Psychology 155 / Linguistics 155

The Psychology of Language
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Psycholinguistics lies at the center of modern cognitive neuroscience, and as such addresses many of the core questions about language and cognition: Do we think in our language? How does our language affect our thinking? Why does visual and other non-auditory information affect what we (think we) hear? How is it that split-brain patients can name objects without being consciously aware of seeing them, or be able to write but not name them? Why do so many children learning a first language go through stages where they produce forms like goed for went and doggie for all animals? What can aphasias (language disorders), Alzheimer’s Disease, dyslexia, speech errors, and tip of the tongue states tell us about regular linguistic processing and production? Can subliminal messages actually affect our thinking? In this course we address these and many other fascinating linguistic mysteries as part of a larger examination of how the mind constructs and deconstructs language. In the process we contrast leading mentalist and associationist theories of language and cognition, and consider how linguistic behavior bears on the question of whether the human mind is a connectionist automaton or a higher-level rational computational system.

No previous courses or other background in linguistics is required.

Readings


• Pinker, Steven. 2007. The Language Instinct. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics. (Available in many different versions beginning in 1994, all of which are acceptable for this course.)

• Additional articles are assigned for each lecture; these are available as pdf files that can be accessed by clicking on the links on the course website.

Readings must be completed before the lecture for which they are listed.

Lectures

Part 1: Introduction

1. Overview of cognitive psycholinguistics

* Harley ch 1
* Pinker ch 1
* Derwing and de Almeida 2004, Non-chronometric experiments in linguistics
* Schütze, Thinking about what we are asking speakers to do

2. Language and thought
* Pinker ch 3
* Harley ch 3
* Bloom, Children think before they speak
* Gallistel and Gelman, Language and the Origin of Numerical Concepts

Part 2: Language acquisition
3. First language acquisition
* Harley ch 4
* Pinker ch 9
* Gallistel, The nature of learning and the functional architecture of the brain

4. Second language acquisition
* Harley ch 5
* Peperkamp, Sharon and Emmanuel Dupoux. 2007. Learning the mapping from surface to underlying representations in an artificial language

Part 3: from thoughts to waveforms
5. Language planning
* Pinker ch 6

6. Speech production and errors
* Harley ch 13
* Berent et al., The nature of regularity and irregularity
* Honda and Fujino, Compensatory responses of articulators to unexpected perturbation of the palate shape
* Fromkin 1973

Part 4: from waveforms to thoughts
7. Speech perception
* Speech perception

8. Lexical access
* Pinker ch 5
* Harley ch 9

9. Parsing
* Pinker chs 4&7
* Harley ch 10

Part 5: neurolinguistics
10. Disorders
* Pinker ch 2
* Caramazza and Mahon 2003, The organization of conceptual knowledge
* Christoph et al., Different perceived foreign accents in one patient after prerolandic hematoma

11. Reading
* Harley chs 6-7

12. Writing: evolution
* Harley ch 8
* Treiman and Bourassa 2000, The development of spelling skill

13. Writing: acquisition and disorders

14. Animal communication and the evolution of language

15. Gestures and signed languages
Assessment

Your final grade will be based on four items:

• attendance (10%)
• doing all of the course readings (inscrutable %)
• final project (45%) DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF LECTURE ON 26 JULY
• final exam (45%) 27 July 12-2.30pm

Midterm exam

There will also be a non-graded midterm exam to keep you on track and give you an approximate idea of how you're doing halfway through the course.

Final project

For this you have two options:

* a pilot study of a psycholinguistic question.
  o you should take a question that is interesting and can be investigated successfully in the time you have available, such as "does the McGurk effect work in the same way with Chinese speakers as it does with English speakers?". You should conduct your study on at least 5 test subjects, though the precise number can vary depending on how complex and time-consuming your study is.
  o click here for a nice 1000-word sample to give you an idea of how something cool can be investigated quickly and easily and written about efficiently.

* a critical review of a psycholinguistic article.
  o in addition to presenting the argumentation and results of the article, you should situate the topic(s) covered by the author(s) in their larger context, mentioning relevant other studies and phenomena where possible.
  o Here are some tips for how to go about preparing your critical review of an article/topic, sent to me by one of the students in the class who "gets" what I have in mind.
  * I had an initial topic in mind, originally just aiming to do a single article review. After thinking about the limitations of only one article I decided that I wouldn't be able to write a
full 3000 words and decided instead to do a more traditional critical review. To do this I found a small subtopic focusing on a very limited section of my original topic and then found articles within that branch of research. In my case this consisted of 4 key articles. In short, I had to:

* Decide on a general branch of psycholinguistic study
* Find a more specific, smaller section of research within that branch
* Search for key articles discussing hypothesis and research within that subsection
* Discuss the main hypothesis within this research and analyze the evidence for and against presented in the articles found.

Some nice websites that give more tips on how to do this sort of thing:

* http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/critrev.html

Whichever option you choose should be approximately 2500-3000 words in length.

Final exam

75 multiple-choice questions designed to test your knowledge of the terms, concepts, experiments, etc. covered in the course.