

University of Alberta – School in Cortona
PSYCO 305: Words that Change Minds:
The Language of Thought can be Engaged
Winter Semester 2016

Language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication ... - Steven Pinker

Language is wine upon the lips – Virginia Woolf

Instructor Prof. John L. Dennis, Ph.D.

Credits 3

Class Mondays & Wednesdays 10:45-12:15 PM

Office Hours I'm available to meet with students immediately before/after class or by appointment j.lawrence.dennis@gmail.com.

Course Description

This course provides a cross-disciplinary approach to answer deep and interesting questions about the origins, structure, and meaning of language and how our understanding of culture is crucial to answering these questions.

By approaching these questions from a cross-disciplinary approach, we are afforded the richness that is necessary to look at the confluence of culture, evolution and language. Indeed, how can we know if learning new languages changes the way that we think if we don't first understand what language and what culture is from an evolutionary perspective? At the end of this course, we will see that the language of thought is the result of a clear interaction between culture, evolution and the language one speaks.

Organizing Questions

1. What does an evolutionary perspective towards language tell us about the influence of culture?
2. Why do we humans have language and other animals do not? Is that true?
3. How does the confluence between Creoles, culture and language help to answer questions about whether language is innate?
4. What does primate communication systems tell us about human language?
5. Why is the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others so important for decoding language and what is the impact of culture on this ability?
6. Why are gestures and other forms of nonverbal communication so important for understanding what we are thinking?
7. How does culture influence concepts? Why is this so important, especially when we are talking about "meaning"?
8. How does being bilingual or learning a second language influence your personality, relationships and overall thinking?
9. What is the relationship between metaphors and the idea that our bodies shape our thinking?

10. Does your language shape the way that you think?

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will have:

- Gained knowledge of psychology, cognitive science, and evolutionary theory on the study of language.
- Developed the tools and knowledge to ask meaningful questions about the relationship between language and science – how to frame these questions and how one might actually answer these questions.
- Integrated knowledge gained in the course to enrich their understanding of language.
- Synthesized understanding of how language and science can be used to interpret cultures.
- Gained career relevant experiences in research, teamwork and community engagement.

Instruction Methods

This class uses a method where students gain a significant amount of knowledge before class starts. Once the class starts, students get to actively and interactively clarify and apply that knowledge – all with the help of the professor as a guide. This is referred in pedagogy as a [flipped](#) instruction method (you can go here: <http://vimeo.com/70893101> for The University of Texas at Austin’s discussion of this method.)

Assignments will be done with the help of several cooperative tools that are consistent with the flipped instruction method outlined above.

1. Submit short (250-500) reactions to readings 24 hours before class on [Google Drive](#).
2. Submit peer view tickets, assignments, projects, reports submitted by fellow students.
3. Attend artistic events, museums and visit artistic sites in Tuscany/Umbria.
4. Complete a field group project with a community partner.
5. Guide classroom discussion based on classroom/experiential course components.

Instruction Methods Note

This class does not have a midterm or final exam. This class has writing and reviewing due before each class and periodic presentations, blogs, field studies, a field project and the final group report and final group presentation that ensure students know classroom materials.

Assignments & Grading Weights

<u>Writing</u>	55%
Tickets/Blog/Group Paper/Peer Review	
<u>Experiential Component</u>	20%
Group Field Project	
<u>Participation</u>	25%

Participation/Presentations

1. Tickets: Students will submit one ‘ticket’ per reading/field study to [Google Drive](#) at least 24 hours before class. For articles, tickets must answer the following 4 W’s: 1) *What was the article’s main question?* (in a single sentence); 2) *What was done/discussed?* 3) *What did they find?*; 4) *What you think?* The first three W’s help you remember the positive first while the last integrates your experience/thoughts with article’s content. Following field studies, students will write about their experience integrated what they have learned in class. The minimum/maximum for Tickets is 250/500 words.
2. Blog: Students will submit 2 blog entries (min/max 250/500 words) to Google Drive based on classroom experiences during the semester. These blog posts can be based off your Tickets, Reviews, Presentations, Group Projects, Group Field Project, or any other exercise, discussion, etc. that happens inside the class or with your classmates. A signup sheet for Blog entries will be shared on GoogleDrive. Once those entries have been reviewed and approved they will be uploaded to the class blog.
3. Group Report: Students will submit preliminary drafts of a final research report periodically on Google Drive culminating in a final research report (min 2500 – max 3500 words).
4. Peer Review: Students will review tickets, blog entries and report drafts submitted by fellow students. Reviews should consist of comments that are helpful to your fellow students. Reviews should provide “additive feedback”—that is, make suggestions only about what the writer might add to or develop in the Ticket, Blog, Report, Presentation. A signup sheet for all Peer Reviews will be shared on GoogleDrive. Students are responsible for completing one Ticket Peer Review per week and Blog entries, Group Report and Presentations as they are assigned throughout the semester.
5. Group Field Project: Students will work on projects in accordance with the professor and the local partner.
6. Presentation: Students will lead class via short presentations of their tickets/project/field study during the semester. Student lead presentations, with group discussion will last 15 minutes, but the presentation itself done and shared in Prezi should have about 5 minutes of prepared material. Presentations, once reviewed by fellow students will then be placed on SlideShare. A signup sheet for all Presentations will be shared on GoogleDrive.
7. Participation: Class participation entails active engagement in the course. Being consistently prepared for class, asking questions, responding to questions, attentively listening to others is essential. Successful participation has four prerequisites:
 - a. Being on time. If you’re not here, you can’t contribute much to class discussion. If you need to miss class please notify me at least 24 hours in advance. I will also appreciate advance notice if you know that you need to arrive late or leave early on a particular day.

- b. Being prepared. To contribute to class discussion, you must come to class having carefully prepared all assignments (i.e., readings, tickets, cases, exercises). If you are unsure of the assignments for an upcoming class session, please ask me.
- c. Being brave. You are expected to participate fully in all class exercises, to voice your views in class discussions, and to ask questions about things that you don't understand. Asking questions might be intimidating, but doing so helps your classmates, as well as you, by moving the discussion forward in new directions.
- d. Being courteous. Listening carefully to the comments and questions that your classmates voice will help you learn something new from their perspectives. Voicing disagreement is essential as it often leads thoughtful and informative class discussions. Disagreements should be kind and considerate.

Attendance Note

Attendance at every class is expected. Classes are an important moment to discuss course topics, share experiences, and address community project activities. Students are expected to keep appointments and always be punctual. Only two unjustified “free” absences are allowed. Each additional absence, unless for a very serious reason, will lower the student’s grade (e.g., B+ becomes a B).

Generous Giving

Promoting productive generosity is important. In this class, we have the **giving message**. A giving message is one that acknowledges one of your classmates for being especially helpful and is broadcast to everyone in the class.

Anyone who receives a giving message receives 10 points on an assignment. Giving messages can be given to anyone (including, of course, yourself).

Feedback & Questions

This course should be a valuable learning experience for you. Your feedback regarding the class is appreciated at any time during the semester. It is easiest to reach me by email or right before or after class, or we can set up an appointment. That said, one month after the course has started we will evaluate our progress and make any necessary changes to keep us on track.

Grading Scale:

Grade	<i>A</i>	<i>A-</i>	<i>B+</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B-</i>	<i>C+</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>C-</i>	<i>D+</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>D-</i>	<i>F</i>
Score %	100-93	92-90	89-87	86-83	82-80	79-77	76-73	72-70	69-67	66-63	62-60	>59

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments:

Jan. 13 EVOLUTION AND LANGUAGE

1. Ticket: Donald, M. (1993). *Precis of Origins of the modern mind: Three stages in the evolution of culture and cognition. Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 16(04), 737-748.*
2. Group Field Project: Discuss possible project ideas.

Jan. 18 EVOLUTION AND LANGUAGE

1. Ticket: Pinker, S. (2010). The cognitive niche: Coevolution of intelligence, sociality, and language. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107(Supplement 2), 8993-8999.
2. Group Field Project: Discuss possible project ideas.

Jan. 20 SOCIAL LANGUAGE

1. Ticket: Astington, Janet Wilde; Jenkins, Jennifer M. (1999). A longitudinal study of the relation between language and theory-of-mind development. *Developmental Psychology*, 35(5), 1311-1320
2. Group Field Project: Meet with community partners.

Jan. 25 SOCIAL LANGUAGE

1. Ticket: Tomasello, M. (1992). The social bases of language acquisition. *Social development*, 1(1), 67-87.
2. Group Field Project: Discuss possible project ideas.

Jan. 27 BILINGUAL

1. Ticket: Ramírez-Esparza, N., Gosling, S. D., Benet-Martínez, V., Potter, J. P., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2006). Do bilinguals have two personalities? A special case of cultural frame switching. *Journal of research in personality*, 40(2), 99-120.
2. Group Field Project: Discuss possible project ideas.

Feb. 1 BILINGUAL

1. Ticket: Tremblay, P. F., & Gardner, R. C. (1995). Expanding the motivation construct in language learning. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79(4), 505-518.
2. Blog: Did you sign up for today? If so, its due.
3. Group Report: Submit Introduction

Feb. 3 CULTURAL LANGUAGE

1. Ticket: Jiang, W. (2000). The relationship between culture and language. *ELT journal*, 54(4), 328-334.

Feb. 8 CULTURAL LANGUAGE

1. Ticket: Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1997). Remarks on relevance theory and the social sciences. *Multilingua*, 16, 145-152.

Feb. 10 CONCEPTS

1. Ticket: Marcus, G. F. (1996). Why do children say "brealed"? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 5, 81-85.
2. Blog: Did you sign up for today? If so, its due.

Feb. 15 CONCEPTS

1. Ticket: Medin, D. L. (1989). Concepts and conceptual structure. *American Psychologist*, 44, 1469-1481.

Feb. 17 LANGUAGE GENES

1. Ticket: Calvin, W. H. (1987). The brain as a Darwin machine. *Nature*, 330, 33-34.

Feb. 22 LANGUAGE GENES

1. Ticket: Campbell, L. (2006, September). Languages and genes in collaboration: some practical matters. In *language and genes: an interdisciplinary conference, University of California, Santa Barbara*.
2. Blog: Did you sign up for today? If so, its due.

Feb. 24 METAPHORS

1. Ticket: Ortony, A., Schallert, D. L., Reynolds, R. E., & Antos, S. J. (1978). Interpreting metaphors and idioms: Some effects of context on comprehension. *Journal of verbal learning and verbal behavior*, 17(4), 465-477.

Feb. 29 METAPHORS

1. Ticket: Wilson, M. (2002). Six views of embodied cognition. *Psychonomic bulletin & review*, 9(4), 625-636.

Mar. 2 THE HAND

1. Ticket: Iverson, J. M., & Goldin-Meadow, S. (1998). Why people gesture when they speak. *Nature*, 396(6708), 228-228.
2. Group Field Project: Near end project analysis.
3. Group Report: Final report draft is due.

Mar. 7 THE HAND

1. Ticket: Harnad, S. R., Steklis, H. D., & Lancaster, J. E. (1976). Origins and evolution of language and speech. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*.

Mar. 9 NAMES

1. Ticket: Brown, R. (1958). How shall a thing be called? *Psychological Review*, 65, 14-21
2. Blog: Did you sign up for today? If so, its due.

Mar. 14 NAMES

1. Ticket: Bickerton, D. (1984). The language bioprogram hypothesis. *Behavioral and brain sciences*, 7(02), 173-188.
2. Group Field Project: Final Field Project is due.
3. Group Report: Final report is due.

Suggested Readings

- Bickerton, D. (1983). Creole languages. In *Readings from Scientific American: Language, Writing, and the Computer* (pp. 24-30). New York: Freeman.
- Calvin, W.H. & Bickerton, D. *Lingua ex Machina: Reconciling Darwin and Chomsky with the Human Brain*. Excerpts Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- Campbell, Lyle (2002). What drives linguistic diversification and language spread? In Peter Bellwood & Colin Renfrew, (Eds.), *Language-Farming Dispersals*. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.
- Dunbar, R.I.M. (1988). *Primate Social Systems*. Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Gardner, Robert C. (1991). Attitudes and motivation in second language learning. *In Bilingualism, Multiculturalism, and Second Language Learning* (pp. 43-63). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates,
- Goldin-Meadow, S. *Hearing Gesture: How our Hands Help Us Think*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Ortony, A.(1980). Some psycholinguistic aspects of metaphor. In R. Honeck & R. Hoffman (Eds.), *Cognition and Figurative Language*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Searle, J. R. (1965). What is a speech act? In M. Black (Ed.), *Philosophy in America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson. (1995). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (2nd ed.) Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tomasello, M. (1998). Introduction A Cognitive–functional perspective on language structure. In M. Tomasello (Ed.), *The New Psychology of Language: Cognitive and Functional Approaches to Language Structure*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Whorf, B. L. (1956). The relation of habitual thought and behavior to language. In J. B. Carroll (Ed.), *Language, Thought, and Reality* (pp. 134-159). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Many of the readings can be downloaded via [Google Scholar](#), or University of Alberta's library. If you use your library then go to the library and then:

1. Browse the list of databases (e.g., JSTOR, PubMed, PsycArticles, etc.)
2. Search for particular journals (e.g., Psychological Science, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, etc.).

Instructor Biosketch

[John L. Dennis](#) currently teaches at Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, University of Perugia, The Umbra Institute as well as the University of Alberta. He received his B.A. from the University of Colorado and his Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. He does [research](#) on the mechanisms that underlie self-regulation, primarily in the domains of goals, ownership, morality and culture and is currently funded by the [EU](#) and the [Templeton Foundation](#). He is a licensed psychologist and does consultations using Cognitive Behavior Therapy techniques. In 2013, he started [Melioravit](#), a scientific communication company that helps researchers get funded, published and cited.