Adv. Topics: Events in Language and Cognition
01:185:412:01

Meets: Monday and Wednesday 2:00-3:20pm, Beck 3 (LIV)
Format: In-person
Instructor: Shannon Bryant (shannon.bryant@rutgers.edu)
Office Hours: Thursday 1pm, RuCCS A106, or by appointment.
Course Site: Canvas

Course Description

The world around us is constantly changing. Humans are incredibly adept at making sense of those changes, sorting the flux into well-defined events. This course will explore how we experience events in the world: how we think about them, how we talk about them, and the relationship between the two. We will compare event cognition in adult humans, pre-linguistic infants, and non-human species to better understand what aspects of event cognition come from “core knowledge” shared by all humans and how event cognition shapes and is shaped by language.

Drawing on research from theoretical linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience, we will focus on the following major themes in event cognition:

- **Event segmentation:** how we carve up our experience into discrete events in perception and memory.
- **Motion and direction:** how we track the flow of events through space and time.
- **Event roles:** who/what is involved in an event, and the nature of their involvement.
- **Causation:** how we track cause/effect relationships between events.

The course will meet twice a week, and class time will include a mix of lecture and discussion centered on primary scientific literature. Students will be required to read
and respond to assigned papers before class time to ensure rich and fruitful engagement with the material when we come together in the classroom.

**Learning Outcomes**

This course has two primary goals. The first is to develop a wholistic view of events in language and cognition by pulling together a wide range of research perspectives and seeing how they all fit together, like the pieces of a puzzle. Students should leave with an understanding of the kinds of questions researchers ask, the variety of methods they use to ask them, as well as an appreciation of how the mix of methods complement one another.

The second is to develop the skill of reading scientific papers, extracting meaningful information, and integrating that new information with our prior knowledge. We will be viewing this literature with a critical lens to better understand scientific reasoning as it is applied to very difficult questions.

**Course Materials**

This course has no textbook. We will be reading book chapters and articles published in peer-reviewed journals, all of which will be available on Canvas.

**Assignments**

**Attendance: 15%**

Students will be required to attend biweekly lectures. Up to four absences will automatically be excused, no questions asked. Any absences beyond that can be made up by attending office hours. Absences for religious observance will be excused and will not count towards the four automatically excused absences.

**Weekly readings + annotations: 30%**

Each week, students will be required to read one journal article or book chapter and to submit a short (~300 word) annotation consisting of a summary of the reading (e.g., the central research question, research methods, and overall
finding) along with any questions or comments the student had about the reading. Annotations will be due the Sunday before the week when the reading will be discussed. Students must complete at least 10 annotations over the course of the semester.

Group presentation: 15%

On the final Thursday of each module, groups of 3 or 4 will lead a 15-minute presentation on a supplemental reading related to the module. Students will guide the rest of the class through the selected paper, giving us an overview of the following:

- Research question
- Background necessary to understand the paper
- Experiment or argument presented to answer the research question
- Findings or conclusion

Your job will be to ensure the class understands this paper and to lead a class discussion. This is a group assignment, so you will present as a group, and every member of the group is expected to contribute to the presentation and discussion.

Each student group will present once during the semester. Groups will be invited to meet with me before their presentation to discuss the paper in order to ensure understanding and to talk through the presentation format.

Final Paper: 25%

The final project for this course will be a paper that expands on a topic discussed in the class. Students may write experiment proposals, literature reviews, or position papers. The paper should be 10-15 pages in length, double-spaced, 12 pt font, 1 inch margins. Papers will be due the first day of the final exam period (May 2).

Lightning talk: 15%

On the last day of class, students will give a 5-minute presentation of their final paper research, giving us an overview of the following:

- Their research question
• The primary literature their paper engages with
• Major takeaways, proposals, and/or open questions for future work.

Extra Credit: 2%

Students can receive extra credit in the course by participating in research studies through the SONA system. Each study will be worth 1% of your final grade, with a maximum of two studies.

Schedule

The semester will be split into five modules. Please email me for a sample of the readings that will be assigned in each module.

Weeks 1-2: Introduction to events
Weeks 3-5: Event segmentation
Weeks 6-8: Motion and directionality
Weeks 10-12: Event roles
Weeks 13-15: Causality

Class Policies

Late Policy

All assignments are subject to late penalties. Canvas will automatically deduct 10% every day the assignment is late to a maximum of 50% deduction.

Collaboration

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

ChatGPT

Students are invited to use GPT to clarify concepts encountered in the course. However, all written assignments must be produced by the student. Please refer to the Rutgers University policy regarding use of ChatGPT.