

PSYCHOLOGY 440: Winter 2007

Instructor: Meredith Meyer (398 Straub, 346-4947)
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Office hours: W 2:00-3:00, F 10:00-11:00

Required Reading:

There is no required text for this course. Articles will be available on blackboard as .pdfs.

Overview:

Psycholinguistics (aka the psychology of language) falls at the intersection of many different fields, including linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, artificial intelligence, neuroscience, communication disorders, genetics, and of course, psychology. Our goal in this course is to use the knowledge and methods unique to each of these fields to gain a broader as well as deeper understanding of the abilities that underlie human language. This course emphasizes commonalities that underlie human languages everywhere, and we will focus on what these commonalities tell us about the basic nature of the human language-making capacity. Along the way we will be examining questions like the following:

- Who has language, and what is so great about it?
- How different are languages really, and what might be universal about language?
- What is it like to live without language?
- To what extent is language a cultural phenomenon, and to what extent is culture a linguistic phenomenon?
- What about language is special, and what can be accounted for in terms of other things we know about the human mind and brain?
- What about language is “instinct,” and what is learned?
- Why does it seem to be more difficult to acquire a high degree of fluency in a language if you begin in adulthood rather than childhood?
- If language is lost – due to accident, illness, or other trauma – to what extent can it be regained?
- How do infants make a start at language learning, and how crucial a role do adults play in fostering infants’ language acquisition?

The overarching goal motivating the course is that you will come away with a body of knowledge about techniques for investigating language and a new appreciation for the centrality of language to human social and cognitive functioning. My hope is that you will find the material in this course to be both fascinating and challenging.

Course Requirements:

Grades for the course will be based on 1) three in-class exams (each worth 15% of the overall mark, 45% in all) , 2) five reading responses (each worth 4% of the overall mark, 20% in all) and (3) a group-based research project (35% of the final grade) in which you analyze either a pooled set of adult naturalistic speech samples that you collect yourselves OR an available database of child speech samples that is accessible online. You will need to formulate a research question and hypotheses as well as perform a background literature search as part of this project. The final written product will take the form of an APA-style research paper.

Three in-class exams will account for 45% of your overall grade. The exams will be short essay in format. The exams are designed to help motivate you to keep up with the reading and to consolidate and integrate your growing knowledge about the psychology of language. **ALL EXAMS MUST BE TAKEN TO PASS THE COURSE.** Make-up exams will be allowed only with appropriate documentation (e.g., doctor’s note).

Review questions will be provided to you in advance of the exam. Review sheets will address LECTURE ONLY, although you will also be responsible for understanding material in assigned readings.

****You will be able to bring copies of all assigned readings for reference during the exams. However, you will NOT be able to bring notes from class lectures.****

Reading Responses: It is crucial that you keep up with readings assigned for this class. Readings will be taken from popular press sources, empirical articles, and scholarly reviews and will cover a diverse range of topics. You will need to turn in a total of five 1-2 page (double-spaced) reading responses. Each reading response should cover the assigned readings from one week and should be turned in on the Thursday of that week’s readings. For example, if you choose to respond to the readings from Week 2, you will write a 1-2 page (double-spaced) response to all readings assigned for Week 2, and you will turn in your response in class on Thursday of Week 2.

There are no formal requirements for the content of your responses. One possible format is to summarize the readings briefly in the first paragraph, and then integrate aspects of the reading with material you learned from class lecture or discussion. You might

also think about posing hypothetical future research questions, speculating on what you think you might find if you investigated your questions. A sample reading response (from an entirely different course) is posted on blackboard under Course Documents.

Group-based Research Project.

Along with the other members of your group, you will conduct a study of either child speech or adult speech.

(1) Naturalistic child speech data is available on CHILDES, a database consisting of transcribed speech between adults and children at all stages of language acquisition. If you choose to conduct your study using child speech, have your group make an appointment with me to go over the basics of CHILDES (access, how to search for parts of speech or specific words, how transcriptions are coded, etc.).

(2) Naturalistic adult speech data must be collected and transcribed according to a standard transcription scheme that will be provided to you. You will be transcribing a conversation between two people talking for ten minutes. Once the naturalistic speech transcripts are completed, we will pool them to provide a source of data for the group-based research project. You may also be provided with additional transcripts to help increase the amount of available data. This way, all adult-speech groups will have a sizable pool of data on which to draw for discovering interesting regularities and making inferences about underlying psycholinguistic mechanisms.

The group-based research project will involve joining with other members of your group to design and carry out an investigation of a research question regarding everyday, naturalistic conversation. This project will account for 35% of your overall mark. The goal of this assignment is to encourage you to “go below the surface” of language and think deeply about underlying factors that give rise to, or impinge on, our everyday language functioning. I will provide a set of possible topics that you can consider for your group research project, but do not feel limited by this list. Once your group settles on a research question and a basic course of action, you will need to check them out with me before you conduct your data analyses and literature search. What you will ultimately hand in is an independently-generated, APA-style write-up of the research project.

****All sections of the paper must be independently written, including the Results and References sections.**** The research project write-up is due by 4 p.m. Thursday of Finals Week (March 22) in the main office of the Psychology Department in Straub Hall.

Point break-down for the group-based research project with child data:

Group Hypotheses and Article Summaries: 35%

Paper: 65%

Point break-down for the group-based research project with adult data:

Group Hypotheses and Article Summaries: 20%

Transcript Draft: 5%

Transcript Final: 10%

Paper: 65%

Extra Credit You will have the opportunity to improve your grade by up to 2% by participating in the Human Subjects Pool. Each hour of study=1 credit=1%. You will need to assign the credit to this class (Psych 440) in order to receive extra credit. If you are unfamiliar with how to sign up for studies, please come talk to me. If you have participated in studies before but have forgotten your login information, please contact the human subjects coordinator, Jeff Loucks, at hscoord@uoregon.edu

Rough Timetable of Events and Accompanying Readings

<u>Approximate date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Text Readings</u>
Week 1	Language: What is it? Who has it? What's so special about it?	1/19: no reading due 1/11: Pinker, Carroll (optional: NY Times article optional: Hockett)
Week 2	Sound sense	1/16 Carroll, Catford 1/18 Werker
Week 3	Making meaning	1/23 Carroll, Aitchison 1/25 Murphy or Markman
Weeks 4-5	Structuring meaning	1/30 Pinker, Marcus 2/1 Tomasello; Chomsky, Hauser, & Fitch 2/6 TEST 1 2/8 Saffran, Aslin, & Newport Baldwin
Week 6	Epigenesis	2/13 Kuhl 2/15 Marcus et al., Saffran & Wilson, Gertner, Fisher, & Eisengart
Weeks 7-8	Epigenesis II +Language under special circumstances	2/20 Lidz, Waxman, & Freedman 2/22 Tomasello, responses to LWF 2/27 TEST 2 3/1 TBA (topic: Bilingualism)
Week 9	Language under adverse circumstances	3/6 TBA (topic: Autism and ASL) 3/8 TBA (topic: gender)
Week 10	Language, thought, culture	3/13 Boroditsky, Bowerman & Choi 3/15 TEST 3

TWO IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL NOTES:

Academic Honesty: As a member of the university community you are expected to be honest and forthright in all your academic endeavors. To falsify the results of one's research, to present the words, ideas, data, or work of another as one's own, or to cheat on an examination corrupts the essential process by which knowledge is advanced. All work submitted in this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. For the consequences of academic dishonesty, refer to the Schedule of Classes published quarterly. Violations will be taken seriously and are noted on student disciplinary records. If you are in doubt regarding any aspect of these issues as they pertain to this course, please consult with the instructor before you complete any relevant requirements of the course. (Text adopted here as recommended from the UO web site regarding academic honesty at: <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~conduct>)

Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with the instructor soon. It would be wise to contact Disability Services (164 Oregon Hall, 346-1155). Also please request that the Counselor for Students with Disabilities send a letter verifying your disability. [Counselor for Students with Disabilities: Molly Sirois, 346-3211, 164 Oregon Hall, 346-1073, sirois@uoregon.edu]

