland

LOT 2018, Groningen

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**General course information**

- It assumes basic familiarity with the generative approach to linguistics
    - as well as some basic concepts in syntax
  - **That said: please don't assume that if you don't understand something, it's your fault**
  - Part of what I want to do here is develop a “feel” for the level of background you have as we go
- ⇒ So I'd like you to ask anything you don't understand —  
     (this includes any terms I use that you might not be familiar with)  
 — and let me be the one who decides if it's “required background” or its something I'd like to explain in class.

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**General course information**

- Handouts: available after each class, at:  
<https://omer.lingsite.org/lot-2018/>



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**What this course is about**

- This course is about the categories of **PERSON** and **NUMBER** in grammar
- There is a somewhat puzzling tradition —  
     (puzzling in the context of the rest of generative linguistics, at least)  
 — of treating PERSON and NUMBER as *pan-modular linguistic primitives*
  - that is, it is taken for granted that:
    - there exist primitive categories PERSON and NUMBER
    - and, furthermore, these categories align across morphology, syntax, and semantics

**What this course is about**

- My primary goal in this course is to get you to question this assumption
  - here, and in any subsequent course/talk/paper that you hear/read
- In the course of this week, we'll examine several case studies that shed light on these issues
  - and we will see that in some cases, the conventional wisdom is quite radically wrong

**A bit of terminology**

- I'm going to be using the term  $\varphi$ -features
  - this term, which I think originates with Chomsky (1995:31), is a (quasi-)mnemonic for "formal features"
- It is more commonly used, though, as shorthand for:
  - **PERSON, NUMBER, and GENDER(/NOUN-CLASS)** features in syntax
- But, given what we just said, this is actually not a coherent concept...!
  - PERSON, NUMBER, and GENDER(/NOUN-CLASS) are semantic notions
  - the claim that these categories map straightforwardly onto syntax is a *hypothesis*
    - and, we will see, a false one at that

**A bit of terminology**

⇒ When I use the term, here's what I mean:

 **$\varphi$ -features**

The set of syntactic features that, at the LF interface, trigger interpretations that are exclusively related to PERSON, NUMBER, and GENDER(/NOUN-CLASS).

- With that in mind...
  - let's start with some basics on the syntax of  $\varphi$ -features