

PSYCHOLOGY 450: Seminar in Psycholinguistics

Spring Semester, 2013

M 2:30-4:20

Kahn 142

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Course Description:

We speak and understand language so easily and fluently most of the time that we don't even realize the degree of complexity involved. But language acquisition happens amazingly quickly given the enormity of the task, and language production and comprehension involves the interaction of many sources of information, linguistic and non-linguistic, on a millisecond time-scale. Many tasks that we undertake with the help of language, such as filling out a government survey or interacting in a computer chat room, are also affected by it in ways that we aren't always aware of. In this seminar we will examine the psychological study of language across a range of levels of processing, from words and syntax, to pragmatics and discourse, and from acquisition to how language interacts with our other cognitive abilities. Our discussions will address the "nuts and bolts" of processing theories, and also classic and more recently developed methods and technologies used to experimentally test these theories. Throughout the course an emphasis will be placed on how contexts of various kinds affect language processing, especially the context of being engaged in conversation.

Some of the questions that we will address throughout the course are:

- *What is special about human language acquisition?*
- *How is language situated within our cognitive abilities as a whole?*
- *Why do psycholinguists care about ambiguity?*
- *Is language processing modular?*
- *What linguistic and non-linguistic information does our language processing system use?*
- *How can eye-movements tell us anything about language?*
- *What is conversation like?*
- *How are tools such as surveys and IQ tests, and human-computer and computer-mediated interactions, affected by what we expect to happen in conversations?*

The primary goals of this course are to:

- 1) increase your awareness of the language that is going on around you all the time;
- 2) expose you to influential and on-going research in this area;
- 3) increase your understanding of the important questions facing researchers;
- 4) familiarize you with standard and newer methodologies that are used to investigate these questions;
- 5) help you develop your critical thinking skills and be comfortable expressing your thoughts in the seminar setting.

Class Format and Requirements:

This course is a seminar. All students are expected to come to class having thoroughly read and thought about the readings. You are expected to contribute to each of the class discussions. In addition, you will lead at least two class discussions of an assigned reading (depending on class size), turn in weekly written responses, and complete two "observational exercises" and a final project.

Class participation:

Given that this class has a discussion format, you do need to participate. I will do my best to create a comfortable environment in which to explore our ideas, questions, and reactions, but in order to make the most of this class, you will need to take individual responsibility for sharing your thoughts. It will be a lot more interesting for everyone if all of us are collaborators in the content of the discussions.

Weekly written responses:

In order to facilitate your readiness for a class discussion, each week you will submit a written response to the week's readings. The response should take the form of two pages.

On the first page you should list at least 2 questions that you had about the week's readings; the questions can be about the details of a theory or an experiment, or they can be more general. On the second page you should write a response to the readings; you can attempt to answer one of the questions that you have posed, or you can write down other reactions, agreements, criticisms, or related ideas that the readings have prompted. The questions and responses do not need to be long or exhaustive, but they should reflect a careful consideration of the materials. They will be evaluated both on the basis of their thoughtfulness and how well written they are.

Written responses should be printed out and handed in at the end of each class session. **Late responses will not be accepted.** However, you do not have to turn in a written response the weeks that you are responsible for leading the class discussion.

Leading Class Discussions:

Two times during the semester, you will choose an article on the reading list and present this article to the class and lead the class discussion. One additional time the class will be assigned a topic and in a small group you will lead the discussion of articles that students find on their own.

Observational Exercises:

In order to increase your awareness and understanding of how language is used in everyday settings, help you relate the abstract concepts that we cover in class to concrete examples, and serve as a springboard for class discussion, you will be conducting two observational exercises, and discussing the results in class. More details will be provided. Observational exercises are due in class on the date listed below in the class schedule. **Late assignments will lose 1 grade (e.g., from an A to an A-) for each day that they are late.** A brief description follows:

Exercise 1.

You will record some naturally occurring face-to-face casual conversation between two or three people, and transcribe about 2-3 minutes of the conversation using a system of your own devising. You will examine and discuss your sample of conversation using the material we have covered in class, and compare it to non-spontaneous speech.

Exercise 2.

As we progress through class, we will be discussing various example sentences, utterances, and conversational exchanges with interesting, unusual, difficult-to-process, or ambiguous features (at any level of linguistic representation – from their phonological or syntactic structure, to their pragmatic context or conversational use). I'd like you to collect at least five additional examples from your daily life and briefly describe them. Pay attention to the language around you, notice when things go wrong (or, perhaps, could have gone wrong, but don't in a surprising way), and write them down!

Final Project/Exam:

You will take two of the examples you collected in Exercise 2, and relate them in a detailed, thorough way to the relevant literature and topics we have discussed in class. You will also answer several additional questions that will ask you to engage with the literature and discussions from class. The final project is due at end of the scheduled final exam time for this class (9:00 pm, May 18th).

Grading:

Class participation	10%
Weekly written responses	10%
Leading Class Discussions (3)	30%
Observational Exercise 1	15%
Observational Exercise 2	15%
Final Project	20%

Class Policies:

The Oberlin Honor Code applies to all work submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of this course. You may discuss readings and the process of doing your observational exercises with each other, but all written work and observations must be the result of individual effort. The members of the Psychology Department strictly adhere to the College policy regarding the due date for written material. No written material will be accepted after the last class meeting (except for the final project).

Class Schedule:

Each week, by Tuesday evening, I will post on Blackboard some commentary and a list of questions or issues to keep in mind for the following week's readings.

There are two main types of class sessions:

1) Assigned reading weeks. I have provided a reading list, and **everyone** should read the background articles and/or chapters (if there are any), which are presented above the dividing line. Each of the primary literature articles below the line will be chosen by one student, and each student will lead a discussion on their article. When you are leading a class discussion, you may skim the other articles. When you are not leading a class discussion, you may choose one primary literature article to read in depth, and skim the others.

2) Assigned topic weeks. Weeks for which there is only a topic provided, each student will find an article to read and prepare to discuss in class. Guidance will be provided to help you choose an article. A subset of students will be selected for each of these weeks to lead the class discussion as a whole.

Class 1 – 2/4

Introduction

Class 2 – 2/11

Background: Traditions and Methods

Clark, H.H. (1997). Dogmas of Understanding. *Discourse Processes*, 23, 567-598.

Miller, George A. (1990) The Role of language in a Scientific Psychology. *Psychological Science*, 1, 7-14

Pinker, S. (1994). *The Language Instinct*. New York: William Morrow.

*Chapter 5: How Language Works, 83-125

Tanenhaus, M.K. & Trueswell, J.C. (2003). Eye-movements as a tool for bridging the language-as-product and language-as-action traditions. In J.C. Trueswell & M.K. Tanenhaus (Eds) (2006). *Approaches to processing world-situated language: Bridging the product and action traditions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

*Pages 1-11

Class 3 – 2/18

Word recognition and the Lexicon

Tanenhaus, M.K. & Trueswell, J.C. (2003). Eye-movements as a tool for bridging the language-as-product and language-as-action traditions. In J.C. Trueswell & M.K. Tanenhaus (Eds) (2006). *Approaches to processing world-situated language: Bridging the product and action traditions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

*Pages 12-15, 22-25

Allopenna, P.D., Magnuson, J.S., & Tanenhaus, M.K. (1998). Tracking the time course of spoken word recognition using eye movements: Evidence for continuous mapping models. *Journal of Memory & Language*, 38(4), 419-439.

Clark, H.H. (1992). *Arenas of Language Use*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

*Chapter 11: Understanding Old Words with New Meanings, 341-365 (with R.J. Gerrig)

Swinney, D.A. (1979). Lexical access during sentence comprehension: (Re)consideration of context effects. *Journal of Verbal Learning & Verbal Behavior*, 18, 645-659.

Class 4 – 2/25

Syntax and Sentence Processing

Altmann, G.T.M. (1998). Ambiguity in sentence processing. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 2, 146-152.

Tanenhaus, M.K. & Trueswell, J.C. (2003). Eye-movements as a tool for bridging the language-as-product and language-as-action traditions. In J.C. Trueswell & M.K. Tanenhaus (Eds) (2006). *Approaches to processing world-situated language: Bridging the product and action traditions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

*Pages 16-19, 22-28

Eberhard, K., Spivey-Knowlton, M.J., Sedivy, J., & Tanenhaus, M.K. (1995). Eye movements as a window into real-time spoken language comprehension in natural contexts. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 24(6), 409-436.

Rayner, K., Carlson, M., & Frazier, L. (1983). The interaction of syntax and semantics during sentence processing: Eye movements in the analysis of semantically biased sentences. *Journal of Verbal Learning & Verbal Behavior*, 22(3), 358-374.

Class 5 – 3/4 Disfluencies

Levelt, W.J.M. (1999). Models of word production. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 3(6), 223-232.

Bailey, K.G.D. & Ferreira, F. (2003). Disfluencies affect the parsing of garden-path sentences. *Journal of Memory & Language*, 49(2), 183-200.

Brennan, S.E. & Schober, M.F. (2001). How listeners compensate for disfluencies in spontaneous speech. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 44, 274-296.

Fox Tree, J.E. & Clark, H.H. (1997). Using uh and um in spontaneous speaking. *Cognition*, 84(1), 73-111.

Class 6 – 3/11 Observational Exercise I due. Presentations and discussion.

Class 7 – 3/18 Topic: Language Acquisition

No Class, Spring Break – 3/25

Class 8 – 4/1 Pragmatics

Tanenhaus, M.K. & Trueswell, J.C. (2003). Eye-movements as a tool for bridging the language-as-product and language-as-action traditions. In J.C. Trueswell & M.K. Tanenhaus (Eds) (2006). *Approaches to processing world-situated language: Bridging the product and action traditions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

*Pages 28-31

Altmann, G.T.M. & Kamide, Y. (1999). Incremental interpretation at verbs: Restricting the domain of subsequent reference. *Cognition*, 73(3), 247-264.

Chambers, C.G., Tanenhaus, M.K., & Magnuson, J.S. (2004). Actions and Affordances in Syntactic Ambiguity Resolution. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, & Cognition*, 30(3), 687-696

Hanna, J.E. & Tanenhaus, M.K. (2003). Pragmatic effects on reference resolution in a collaborative task: evidence from eye movements. *Cognitive Science*, 28, 105-115.

Class 9 – 4/8 Common Ground and Perspective-taking

Clark, H.H. (1992). *Arenas of Language Use*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

*Chapter 2: Context for Comprehension, 60-77 (with T.B. Carlson)

Tanenhaus, M.K. & Trueswell, J.C. (2003). Eye-movements as a tool for bridging the language-as-product and language-as-action traditions. In J.C. Trueswell & M.K. Tanenhaus (Eds) (2006). *Approaches to processing world-situated language: Bridging the product and action traditions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

*Pages 28-31

Hanna, J.E., Tanenhaus, M.K., & Trueswell, J.C. (2003). The effects of common ground and perspective on domains of referential interpretation. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 49, 43-61.

Keysar, B., Barr, D.J., Balin, J.A., & Brauner, J.S. (2000). Taking perspective in conversation: The role of mutual knowledge in comprehension. *Psychological Science*, 11(1), 32-38.

Wu, S. & Keysar, B. (2007). The effect of culture on perspective taking. *Psychological Science*, 18(7), 600-606.

Class 10 – 4/15 Topic: Bilingualism

Class 11 – 4/22 Non-linguistic Cues

Bangerter, A. (2004). Using pointing and describing to achieve joint focus of attention in dialogue. *Psychological Science*, 15(6), 415-419.

Clark, H.H. & Krych, M.A. (2004). Speaking while monitoring addressees for understanding. *Journal of Memory & Language*, 50(1), 62-81.

Hanna, J. E. & Brennan, S. E. (2007). Speakers' eye gaze disambiguates referring expressions early during face-to-face conversation. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 57, 596-615.

Class 12 – 4/29

Topic: Embodied Language

Friday, 5/3, 5:00 pm

Observational Exercise 2 due.

Class 13 – 5/6

**Language processing in the real world:
IQ tests, Surveys, and Computers**

Brennan, S.E. (1998). The grounding problem in conversations with and through computers. In S.R. Fussell & R.J. Kreuz (Eds.), *Social and cognitive psychological approaches to interpersonal communication* (201-225). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Branigan, H.P., Pickering, M.J., Pearson, J. & McLean, J.F. (in press). Linguistic alignment between humans and computers. *Journal of Pragmatics*.

Hancock, J.T. & Dunham, P.J. (2001). Language use in computer-mediated communication: The role of coordination devices. *Discourse Processes*, 31, 91-110.

Schober, M.F., Conrad, F.G., & Fricker, S.S. (2004). Misunderstanding standardized language in research interviews. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 18, 169-188.

Saturday, 5/18, 9:00 pm

Final Project/Exam due.