

Psychology 3240/Modern Languages 3240: The Psychology of Language
Spring 2019

Class meetings: M 14:00-16:50, L1060
Office: C876, University Hall
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Course description: This course provides an introduction to psycholinguistics and to some of the important issues in the study of language processing and language acquisition. Topics will include: Where did human languages originate and how do they evolve over time? How does the human mind process sounds, words, and sentences? How do children learn language? What is the biological and social basis for language?

Course objectives: This course will acquaint you with the primary theoretical and experimental issues involved in the study of natural language and the brain, and will offer you the opportunities to learn how to evaluate and discuss these issues in a critical and coherent manner. It will also enhance your awareness of the importance of human language and your understanding of human beings as language speakers.

Textbook:

[*Language in Mind*](#) by Julie Sedivy (2019) 2nd Edition. Oxford University Press.

Coursework and grading:

In-class activities	15 %
Presentations	20 %
Midterm exam	25 %
Final exam	40 %
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Total	100 %

Grading scale:

A+	93 – 100	B+	83 – 86.9	C+	73 – 76.9	D+	63 – 66.9	F	0 – 59.9
A	90 – 92.9	B	80 – 82.9	C	70 – 72.9	D	60 – 62.9		
A-	87 – 89.9	B-	77 – 79.9	C-	67 – 69.9				

Course Requirements:

Readings: Readings include both the textbook and other relevant journal articles. Since the major format of this class is in-class discussion of these readings, it is crucial for you to complete assigned readings ahead of time for each class. You should also bring the textbook and other supplementary readings to class every day as handy references.

In-class Activities: There will be a number of in-class activities throughout the semester, which count 15% towards your final grade. In-class activities can only be completed within class time. The whole class will be divided into groups of 5 to 7 students. For each in-class activity, each group only hands in one answer sheet for grading. Only those students who attend classes and contribute to the completion of

the answer sheet get credits. Missing activity can only be made up with advance notice accompanied by appropriate/ official documentation.

Group presentation on selected articles: Each student will participate in a group presentation that involves reading of a particular article and then presenting it to the class. The articles are listed on the weekly schedule. In addition, your initiative is encouraged: Any supplementary material relevant to your presentation will be welcomed. You are expected to choose an article during the first class and no later by the second week of the class. A detailed description of how to present the articles will be discussed in class. Evaluation will be based on the presentation content, organization, clarity, timing, etc. It is important to note: Failure to show up on your scheduled presentation date will result in a penalty of 20% of your final grade.

The language project: It is hard to reflect on your own language use because the whole language processing procedure is so integrated, automatic, and seemingly transparent. In order to bring home many concepts that we learn in class, you are required to complete a language project by interviewing a native speaker of a language other than English. You will be assigned to work in a group of 5-6 (the grouping will be decided by the instructor after the last add/drop day). The interviews can be quite informal and should focus exclusively on the language aspect, including levels in sounds, words, sentences, and practical use of the language. No personal information should be collected, although a consent form is still required. Pay attention to the peculiarities of the language of interest and use those special features as the basis of proposing psycholinguistic experiments for your project. You and your team members will be asked to present your project at the end the semester for about 15 minutes (10%). For the sake of fairness, for both presentations, every group member will rate the relative contributions of each other, including him/herself, which should add up to 100%. Your final presentation grade will be weighted by the averaged ratings.

Exams: There will be two exams for this course, and both exams will be computer administered via Moodle at the Testing Center (University Hall, Room **B700**). More information regarding the online exam procedure can be obtained from the link: <http://www.uleth.ca/teachingcentre/testing-centre>. The exam questions will test things discussed in class, including reading materials, lectures, and in-class activities. Make-up exams will only be given with a valid medical note or other official documentation.

Quizzes: You may be given informal quizzes from time to time throughout the semester. These quizzes are designed to test your understanding of the critical course materials covered in lectures or readings. Quizzes will NOT be graded and therefore are NOT counted towards your final grade.

Course website: All course materials will be posted to Moodle. You can log on to Moodle course using your U of L computer account.

Students with Special Needs: If you have any special needs that require accommodation, it is your responsibility to contact Counseling Services to acquire an official letter concerning your situation. Accommodations will only be given upon receiving the official notification from that office.

Tentative weekly schedule

Month	Date	Topic	Reading
Jan	7	Introduction	Chap 1
	14	Linguistic principles and Psychological mechanisms	Chap 2.1, 2.3 Nettle (1995); Boutla (2004)
	21	Origins of human language	Chap 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 Atkinson (2011); Lipkind et al. (2013)
	28	Language and the brain	Chap 3
Feb	4	Language acquisition: Learning sound patterns and words	Chap 4 & 5
	11	Midterm (Feb 11-14)	No class. Exam takes place in the testing center.
	18	Reading week	
	25	Language acquisition: Learning words and the structure of sentences	Chap 5 & 6 MacNeilage (2000); Imai (2008)
Mar	4	Sound and word recognition	Chap 7; Gupta (2005); McMurray (2002)
	11	Understanding sentence structure and meaning	Chap 8, 9 Matlock (2005); Siok (2004)
	18	Speech production: from planning to articulation	Chap 9, 10, 11 Houde (1998); Frisch (2002)
	25	Language and culture	Chap 12 Helmuth (2001); Gordon (2004)
Apr	1	Language project presentation Final exam (Apr 2-5)	Exam takes place in the testing center.

Reading list:

- Atkinson, Q. D. (2011). Phonemic diversity supports a serial founder effect model of language expansion from Africa. *Science*, 332, 346-349.
- Boutla, M., Supalla, T., Newport, E. L., & Bavelier, D. (2004). Short-term memory span: insights from sign language. *Nature (Neuroscience)*, 7(9), 997-1002.
- Frisch, S. A., & Wright, R. (2002). The phonetics of phonological speech errors: An acoustic analysis of slips of the tongue. *Journal of Phonetics*, 30, 139-162.
- Gordon, P. (2004). Numerical cognition without words: evidence from Amazonia. *Science*, 306, 496-499.
- Gupta, P. (2005). Primacy and recency in nonword repetition. *Memory*, 13(3/4), 318-324.
- Helmuth, L. (2001). Same brains, different languages. *Science*, 291, 2064-2065.
- Houde, J. F., & Jordan, M. I. (1998). Sensorimotor adaptation in speech production. *Science*, 279, 1213-1215.
- Imai, M., Kita, S., Nagumo, M., & Okada, H. (2008). Sound symbolism facilitates early verb learning. *Cognition*, 109, 54-65.
- Lipkind, D. et al. (2013) Stepwise acquisition of vocal combinatorial capacity in songbirds and human infants. *Nature*, 498:104-108.
- MacNeilage, P. F., & Davis, B. L. (2000). On the origin of internal structure of word forms. *Science*, 288, 527-530.

- Matlock, T., Ramscar, M., & Boroditsky, L. (2005). On the experimental link between spatial and temporal language. *Cognitive Science*, 29, 655-664.
- McMurray, B., Tanenhaus, M. K., & Aslin, R. N. (2002). Gradient effects of within-category phonetic variation on lexical access. *Cognition*, 86, B33-B42.
- Nettle, D. (1995) Segmental inventory size, word length, and communicative efficiency. *Linguistics*, 33, 359-367.
- Siok, W. T., Perfetti, C. A., Jin, Z., & Tan, L. H. (2004). Biological abnormality of impaired reading is constrained by culture. *Nature*, 431, 71-76.