

Words and the World: How Words Capture Human Experience

Seminar in Cognitive Processes (PSYC 471S)
Special Topics in Linguistics (LING 385S)
Emory University
Fall 2005

Time and Place:

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:30 – 3:45pm
Psychology 302

Instructor information:

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Course Description:

Language has frequently been viewed as a window into the human mind. But now that we know more about the semantics of different languages, we are faced with an interesting problem. Different languages seem to be telling us different stories about the nature of the mind. Important distinctions made in one language are not necessarily made in another. The question, then, is what are we to make of these cross-linguistic differences? How do they arise? Are they created by purely linguistic processes operating over the course of language evolution? Do they represent differences in thought? In this sea of differences, are there any semantic universals? If so, are these universals based on innate categories, or are they acquired? What might the cross-linguistic similarities and differences contribute to our understanding of conceptual and linguistic development? Which categories might be given to us by our genetic inheritance, which by culture, and which by our language?

These questions have long been of interest to psychologists, linguists, and anthropologists. But only recently has the integration of knowledge and methodologies necessary for real progress on these questions taken place. In particular, experimental approaches have only recently been applied to the cross-linguistic study of word meaning. The course will review the literature covering these exciting new findings.

This course fulfills the GER advanced seminary requirement. There are no prerequisites.

Format:

The course will be conducted as a seminar / workshop. Students will be expected to present papers, write weekly reaction papers, complete homework, and write an end-of-semester paper. Details are provided below.

Course Materials:

Articles will be put on electronic reserve. Electronic reserve can be reached at <http://www.library.emory.edu>. Press the "Reserves Direct" button at the top of the page. You will be prompted for your university login and password. After entering these, you will be shown the option "Add a class." After pressing this, you will be able to "Search by Instructor." Search for "Wolff, Phillip". I currently have only one class, "Words and the World". Click this option and you're all set.

Course Requirements:

Student presentations. The instructor will present the class reading for 6-8 of the classes. In the remaining classes, the class reading will be presented by a student. A presentation should accomplish three objectives. First, it should summarize the paper (~20 minutes). In summarizing a paper, you should be sure to specify 1) the problem being investigated, 2) hypotheses, 3) predictions, 4) the experimental methods used to test these predictions, including details about the stimuli and procedure, 5) the key findings, and 6) conclusions. Second, class presentations should provide a critical reaction to the paper (~10 minutes). In this part of your presentation, you should go beyond what was said in the paper. There are many ways in which you might react to a paper. For example, you might challenge the hypotheses, methodology, or conclusions. Alternatively, you might elaborate on the significance (or insignificance) of the paper. Finally, your presentation should include 2-3 deep questions for the class. Deep questions often spur class discussion. However, perhaps the most effective way of spurring class discussion is to describe the papers clearly and with sufficient detail. Each presentation should include a 1-2 page handout. It is expected that everybody will bring a printout of the assigned reading(s) to class.

Presentations will be graded on the quality of the summary, critical reaction, and overall coherence.

Tickets. For each class, students must turn in a "ticket." The tickets should have two parts: a comment and a question. Ask good questions, that is, questions whose answers (if known) would be consequential. In formulating your ticket, you might begin with an observation (the comment part), then raise a question. Alternatively, you might begin with a question, and then propose an answer. Your tickets should be 120 words or less, printed out (not hand written or emailed), and turned in at the end of class. In most classes, I will ask you to read your comments and questions. Your tickets will be graded as either good (√), very good, (√+), or excellent (√++) (= 85%, 95% & 100%). You will be allowed to drop the three tickets with the lowest grade. (The current paragraph is 148 words, and hence it would be a little long for a ticket.)

Homework. There to four homework assignments will be assigned during the semester. The focus of the assignments will be on how causal relationships are expressed in English and other languages. The homework will involve 1) identifying the different ways in which we can describe causal relationships, 2) interviewing speakers of different languages on how they express causation in those languages, and 3) analyzing the results. As with the tickets, the assignments will be graded as either good (√), very good, (√+), or excellent (√++).

Class participation. Even if you are shy, you need to contribute to the class discussion. Class participation will be graded as either good (√), very good, (√+), or excellent (√++).

Course paper. At the end of the class you need to write a paper addressing one or all of the following questions: 1) How do cross-linguistic differences in meaning arise? 2) Do cross-linguistic differences in meaning indicate differences in thought? 3) In this sea of differences, are there any semantic universals? 4) If so, are these universals based on innate

categories, or are they acquired? 5) What might the cross-linguistic similarities and differences contribute to our understanding of conceptual and linguistic development? 6) Which categories might be given to us by our genetic inheritance, which by culture, and which by our language? 7) What implications might cross-linguistic differences have for the learning of a first and/or second language?

Your paper should be “thesis-driven.” Start the paper by identifying a problem or question (~ 2 paragraphs). Then state your thesis. A thesis is signaled by a statement like “In this paper I will argue that...” Once you state your thesis, you should then briefly outline how you plan to defend your thesis. The rest of the paper should constitute your defense and final conclusions. Your defense should cite studies and theories from the literature. You are encouraged, but not required, to go beyond the readings covered in the course.

All papers must be 7.5-8 pages long, have 1.5 spacing with 1 inch margins, and be in 12 point Times-Roman font (or 11 point Arial). Citations and references should be in APA style. Papers not meeting these style requirements will be returned ungraded.

A draft of each paper is due by class on Tuesday, November 29. I will provide feedback and grades by December 6. Final papers are due by the 5 PM on Friday, December 16. Papers will be graded on the following dimensions: 1) thesis quality, 2) literature covered, 3) logical coherence, and 4) written presentation.

Grades:

Your class grade will be based on your class presentations (20%), tickets (40%), class project homework (10%), class participation (5%) and first (10%) and final (15%) drafts of your class paper. Extra credit assignments will not be offered. Class grades will be assigned according to the following averages: A (93-100%), A- (90-92%), B+ (87-89%), B (83-86%), B- (80-82%), C+ (77-79%), C (73-76%), C- (70-72%), D+ (67-69%), D (63-66%), D- (60-62%), F (below 60%).

Students taking the course Pass/Fail must attend course meetings regularly, read the assigned articles, turn in the class questions regularly, and turn in class project homework. The class paper and presentations are not required.

Miscellaneous policies:

Academic honesty. Every student who applies to and is accepted by Emory College, as a condition of acceptance, agrees to abide by the provisions of the Honor Code so long as he or she remains a student at Emory College. By his or her continued attendance at Emory College, a student reaffirms his or her pledge to adhere to the provisions of the Honor Code. Plagiarism and/or cheating won't be tolerated.

Students with disabilities. It is the policy of Emory University to make reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. All students with special requests or need for accommodations should make this request in person as soon as possible.

Tentative Schedule

| Dates | Discussion topic | Presenter | |
|----------|-------------------------------|------------|--|
| Sept. 1 | Introduction | Instructor | Wolff, Klettke, Ventura, & Song (2005) |
| Sept. 6 | Basic issues | Instructor | Crystal (1997) pp. 1-7 & 14-15 Whorf (1950) pp. 57-64 Whorf (1941) pp. 233-245 |
| Sept. 8 | | Instructor | Pinker (1994) pp. 55-67 Pullum (1991) pp. 159-171 |
| Sept. 13 | Spatial Orientation | Instructor | Li & Gleitman (2002) |
| Sept. 15 | | Instructor | Levinson, Kita, Haun, & Rasch (2002) |
| Sept. 20 | Spatial relations | Brad | Bowerman (1996) |
| Sept. 22 | | Rachel | Munnich & Landau (2003) |
| Sept. 27 | Artifacts | Nicole | Malt, Sloman, Gennari, Shi, & Wang (1999) |
| Sept. 29 | | Maryanne | Ji, Zhang, & Nisbett (2004) |
| Oct. 4 | Number | Brad | Gordon (2004) Dehaene, Spelke, Pinel, Stanescu, & Tsivkin (1999) |
| Oct. 6 | | Marcie | McCrink & Wynn (2004) Beller, S., & Bender, A. (2005) |
| Oct. 11 | FALL BREAK | | |
| Oct. 13 | Grammatical Gender | Hyun | Boroditsky, Schmidt, & Phillips (2003) |
| Oct. 18 | Objects/Masses | Chris | Soja, Carey, & Spelke (1991) |
| Oct. 20 | | Maryanne | Imai & Gentner (1997) |
| Oct. 25 | Events | Instructor | Frawley (1992) 140-169 |
| Oct. 27 | | Instructor | Frawley (1992) 170-196 |
| Nov. 1 | Motion | Lindsay | Slobin, (1996 or 2003) |
| Nov. 3 | | Rachel | Papafragou, Massey & Gleitman (2002) or Gennari, Sloman, Malt, & Fitch (2002) |
| Nov. 8 | Aspect | Emily | Boroditsky, Ham, & Ramscar (2002) |
| Nov. 10 | NO CLASS | | |
| Nov. 15 | Space & Time | Marcie | Casasanto & Boroditsky (2003); Casasanto et al. (2004) |
| Nov. 17 | Space | David | Hermer-Vasquez, Spelke, & Katsnelson, |
| Nov. 22 | Time | Chris | Boroditsky (2001) |
| Nov. 24 | THANKSIVING | | |
| Nov. 29 | Color (Draft of paper due) | Lindsey | Kay & Regier (2003) |
| Dec. 1 | | Emily | Roberson, Davies, & Davidoff (2000) |
| Dec. 6 | Animals | David | Varley, & Siegal, (2000); Hauser, M., & Carey, S. (1998) |
| Dec. 8 | Overview | Hyun | Gleitman & Papafragou (2005) |
| Dec. 16 | Final paper due | | |

References

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