



PSYCHOLOGY 440/540: PSYCHOLINGUISTICS, Spring 2009

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Office hours: Tuesday 1:30-2:30pm, Friday 11am-12pm

GTF: Jeff Loucks (375 Straub, 346-XXX)
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Office hours: Wednesday 10am-12pm

Required Reading:

- 1) Carroll, D. W. (2007). Psychology of language. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Overview:

Psycholinguistics (aka the psychology of language, and not the study of psychotic linguists, as you may have thought) 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. A common misconception is that one learns about the specifics of particular languages in a course on psycholinguistics; for example, how Russian uses different case-endings than German. Instead, 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.

Course Requirements:

Grades for the course will be based on 1) five in-class quizzes (each worth 8% of the overall mark, 40% in all) , 2) collection and transcription of naturalistic speech data (20% of the final grade), and 3) a research project (40% of the final grade) in which you analyze the pooled set of naturalistic speech samples to discover interesting regularities and draw inferences about underlying psycholinguistic mechanisms. Extra credit (to improve your final grade by up to 3%) can be gained through participation in Psychology Department research (via the Psychology Department's human subjects pool) along with a brief description of each study you participated in.

In-class quizzes will take place every other Thursday, beginning the second week of classes. Each exam accounts for 8% of your final grade (40% overall). The quizzes will be primarily short answer in format, but expect some variation in format over the course of the term. The quizzes 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. If you cannot attend class on a given in-class quiz day (and thus miss the quiz), you can make up the quiz either during my, or Jeff Loucks', office hours the following week. Given the sizable number of people involved, it will not be possible to schedule special appointments for makeup quizzes; you will need to attend office hours.

IMPORTANT NOTES regarding makeup exams:

- There will be a one-week "critical period" within which missed exams must be made up or else forfeited.
- As an incentive to complete exams on time, a bonus question will be included on the exam on the day it is scheduled that provides the opportunity to earn extra points. The bonus question will not be available if the exam is taken as a make-up.

Naturalistic speech data will be collected and transcribed according to a standard transcription scheme. The transcript you generate will be worth 20% of your overall mark in the course. This assignment offers you the opportunity to delve into what everyday, conversational language is really like – with all of its oddities described in full detail, rather than winnowed out (as is typical of how we normally capture language in the form of written dialogue). Once the naturalistic speech transcripts are completed, we will pool them to provide a source of data for the group-based research project. This way, all groups will have a sizable pool of data on which to draw for discovering interesting regularities and making inferences about underlying psycholinguistic mechanisms. The transcript is due by 4 p.m. on Thursday, April 30. If errors are detected in your transcription method, you will have the opportunity to correct those errors. The final, corrected version of your transcript is due by 4 p.m. on Thursday, May 14.

The research project will involve designing and carrying out investigation of a research question regarding everyday, naturalistic conversation. This project will account for 40% 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 research project, but do not feel limited by this list. Once you resolve on a research question and a basic course of action, it is a good idea to check them out with me or Jeff Loucks before you launch your data analysis phase. You may team up with another student in the course in conducting the research project if you wish, but if you do so, your write-ups must be carried out independently and you will also be required to explicitly document (in written form) the specific role you played and the work you undertook as a member of the investigative partnership. What you will ultimately hand in is an independently-generated, APA-style write-up of the research project that includes, as an appendix, the documentation

of your particular work on the project (if you were part of a partnership). Note that the paper you turn in will be submitted to SafeAssign, a Blackboard-based tool that helps to ensure that papers follow ethical guidelines, such as avoiding plagiarism. The research project write-up is due by 4 p.m. Monday of Finals Week (June 8) in the main office of the Psychology Department in Straub Hall.

Extra credit to improve your overall grade by up to 3% can be earned by participating in Psychology Department research through the Psychology Department Human Subjects Pool. For each hour of participation you can earn a 1% improvement to your mark as long as you hand in a brief (1-2 page) description of the goals and methodologies of the research for each study you participated in. You can gain information by contacting the coordinator of the Human Subjects Pool, Adam Kramer, by email at hscoord@uoregon.edu. You can also gain additional information by going to the Human Subjects Pool website at <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~hscoord>. The research descriptions are due by 4 p.m. Monday of Finals Week (June 8) in the main office of the Psychology Department in Straub Hall.

Blackboard Website:

We will utilize the Blackboard website to communicate about ongoing events that arise in the course, as well as to make announcements about course-relevant information. I will post powerpoint lecture slides and other course documents, such as this syllabus on. Please check it regularly – every day or two. Also, please see Jeff Loucks if you need assistance getting started with Blackboard.

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?	Chs 1-2
Week 2	Animal communication	Ch 13 (p. 379-392)
Week 3	Sound sense	Ch 4
Weeks 4	Making meaning	Ch 5
Week 5	Structuring meaning	Ch 6
Week 6	Communicating	Chs 7, 8, and 9
Weeks 7-8	Taking an epigenetic perspective on language	Chs 10, 11, and 12
Weeks 9-10	Language, brain, thought, & culture	Chs 13 (p. 354-379) and 14

Dates of Special Significance:

April 9 (Thursday)	In-class quiz #1
April 23 (Thursday)	In-class quiz #2
April 30 (Thursday)	Naturalistic conversation transcript due
May 7 (Thursday)	In-class quiz #3
May 14 (Thursday)	Corrected naturalistic conversation transcript due
May 21 (Thursday)	In-class quiz #4

June 4 (Thursday)	In-class quiz #5
June 8 (Monday)	Research project due
June 8 (Monday)	Extra credit research participation descriptions due

THREE IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL NOTES:

1. Guidelines for Teaching and Learning: The Psychology Department has recently developed guidelines for teaching and learning in Psychology. These guidelines can be accessed at the following web address: <http://psychweb.uoregon.edu/guidelines/>

- Please read these guidelines carefully as they clarify our general expectations and goals for each other in this course.

2. 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. (For more information regarding academic honesty and the student conduct code at the University of Oregon, visit the University's Office of Student Life website at: http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/programs/student_judi_affairs/index.htm).

3. 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, disabsrv@uoregon.edu, <http://ds.uoregon.edu/>). 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]