

LANGUAGE AND COGNITION

01:185:340

Meets: Monday and Wednesday 3:50-5:10pm, BE-111 (LIV)

Format: In-Person

Prereqs: 01:185:201 and 01:615:201

Instructor: Ryan Rhodes (ryan.rhodes@rutgers.edu)

Office Hours: TBD, or by appointment. RuCCS, Room A111.

Course Site: Canvas

Course Materials

This course has no textbook. We will be reading scientific articles published in peer-reviewed journals, which will be available on canvas.

All relevant materials can be found on the course canvas site.

Course Description

What is language? How does language interact with other domains of human cognition? What can we learn about the mind from the fantastic diversity of human language and cultural expression? The intersection of language and cognition is a hotbed for some of the biggest and most highly debated questions in cognitive science!

In this course we will explore the relationship between language and cognition and grapple with some of the biggest, most controversial debates in the current study of language, the mind, and culture.

Some of you may find this course frustrating—we are at the absolute edge of human knowledge. There are very few certainties in this field, and everything is up for debate. Some of these debates will touch on sensitive issues in various fields—issues that researchers often have very strong opinions about. We will approach these big questions with both an open mind and a critical eye, and a sensitivity to our personal experiences and the diversity of human language, culture, and thought.

This course incorporates both lecture and discussion, and we will be reading and discussing primary scientific literature.

Course Learning Outcomes

This course has three primary objectives. You will engage critically, creatively, and collaboratively with research and literature addressing the big questions at the intersection of language and other areas of human cognition.

In this course, you will:

- Reason creatively about big questions related to the relationship between language and cognition. You will be developing and synthesizing your own thoughts on these questions before we engage with them in class, which will require you to innovate, speculate, and even confabulate hypotheses and explanations—based on your own intuitions, personal experience, information from other courses and other fields of study, and your own scientific reasoning.
- Read, understand, and critically evaluate primary scientific literature at the intersection of linguistics, psychology, and anthropology, as they bear on questions regarding language and cognition. We'll keep an open mind, but we will also approach the literature with a critical eye and refine our own thinking on these big questions. This means we have to be both skeptical and flexible to considering new, potentially heterodox hypotheses.
- Work collaboratively with each other. You as students all have unique backgrounds, interests, and prior knowledge. We will leverage this to our advantage by working together on assignments and projects. You will be assigned to heterogeneous groups—you will sit with your group in the classroom, discuss with your group, and work with your group outside the classroom. Humans are social animals—use this to your advantage!

Course Work

Annotations: 5%

Every week there will be an assigned reading. These will be published papers in linguistics, psychology, anthropology, animal behavior, or other fields. You will be expected to read the weekly reading before class, so we can discuss it. Each week you will contribute to a collaborative annotation of the reading on Canvas. This is done via hypothes.is—simply add comments directly to the reading via the link on Canvas. This is required! It's important for me to have a sense of what is troubling you so we can address it in class.

You can miss up to 3 annotations without penalty. Annotations are graded as complete/incomplete.

Assignments: 35%

There will be one assignment per Module. There are six modules, so there will be six assignments. Each assignment will relate to the big questions raised in that Module, and you will be given a directed prompt to guide your thoughts and research.

Assignments will be done **before** we introduce the topic in class—each assignment will be due the Sunday before the module begins. This is meant to stimulate you and encourage you to do your own research on big questions and innovate, speculate, and even confabulate your own hypotheses to these big questions.

You will not be graded on whether your hypothesis is right or wrong! Remember, we are at the very edge of human knowledge—these questions are often very highly debated and even controversial. I want you to offer your own thoughts and insights. You should synthesize your thoughts from your own research, personal experience (do you speak another language? Did you study another language in high school? Do you have experience with small children, people with disabilities, other cultures, etc.?), what you've learned in other courses or other disciplines (what would a linguist say about this topic? What about a psychologist, or a neuroscientist? An anthropologist?), and independent reasoning (what makes sense to you?).

Instead, you will be graded on the clarity of your thoughts and cogence of your reasoning. Does your hypothesis make sense, given the information that you bring to bear on the question? Be clear, be creative, be cogent, and don't be afraid to speculate!

Each assignment is collaborative—you must meet and discuss with your group before you write your response. Every student will write and submit their own assignment, but you must explicitly reference a contribution from each member of your group in your response! Each of you has unique experiences, background, and prior knowledge, so you will all be able to contribute different ideas to the big question of the week. Your assignment must acknowledge the contributions of your group members (if they in fact were part of the collaborative process).

Assignments will be graded according to the following rubric:

Great 10-9	Proficient 8-7	Developing 6-5	Unsatisfactory 0
The response is well-developed. The reasoning is clear and cogent. It expands on, elaborates, or offers a unique insight on the question. Group contributions are explicitly referenced.	The response is adequate. The reasoning is adequately clear. Elaboration or unique insights may be less developed. Group contributions are explicitly referenced.	The response is not adequate. The reasoning is unclear or inadequate. There is no elaboration. Group contributions may be absent.	The response was not submitted properly to Canvas by the deadline.

Participation: 10%

You are expected to come to class, to work with your group, and to participate in class discussion. Your group will keep collaborative notes during class, which will be signed by group members who contribute.

Quizzes: 15%

There will be occasional, brief in-class quizzes. These quizzes will be open-book/open-note and will test your ability to parse the literature we will be reading during each module. I will ask questions related to the reading, about the research question, hypothesis, methods, or findings of the paper.

Final Project: 35%

At the beginning of the course, your group will be assigned a language family and will be given a few reference grammars of languages in that family.

At the end of the course, you will turn in a final group project and present your project to the class. This project will require you to find an interesting feature or set of features in your assigned language family, develop a hypothesis about how the feature/s may interact with some non-linguistic cognitive domain, and propose a way to test your hypothesis. This can be a domain we discuss in class (color, smell, spatial navigation, number, etc.) or one of your own choosing (music, decision-making, working memory, etc.). Your research question may also intersect with other big topic areas in language and cognition, including language evolution, learning, development, or even artificial intelligence.

Your project should draw on material from class, class discussions, and your own independent research.

Schedule

Week	Date	Module	Reading	Assignment
1	1/18	What is language?	TBA	TBA
2	1/23 1/25			
3	1/30	The shape of language	TBA	TBA
4	2/1 2/6 2/8			
5	2/13	Language and thought	TBA	TBA
6	2/15 2/20 2/22			
7	2/27 3/1	Language and the senses	TBA	TBA
8	3/6 3/8			
9	3/20 3/22			
10	3/27 3/29			
11	4/3	The function of language	TBA	TBA
12	4/5 4/10 4/12			
13	4/17	The origins of language	TBA	TBA
14	4/19 4/24 4/26			
15	5/1	Project presentations		

Class Policies

Attendance

This is a synchronous, in-person lecture-and-discussion class. If you can't make the lecture, feel free to email me any time or come to office hours to find out what you missed.

I love class participation! This class consists of both lecture and discussion, and I'd like to have the liveliest discussion possible. I want to hear your thoughts and insights! So please come to the live lecture sessions and feel free to participate!

I want our class to be an open forum and a safe space to engage in discussion and speculation on topics related to language and the brain. We will engage in discussion in a positive and non-judgmental way while we explore interesting new ideas. Everyone's diverse backgrounds and knowledge will give unique insights that may benefit all of us!

Collaboration

Collaboration is at the heart of good science! I encourage you to collaborate with each other - but every student must always turn in their own work. Your work must be written solely by you!

Academic Integrity

Cheating or plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. University policies on academic dishonesty are draconian – please don't put me in a position where I have to enforce them. If you are not familiar with Rutgers's academic integrity policies, you can find them here: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>.

Student Resources

Accommodation of Disabilities

I am very happy to offer any kind of accommodation you may need. Please let me know if you have any special needs by coordinating with me and ODS: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registering-for-services>

Student wellbeing

Your mental health, comfort, and wellbeing are important! Please be aware and if needed avail yourselves of the counseling, psychiatric services, and crisis intervention resources Rutgers makes available for students.

Mental health services: <http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Crisis intervention: <http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/crisis-intervention/>

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.

Violence prevention and victim assistance: www.vpva.rutgers.edu/

Readings

TBD