Course Overview and Objectives:

Psychologists, linguists, and scholars from other academic disciplines study language and behavior in different ways. Clearly, there is no one “right” way to think about this topic. Instead, researchers use a variety of approaches and methods to understand language and behavior. In this course, we will take a cognitive-experimental approach to the psychology of language. That means that we will favor theories that can be tested scientifically, and that we will be reading and talking about controlled laboratory experiments as much as we will be reading about and discussing theories.

This course has four primary objectives: 1) to expose you to a range of theory and research in language comprehension that includes work from a variety disciplines; 2) to provide a forum in which you and your peers will discuss the readings in a relaxed yet analytical and rigorous fashion that will lead to a mastery of current theories and research methods; 3) to give you the opportunity to develop and hone your presentation skills; and 4) to give you the opportunity to use your knowledge of the relevant literature and experimental methodology to design an original study that will be realized in the form of a research proposal. You will make a poster presentation of an article central to your proposal midway through the semester, and you will present your full proposal at the end of the semester.

This syllabus is preliminary. Readings and assignments are subject to change.

Course Requirements

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Points</th>
<th>Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; Participation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>every class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Class Presentation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>TBD/day of class</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Critical Reader” Summaries</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>TBD/day before class</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 section summaries presented in class</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>TBD/day of class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poster Presentation of Article Relevant to Final Project</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>midterm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poster Presentation of Proposed Research</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>last class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Proposal</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>end of term</td>
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Grading

Grades will be assigned based on the percentage of available points:

- A+ 92-100%
- A 90-91%
- A- 88-89%
- B+ 82-87%
- B 80-81%
- B- 78-79%
- C+ 72-77%
- C 70-71%
- C- 68-79%
- D+ 62-67%
- D 60-61%
- D- <60%
- NC <60%
Attendance and Participation
10 pts  Attend all classes
         Initiate contributions multiple times during each class period
         Contributions are relevant and insightful
         Listen attentively when others present
5 pts   No more than one excused absence
         Initiate contributions once during each class period
         Contributions are usually, but not always, relevant and insightful
         Listen attentively when others present
0 pts   More than one unexcused absence
         Initiate contributions infrequently
         Contributions are not relevant or informative
         Not consistently attentive

Classroom Roles
The Presenter’s job can be defined in two ways: 1) Whole paper presentation; and 2) section presentation.

The goal of the whole paper presentation is to provide a cogent presentation of a reading. The presentation should be understandable to an interested, general audience that has not read the article. Presentations should be formalized as either a “Powerpoint” presentation or a structured handout.

Key points for whole paper presentations:
- Introduce theoretical motivation, research questions/predictions, and prior results.
- Describe method and design: give examples of stimuli, if possible, before or while you describe them in abstract terms; describe assumptions.
- Describe results: explain why and how results relate to research question, make sure to “unpack” the results for a general audience (e.g., if key results are in tabular form in the article, consider converting them to a graph so that the effects are more transparent).
- Describe the authors’ conclusions, alternative interpretations, and the paper’s contributions.

The goal of the section presentation is to walk the group step by step through their assigned section of the article. The most important job of the presenter is to figure out which details embedded in their section are important, and which are less important. You will present the important content and skip over the less crucial details. Above all, do not simply read verbatim from the article (or your verbatim notes of the article)! There may be definitions, or technical terms that, of course, you’ll want to present exactly as they appear in the article. The point of the assignment is for you to read and understand the article deeply, especially the section that has been assigned to you. Only then will you be able to easily identify what are the important bits that deserve presenting. It is the presenter’s job to answer any questions about that section that come up. The section presenter will, of course, have read the entire article thoroughly; they will be expected to have a particularly fine-grained understanding of the assigned section.

The Discussion Leaders’ job is to engage the class in thoughtful discussion of the research presented. There will be discussion leader for each reading. Each discussion leader will read the paper carefully and will submit a brief synopsis together with a set of discussion questions of the
paper on Moodle the day before class.

Key points for synopses:

- Describe the major contributions of the paper.
- Summarize the design (i.e., What were the dependent and independent variables? How were independent variables operationalized? How were dependent variables measured?)
- Describe the researchers’ assumptions (e.g., “reaction time reflects accessibility of information from memory”) and their predictions
- Pose one question about lit review, methods, or results section.
- Describe how the results relate to previous research that we have covered.

Key points for discussion questions:

- Avoid closed (e.g., yes/no) questions
- Remember that the discussants have not read the paper; but they have just seen a great presentation.
- The goal is to get classmates to engage as deeply as possible with the material.
- Avoid the temptation to focus too much discussion on opinion. (e.g., Weak: “What do you think of Grice’s proposal?” Stronger: “Which parts of Grice’s proposal fit conversational behavior, and which seem problematic, and why?”)
- Avoid the temptation to answer your own discussion questions. It’s the discussants’ job to respond to your prompts.

Final Project and Poster Presentations

The final project is to propose a novel experiment, in the form of a grant proposal, which will help to answer a question related to language behavior. This is an opportunity to study a topic that is of particular interest to you. This is also an opportunity to develop and refine your research/design skills and to practice scientific communication. An important consequence of this project being a grant proposal is that the research must be interesting and important to people other than yourself. Specifically, the research you propose should have the potential to advance current research and be useful to other scholars. Therefore, as you identify and develop your research ideas we will be mindful of how “the reviewers” will react to various elements of your proposal. “The reviewers” are (hypothetical) grant reviewers at large government agencies like the NSF (National Science Foundation) and the NIH (National Institutes of Health) who must decide which research projects will likely be the most valuable to the scientific community. Only a fraction of grant proposals are funded. The evaluation of your final paper will in part be determined by how fundable (i.e., potentially valuable to the field) the proposed research is. I will serve as your research colleague throughout the semester until you turn in your paper. Then I become a grant reviewer. Along the way, you will need to complete the following:

- Description of Interest Area & List of 3 Key Papers 9/23
- Preliminary Research Question / Paper for Poster Presentation 10/7
- Poster Presentation of a Published Article Relevant to Final Project 10/14
- Draft of Methods 11/4
- Draft of Introduction (literature review) 11/11
- Draft of Results / Discussion 11/18
- Poster Presentation of Proposed Research 12/9
- Final Research Proposal 12/16
Outline of the Topic Schedule (subject to change), and Deadlines:

9/2: Introduction to the course and some background to language research

9/9: Background to language research

9/16: The Importance of Cooperation in Discourse

9/23: Discourse as a Collaborative Process/The role of Common Ground in Discourse
   Description of Interest Area & List of 3 Key Papers

9/30: Inferences During Reading

10/7: Video Night: “Genie: The Wild Child”; “Acquiring the Human Language”
   Preliminary Research Question / Paper for Poster Presentation

10/14: Poster Presentations
   Research Topic approved

Fall Break!

10/28: Language Acquisition

11/4: Bilingualism
   1st draft of Method section due

11/11: Metaphor and Sarcasm
   1st draft of Introduction (literature review)

11/18: Learning from Texts/Individual Differences in Reading
   1st draft of Results / Discussion sections due

12/2: Mixed Topics

12/9: Poster Party

Final paper Due Wednesday, December 16
**Tentative Reading List:**

**Background Reading**


**The Importance of Cooperation in Discourse**


**Discourse as a Collaborative Process / The Role of Common Ground in Discourse**


**Inferences During Reading: The Minimalist Hypothesis and Reactions to it.**


**Language Acquisition**


**Bilingualism**


**Metaphor and Sarcasm**


Learning from Texts and Individual Differences in Reading


Mixed Topics of Interest


