
COURSE DESCRIPTION
Languages differ in the way they describe the world. For example, the noun for bridge is feminine in German, but masculine in French. Russian has two words for blue, while English has only one. The Piraha (an Amazonian hunter-gatherer tribe) arguably have no number words. In this course, we will be asking to what extent these cross-linguistic differences are reflected in thought. That is, do German speakers think bridges are more feminine than French speakers do? Can Russian speakers discriminate different shades of blue better than English speakers? Can the Piraha count? In exploring these questions, we hope to discover how tightly linked language and thought are.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Knowledge:
- Understand the history of the debate surrounding Language and Thought
- Understand why this debate is important to the study of Cognitive Science
- Understand the variety of ways in which languages can differ:
  - Phonetics
  - Morphology
  - Syntax
  - Semantics
  - Pragmatics
- Understand how culture can influence cognition

Skills
- Critique a primary source article
  - Understand the BIG QUESTION the paper addresses
  - Understand the hypothesis of the paper
  - Determine whether the method is appropriate for testing the hypothesis
  - Determine whether the data support the hypothesis
  - Determine whether the author’s conclusions are warranted based on the data
- Design an experiment
  - Propose your own hypothesis about the relationship between language and thought
  - Design a method appropriate for testing your hypothesis
  - Think about possible results and their interpretation

CLASS PARTICIPATION
You are required to participate in class discussion. Participation counts heavily toward your final grade. This class does not work well if students do not come to class prepared (having done the assigned reading) and/or if they sit in class passively. You are expected to share your thoughts, reactions, and questions regularly. This also means that you are not permitted to miss more than one class throughout the semester. Missing two or more classes will result in a failing grade.
**READINGS**
The readings are posted on Moodle. Readings must be completed prior to the class for which they are assigned, as they will be discussed in class.

**DISCUSSION POSTS**
You are required every week to post to the forum on Moodle. This post should be a minimum of 500 words long, and should address an issue from the week’s readings. You can raise a question about something you’ve read and didn’t fully understand, or make connections between readings. Alternatively, you can raise a question not answered by the readings and propose an experiment to address it. These posts must be made by 12pm the day before class (Tuesday). In addition, you are encouraged to respond to one another’s posts. Responses can be made after the 12pm deadline and up to the start of class.

**PAPER PRESENTATION**
You will be required to present a primary research article to the class. You will choose this paper from the readings list within the first 2 weeks of class. Your presentation should last 20-30 minutes. You should begin looking over the papers, which are posted on the course website, to get a sense of which ones you might like to present.

1. You should plan to use PowerPoint, Keynote, OpenOffice, or Prezi for your presentation.
2. You should present your points as bullet points, which are short, but complete, sentences.
3. You should include all important graphs and tables in your presentation and be able to explain what each is showing.

What follows is an outline of what should be included in your presentation:

**Introduction:** Here is where the authors situate and motivate the experiment they conducted. The goal of a good introduction is to tell the reader what experiments have been done on the topic before, the results of those experiments, and why what the authors have done is the logical next step toward answering the *big question.* You should tell your audience the following:

1. What is the *big question* the authors are addressing?
2. What important prior findings led to this experiment?
3. What is the authors’ hypothesis, i.e. what is the claim they are testing with the experiment?

**Method:** In this section, the authors should present all of the information you would need if you wanted to replicate their experiment. In your critique, include the following:

1. Who were the participants in the experiment?
2. What were the experimental materials?
3. What was being manipulated in the experiment?
4. What did the participants do?

**Results:** You will spend the least amount of time with this section. You should try to understand and graphs or figures that appear in this section, and do your best to explain what they are showing.

**Discussion:** Here is where the authors will explain what they found and what they think it means. In your critique, include the following:

1. What did the authors conclude from their results?
2. What do they say their results mean for our understanding of the *big question*?

**Critique:** In this section, explain what *you* think of the study. Here are the types of things you should include:

1. Do you agree with the authors’ conclusions? Why or why not?
2. Do you think the conclusion is warranted based on the data?
3. Could you improve on the methodology?
4. What other questions could be addressed with the method used?
5. What are some real-world implications of the findings?
6. What would you propose as a follow-up to the experiment?

**FINAL PROJECT**

You will be required to complete a final project for the class in which you propose an experiment to answer a question about the relationship between language and thought. The main steps of the project will be:

1. Develop a hypothesis that you can test experimentally
2. Propose a plan to collect data (and possibly collect it!)
3. Discuss the possible results (or the real results) and what these results would mean to the topics we’re discussing.

You may decide to follow up on something we cover in class, or you may prefer to explore a different topic. Please feel free to ask me for help on this. We will use some class time to work on these projects throughout the course of the semester.

You will need to submit a ~100 word written proposal of your idea to me by October 24th. The write-up of this project will result in 10-15 typed, double-spaced pages, using 12-pt font and will be due on December 14th at 7pm.

**PROJECT PRESENTATION:**

In addition to writing a paper about your project, you will also present your project to the class on the last day. This presentation will take the form of a 10-minute brief talk.

**GRADING ALGORITHM**

You will be graded on class participation, discussion posts, an oral presentation of a paper, an oral presentation of your final project and a final paper. Here is the formula that will form the basis for your grade:

- Class Participation: 15%
- Reading Responses: 15%
- Paper Presentation: 25%
- Project Presentation: 15%
- Final Paper: 30%

**ACCOMMODATION**

If you require accommodation for a disability, you need to provide the appropriate documentation from Disability Services: http://www.mtholyoke.edu/disability/. Please provide this documentation within the first 2 weeks of class.

**IMPORTANT**

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. When in doubt about whether to attribute an idea to someone, do it. It is always better to over-cite than to fail to cite someone. This tutorial will instruct you about the proper use of sources: http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism/What_is_plag.htm

Any student found to be in violation of the College’s honor code could receive a failing grade for the class and be reported to the dean of the College. For more information on the College’s honor code, consult the student handbook: http://www.mtholyoke.edu/studentprograms/honorcode.html

**GRADES CALCULATION:**

Grades will be rounded to the nearest whole number, and assigned a letter as follows:
Topic Schedule:

9/5/12 – INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT

9/12/12 – HISTORY OF THE DEBATE:

Readings:


9/19/12 – LANGUAGE SOUNDS:

Readings:


9/26/12 – LIBRARY

10/3/12 – COLOR:

Readings:
Deutscher, G. Chapters 1-4 & 9, pp. 25-98; 218-232.


10/10/12 – STUFF:

Readings:


**10/17/12 – GENDER:**

**Readings:**
Deutscher, G., pp. 194-216.


**10/24/12 – TIME:**

**Readings:**


**PRESENTATION (2 papers):**


**10/31/12 – SPACE:**

**Readings:**


11/7/12 – EVENTS:  
**Readings:**  


11/14/12 – NUMBER:  
**Readings:**  

**Optional (but cool!) reading:** Colapinto, John (16 April 2007). "The Interpreter—Has a remote Amazonian tribe upended our understanding of language?". *The New Yorker*.  


11/28/11 – REASONING & FALSE BELIEF:  
**Readings:**  


12/5/12 – PROJECT PRESENTATIONS