

SYLLABUS

OLLI Class: **Browsing Further into the Language Universe**
Instructor: **Art Fournier (foursite@cox.net)**

Merrill Gardens
Wednesdays 10:00 AM
9/18/2019 - 11/20/2019

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Linguistics – the science of language – is a vast field; in this class we will be “browsing” within that field, selecting topics that are intrinsically interesting, often surprising, and always accessible to the curious layman. Sessions will include video presentations from Great Courses and from various internet sources; the instructor will supplement these with discussions, whiteboard illustrations, printed handouts, and the occasional anecdote. Class participation is encouraged. Specific topics may be determined by time restrictions and students’ interests, but certain themes will predominate:

- ▶ **Just what is it that linguists study, and how do they go about it? Compare descriptive (how people speak) versus prescriptive (how people should speak) approaches to the subject. Did our elementary school teachers mislead us?**
- ▶ **English has idiosyncrasies that native speakers master without being aware of them, but that linguists delight in uncovering; your own language is not as boring as you perhaps thought it was.**
- ▶ **Sampling foreign languages – both familiar and exotic – will reveal strange and wonderful aspects of speech and grammar which are (of course!) perfectly normal to their speakers.**
- ▶ **Why do almost all major languages contain dialects? What distinguishes a “dialect” from a language?**
- ▶ **Some languages have unusual origins: reconstructed by necessity from other languages (creoles,) or consciously invented either for fun (such as Klingon) or with serious intent (such as Esperanto.)**
- ▶ **Is the capacity for language pre-wired in our brains, or totally cultural? Does our language control the way we think? These issues remain contentious issues within the field.**

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NOTE: This class repeats some of the material from similar classes held previously on the Paradise campus, but roughly half of the presentations will be new even to those who attended those classes.