

Psychology of Language

1 Introduction

Fall 2023
Tues/Thur 5:00-6:15pm

Emma Wing
Drop-in hours: TBD
& by appointment

Introductions

- A little about me
- A little about you

- **IN GROUPS**

- Name
- Major
- Languages that you speak, understand, were exposed to, or started learning
- Why did you choose this course? (you can be honest!)
- What other language courses have you taken?
- What do you think you'll learn in this course?
- What do you hope to learn in this course?



Syllabus

- What is psycholinguistics?
 - Study of unconscious processes that take place as humans use language
 - It's a science that uses experimental methods and theory to understand language acquisition, language comprehension, language production, and how language is represented in the mind and processed in the brain
 - Inherently interdisciplinary: **psychology, linguistics**; but also developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, neurolinguistics, and speech science

Syllabus

- **Course Objectives**

- Name the language subsystems and describe 1+ thing about their development
- Describe a kind of experiment used to study language and its strengths and limitations
- Name 2+ differences and similarities between language comprehension and production
- Explain the relevance of the distinction between competence and performance
- Describe how 1+ kind of computational model for language works
- Name a language disorder, how it is acquired, and what it disrupts
- Use experimental evidence to think critically about theoretical debates in the field

Syllabus

- **Modality:**
 - in person
 - all content will be posted to HuskyCT
- **Texts and readings**
 - Altmann, Gerry (1997). *The Ascent of Babel*. [Oxford University Press].
 - Purchase used for as low as \$6 on Amazon.
 - Other required readings will be made available on HuskyCT
 - Optional background:
 - Fernández, Eva, and Helen Smith Cairns (2011). *Fundamentals of Psycholinguistics*. [John Wiley & Sons].
 - Sedivy, Julie (2014). *Language in Mind: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*. [Sunderland, MA: Sunauer Associates.]
- **Drop-in hours**
 - Zoom at a convenient time, and in person TBD

Syllabus

- **Grading**

- When grading is not straightforward, like for assignments, I'll provide a rubric to follow
- Please ask if anything is unclear!

- Exams (3/4)

- Quizzes (8/13)

- Assignments (3)

- Experiment participation or alternate assignment

Grading breakdown		
Exams (3)	20pts each	60%
Homework assignments (3)	10pts each	30%
Quizzes (8/13)	1pt each	8%
Experiment Participation	2 pts total	2%

Syllabus

- Attendance and make-up policy
 - No make-up exam, but your lowest score will be dropped
 - Out of 3 total homework assignments...
 - One can be submitted late with a 10% deduction until the final day of class
 - Any other late assignments will not be accepted
 - In return, I'll give timely feedback on your assignments
 - One assignment can be resubmitted for a better grade until the last day of class
 - The 10% deduction will apply. In other words, you can redo an assignment for up to 90% of the total points.
 - If you got above a 90%, you cannot receive any more points for redoing it.
 - Any assignment can be resubmitted except an assignment that received a 0 for cheating or plagiarism (chat about ChatGPT and equivalent)

Syllabus

- **Academic misconduct**
 - No credit is given on an assignment if plagiarized.
- **Accommodations**
 - If I haven't emailed you yet to confirm I've received information about your accommodation, please contact the Center for Students with Disabilities and we will work together to meet your needs.
- **Also on the syllabus:** a note about resources for students and a statement on copyright

Course Schedule (also on the syllabus)

*if any changes are made to the syllabus, I'll notify you and put the updated version on HuskyCT.

	Week	Tuesday	Topic	Thursday	Topic	Assignments
UNIT 1: DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE	1	Aug 29	What is language?	Aug 31	Phonemes & speech perception	Citations quiz
	2	Sep 5	Syllables & prosody	Sep 7	Learning words	HW1 posted
	3	Sep 12	Learning syntax (grammar)	Sep 14	Critical period & language creation	
	4	Sep 19	Big picture discussion	Sep 21	Midterm 1	HW1 due

Course Schedule (also on the syllabus)

*if any changes are made to the syllabus, I'll notify you and put the updated version on HuskyCT.

	Week	Tuesday	Topic	Thursday	Topic	Assignments
UNIT 2: THE MATURE SYSTEM	5	Sep 26	Lexical access & context effects	Sep 28	Semantic memory	
	6	Oct 3	Sentence processing	Oct 5	Discourse processing	
	7	Oct 10	Computational models I	Oct 12	Computational models II	HW2 posted
	8	Oct 17	Dialogue	Oct 19	Pragmatics	
	9	Oct 24	Production	Oct 26	Big picture discussion	HW2 due

Course Schedule (also on the syllabus)

*if any changes are made to the syllabus, I'll notify you and put the updated version on HuskyCT.

	Week	Tuesday	Topic	Thursday	Topic	Assignments
UNIT 3: LANGUAGE, BRAIN, & DIVERSITY	10	Oct 31	Midterm 2	Nov 2	Language & mind (Radiolab)	Radiolab
	11	Nov 7	Language & brain	Nov 9	Aphasia	
	12	Nov 14	Reading	Nov 16	Acquired dyslexia	HW3 posted
	13	Nov 21	<i>Break</i>	Nov 23	<i>Break</i>	<i>Thanksgiving</i>
	14	Nov 28	Diversity & multilingualism	Nov 30	Language, culture, & thought	HW3 due
	15	Dec 5	Big picture discussion	Dec 7	Final review (optional)	

Midterm 3 & Cumulative bonus exam: Anytime Monday 9am–Friday 11:59pm during finals week
Quizzes are administered online through HuskyCT every week except for weeks 13 and 15.

Course Schedule (also on the syllabus)

➤ Reading and quiz for this week

1. Introduction & What is language?
2. Phonemes and speech perception

Required: Citations Quiz (due Tuesday, Sep. 5, by 5pm)

Reading for before or after Thursday: Altmann (1997) Ch. 3 (pdf on HuskyCT)

Language

➤ Study of language as a science

1. Why do we want to study it?
2. What do you think this course will cover?
3. What does it mean to know a language?
4. What even IS language?
 - Come up with a definition, then test your definition out: **Are the following things language?** Why or why not? Adjust your definition if you need to!
 - Russian
 - Gestures
 - Sign language
 - emojis
5. What are the components or levels of language?

Why do we want to study language?

- Your reasons
- Some other reasons
 - It sets us apart from other species
 - It's how we interact, socialize, and relay information (a form of telepathy: put a thought into another person's head)
 - It is fascinatingly complex
 - We learn it without being taught, and all arrive at the same set of rules in the same amount of time (within a speech community)
 - How it works tells us about the brain
 - When language goes wrong, it tells us how the brain isn't working correctly
 - Pure curiosity!

What do you think this course will cover?

What is language?

- **One definition:** Language is the knowledge you have (of words and rules) that allows you to construct meaningful expressions in real time (and understand them).
- What can be considered as language?
 - Russian?
 - Gestures?
 - Sign language?
 - Emojis?

Russian & sign language are languages; emojis and gestures are other forms of communication: language is not exclusive to a particular way of making expressions available to other speakers (Russian and sign language use different *modalities*).

Language is productive, creative, universal (among humans), and distinct from thought.

What is language?

- What are the components or subsystems of language?
 - Acoustic signal (what you hear)
 - Phonemes (the smallest unit of sound you can change to make a new word)
 - Lexicon (the words of the language)
 - Syntax (the grammar of the language)
 - Prosody (the rhythm, intonation, and melody of the language)
 - Semantics (the meaning)
 - Pragmatics (beyond literal meaning)
 - Discourse (language at the level of larger than a sentence)

What is language?

- What are the components or subsystems of language?
 - Sounds, words, and sentences are arbitrarily related to the things they mean (that is, there is no reason why the word for *cat* in English sounds the way it does, but we all agree on what it refers to)
 - They can be combined in different ways to convey different meanings
 1. (a) pat
(b) tap
 2. (a) clown class
(b) class clown
 3. (a) Oliver likes Jasmin.
(b) Jasmin likes Oliver.

What is language?

We stopped here in class!
You will discuss these last few content slides briefly with Kaya on Thursday.

-
- Language at all of its levels!
 - Discuss the following pairs of concepts in groups and what may make them important for our discussion of language
 1. Tacit and conscious knowledge
 2. Prescriptive and descriptive rules for language use
 3. Knowledge of your language and use of your language (competence and performance)
 4. General intelligence and knowledge specific to language (domain general and domain specific)
 5. The role of experience and the role of biology (empiricism and nativism)

What psycholinguists study

- Some important distinctions
 - Tacit and conscious knowledge
 - Language research is necessary because we can't just reflect consciously on how we *do* it
 - We run tests and experiments to better understand language and language use (both comprehension and production)

What psycholinguists study

- Some important distinctions

- Prescriptive and descriptive language use
 - Because we want to know how we do language, we are interested in *descriptive* language use—the way people actually use language, not the way other people tell us is the right way to use language (what you *should* do), which is *prescriptive* language use.
 - E.g., preposition stranding, split infinitives, etc.
1. *Ending a sentence with a preposition is something up with which we will not put.
 2. **What** do you like? [English]
 3. Ni xihuan **shenme**? [Mandarin]
you like **what**
 4. Me and Pasha are going to the movies.
 5. Pasha and I are going to the movies.

What psycholinguists study

- Some important distinctions
 - Competence and performance

Competence: knowledge that a speaker has in their mind that allows them to produce/comprehend grammatical expressions of their language (linguists, typically)

Performance: the actual language behavior speakers display, often distorted by memory, false starts, fatigue, drunkenness, context of utterance effects, etc. (psycholinguists, typically)

1. The cheese smelled good.
2. The cheese **that the mouse ate** smelled good.
3. The cheese that the mouse **that the cat chased** ate smelled good.

The same rule is applied in #2 & #3 (add a clause). Why is #3 so bad then?

What psycholinguists study

- Language at all of its levels
- Some important distinctions
 - Domain general and domain specific

One thing we can ask while studying language is whether an aspect of language is learned using general cognitive mechanisms (domain general) or whether a specific mechanism exists for learning language (domain specific).

We can also ask whether certain aspects of adult language knowledge and use rely on general cognitive mechanisms or mechanisms specific (unique) to language.

What psycholinguists study

- Language at all of its levels
- Some important distinctions
 - Empiricism and nativism
 - **Modern Empiricism:** language comes directly from sensory experience or is derived from experience using abstraction. All knowledge of language is learned.
 - **Modern Nativism:** we have an innate body of pre-specified knowledge about human language, which makes up the language-specific domain of the mind. The role of input and experience is also acknowledged.

Wrap up

- Don't forget to complete the **Citations Quiz** this week! (it's the only required quiz this semester, the rest of the 7 out of 8 minimum that you choose are up to you)
- I will not be here on Thursday due to a conference. A colleague from Developmental Psychology will be filling in for me (Kaya LeGrand)