

# PSYCH 450 – Fall 2013

## Language & Thought

In this class we will explore the complex interrelationships between language and thought. Can subtle differences in the language we are exposed to affect how we make important decisions or remember events? Do people who speak different languages think about and even perceive the world differently? Are some thoughts unthinkable without language or are the effects of language on thought more benign? And through what mechanisms might language influence other cognitive processes?

Instructor: Paul Thibodeau

Email: pthibode@oberlin.edu

Office phone: 440-775-5152

Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30-4:30 or by appointment in Severance 213

Contacting me: If you contact me with a question, I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours.

Course overview and objectives: This will be seminar-style class centered on group discussions of relevant research articles. Because this class is small participation critical. I ask that you attend every class (if you have to miss, please let me know ahead of time) and actively engage in the discussion. The more that people are willing to participate in conversation about the research and ideas we are discussing, the more rewarding the class will be. Even if you were completely confused about the assigned readings, that's OK: it is great to identify questions you have about the articles.

Expectations and Approximate Grading: Your job is to come to class, do the readings, get involved in the material, and ask lots of questions. The class grades will be based on several position papers, a presentation, a few short assignments, and participation.

(1) Position Papers	45%
(2) Presentation	10%
(3) Participation and short assignments	45%

Position papers: Before every class I will ask that you write a response to a prompt that I (or we) design. These responses should be short (1-2 double-spaced pages) and targeted. They should be submitted by 10am the day of class.

Presentation: Every student will be responsible for giving a presentation / leading a discussion about one of the research articles we will be reading. Your presentation should review the scientific question raised in the article, describe the experiments, and summarize the results. You should also be ready to critically assess the paper's theory and method. This summary will help get everyone on the same page and spark a group discussion about the day's topic.

Topics: The area of Cognitive Science that can be described as having to do with questions of Language & Thought is broad and deep. There are several topics that will be central to the course:

- The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis
- Thinking for speaking
- Categorization and categorical perception
- Abstract conceptual representations
- Metaphor
- Taboo
- Embodied cognition

On the first day of class we will discuss how we want to select among the many topics that could constitute a course on language and thought.

Readings: For each class period you will be responsible for reading 2-4 articles. Most of the readings are scientific research articles, but there will be a few book chapters and review papers as well (and even a short story!). This course will not use a textbook. Weekly readings will be posted online at least a week before they are due.

Academic Honesty: Don't cheat. Don't plagiarize. If you are unsure, please ask me. You may discuss homework with fellow students, but write-ups must be completed independently. The use of books, notes, etc. during an exam is not permitted. The Oberlin Honor Code will be in effect as usual in this course.

Note to students with disabilities: If you have a documented disability and will need accommodations in this class, please speak privately with me early in the semester so I may be prepared to meet your needs. All discussions will remain confidential.